



End the rule of fossil fuel

Anna Pha

“Climate change is here. It is terrifying. And it is just the beginning. The era of global warming has ended; the era of global boiling has arrived.” UN Secretary-General António Guterres declared last week, pleading for swift action on climate change. **“The air is unbreathable. The heat is unbearable. And the level of fossil fuel profits and climate inaction is unacceptable.”**

It's time to end the rule of fossil fuel.

The extreme impacts of climate change are in line with scientists' predictions and repeated warnings; “the only surprise is the speed of the change.”

“For vast parts of North America, Asia, Africa, and Europe, it is a cruel summer. For the entire planet, it is a disaster. And for scientists, it is unequivocal – humans are to blame,” Guterres said, not mincing words.

Powerful vested interests in fossil fuels backed by corrupt, self-interested politicians were in denial until recent extreme weather events made it impossible to continue to do so. Today they have made an art of greenwashing – witness the claim that gas is a means of transitioning to renewables.

Governments, including Australia's, unashamedly lie about progress with greenhouse gas emission reductions while new gas and oil project approvals accelerate along with emissions.

Extreme weather events pose a serious threat to human lives, to the environment, crops, livestock, water sources, and ecosystems.

DEADLY HEAT

July was the hottest month globally since records were kept

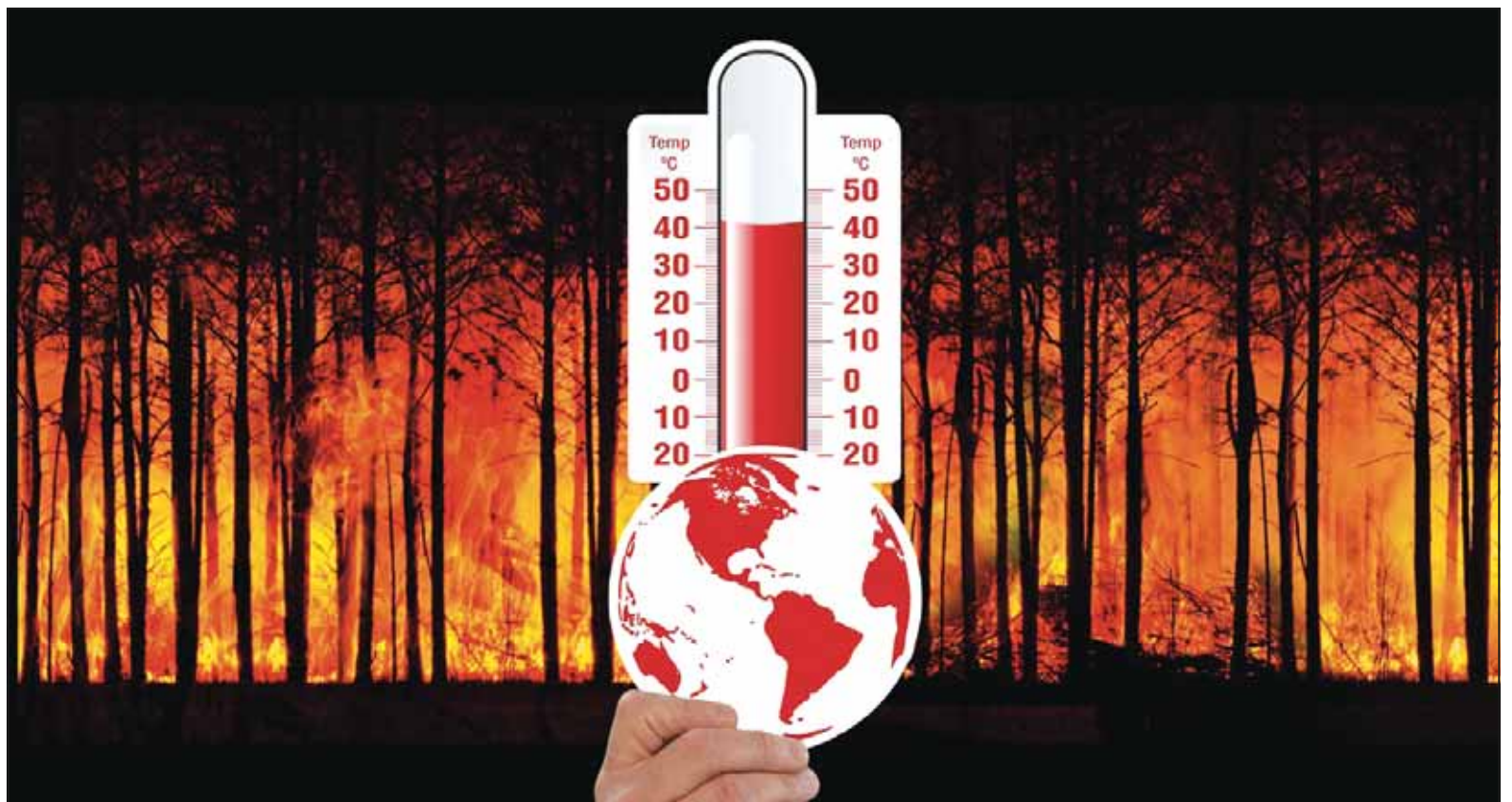


Image: geralt – pixabay.com

and scientists, using such means as ice cores and tree rings, suggest it is the hottest in 120,000 years.

Climate scientist Karsten Haustein has found the world was 1.5°C hotter in July 2023 than in the average July before industrialisation.

Heat domes, high-pressure systems filled with hot air, hang over parts of America, Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia keeping cooler air out. They are responsible for wildfires and droughts as well as deadly heatwaves.

A combination of record warm oceans and high humidity result in the heat being felt more severely,

hampering people's and animals' ability to sweat and cool down.

Out-of-control bush fires in Canada continue to rage with smoke and ash making its way beyond the American continent to Portugal and Spain. Italy, Greece, and Algeria along the Mediterranean are experiencing record heatwaves and wild fires.

HOTTER THAN A HOT BATH

To put these temperatures into perspective, plumbing laws in Australia limit the maximum temperature of shower outlets

and taps in the bathroom to 50°C. This mixed with some cold water is hot enough for a bath or shower. At 68°C, it can take as little as one second to cause a full thickness scald. At 50°C degrees, it takes five minutes.

Temperatures are approaching the point at which the human body cannot cool itself by such means as sweating. This poses a life-threatening situation for workers in industries such as construction, farm work, and other outdoor physical work or sport.

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EXTREME HEAT

66.7°C Persian Gulf International Airport (Iran)

53.3°C Death Valley (USA)

51°C Algeria

50°C Sanbao (China)

50°C Puerto Rico

38°C Siberian Arctic town

Climate action is not a luxury but a must.

YES TO THE VOICE

Guardian

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Learning from Cuba

Really standing up to the US is something Australia *could* do, but which the vast majority of our media and both our largest political parties – for all their chest-puffing talk of “sovereignty” – treat as a total impossibility. Cuba has done it. Cuba shows that actual independence and actual socialism are achievable. Cuba has a flourishing culture and a health system that puts ours to shame and shows up the US health system for the criminal catastrophe it is.

Cuba is an inspiration. It’s also a warning. There is a price to pay for standing up to the US. The last time Australia tried that, under the Whitlam government, we had a coup. Whitlam wanted to nationalise resources and was far too independent on military matters for the USA’s liking – so Australia wound up with an unelected government running the country with both topics very much off the table. The lesson has been learned by the supposed party of the workers, and the Australian Labor Party is very careful to let the US know that Labor’s idea of sovereignty now amounts to joining in on the United States’ campaign to encircle and stifle China.

The Cuban people have been standing up to the US since 1959, and have more than paid the price, with a blockade designed to starve Cuban people into kowtowing to the self-styled “land of the free.” If freedom was the USA’s concern, it wouldn’t be propping up Israel’s apartheid in Palestine, or the Egyptian military dictatorship, not to mention all the anti-freedom dictatorships which have grown fat on US aid in the 64 years since the Cuban revolution.

The blockade of Cuba is not about freedom. It’s about power. Unlike military regimes around the world which receive active encouragement or a mild “tut-tut” from the USA, Cuba is a challenge to US power and the hyper-capitalist US system. A short boat ride from the United States is a society where money can’t buy power and where nobody has to choose between poverty and health.

Many *Guardian* readers will remember the TV series *Breaking Bad*, in which an Albuquerque high school science teacher, faced with ruin and humiliation because of the cost of cancer treatments, becomes a drug manufacturer and is rapidly corrupted. This tragic story could not have been made in Cuba, where healthcare is a right, not a luxury.

A doctor known to the *Guardian* staff told of a friend in the US who did all the right things by the country’s health system. He had a good job and paid a lot for health insurance. He died of an entirely preventable disease because his insurance company refused three times to pay for a test he needed and fobbed him off with a less expensive – but useless – test. This would not happen in Cuba. The USA exports weapons and military bases. Cuba exports doctors and teachers.

Another area Cuba can teach richer countries a lot about is climate change, in the areas of adaption and mitigation. Previous *Guardians* have described the “organoponics” farming systems by which Cuba feeds its people. Nobody goes hungry.

Cuba could also teach us something about democracy. The recently introduced Family Code went through extensive genuine community consultation all throughout the island before being voted on. Unlike in Australia, where politicians who own an average of 1.34 investment properties per person look forward to a nice pension after they leave Parliament, Cuban politicians keep their day jobs while in office, and get the same pension as the people they represent.

Fidel Castro once said that revolution can’t be exported because it is impossible to export the objective conditions that make revolution possible. The Communist Party of Australia looks to Cuba as an inspiration rather than as a model to copy.

The Cuban people have shown that there is a price to pay for achieving real independence and socialism. They’ve also shown that the price is worth paying.

Viva Cuba! End the blockade!

Cuban resilience to overcome the blockade

ACFS Consultation Melbourne 2023 a catalyst in solidarity

Cuban Ambassador, Tanieris Dieguez La O, expressed her gratitude to the Consultation for the continuing Australian solidarity with the Cuban people. At the Australia Cuba Friendship Society National Consultation in Melbourne on Saturday, 29th July 2023 she explained that solidarity from around the world coupled with the unity of the Cuban people with their government enabled the small island nation to confront one of the most vicious blockades on the planet which is being tightened even further.

Gratitude was also expressed for the 40 years of ACFS solidarity in the Asia-Pacific region. Continued UN support was also praised. The blockade seriously affects the Cuban economy and relations with other countries. Ironically, even citizens of the United States suffer adversely.

CUBAN VISITORS

Accompanying the Ambassador were two young representatives from ICAP, the Cuban Institute for Friendship with the Peoples. Marianniz Diaz Hernandez, a scientist involved in molecular immunology, who has a leadership role in the 600,000 member strong Communist Youth League in Cuba, spoke in detail about the successes of the Cuban pharmaceutical industry with its 35 years of experience in integrated biotechnology development. Ivan Barreto Lopez, an international relations expert, reinforced Cuban gratitude for Australian solidarity work which included the donation of 20,000 syringes that were devoted to children’s medical needs, the Brisbane Branch initiative, “To Cuba with Love” fundraiser and, in addition, demonstrations across Australia against the illegal US brigade.

Significant 2023 milestones were noted including 70 years since the 26 July 1953 Moncada attack and 40 years of Australian solidarity, which includes the operation of the Southern Cross Brigade from Australia and Aoteorora / New Zealand. Brigades come to Cuba from all over the world, even the US, in defiance of legal restrictions.

OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENTS

In defiance of tighter and totally despicable financial controls, “brigadistas” and tourists are encouraged to bring medical supplies and, where possible, cash to Cuba as the nation endeavours to maintain its vital tourist industry under the most challenging of

circumstances. Social achievements, a revolutionary history, magnificent scenery and warm friendly people certainly justify the longest possible visit.

An initiative of world-wide significance, highlighted in the Consultation, was the recently developed Cuban treatment for cancer with the possibilities of collaboration with Queensland University. Despite the horrific blockade, Cuba contributes magnificently to humanity.

Medical achievements have continued despite the pandemic. Cuban vaccines are effective and safe to use on children as young as two years of age. As a consequence, there were very few “anti-vaxxers” in Cuba as everyone was confident in the safety of Cuban vaccines. Approaches were made to Cuba by the large pharmaceutical companies but on a competitive basis, that is for profit, not in collaboration.

As the pandemic eased, schooling in Cuba was able to adjust to the necessary lockdowns and their lifting because the socialist system allowed this to happen quite readily along with free health care, as both are government operated, that is, in the hands of the people.

A resolution from the 2022 National Consultation held in the ACT sees ACFS working side-by-side with ICAP in the development of environmental, economic and sustainable projects in Cuba. Cooperation between Cuba and Australia always has been so very productive, especially in the literacy program “Yes I Can.” Such a model could well be applied to the provision of Cuban doctors in Australia, especially in regional and particularly remote communities.

STATE BRANCH INITIATIVES

Each mainland Australian state has its own ACFS branch, and reports on individual branch activities at the national consultation where inspiration comes in turn from the Ambassador and special visitors or guests from Cuba.

Each branch makes its own special contribution. The ACT Canberra Branch has access to the Federal Parliamentary Cuban Interest Group. Brisbane continues with the “To Cuba with Love” initiative, while Perth, Sydney and Adelaide (noted for Fidel’s Bar), continue with public protests against the illegal blockade of Cuba.

It was announced that the 2024 and 2025 consultations would be held in Sydney and Adelaide respectively. ☺

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The homeless and elderly are amongst the most vulnerable to heat waves as are those who do not have access to drinking water, cooling, and shelter.

Extreme heat is on the path to making large parts of our planet uninhabitable or inhospitable for human life and the biodiversity and ecosystems that humanity is dependent on. Millions or even billions of lives will be lost if the current trend is not turned around.

In addition to the heatwaves, record rainfall and floods have been experienced in South Korea, Japan, India, China, and Pakistan. The death toll is unknown.

OCEANS

The oceans, which have historically absorbed a great deal of emissions are warming and acidifying. In the Antarctic an area of ice larger than Western Australia that typically melts in summer and freezes in winter has vanished. Polar regions and oceans have a huge impact on weather patterns.

The reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by 43 per cent by 2030 is too little too late. There is nothing in Labor’s draft National Platform for the upcoming national conference to speed up the phasing out of fossil fuels, let alone opposing the approval of any new fossil

fuel projects. Labor is set to maintain the status quo with Australia as a world leader in the export of fossil fuels.

Poorer countries least responsible for emissions are hit hardest with drought, famine, lack of fresh water, loss of crops, little shade or shelter let alone air conditioning or other cooling mechanisms. Rich countries have failed to honour their commitments under the Kyoto Protocols to provide financial aid for adaptation and mitigation to poor countries.

ADDRESS THE CAUSES

Profiteering fossil fuel companies keep coming up with diversions from real action on climate change. They advocate unproven and potentially dangerous mechanisms to sequester carbon – anything to be able to continue expanding operations and hence greenhouse gas emissions.

Compliant governments, in the pockets of these powerful multinational corporations, hop on board, putting life as we know it at risk.

Capitalism with its short-sighted pursuit of maximum profits got humanity and the planet into this mess and it is incapable of getting us out of it.

Capitalism must go and be replaced by a society where people’s needs come first – socialism.

Humanity is on a precipice but it need not be all gloom and doom.

Listen to and learn from the Indigenous peoples of the world who have managed the land, waters, and fish stocks for thousands of years.

No new fossil fuel projects. Phase out existing ones in a rapid and just transition to renewables.

The science is well known. It tells us that a rapid phasing out of greenhouse gases over the **next seven** years is required.

Pursue **zero** emissions. Net zero is not zero. Net zero has become a shield for the continuation of greenhouse gas emissions while advocating for unproven and even dangerous methods of sequestration.

Guterres offers hope: “It is still possible to limit global temperature rise to 1.5°C and avoid the very worst of climate change but only with dramatic, immediate climate action. We have seen some progress – a robust rollout of renewables and some positive steps from sectors such as shipping – but none of this is going far enough or fast enough. Accelerating temperatures demand accelerated action.”

As the Secretary-General of the World Meteorological Organisation, Petteri Taalas says, “Climate action is not a luxury but a must.” ☺

MUA rallies for respect for workers

Australian maritime workers converged in Melbourne to rally at the Australia Wind Energy conference at South Wharf, to draw attention to the actions of global energy giant Orsted, a Danish multinational company that constructs wind and solar farms, energy storage facilities and renewable hydrogen infrastructure.

Orsted has projects around the globe, including in Scandinavia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. They are also poised to become a major player in the burgeoning offshore wind sector around the Australian coastline.

Orsted is currently locked in a dispute overseas with the ILA (International Longshoremen's Association), the union representing dockworkers on the American East Coast, and is trying to lock out the union and the existing workforce from new jobs at its New London, Connecticut wharf.

The Maritime Union of Australia's National Secretary, Paddy Crumlin, and Assistant National Secretary, Adrian Evans, are presently overseas visiting International Longshoremen's Association representatives in Florida where the conduct of Orsted and other offshore wind developers will feature heavily in international discussions between unions.

While the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) welcomes growth of new renewable energy zones such as those announced in the Hunter, Gippsland, and Southern Ocean areas in New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia, the development of renewable energy infrastructure must be done in a way which delivers secure, safe, and rewarding long-term employment for workers in the maritime, energy and offshore resources sectors.

"If Orsted want to take on dockworkers around the globe they take on all of us. An attack on the ILA's jurisdiction on the

American East Coast will not be tolerated by the MUA here in Australia, because an attack on one of us is an attack on us all," said the MUA's Deputy National Secretary, Warren Smith.

Orsted are proponents of a new offshore wind cluster in the Gippsland region of the Victorian coast, with a proposal to install 5.6GW of generation capacity. Their proposal trumpets over 6000 new jobs in Victoria.

"The MUA expects to be fully engaged and consulted on by Orsted during the implementation and development of their offshore wind installation in the Gippsland region, and the new jobs this company is touting should be well-paid, skilled, safe and sustainable, which means they should be good union jobs from day one," said the MUA's Victoria Branch Secretary, Robert Lumsden.

"When Orsted commence operations in Australia they must understand that maritime workers, dockers and energy workers throughout the globe are united in a collective demand for clean energy jobs that are sustainable not just on an environmental basis but socially and economically sustainable for the workforces and their families that will ultimately deliver them. Orsted must start from a position of respecting the jurisdiction of unions wherever they commence new projects, and the MUA will monitor closely the way in which Orsted conducts itself both overseas and locally," said Smith.

The MUA is calling on Orsted to sign union agreements with all unions with coverage of work required in the development and ongoing operation of offshore wind in Australia, including the MUA, the Electrical Trades Union, the Plumbing and Pipe Trades Employees Union, the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union, and the CFMEU Construction Division.

The key demands by the MUA are:

- Orsted must respect dockworkers and

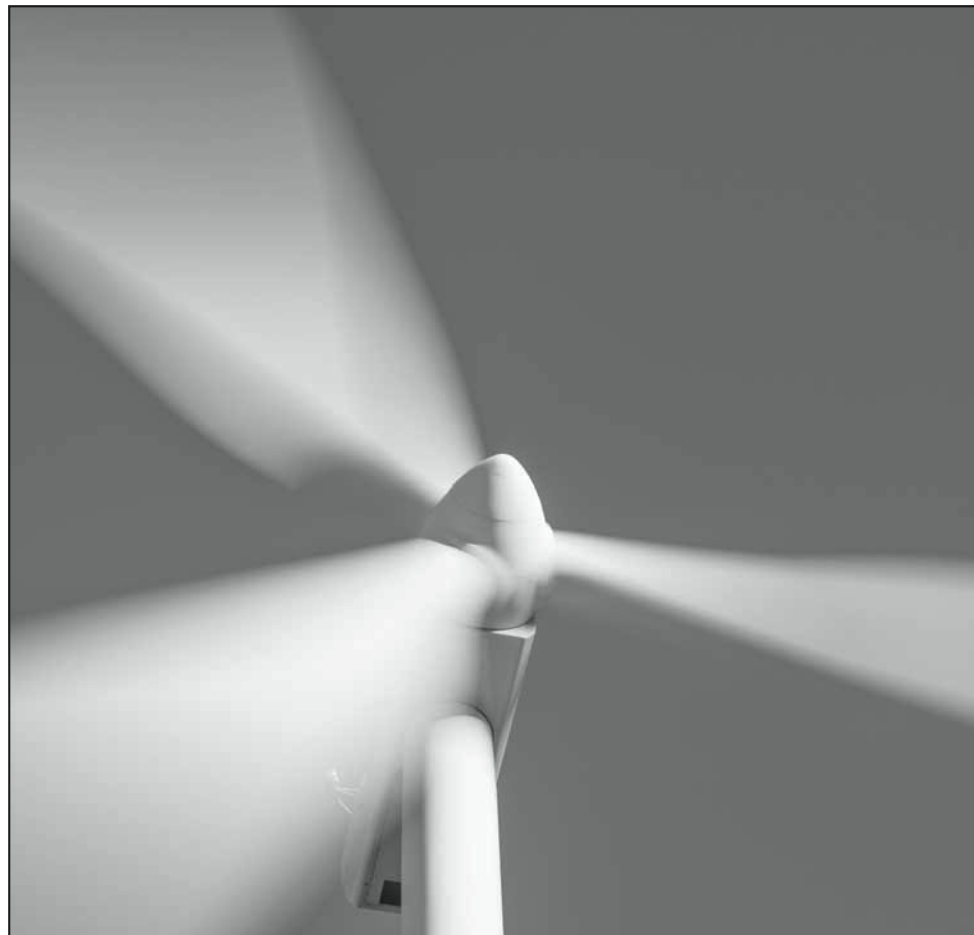


Photo: rawpixel.com (CC0)

negotiate union agreements with the US east coast dockworkers union, the ILA, for all US east coast offshore wind projects;

- Orsted must stop excluding dockworkers from its new wharf in New London, Connecticut, and train the dockworkers who have worked in the

port for the last 100 years to operate the new wharf cranes and wharf transport machinery;

- Orsted must also sign union agreements with all the relevant Australian unions for any offshore wind projects it is licenced to build in Australia. ✪

New US study shows further evidence of the fatal impact of engineered stone

ACTU

The Australian Council Of Trade Unions has long highlighted the terrible impacts that engineered stone is having in Australia, with one in four stonemasons who work with engineered stone products having contracted silicosis, an incurable and aggressive lung disease.

Engineered stone is not an essential building material and there are many safe alternatives.

Emissions from engineered stone are qualitatively different from natural stone, with experts finding that even engineered stone products with low silica levels are still highly dangerous for those fabricating and installing bench tops.

A new US study estimated that 100,000 workers in the US are potentially at risk of silicosis due to exposure to silica dust.

Roughly 2.3 million US workers are exposed to silica in the workplace, including 2 million in construction and 300,000 in other

industries, according to the American Lung Association.

As ACTU assistant secretary Liam O'Brien has said:

"The world is finally waking up to the impacts of this deadly disease. In Australia we are calling for a full ban on all engineered stone, irrespective of silica content. We are now seeing on a global scale how this deadly dust impacts those who work with it. Industry is failing to demonstrate that engineered stone products can be worked with safely. A full ban is the only option. ✪

Transport Workers say YES

The Transport Workers Union (TWU), representing pilots, truck drivers, food delivery workers and others, has come out strongly in favour of a YES vote for the Voice to Parliament.

The TWU says:

"At the TWU, we fight every day to give transport workers a powerful voice. We understand the importance of having a seat at the table and consulting on issues that directly impact our lives and work.

We are backing our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members, families, friends and communities in this historic campaign. Here's why:

We are answering the call of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who want our movement's support for a Voice to Parliament in the constitution.

For over 100 years, parliaments have enacted laws and failed policies that have often entrenched discrimination and disadvantage, such as forcing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to work for free or below legal minimum wages.

The minimum First Nations peoples deserve is that their voices be respected and listened to before laws & policies are made that directly affect them.

It's time we open our nation's next chapter by voting 'YES' at the referendum. ✪



Perth

Cuba Today Public meeting

Saturday 12th August 3-5 pm

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.



Sydney Vigil

STOP USA BLOCKADE ON CUBA

Also solidarity with
Venezuela & Gaza

4:15 pm Thursday 17th August
50 Miller Street North Sydney

Youth corporation in Kimberley lacks funds



Wyndham Youth Aboriginal Corporation Staff. Image: WYAC.

A Youth Aboriginal Corporation in the Kimberley has told Ngaarda Media that it would have to close its doors temporarily due to a lack of available funds.

Wyndham Youth Aboriginal Corporation (WYAC) runs youth diversion programs in the town, aimed at keeping kids out of the justice system.

The diversionary programs are funded by the Kimberley Juvenile Justice Strategy and the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA).

WYAC CEO Neville De Silva says they have been promised funds by NIAA to keep their programs running, but have not received the appropriate contracts.

He said that until he receives the contracts, he's unable to receive money and pay WYAC's employees.

"This is the last pay cheque, there's no more money," he said.

He said he was having to pay staff out of reserve funds.

"The people that are employed, even they don't

have any money, because that money was supposed to have been finished on the 30th of June and we've actually run at a loss," he said.

"The money that we have right now is the Covid funds that we were not supposed to acquit for."

Mr De Silva says his organisation does good work for the community, but that Wyndham will experience more social problems if the Centre's programs aren't able to keep running.

"We have already achieved targets such as reducing crime, by 22 - 23 per cent," he said.

"We have stopped crime, we have stopped the kids running around at night ... this is where family violence starts.

"The kids who are old enough to know a few things start committing crimes, this is what I'm trying to stop."

A spokesperson for NIAA said it has agreed to continue to fund two programs with the Wyndham Youth Aboriginal Corporation until 30th June 2026.

Ngaarda Media

Damning report reveals devastating decline of Australian universities

A report from progressive thinktank Per Capita has detailed major problems with Australian universities after decades of neoliberal governments.

As the report says, "Whether it's funding cuts, insecure work, student debt, or increasing class sizes, it's patently clear from this polling there are high levels of concern about this decades-long trajectory."

Key findings from the report are:

- Federal government funding for universities (excluding HELP) has fallen from 0.9 per cent of GDP in 1995 to 0.6 per cent of GDP in 2021 – implying a \$6.5 billion reduction in funding in 2021
- On a per student basis, Commonwealth higher education funding has declined significantly in the last decade
- Since 1995, private sources of revenue have doubled as a share of university revenue: increasing from 21.7 per cent to an all-time high of 43 per cent in 2019
- Casual employment now

accounts for 40 per cent of jobs at public universities

- While total employment has grown on average by 2.3 per cent per year between 1999 and 2019, casual employment has grown almost twice as fast (4.5 per cent per year) over the same period
- Average HELP debt has doubled since 2008: increasing from \$12,990 to \$24,771 in 2022
- Tuition fees make up 51 per cent of total funding for universities in Australia, compared to the OECD average of 22.3 per cent.

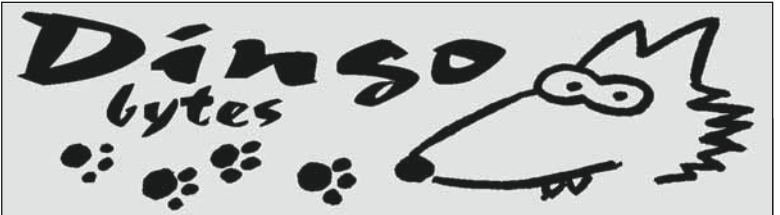
The report polled Australians on attitudes to tertiary education and found:

- Three in four (74 per cent) Australians are concerned about the decline in government funding with 35 per cent very concerned
- Five in six (83 per cent) Australians said they were concerned universities focus on profit at the expense of education, with 50 per cent very concerned
- 51 per cent agreed a mostly

permanent faculty would provide the best university education for students

- Just 22 per cent believe there would be no difference in quality between sessional/contract and permanent staff, while only 17 per cent said mostly sessional and contract staff would be best for a student's education
- 68 per cent were concerned about larger class sizes and fewer faculty members per student, with 25 per cent who said they were very concerned
- 67 per cent said it costs too much to attend university, while 22 per cent said the cost was about right, and only 2 per cent said costs were too low
- 76 per cent were concerned about student debt burden, with 44 per cent very concerned
- 85 per cent agreed that any Australian with interest and pre-requisites should be able to receive a university education, regardless of their personal financial circumstances, with 47 in strong agreement.

National Tertiary Education Union



A new political force uniting left and progressive parties and other organisations with a clear pro-people agenda is needed urgently. The Communist Party is convinced of the centrality of this task and is working hard towards that end. But the message is not getting out far enough and the process is way too slow. The membership and resources of the Party need to be built substantially to ensure the success of a coherent, genuine alternative to the disastrous political course the country is currently headed down. The best thing angry workers can do about the present very parlous state of the economy and the political scene is not to hurl cheap insults about the Prime Minister or the ALP. The most constructive thing a worker could do to build the political alternative and, ultimately, a more just society is to join the Communist Party.

Some thoughts on strategy. The US/NATO objective of the control of Ukraine was to give them control over the Black Sea. The other countries bordering the Black Sea – Romania, Bulgaria, Turkey, and Georgia – are at present firmly in the imperialist camp. Russia has four naval fleets – Black Sea, Pacific, Northern and Baltic. The Black Sea Fleet is the most important because of the links to the Middle East. Sevastopol is a large and deep port. The ports along Russia's coastline with the Black Sea are shallow. It is also Russia's only warm water port. It is vital to Russia's security. Ukraine is a strategic piece in the US's attempts to encircle Russia, which are well advanced. The US already has Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Georgia, Romania, Poland, and Azerbaijan at its disposal for military operations. Crimea is only 30km from Turkey, which the US used as a launching pad for wars in the Middle East. In Afghanistan the US originally trained and armed the Taliban to bring about regime change and install a government hostile to the Soviet Union. US geo-political meddling hasn't stopped since but it has not gone all their way. Iran is lined up for regime change. The US's anti-missile shield, with bases in Eastern Europe, is targeted at Russia. Afghanistan and Iran are also critical to the US's moves to encircle the People's Republic of China.

PARASITE OF THE WEEK: Who rules Australia? In 2014 mining magnate Andrew Forrest's "Creating Parity" report, a recipe for wiping out Native Title, clearing outback Indigenous communities off their land, private sector control of their lives and assimilation, was handed to the then Abbott Coalition government. It is a paternalistic, racist 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. Gina Reinhart is back in the news with her \$11 billion of personal wealth. Her mining magnate daddy Lang Hancock was also commissioned by government to outline policies in Indigenous affairs in which he proposed a sterilisation program in Indigenous communities "so they die out". That's who.

Australia Cuba Friendship Society - South Australia

Meet Marianniz Díaz Hernández,
Cuban chemical research scientist

&

Iván Barreto López,
Cuban international relations expert.

111 Franklin Street, Adelaide 5000
10th of August @ 6:30PM
Food, drinks and music
FREE EVENT



On the 26th of July 1953, a group of revolutionaries led by the brothers Fidel and Raúl Castro assaulted the "Moncada Barracks" located in the Santiago de Cuba province, with the aim of overthrowing the dictator Fulgencio Batista.

Condemn me. It does not matter.
History will absolve me. Fidel Castro

Contact: Juan 0402 609 183 || Claudia 0458 640 457

Leaving communities behind

Finance Sector Union looks at bank branch closures

In the past, every town no matter the size, was guaranteed to have two things: a pub and a bank. But in the last 25 years major banks have been leaving regional Australia in droves, devastating local communities, creating huge service gaps, and putting local economies under severe pressure.

SENATE INQUIRY

On 8th February 2023, the Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee initiated an inquiry into bank closures in regional Australia, with a report due by 1st December 2023. The inquiry will examine regional bank closures, their impacts, and possible solutions.

On 2nd March 2023, the Senate committee conducted its first hearing in Sale, Victoria, with the aim of examining the effects of branch closures. The FSU (Financial Sector Union) attended the hearing to advocate for the interests of our members, and to provide the inquiry with a comprehensive understanding of the real-world impacts that these closures can have on staff and the communities they serve.

An FSU survey of regional members found that 86 per cent of respondents believe they will have difficulty finding a new job if their local branch closes. Respondents cited factors such as ageism, distance to the next nearest branch, and lack of job experience as reasons for their difficulty.

NUMBERS

Between June 2017 and June 2022 over 1600 bank branches were closed, with a disproportionate number of these branches located in regional Australia. Furthermore, it appears that without intervention this trend is set to continue, leaving more regional communities in its wake.

The Regional is an independent news source that tracks bank closures across Australia. Go to theregional.com.au to learn more about which communities have been affected.

MAKE BANKING AN ESSENTIAL SERVICE

The banking sector was deemed an essential service during the COVID shutdowns of 2020 and 2021, and bank workers were declared essential workers. Like energy and water, access to banking



ANZ bank in Jamestown, SA. Photo: denisbin – flickr.com (CC0)

should be mandated as an essential service for the financial accessibility and the health of regional Australia. To establish minimum service standards, an industry-wide group should be formed. Any future branch closures must be evaluated against these standards and not proceed if the standards are not met.

INNOVATION OVER WITHDRAWAL

To remain financially viable in regional Australia banks should be focusing on innovation rather than cutting and running. Trials have demonstrated the effectiveness of the multi-branch approach, where banks have shorter trading hours and bank employees perform call centre duties. Additionally, deploying mobile branches that rotate through major towns can improve accessibility to banking services while reducing costs.

ENGINEERED

Members have said they are trained to steer customers towards using ATMs and online banking to decrease in-person visits to branches. This approach leads to job insecurity as FSU members may face disciplinary action or termination if they do not meet the targets. If members do meet these targets, as they have been instructed, then the banks have the evidence they need to implement the branch closures.

AFFECT ON WOMEN

The closing of regional branches in retail banking disproportionately affects women because they make up the majority of front-line staff. This results in a higher number of job losses for women, who already have less job security compared to men who our survey's show are

more likely to hold business banking and sales roles.

DO BANKS CARE?

Banks often make the decision to close branches with a primary focus on financial gain – overlooking the negative impact it has on the local communities and customers who rely on those branches. The Royal Commission into misconduct in the financial sector uncovered instances where banks have not sufficiently considered the consequences of such closures on their customers. Banks are willing to cop the bad publicity from the closures because for most people it is too much of a hassle to switch their bank accounts in protest. Banks may argue that they are adapting to the digital banking trend, but the reality is that these closures cause significant hardship, especially for those who are older, less mobile, or lack access to technology.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A BRANCH CLOSES?

When a branch closes, it can have significant negative effects on residents and businesses. These effects can include feelings of anxiety and concerns about safety and security, as well as additional costs associated with having to travel farther to access banking services. Furthermore, the loss of a financial service can lead to a loss of economic opportunities for the community, resulting in job losses and a decrease in business for local retailers. This can have a cascading effect on the community, leading to population decline, the loss of skills and experience, and even the erosion of cultural activities like the local footy, cricket, and netball team. 🗳️

GREEN NOTES

Nothing clean about fracking

Anna Pha

Over 900 health professionals from across the country have signed a joint letter speaking out against fracking the Beetaloo Basin and the Middle Arm gas hub in the Northern Territory. The fracking is dangerous to health and would add to greenhouse gas emissions at a time when there is an urgent necessity to reduce them. They are calling for a halt to polluters like Santos and Tamboran Resources unleashing massive new gas projects. The Beetaloo Sub Basin covers 28,000 square kilometres and is estimated to contain 14 trillion cubic meters of gas.

The letter states: "The proposal to frack shale gas in the Beetaloo Basin and construct a gas processing hub at the Middle Arm Precinct in the centre of Darwin Harbour poses serious threats to the health and wellbeing of our children and our communities, both in the Northern Territory and throughout Australia. These serious health risks arise due to the direct impacts of fracking and the exacerbation of climate change... Air pollution can disperse widely from gas operations and contains multiple noxious substances including ground level ozone which is harmful to humans, and fine particulate matter (PM2.5) that is associated with increased asthma exacerbations, heart attacks, chronic lung disease, cancers and death rates."

In May, following the NT government's announcement that fracking in the Beetaloo Basin could go ahead, close to 100 scientists also published an open letter to the government urging it to abandon plans for fracking in the Beetaloo Basin, warning of "the damage it will inflict on our climate." One of the signatories, UNSW Professor Matthew England, who specialises in oceans and the impacts of global warming, said "Australia has been suffering severe bushfire seasons, intense flooding rains, we're seeing our coral reefs die off before our eyes – all of these events are costing the Australian economy hugely."

The project has the potential to increase Australia's total CO2 emissions by 20 per cent leaving Australia unable to meet its already inadequate emission reduction targets. This enormous increase in greenhouse gases will fuel global warming as well as have a serious impact on health. Northern Australia is particularly vulnerable to temperature rises and is at risk of becoming uninhabitable in coming decades.

According to the Northern Territory government: "Globally significant gas reserves in the Beetaloo Sub-basin could propel advanced manufacturing, domestic supply security and cleaner energy production in Australia, while accelerating multibillion dollar growth in the Territory economy, with long-term global gas supply potentials of international significance." There is nothing clean, let alone "cleaner" about fracking!

One of the arguments being used to justify the fracking is to meet the needs for domestic gas use on the east coast of Australia. The government could achieve this objective by imposing caps on exports to ensure adequate domestic supply until gas is phased out. The fossil fuel companies argue that the additional greenhouse gas emissions can be offset by such means as carbon capture and storage (CCS) or the development of geoengineering projects at some time in the future. These are not only extremely costly, some are known to be harmful to the earth's ecosystems while being unproven on an industrial scale. Orca in Iceland is the largest CCS project in the world. It cost almost \$30 billion and captures 4000 tonnes per annum – around half the emissions of Bill Gates' private jet.

There is only one way to tackle climate change: No new fossil fuel projects; no expansion of existing projects; phase out the use of fossil fuels as rapidly as possible. Plan and fund the just transition to renewables.

Write to PM Anthony Albanese and Environment Minister Tanya Plibersek calling on them to block the Beetaloo Basin project and demanding the immediate phasing out of fossil fuels.

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Time to end politically induced poverty

John Falzon

It's been a little over ten years since mining magnate Gina Rinehart suggested that workers are being grossly overpaid, approvingly citing the example of workers in Africa who were "willing to work for less than \$2 per day". Such a dire situation (the alleged overpayment, not the unconscionable underpayment) was, according to the mining magnate, evidence "that Australia is becoming too expensive and too uncompetitive to do export-oriented business." As a result of these comments, Rinehart was singled out for what many would consider to be appropriate excoriation. The truth of the matter is, however, she was simply saying what others of her class were thinking.

Jobseeker payments have just been indexed for inflation and increased by \$24.70 a fortnight, or the princely sum of \$1.77 a day, taking them from \$47.75 to \$49.50 a day. This is still 57 per cent below minimum wage and 34 per cent below the age pension.

You'd hardly call it an increase since it is merely a way of acknowledging the decrease, in real terms, in the value of this and other income support payments in the face of a period of severe inflation due to a cost-of-profits crisis.

We do an enormous disservice to the people who are forced to wage a daily battle from below the poverty line when we frame this as an issue that is somehow separate from everything else happening in society, including its economic base.

In the kind of world yearned for by many of those controlling the biggest chunks of capital, giving them permission under the current socio-economic formation to exploit labour, even the lowest paid workers would be paid less than they currently are. And what better way to incentivise workers to accept unconscionably low wages than by making sure the alternative – having to live on unemployment payments – is even worse!

According to this line of thinking, income support payments, if they are to exist at all, should be so low that the recipients will be fighting each other for jobs that offer even the most execrable working conditions and below-poverty-line wages.

It is no accident that the neo-liberal period of capitalism saw both the systematic dismantling of essential social infrastructure (including social security) and the strategic undermining of the capacity for working people to collectively organise and bargain for decent pay and conditions.

Where has this gotten us? A place where multinational



Photo: Ahsanjaya – pexels.com (CC0).

corporations are encouraged to avoid taxes; a place where precarious work has been normalised, effectively rendering the minimum wage and minimum working conditions (such as sick leave) meaningless for many, and where the social security system parks people in a state of permanent social *insecurity*; a place where the labour market no longer opens the door, especially for younger workers, to the housing market.

For decades, we have seen the emergence of a troubling consensus on the acceptance of the falsehood that people who are living in poverty, more than anything else, need "tough love" paternalism. And for decades this dominant policy frame has not only failed to reduce poverty and inequality but has made life harder for the people it was purportedly designed to help.

Poverty is, above all else, a power relation. Typified by income inadequacy and housing deprivation, it is a means of deliberate disempowerment, a structural and historical violence *done to people*, not an individual state passively or accidentally *experienced by people*. Nor is poverty a choice by those who are forced to experience it, as per former British prime minister Margaret Thatcher's argument that poverty in Britain was "not material but behavioural."

Poverty is a choice, a political choice though, not a personal one. And poverty is material. But it is also more. That it is primarily a power relation is evidenced in the

poverty experienced on the basis of gendered violence, unequal (or absent) bargaining power, colonisation, ableism, queerphobia, ageism and exclusion from secure work, adequate income security, or housing. It is also evidenced by the shame and humiliation that is often carefully manufactured and imposed.

In 2004, the Senate Community Affairs References Committee tabled its Report on poverty and financial hardship. The report contained valuable insights and some excellent recommendations, including an increase to the base rates of allowances, the guaranteeing of standard entitlements, such as annual leave and sick leave, for labour hire workers, and a new minimum wage benchmark.

The evidence given to that inquiry 20 years ago is unsurprisingly familiar. Much of it, such as the following testimony by Margaret Clarke, from Byron Bay, may well have been given in 2023 rather than 2003:

"Like millions of other low-income Australians, I am one of the hidden poor, just keeping afloat. We are flat-out treading water here. We are making very little headway towards our aspirations, and we are one crisis or catastrophe away from the poor box. We are living on the edge.

"We live in the shadow of the dismal statistics. We are not mad, bad, sad or totally dysfunctionally overwhelmed by life circumstances. Many of us are highly skilled and

well educated. We are all doing what we can to contribute to society with the resources we have. Our poverty is poverty of resources, services, and opportunities ... it is getting too hard to make ends meet, let alone work towards our dreams."

A rising tide might lift all boats, but if you have no boat, you're lucky to be "flat-out treading water," always on the verge of, if not actually, drowning. As things stand, a tiny minority of us have luxury yachts, while many are lucky to have a lifejacket or the most rudimentary of watercraft.

Middle-class Australians are accustomed, at worst, to painting those who are barely treading water as the problem. At best, they acknowledge the roughness of the sea, the wild fluctuations of the global economy, resulting, for example, in high unemployment followed by periods of steep inflation.

It is certainly important to stabilise economic conditions. But the crux of the issue is twofold: the allocation of "boats" and the construction of a "safe harbour."

If we want to prevent poverty we need both: a more equitable distribution of income, especially for those who are on income support payments or low or insecure wages; and the building and buttressing of a safe, democratic and respectful socio-economic space.

It means creating the kind of society where housing is a right enjoyed by all, not a speculative sport for some and a lottery for others. It means ensuring that social

security payments actually protect us from precarity rather than exposing us to it. This is the allocation element and, given the political will, can actually be achieved relatively quickly. Witness, for example, the speed with which even the Morrison government, albeit all too temporarily, implemented a life-changing increase to social security payments at the height of the pandemic.

The safe harbour element is more of a long-term project. But we need to start now! It is a reconfiguration of first principles. Equitable allocation of income and housing must, in order to be sustainable, be anchored in the safe harbour of a protected planet; a society that acknowledges, and responds to, the rich, ancient history of the First Nations, as well as the violent and ongoing social crime of colonisation. A safe harbour means shaping our economic activity to serve the needs of people rather than pandering to the greed of profiteers. It means socially useful work. It means healing. It means respect, reverence and celebration, as well as space for the work of mourning and the collective work for liberation, under the guiding stars of struggle and hope.

Dr John Falzon is Senior Fellow, Inequality and Social Justice at Per Capita. He is a former national CEO of the St Vincent de Paul Society. He is a member of the Australian Services Union.
Eureka Street ✪

Poverty is, above all else, a power relation.

Pessimism of the West, Optimism of the East

Roland Boer

Over the last few months, I have experienced first-hand both East and West, both China and some countries in Western Europe. I have been quite struck by the contrasts, which may be described as pessimism of the West, optimism of the East.

PESSIMISM OF THE WEST

In Western Europe, there is a pervasive air of gloom and pessimism. My initial impressions came from Denmark, in the cities and the countryside. Later, I experienced travel by train to Paris, and then a little later we rode our bicycles for nine days through the countryside in Denmark and across the border into Germany.

On our ride, we passed through one country town after another, and they felt like ghost towns. “For sale” and “for rent” signs were everywhere. Few people were out and about. In one place, we managed to find the only shop in town, which also provided deliveries from a chemist in another town. In other words, even the local chemist had closed. Only one place – Glückstadt on the Elbe River – seemed different, with the buildings in the old part of the port town glistening and trying to appeal to tourists. On the outskirts, the real situation behind the facade soon emerged: nearly all of those shopping at a discount supermarket were clearly struggling and trying to save what little cash they had.

Are the cities any different? Initially, one might think so, since some have plenty of money to do as they wish. However, Paris felt as though it was becoming like New York: many, many homeless people, sleeping rough, begging ... And you only need to go to Hamburg railway station to find an immense number of homeless people scouring the bins, asking for a few coins, trying desperately to keep going.

Friends in China would ask me from time to time what it is like in Western Europe. My answer: people are pessimistic. The question: why? My answer: the economies in Western countries are in very poor shape. Fifty years of economic decline, failed policies, social upheaval, political breakdown, the fact that



Photo: pxfuel.com (CC0)

the combined forces of the West cannot defeat Russia, the expectation of a European war, the talk of “existential crises” that are really the crisis of the West – this situation makes people pessimistic and full of gloom.

OPTIMISM OF THE EAST

Stay too long in a Western country and the gloom begins to affect you. Fortunately, I do not spend much time in Western countries these days. In fact, I came to Europe for a month from Beijing. What a contrast: I have written earlier of a quiet but evident optimism and confidence in China, which is palpable at every turn. For most people in China – as is now the case in more and more countries of the world – the West is neither of interest nor

is it to be feared. The West has in effect become irrelevant.

The reasons for such optimism are plenty. To mention but a few: the greening of China, which has taken place at impressive speed so that China is now a world leader in showing how climate change and environmental problems can be solved – if you have a socialist system. There is also the development of the economy in all aspects, so much so that you see it in everyday life. On a personal note, I experienced this at my local dentist, seeing a medical specialist, buying a few necessities, travelling on the standard 300 kph trains, or when checking my phone at a pass in Xizang (Tibet) that is 5000 metres above sea level. And yes, the phone reception was at the full five bars. How is this possible? When you have the only country in the world

with a complete industrial chain, then the latest breakthroughs are affordable for everyone. As I like to put it: whenever I visit a Western country, I feel as though I am stepping into the past; whenever I return to China, I am stepping into the future. And there are many, many people from all countries flowing to China in these times.

At a social and political level, China is progressing at a significant pace that is also stable. After much research and on-the-ground experience, it is clear to me that China’s socialist democratic system and rule of law are now more mature and developed than any political system you will find elsewhere. At a cultural level I have found a creative energy that is increasingly being called the new “liberation of thought.” This appears most obviously in the ferment of ideas,

proposals, and plans that come one after the other. This really is a time when a hundred flowers can bloom and a hundred schools of thought can contend.

As they observe in China, the world is undergoing changes unseen in a century. These are qualitative changes, which entail both significant risks but also immense opportunities for shaping what is known as a “new form of human civilisation.” As they say, the times very much suit China.

Pessimism of the West, optimism of the East. Will the West be able to overcome its gloom and pessimism? Only when it stops blaming others, soberly assesses the internal causes, and finds a way for renewal that is qualitatively different from the last few centuries. By that time, the world will be a very different place. ✪

Protests against Pakistan’s move to corporatise, militarize agriculture

Pakistan’s government is planning to lease 4.4 million acres of land to investors from China, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, and Bahrain, to create 2,000 large-scale farm developments. The Pakistani army will provide management, coordination and technical support to the project, which is organized through the recently formed Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC).

Progressive movements in the country are concerned that the plan will turn large swathes of agricultural land over to foreign capitalists

and corporate giants. They are also alarmed that it will increase the involvement of the military establishment in economic affairs. The military already occupies 12 per cent of Pakistan’s land.

Akhtar Hussain, president of the Awami Workers Party (AWP), warned that “the capture of agricultural resources by military-supported corporations and real estate tycoons will deprive millions of peasants, farm workers and rural labourers of access to land, leading to further poverty, displacement and exploitation.”

Hussain said that agriculture is

the most important segment of the national economy, contributing over 20 per cent to the GDP and providing jobs to almost two-thirds of the population, yet peasants and rural workers remain neglected. According to the Global Hunger Index, growing hunger in rural areas and the massive damage to farmland caused by last year’s climate-change-induced floods is pushing many small cultivators, tenant farmers and sharecroppers into rural wage work. Approximately 80 per cent of the rural population is now landless and rural poverty remains above 50 per cent.

The AWP says that to resolve food insecurity and rural poverty, the government should introduce a new agrarian policy, abolish big landholdings, distribute land among landless peasants, and fix land ownership to 100 acres of rainfed and 50 acres of canal-fed land per family. The party also calls for state and collective agriculture farming through cooperatives; incentives and financial assistance to peasants and small growers for the use of modern technology, seeds and agri-inputs; and for small growers to have cheaper credit, crop insurance and a link to markets so that

the role of middle distributors is eliminated.

In addition to agrarian reform, progressive forces are calling for urban land reform. The AWP says big real estate moguls should be stripped of the lands they have grabbed, which should then be redistributed among people living in katchi abadis (informal settlements or squatter areas), migrant workers and other segments of the urban poor.

People’s Voice ✪

The Police-Industrial-Complex

How the US Police Became Militarised

Graham Holton

US citizens believe they have the right to representative democracy, freedom of speech, religious worship, a free press, and equality before the law with a fair trial before a jury of their peers. According to Radley Balko in his *Rise of the Warrior Cop* (2014) these rights have been deeply eroded since the 1960s, with the police force becoming increasingly militarised as part of a Police-Industrial-Complex. The military weapons and gear used by the police are manufactured in the US, a boon for weapons manufacturers. Complementing this access to military weapons were new laws that increased the power of the state at the expense of citizen's rights.

In 1963, in the trial of *Ker v. California*, the Court concluded "that the Fourth Amendment requirement that searches be reasonable applies to the states as well as the federal government, and that evidence obtained in unlawful searches is inadmissible." The following year New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller pushed through two important pieces of legislation, the "no-knock bill" and the "stop-and-frisk" bill. In 1973 a set of draconian laws were pushed through, known as the Rockefeller Drug Laws.

Today police officers, dressed in military gear and armed with the latest military weapons, can enter a residence with no-knock-and-announce requirement, if they believe the suspect is destroying evidence, such as flushing drugs down a toilet. The police can smash in the front door with a ram, following an unverified tip from an anonymous source. This has led to numerous wrongful arrests and police breaking into a wrong address. No matter how small the quantity of drugs found on the premises, the raid is reported as a success. Residents are known to have fired in self-defence at the door, thinking the attacker was a criminal. Any conviction limits the chances of the "criminal" having a successful career.

On 11th August 1965 racial tensions broke out across Watts, Los Angeles. Violent riots followed in Baltimore, New York, Washington D.C. and Detroit. America was burning. With the local police unable to cope, the National Guard was called in. It was from this that the militarisation of the police began. Daryl Gates of the LAPD (Los Angeles Police Department) formed SWAT (Special Weapons and Tactics Team), its purpose tempered by clashes during the United Farm Workers strike and the Delano Grape Strike. SWAT became an elite police unit against the Class Struggle.

As the police cracked down on civil liberties, the Warren Court ruled in what became the *Miranda* decision in 1966. The arresting

officer must read to the individual their *Miranda Rights*. Under the Fifth Amendment they had the right to an attorney during questioning and at trial. They had the right to not self-incriminate. In 1967 in *Katz v. United States* the Court held that the Fourth Amendment protected people from "unreasonable search and seizure."

At the height of the Civil Rights Movement, on 4th April 1968, Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated. Riots in black communities broke out once again. Police units across the US stockpiled armoured vehicles, helicopters, high-powered rifles, sniper rifles and bayonets. That year Richard Nixon was elected president arguing that drugs were the reason why young people attacked traditional values, not the political and social system they were rebelling against. A 1969 poll showed that 42 per cent of parents would turn in their own children if they took drugs.

A poll taken by *Newsweek* in 1969 showed that whites regarded Blacks as a major problem. In December 1969 SWAT raided the Black Panthers Party headquarters in Los Angeles. FBI director J. Edgar Hoover had "declared war" on the group.

While President Lyndon B. Johnson had declared a War on Crime, President Richard Nixon officially declared a War on Drugs in 1972. Police forces were given funding and military training to wage Nixon's war on drugs and the youth. Under Nixon's policies, violent crime across the US increased by 40 per cent and property crime rose by 24 per cent. The government responded by getting even tougher on crime, not tackling the root causes.

In 1973 SWAT battled with the urban guerrilla group, the Symbionese Liberation Army. In 1975 the TV show *S.W.A.T.* was so popular that its merchandise swept the country, from board games to lunch boxes.

The new Reagan administration wanted to end the *Miranda Rights*, abolish bail and parole, destroy marijuana crops and use the military in its war on drugs. Questioning the drug war was seen as a sign of drug addiction. This was in spite of there being no evidence that marijuana was an addictive drug, or that its use caused crimes. On 8th April 1986 President Ronald Reagan signed the National Security Decision Directive 221, which made narcotics a major threat to national security. As Radley Balko argues: "The declaration put pot, cocaine, and heroin at nearly the same class of enemy as any nation against whom the United States had fought a conventional war."

Under the 1987 National Defence Appropriation Act, the National Guard was financed with US\$60 million for counterdrug operations, and local law enforcement agencies were given surplus military equipment. The following year George H.W. Bush, former



Greenville, NC Police Department. Photo: rawpixel.com (CC0)

Director of the CIA, was elected president, on a platform of fighting crime.

In May 1991, officers of the LAPD were filmed viciously beating a Black man, Rodney King. In response, riots broke out in East LA and 13,500 troops from the California National Guard, the Third Battalion First marine and the Seventh Division of the US Army were sent in. Following the riots more money was made available to law enforcement. By 1995, 89 per cent of cities with more than 50,000 people had a SWAT team.

The George W. Bush administration made the drug war a culture war, especially after the 9/11 attacks. Drug offenders were enemy combatants, not citizens with rights. President Bush continued President Clinton's assaults on medical marijuana. SWAT tactics were necessary to fight drug dealers, despite the lack of evidence that drug dealers used high-powered weapons.

Zero-tolerance to crime meant that "community policing" had become militarised. Long gone was the role of the police as part of the community. Over 45,000 paramilitary

raids were conducted in 2001, mostly for drug warrants. Despite drug dealers being portrayed as violent in the media and on TV shows, such as *CSI Miami*, in 2005 only 51 police were killed in the line of duty, out of 800,000 police officers in America.

A 2007 article in the journal *Criminology* concluded that, "COPS spending had little to no effect on crime." At the 2008 the Democratic National Convention police wore T-shirt with "We Get Up Early, To Beat the Crowds" printed on them. Balko concludes that "The police today may be more militarised than the military."

In 2023 militarised police are videoed smashing through doors, shooting unarmed civilians in the back, using attack dogs on people with hands raised, with people of colour fearing for their lives. Despite calls to "Defund the Police" there is little action for police departments to give up their military equipment, or their funding. There are too many interests that benefit from the Police-Industrial-Complex for governments to pay attention to public outcry. ✪



Thanks to all those who contributed to this year's 3CR Community Radio radiothon for the *Alternative News* program. *Alt News* almost doubled its quota for fundraising this year, and will continue to bring you non-mainstream news items on Sunday mornings at 9:15. *Alternative News* and the other 3CR programs are available worldwide via podcast (just like the *Guardian*), head to 3CR.org.au.



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Something to say?
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Amazon's stream of violations

Mark Gruenberg

SEATTLE: Washington state is putting Amazon on trial for worker injuries, especially ergonomic – musculoskeletal disorder – injuries at three of the retail giant's warehouses in Sumner, Kent, and DuPont, Washington.

Technically, the "trial" is a hearing by the state Board of Industrial Insurance Appeals, as the monster warehouse and retailer is appealing some \$49,000 in fines the Washington Department of Labor and Industries levied for rampant job safety and health violations at the warehouses.

But complete with expert testimony, witnesses – the experts and the workers – lawyers and evidence, it certainly looks like a trial.

Amazon, which employs 750,000 people and is owned by one of the nation's three richest people, Jeff Bezos, has a horrifying safety record at its warehouses, with injury rates up to double those of the sector as a whole.

And apparently, conditions at the three Amazon warehouses in Washington are even worse, according to experts and workers testifying at the hearings in Seattle and Tacoma. The trial began 25th July and is scheduled to run through 10th August.

They're so bad, Amazon warehouse workers "told inspectors that pushing through pain was the norm, with some 40 per cent saying they'd experienced it in the previous seven days. Of those, two-thirds said they took medication to ease symptoms."

While it's not in the inspection report, the pro-worker Washington Law Centre reports Amazon overall has a non-fatal job injury rate of 7.7 per 100 workers. That's double the rate for the warehouse industry. In 2019, the centre added, the DuPont warehouse led the country in injuries: 22 per 100 workers.

The Washington state trial is also notable because Amazon's lousy national safety record, in combatting the coronavirus, in ergonomic injuries, and in other hazards, led to unionisation campaigns among its exploited workers. They're among the low-paid, overworked, oppressed masses of workers nationwide who have had it up to here with corporate greed and rebelled by union organising.

As a result, the independent Amazon Labour Union (ALU) capitalised on Amazon's failure to even inform its workers about coronavirus outbreaks, and its illegal firing of Chris Smalls for leading a lunchtime walkout about the issue from Amazon's JFK8 warehouse on Staten Island, NY.

Smalls and his colleagues founded the ALU and decisively won a later National Labour Relations Board-run vote at JFK8, pounding away on health and safety issues. ALU has used ergonomic hazards in a similar campaign at a warehouse south of Albany, NY.

In their written report to the state Department of Labour and Industries (DLANDI), three outside experts – MDs David Rempel and Robert Harrison, who also have master's degrees in public health, and PhD Carisa Adamson – reveal horrifying working conditions at the three warehouses.

They also reported Amazon's safety and health overseers recommended measures to shift the burden of keeping workers safe away from the company and to the workers. Under federal job safety law, which applies to the states, too, the company must shoulder the load, and the blame.

Many job tasks "exposed workers to high levels of biomechanical factors known to increase the risk of musculoskeletal disorders," their summary begins, and conditions go downhill from there.

"The rates and severity of the recorded musculoskeletal injuries at the DuPont and Kent warehouses over the past five years exceed non-Amazon warehouse industry rates and are consistent with the high biomechanical exposures measured during our site visits.

"Observed hazards include excessive rates and loads of lifting, pulling, gripping, and pinching, and an unsafe pace of work. Overall, 10 of 12 processes analysed posed hazardous risk for musculoskeletal injuries. The risk from the biomechanical hazards at both Kent and DuPont exceeded levels known by the medical and scientific community to be safe.

"The patterns of musculoskeletal injuries at Kent and DuPont are consistent with those found in the medical literature to be caused or aggravated by the biomechanical hazards."

But the work itself wasn't the only hazard to the workers. So was the pace, the three reported. "The rate" at Kent and DuPont "often exceeded the limits of risk assessment tools" they used.

"Essentially, this means that based on the pace of work alone, many jobs would be unsafe. For example, workers unloading and loading trailers lifted and moved boxes" – many of them weighing at least 50lbs (22.7kg) – "at rates that exceeded the allowable frequency of lifts" according to federal standards.

Even if the workers held the boxes "at waist height and close to the body" as standards call for, "the rate of lifting would classify this as hazardous." Ten-hour shifts and mandatory overtime in six-day work weeks only made conditions and the risk of ergonomic injuries even worse.

"Productivity measurements, such as 'time off task,' penalise workers and discourage them from taking breaks that could help them recover from the high pace of work and other biomechanical exposures. The penalties applied when not meeting productivity demands can also increase stress associated with an increased risk of musculoskeletal injuries," the three experts reported.

Monthly safety meeting minutes at Kent show Amazon bosses knew what was going on and the high risk of injuries. Their response was "to train the workers in body mechanics," commonly known as lifting techniques, "such as lift with your legs and not with your back."

Except body mechanics don't reduce injuries. And emphasising them also shifts responsibility for injury prevention from the company to the worker, the report notes. That's contrary to the Occupational Safety and Health Act's mandate that job safety is the employer's responsibility.

"This approach of blaming the workers for their injuries and not addressing the risks of the work demanded of them is especially troubling," the three experts said laconically. They also identified many safety measures Amazon could implement fast and cheaply to reduce the injury risk to its workers. It hasn't, which is why the state agency hit it with the fines.

People's World ✪



Global Briefs

VENEZUELA: Thousands of people in Venezuela celebrated the 69th anniversary of the birth of the legendary socialist leader of the Bolivarian Revolution, Commander Hugo Chávez on 28th July 1954. The Cuartel de la Montana in the Venezuelan capital Caracas saw fireworks, music, and traditional songs to celebrate the life of Mr Chávez who died from cancer on 5th March 2013.

SINGAPORE: The first execution of a woman in 19 years took place in Singapore on 28th July, for drug trafficking despite calls for the city-state to cease capital punishment for drug-related crimes. Saridewi Djamani was sentenced to death in 2018 for trafficking drugs in what the Central Narcotics Bureau said was "sufficient to feed the addiction of about 370 abusers for a week."

POLAND: Lawmakers in Poland voted last week to approve a divisive law limiting Russian influences on the country. The law was proposed in May by Poland's ruling right-wing Law and Justice party but critics in the country and outside, such as the European Union, see it as primarily targeting opposition leader and former Prime Minister Donald Tusk, before a parliamentary election scheduled for the autumn.

CHILE: The Supreme Court of Chile ordered compensation to 31 of the 33 miners who were trapped underground for 69 days after the collapse at the San Jose mine in 2010. The judiciary of the South American nation reported that the miners will receive the equivalent of around \$48,200 for lost profits and non-pecuniary damage, leaving out two workers who decided to distance themselves from the lawsuit.

ISRAEL: Israel's highest court said it will hear legal challenges to a divisive new law that weakens its power, putting the country's top justices in the position of defending their own independence. Civil society groups and others filed petitions asking the supreme court to strike down the law enacted last month, the first major piece of legislation in Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's contentious plan to overhaul Israel's judiciary.

RUSSIA: Last week Russian President Vladimir Putin said he supported plans to increase liquidity for the BRICS New Development Bank, which is part of the economic co-operation bloc led by Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa. "We are aware that the bank's liquidity is on the agenda. There are several ideas ... and we will support them," Putin said during his meeting with BRICS NDB President Dilma Rousseff at the Constantine Palace in St Petersburg.

KUWAIT: Five prisoners have been hanged by the Kuwaiti authorities. Prosecutors said the five include a mosque attacker, three people convicted of murder, and a convicted drug dealer. One of the convicted murderers was Egyptian, another was Kuwaiti, and the drug dealer was from Sri Lanka. The statement did not provide the nationality of the mosque attacker or the third convicted murderer.

PHILIPPINES: At least 21 people died and 40 others were rescued after a Philippine passenger boat overturned when it was lashed by strong winds in Laguna Lake south-east of Manila, police said. Police said rescue operations were continuing, but did not immediately provide figures for the total number of people on board the MBCA *Princess Aya*.

Potted Reviews

Short reviews from the shelves

This month: Writing on Indigenous themes, reviewed by various comrades.



But now we want the land back – Hannah Middleton

A solid Marxist analysis of the history of Aboriginal people. The author is an anthropologist, but you don't have to be an anthropologist to find it rewarding. It's particularly good on the Wave Hill strike.

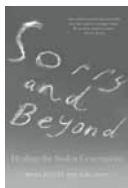
(available from cpa.org.au)



The Biggest Estate on Earth: How Aborigines Made Australia – Bill Gammage

Years before the 'Dark Emu' was published, Bill Gammage looked at how the Aboriginal landscape was constructed before 1788. To quote: "People made the land beautiful."

This book is very thought provoking, and amazing paintings really illustrate how the landscape was sculpted before Europeans arrived.



Sorry and Beyond: Healing the Stolen Generations – Brian Butler and John Bond

Brian Butler, a former ATSIC commissioner for South Australia, has Aranda and Luritja background. John Bond, a writer originally from Britain, served as the

Secretary of the National Sorry Day Committee from 1998 to 2006. **Sorry and Beyond** tells important truths, but it also contains a message of hope. We can all be agents of change. Sorry and Beyond not only examines the 1997 national inquiry into the forcible removal of Indigenous children from their families, but also details the national response, including the marches across bridges and numerous supportive gatherings. Despite all this, however, removals still continue today. As a definite step forward, let us all support First Nations Australians, at the very least by voting yes to the Voice!



The Spirit of Pedzeh-ki – Bev Hall and Ron Hall

CPA members Ron and Bev Hall, lifelong activists for First Nations people, lived in Pedzeh-ki in the Northwest Territories of Canada fifty years ago with their young family. The book combines a personal account of the young Australian couple's adjustment to life in Pedzeh-ki with an account of the history of the Slavey Dene people they lived with. The Slavey Dene struggle to

keep culture and language alive is all too familiar.



Hello and Welcome – Greg Driesse

Short picture book by a prolific Kamilaroi author and illustrator. Includes some Gamilaraay language material, so a good present for kids who like to learn new words (which is all kids) from one of the largest indigenous nations in Australia.

The US Prison in film: A Marxist View

Graham Holton

In the “land of the free,” millions languish in prisons in the name of law and order. The prison, as an institution, is used by the capitalist state as a weapon against the proletariat. A crime occurs when a law is broken, but these laws are written by the government of the bourgeoisie to support its political and social power. What is a crime, and how the judicial system responds, is rooted in capitalist class interests. The bourgeoisie criminalises any act that provokes social unrest, endangers property and its possession, or politically challenges the status quo. Under the prison system the criminal is punished to be turned into a productive element of the national economy.

Lenin described the modern state as the bureaucratic and repressive apparatus of the bourgeoisie. The “law” is used to enforce the interests of the state, so that the ruling class keeps other classes in a disadvantaged position, through a process of criminalisation. An analysis of US conviction rates shows inequalities in the way the law is applied, according to race, gender, and class. It is also witnessed in the conviction rate according to class, and race, such as when a white wealthy person is charged by the police.

Marxism sees a parallel between the emergence of factories as the main sites of capitalist production and prisons as the main institutions of punishment. As American capitalism grew so did the prison system. From the 1960s to the present, the number of people locked in prisons, jails, or on parole or probation, increased from 800,000 to eight million. Mass incarceration is the most visible manifestation of the Prison-Industrial-Complex, which plays a multifaceted and highly dynamic role within American capitalism.

An examination of the political economy of punishment reveals the structural relationship between economic transformations and changes in the penal system. There is a direct correlation between high incarceration rates and unemployment rates, poverty levels, welfare regimes, and limited labour markets. Ruth Wilson Gilmore in her *Golden Gulag* (2007) argues that mass incarceration was never a response to drug epidemics, or an increase in the crime rate, it was a political-economic strategy used to alleviate economic crises. Surplus labour, land, capital, and state capacity was used to produce



Photo: pxfuel.com – public domain.

“the biggest prison building project in the history of the world.” Mass incarceration targeted the poorest of the proletariat, the lumpen-proletariat, with more than 20 per cent of the US population now having some kind of criminal record.

It is within this analysis that the Prison-Industrial Complex, as portrayed in American films, can be viewed. Prisons are a common theme in American popular culture, whether in films, television, old radio shows, video games, plays, songs, documentaries, comic books, or comedies. They are an important fabric of American society and economy.

Since the silent film era (before 1927) prisons have been portrayed as places of violence, with prisoners cramped into unhygienic living conditions, with bad food, corrupt brutal guards, and most of all, boredom. The prisoner is dehumanised and alienated from productive society, which under Marx’s theory of alienation means the prison is a demeaning place of restricted creativity. The system crushes the spirit. The prisoner is punished and broken. Only bad people go to prison. However, the reality is starkly different.

The audience assumes the judicial and legal system is racially unbiased and honest, as portrayed by the elected sheriff, the police, the judge, the FBI, and the government spokesperson. In the 1990s,

police departments implemented zero-tolerance policies in response to minor offenses. Nearly half of those killed by police, and 40 per cent of those incarcerated, are diagnosed with a mental illness or with a cognitive disability. Rather than going to mental health institutions these people are sent to prison.

The history of the United States is a history of class struggle. The prison system is systemic and institutionalised racism, sexism, and classism. The prison sector acts dialectically both as a Band-Aid for the economic crises that capitalism generates, and as a means of reproducing racialised subjectivities in the working class.

Cinema created a prison mythos of punishment and deprivation. Punishment is more than the loss of liberty; prisoners must endure brutal traumatic conditions while trying to survive the prison system. Limited public oversight allows for widespread abuse. The American prison culture is a cycle of harm and trauma, which overwhelmingly falls upon Blacks, Latinos and First Nation peoples.

US prisons have three goals: to punish; to act as a deterrent against further crimes; and to rehabilitate prisoners. The audience assumes that inhuman treatment will reform the prisoner, yet very few films show a rehabilitated prisoner going back into society

and doing well. Their past catches up with them, forcing them back into a life of crime.

Prison is sometimes shown to be a redemptive experience as in the classic *Birdman of Alcatraz* or *The Shawshank Redemption*. The prisoner learns from adversity and turns their life around if guilty, or becomes a better stronger person if innocent. Assault from guards and other prisoners is usually not questioned, but is accepted as a fact of life.

Prison comedies such as *Stir Crazy* or *Naked Gun III* also tend to assume that wrongful imprisonment, brutal mistreatment, and violence and assault from other prisoners are unchangeable aspects of prison experience, rather than a choice that capitalism in the US has made.

Prisons serve capitalism and the US prison system needs to change. Marxists argue that economic power is translated into political power with the general disempowerment of the majority of those who live in the modern state. The bourgeois control immiserated and recalcitrant workers, through the mechanisms of containment, exploitation, and stigmatisation. Marxists fight for the overthrow, dismantling, and complete replacement of the core institutions of the capitalist state, including the police, prisons, military, and courts. These elements of the state can only be abolished through revolution. ✪

Biden keeps lying about the US “not trying to surround” China

Caitlin Johnstone

US President Joe Biden, on a conversation with Xi Jinping:

“We’re going to put together the Quad which is India, Australia, the United States and Japan. I got a call from him [Xi] on that. He said why are you doing that. I said we’re not doing that to surround you, we’re doing that to maintain stability in the Indian Ocean and in the South China Sea. Because we believe the rules of the road about what constitutes international air space, international space, and the water should be maintained.”

Biden uttered this same bogus talking point about not trying to surround China last month at the private fundraising event where he made headlines by calling Xi a “dictator”:

“But what he was really upset about was that I insisted that we

– we reunite the Quad. He called me and told me not to do that because it was putting him in a bind. I said, All we’re doing – we’re not trying to surround you, we’re just trying to make sure the international rules with air and sea lanes remain open.”

Biden is lying. The US is deliberately surrounding China with war machinery and has been for years, and has rapidly escalated its efforts to do so during Biden’s term. There are currently no fewer than 313 US military bases in East Asia by the Pentagon’s own admission, with the Biden administration adding four new ones in the Philippines. Biden’s war machine has been busy instituting the AUKUS alliance which is specifically set up to menace China, moving nuclear-capable bombers to Indonesia, signing a military deal with Papua New Guinea, working to station missile-armed marines

at Japan’s Okinawa islands, staging provocations in Taiwan, and getting into increasingly confrontational encounters with Chinese military vessels and aircraft off China’s coast as part of its dramatically increased military presence in the area.

So of course the US is trying to surround China, as evidenced by the mountains of US war machinery that are being moved into areas surrounding China. Biden can babble all he wants about wanting to secure sea lanes and protect international waters, but only a drooling idiot would believe the world’s most powerful empire is militarily surrounding its top geopolitical rival as an act of *defence*.

Beijing is under no illusions about this. Xi said in a speech earlier this year that “Western countries – led by the US – have implemented all-round containment, encirclement and suppression

against us, bringing unprecedentedly severe challenges to our country’s development.”

So Biden isn’t trying to fool the Chinese government with his “We’re not trying to surround you” schtick – he’s trying to fool *you*. He’s trying to fool the western public and the allies of the United States, who would get spooked if the US president openly admitted to a deliberate campaign of militarily encirclement against an economic superpower they all trade with extensively.

You simply cannot understand the geopolitics and major conflicts of the 2020s without understanding that the US empire has been actively amassing military threats in the immediate surroundings of its top two rivals – China and Russia – that it would never tolerate anyone else amassing anywhere near the United States. The single dumbest thing

the US empire asks us to believe nowadays is that surrounding its two biggest foes with war machinery is a defensive action, rather than an act of extreme aggression.

The best advice I can offer about US-China tensions is to ignore the words and watch the actions. Ignore what officials say about wanting peace and not trying to surround China and supporting the One China policy etc, and just watch all the US war machinery that’s being rapidly added to that region. The US empire is better at international narrative manipulation than any power structure that has ever existed in human history, but what they can’t spin away is the concrete manoeuvring of solid pieces of war machinery, because they are physical realities and not narratives.

caitlinjohnstone.com.au ✪

Op-Ed: What is to be done, and how not to do it

Eileen Whitehead

I have been inspired to write this by reading Amitav Ghosh's brilliant novel *The Nutmeg's Curse: Parables for a Planet in Crisis*, which ends:

"Much, if not most, of humanity today lives as colonialists once did – viewing the Earth as though it were an inert entity that exists primarily to be exploited and profited from, with the aid of technology and science. Yet even the sciences are now struggling to keep pace with the hidden forces that are manifesting themselves in climatic events of unprecedented and uncanny violence."

We must realise that to succeed in saving the earth, we have to stop appealing to those making profits from exploiting it.

Are the rich owning up to their destruction of the planet? Are the multinational fossil fuel corporations immediately cutting back on their rape of our earth? Of course not, that old privileged "white" greed learnt from colonial times is prevalent in their thinking. They are superior to the "lesser" races – those races who are actually doing no harm to our world. They have no respect for Nature, that's been obvious for the last two hundred years at least. Their thinking won't change: it needs to be changed for them by those of us who are going to pay the price for their greed.

This mindset has pervaded capitalist development. With the Industrial Revolution humanity proved its control of nature. With the discovery of oil our way of life has been inescapably consolidated.

The wars of the twentieth century were won by access to oil, which is why the Middle East has become so important geopolitically. In the First World War British control of oil was paramount, but after the Second World War the United States took over many British naval bases and now its role of guarantor of global energy flows maintains what Ghosh calls "the US strategic dominance and its position as global hegemon."

Fossil fuels have given the western powers superiority in war-making. As Ghosh says, "Today the Pentagon is the single largest consumer of energy in the US – and probably the world." But we don't know what percentage of the world's greenhouse gas emissions derives from the military and this is due to the fact that the US requested that emissions related

to military activities were excluded from the negotiations at the 1997 Kyoto Protocol! Knowing that the three branches of the US military consume approximately 25 billion tons of fuel per year (one fifth of America's total consumption, and in excess of the energy consumption of around two-thirds of the planet's use), why is this being swept under the carpet? During the Iraq War the US military consumed approximately 1.3 billion gallons of oil annually, just for Middle East operations. It has been estimated

that the US Department of Defence generates 500,000 tons of toxic waste annually, more than the top five US chemical companies combined, and that the armed forces of the major world powers produce the greatest amount of hazardous waste in the world.

There's no point appealing to the better nature of people who are beholden to the fossil fuel capitalists. That has been tried.

This is a fight for survival and it's going to be nasty. ✪



ASIA PACIFIC REGIONAL COMMITTEE FOR PEACEFUL REUNIFICATION OF KOREA

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Open Letter to the Secretary General of the UN

27th July 2023

His Excellency, Mr António Guterres,
Secretary-General of the United Nations,
New York NY 1017, USA

Dear Mr Secretary-General,

We the undersigned request that the United Nations revoke permission for use of the United Nations flag by the United States of America as leader of the unified command in Korea.

Although it is now 70 years since fighting was brought to a halt by the signing of the Armistice, the danger of an outbreak of hostilities on the Korean Peninsula has seldom been greater than it is today. It is appropriate therefore to revisit the role of the United Nations in order to promote a peaceful regime for the people of the Korean Peninsula.

Use of the United Nations flag in association with such field exercise as the recent large scale Freedom Shield and Warrior Shield War Games, gives a false impression that the United Nations endorses the military manoeuvres of one of the belligerents. This impedes the United Nations potential to act as a peace broker on the Peninsula.

In November 1975 General Assembly Resolution A/RES/3390B clause B3 called for "the dissolution of the 'United Nations Command' and the withdrawal of all the foreign troops stationed in South Korea under the flag of the United Nations."

Subsequently three of your predecessors, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, Kofi Annan and Ban Ki-moon have

publicly acknowledged that the "United Nations Command" in Korea is not an organ of the United Nations.

Accordingly, we call for the nullification of Clause 5 of the July 5 1950 United Nations Security Council Resolution 84 which "authorizes the unified command to use at its discretion the United Nations flag in the course of operations against North Korean forces." This was passed in the absence of a Permanent Member of the UNSC, the Soviet Union. The actual hostilities of that time have long since passed into history.

This action will make a positive contribution to peace by removing the illusion that one of the belligerents, namely the United States, is acting under the auspices of the United Nations. Freed of this burden of false participation, the United Nations, and the office of the Secretary-General, will then be better placed to fulfil its true role of an impartial organisation which is able, in the words of Article 1 of the UN Charter, "to bring about by peaceful means, and in conformity with the principles of justice and international law adjustment or settlement of international disputes or situations which might lead to a breach of the peace."

Yours faithfully,

On Behalf of Asia-Pacific Regional Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of Korea

Contact: aprcprk.secretariat@gmail.com

Growing misogyny in online spaces and internet activism

Elle Bee

Like many young people born into the online world, I first became exposed to political ideas through social media as a teenager and therefore saw the internet as the primary place where political activity was conducted. For me, that initially took the form of passionate enthusiasm for liberal feminism.

Over time I began to recognise the shortcomings of liberal feminist ideology and moved towards socialism. However, many of my early forays into a type of activism still consisted largely of participating in online interactions, whether this was sharing other peoples' content, creating my own, or simply arguing with strangers online. At the time I still believed that social media and online spaces were one of the most valuable tools for creating social or political change.

After joining the Communist Party, my politics continued to develop significantly and I began to truly appreciate the importance of real world organising over and above social media activism. As my political activity changed, I became disillusioned with the ability of social media to affect genuine positive political, social or economic change.

Something that I have come to realise more recently is that while I and other leftists favour grassroots organising, conservative and far right individuals and organisations are continuing to proliferate online – and they are not tucked away in the darker corners of the internet. I am now more than ever seeing the popularisation of misogynistic and anti-feminist content on social media, and most infuriatingly, I see this content being produced by women.

One content creator, known online as Pearl, is an anti-feminist woman who is capitalising on the success of misogynists like Andrew Tate to build herself a platform online. And sadly, she appears to be doing so with great success, despite how shocking many of her opinions are. I have heard her argue for ending no fault divorce, for removing women's suffrage, for banning abortion, ending premarital sex, and many more outrageous and idiotic things. I believe her success in building an audience of men is in part owed to the ideology of identity politics (which, ironically, I'm sure she would claim to hate). I believe that she emboldens misogynistic men to be more forthcoming with their own views, as they now have women like Pearl to hold up in their defence when they're challenged.

Not only are Pearl's opinions harmful enough in and of themselves, but short-form social media reproduces her content (and other kinds of conservative content) in a way that makes her ideas seem more powerful and more persuasive than they really are. Often this content will be taken from longer podcasts or interviews, which allows passages to be cherry-picked to make her arguments seem stronger, her evidence less tenuous, and her opponents less educated.

Seeing the rise of creators like Pearl, I once again feel the need to grapple with how leftists should use social media to be a counterbalance to misogyny online.

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Why the US is a Fascist State

Umberto Eco's Fourteen Properties of Fascism

Graham Holton

Anyone who has been to Washington DC and visited the Capitol, looking up at the Dome, the viewer is treated to an imposing sight. On the ceiling is the "Apotheosis of Washington," the first American president, painted by Constantino Brumidi in 1865. George Washington is surrounded by motifs that pay homage to America's origins and values. The fresco shows thirteen young women, symbolising the thirteen states, encircling Washington, Liberty, and Victory. A banner reads *E Pluribus Unum* (Out of Many, One), the motto of the United States.

Directly below Washington is the armed figure of "War," Columbia, representing Freedom, symbolising the role war played in securing independence from Britain in 1776. The figure personifies the United States' capital, District of Columbia. She wields a sword and a red, white, and blue shield, vanquishing the tyranny of kings, symbolized by the red mantle. A bald eagle carries arrows and thunderbolts to assist the triumph of Freedom. Below Columbia are a cannon and soldiers.

War's central feature in the fresco portrays, not only the importance of war in US foreign policy, but how the US is perceived by other countries as a warring militarised state. It is this mythos of the militarised state, along with other features, that will be examined and compared with Umberto Eco's fourteen properties of ideological fascism.

Robert Kagan argues in his *Dangerous Nation* (2007) that since its beginning, the US has been seen by the world as dangerous nation. After absorbing Texas in 1845, the Mexican-American War (1846 to 1848) gave it the south-west. The Civil War (1861 to 1865) was decisive in creating a set of political, cultural, racial, and social precepts that entitled America to dominate the world. The Spanish-American War of 1898 gave the United States Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Philippines, and the Marshall Islands. Today the US has over 800 foreign bases.

War brought great wealth to the US, becoming so economically dependent upon the Military-Industrial Complex, that constant wars are required to maintain America's role in the World economy. The

military is central to its national mythos. From Westpoint, its monuments and symbols, days of celebration, to its movies and television shows, the military is a vital part of daily life; something that most Americans fail to be aware of.

It is its military culture, that anyone coming to the US for the first time, immediately sees. Whether it is the armed guards at customs, the heavily armed police presence in the streets, or the armed guards at town halls and the state archive buildings, the viewer witnesses a heavily militarised state.

The US condemns a one-party system as authoritarian, but sees its own two-party system as democratic. The last time it had a third party was in 1912, when former president Theodore Roosevelt ran as a "Third Party" candidate. Unlike Australia, the political system awards seats in Congress and the presidency with the winner-take-all. Presidential candidates get all of a state's electoral votes when they win a majority of the votes in that state.

The US is a republic, but it does not have a prime minister. The president is head of government, head of state and Commander-in-Chief, giving them the power to exercise supreme operational command over the military. The president can veto a bill and return it to Congress, which then needs a two-thirds majority in both the House and the Senate to override the veto. Executive privilege gives the president the power to withhold information from the public, Congress, and the courts, in regards to national security and diplomatic affairs. The president can convene or adjourn Congress, and grant reprieves and pardons. Against this, Congress holds the balance of power, but as the presidency of Trump has shown, it has its shortcomings. The US is far from the democracy it portrays itself, holding many fascist properties.

Fascism is an authoritarian political ideology that embraces far-right nationalism and suppresses its opposition. It strongly opposes Marxism, liberalism, and an effective multiparty democracy. The fascist system of government sees the state being above the rights of the individual. The state supports major corporations, which it sees as the core of its economic wealth and prosperity.

The beginnings of American fascism began in the Cold War of the 1950s, when the House of Un-American Activities Committee



Apotheosis of Washington (detail) on the dome of the United States Capitol in Washington. Photo: Farragutful – flickr.com (CC BY-SA 3.0).

(HUAC) and McCarthyism attacked Communism. At the same time racial Segregation was entrenched by law in many states. Women played only a subordinate role in society. In the 1960s President Johnson declared a War on Crime and President Nixon followed with a War on Drugs, resulting in the militarisation of police forces across America. The attempt to annihilate the left and the militarisation of the police are facets of fascism, but there are many more.

In his 1995 essay "Ur-Fascism," or Eternal Fascism, the cultural theorist, Umberto Eco, listed fourteen "typical" properties of being ideologically fascist. Any one of these properties allows "fascism to coagulate around it," as in the US with its core of militarism. Although Eco used these properties to define Mussolini's fascist Italy, we see that the United States has eleven fascist properties.

The cult of tradition: the US has a deep tradition of military history. This is interpreted and taught in schools, portraying the USA as the greatest nation on Earth, thanks to its military.

The cult of action for action's sake: military action is committed without intellectual reflection. The invasion of foreign countries is done with a "can do" attitude, the consequences of which are known

as "Blow Back." The results are only considered once a foreign government is toppled and the country becomes a failed state, such as Iraq. It is then that the US realises it has created a tragedy.

Disagreement is treason: intellectual discourse and critical reasoning are seen as barriers to US military actions. The attack on Julian Assange, the founder of Wikileaks, for espionage and the attempts to extradite him from Britain, is a typical response of fascism.

Fear of difference: police violence towards non-white communities and the immigrants crossing the Mexico border are commonplace.

Obsession with a plot: the government creates an enemy that does not exist. Xenophobia, with its perceived threats of sabotage and the influence on its people, is seen in the vilification of Cuba, China, and Russia.

Pacifism is trafficking with the enemy: the government attacks the anti-nuclear lobby, environmentalism, and the peace movements.

Contempt for the weak: since the Global Financial Crisis of 2008 the number of homeless has grown into millions, but they are treated as a blight upon society. The US health care system does not cater for long-term unemployed.

Everybody is educated to

become a hero: the education and sporting systems preach that winning is paramount.

Selective populism: the president is the interpreter of the popular will. Americans believe that the American way is the best way for success, no matter the cultural, social, and historical differences there are in other countries.

Newspeak: vocabulary and critical analysis is limited to that used by the government. The debate and analysis of foreign policy is controlled by the state, which is then filtered through the media.

Fascist societies cast their enemies simultaneously as too strong and too weak: The US is doing this with "Communist China," seeing China as weak socially and economically, yet it is also a military threat.

Eco's other properties of fascism are: machismo; appeal to a frustrated middle class; and the rejection of modernism. One may argue that the US possesses these three properties as well.

America suffers from a poverty of democracy. It is a fascist state. There are no indications that the political situation will improve while the US prepares for war with Russia, China, and Iran. As has happened with other fascist states, will the next war be a war too many? ✪



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