



Privatisation of government

Anna Pha

The PwC/Tax Office scandal has brought to the fore some of the serious issues that arise when government functions are contracted out to the private, for-profit sector. We are witnessing a corporate take-over of government, a privatisation of government and its functions. The Australian Public Service (APS) has been gutted, service provision has deteriorated to new lows, and the morale of its workforce is rock bottom.

While the process has been underway since the Howard government, it really took off when the Abbott government culled 15,000 public servants and placed a cap on the number of APS employees. This was not a cost-cutting measure, but a pretext to outsource public service work. This came at a huge cost to the public purse, and a social cost to those who rely on public services.

The public service and its agencies have been infiltrated by parasitic, profiteering private firms that exert considerable influence over government. This has been achieved through contracting out public sector operations and functions, and personnel seconded from the private sector being embedded within the public sector.

"We find big consultant partners peppered across government departments. They're in the senior leadership teams, in agriculture, in the Federal Police, in finance, they're auditors internally for a wide range of government departments. So they're everywhere and they're really big, sitting alongside some of the largest corporations in the country," Greens Senator Barbara Pocock told the ABC's *Four Corners*.

Pocock pointed to their lack of accountability. "They're not exposed to [Senate] estimates, they aren't exposed to questions on notice, unless they're inside an inquiry and affected by an inquiry. So, a whole lot of the key transparency devices and tools for our parliament are prevented from really looking at the big spend on consultants ..."

"It has certainly undermined democracy," Pocock said. "And you have to ask, is one of the intentions of moving so much of the government spend outside the public view [...] a deliberate strategy to give certain governments cover for what they want to do."

"Well I really think the Australian taxpayer has been ripped off and it's unethical!"

REVOLVING DOORS

There is a constant rotation of staff from the Big Four and other corporations in and out of the public sector or Parliament and parliamentary offices. The movement is in all directions. (See page 2 for examples.)

"The upper echelons of the Tax Office are stacked with former consultants. Amazingly, two of them, whose salaries are paid by us taxpayers are also still receiving payments from their former employers." *Four Corners* reporter Angus Grigg said.

Defence is KPMG's largest public sector client, providing more than two-thirds of its government business, worth \$1.3 billion over the last five years. In the same period almost 100 former Defence staff have moved to KPMG! Needless to say, they bring with them valuable inside information and contacts that make for cosy relationships.

Over the past four years the Big Four consulting/accountancy firms – KPMG, PwC, Deloitte, and Ernst and Young – raked in a combined \$4 billion in federal government contracts. Because of their partnership structures there is no public access to just how profitable the contracts were.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

At times it is hard to distinguish public from private. These parasites sit on government advisory boards, draft policy as well as deliver "public services" on behalf of the government.

As we saw in the case of PwC which was advising the Tax Office on curbing tax avoidance at the same time as advising its clients on how to avoid taxes, conflicts of interest arise. The response of such corporations is that they have "checks and balances" in place to address any such conflicts!

At the same time as working for government departments they also hold powerful positions on numerous corporate boards. The Big Four accounting/consultancy monopolies audit the books of 97 per cent of the top 300 corporations listed on the stock exchange. Power comes with that inside knowledge of government departments and corporations that can be used for financial gains.

The Big Four donated similar amounts to Labor and Liberal over the past ten years with



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their combined total averaging \$400,000 per annum from 2012-13 to 2016-17. Since then, it has been closer to \$500,000. That's the the donations on the public record. There may well be others.

This is a small down payment for such large and lucrative contracts that make it worthwhile for the major parties when in office to offer them contracts.

The Big Four have become so powerful that the government is dependent on them. At the same time any semblance of an independent public service has long vanished. These consultancies know the importance of telling the government what it wants to hear and, according to the Auditor General and whistle blowers, some of their auditing falls far short of ethical standards. As the saying goes, don't bite the hand that feeds you.

IMPACT

The public service is a shell of its former self. It has lost institutional knowledge and capability.

The sorts of services contracted out include policy advice, labour hire, travel management, recruitment, transcription, IT, auditing, property rental and management, legal services, project management, employment.

All this work was once done by the public sector, without the additional cost of corporate profits.

The contracting out of billions of dollars of work that was once done by the public sector and could and should be done by them,

usurps the power of government, public accountability and democratic processes.

The processes are opaque, with no public accountability, and the services far more costly than if provided by the public service which is not driven by the profit motive.

LABOR

Labor made a commitment to restore the APS and reduce outsourcing. It has introduced an amendment to the Public Service Act to reform the APS. The bill tinkers at the edges and will achieve little if anything.

The Albanese government has committed to reducing spending on consultants and contractors by \$3 billion over the next four years. It's a start. There is no mention of clearing private interests out of the APS ranks, or the extent to which staffing will be increased.

The failure so far of the APS to offer its workforce a decent wage rise to make up for past wage caps – let alone catch up with inflation – is not a good sign.

According to Griggs "This is not about a few consultants behaving badly. It's about the systematic replacement of a once fearless public service with voracious private sector operators, driven not by public good but by profit. The question is ... is it too late to fix it?"

The answer to that question is "No." But it will take political will and courage. Labor hasn't shown much of either quality.

It's time to put the **public** and **service** back into **public service**. ❖



Guardian

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(Bank) Business as usual

The Commonwealth Bank of Australia has just declared a 10.2 billion dollar profit. Its CEO has received 8 million dollars in bonuses. On top of his salary, that's 10 million dollars in income "earned" this year.

The other members of the "big four," Australia's club of protected big banks have done very well for themselves too. ANZ's latest six month cash profit was \$3.8 billion. NAB made \$4 billion over six months, as did Westpac.

Banks usually make money, and Australia's banks are always very profitable, but this year has been exceptional, largely on the back of interest rate increases.

There's a kind of ritual performance that goes on in most of the Australian media when banks clean up like this. First there's the interest rate change. Then there's the will-they-won't-they about what the banks pass on to their customers. Our bourgeois politicians make some useless noises about how the banks should pass on interest rate falls to mortgage holders faster. If interest rates have gone up, MPs make equally useless noises telling the banks to pass on the rises to depositors faster. The noises have no effect.

The banks pass on the rises and falls in interest to their customers in a way that makes the banks even richer. Interest rates go up, and they raise mortgage interest rates by the same amount very quickly, while dragging their heels about passing on some of the rise to depositors. More ineffective scolding follows before the media and the MPs move on to something else. The banks make a few noises about their need for the money, or their regret at having to hurt people, but they basically ignore the protest. Why shouldn't they? Everyone's just going through the motions. Some people lose houses, others have their rent jacked up quickly, but that's just life in this capitalist utopia.

Some commentators argue that the banks need to be obscenely rich because it's good for the economy somehow. Others wish that we had more competition, and moan that if only there were a lot more banks competition would force banks to be less profit-gouging.

Either way, it's wishful thinking. The economy would survive if banks didn't gouge their customers. The system we have now is the result of capitalist competition. The dominance of finance capital in the Australian system is not an aberration. It's a result. As we say about software, it's not a bug, it's a feature.

The money that banks make doesn't come from thin air. It comes from millions of working people, who give up that money because they need to eat and they want a roof over their heads. There's a power imbalance in this country. Banks can push a button and make mortgages more expensive. The Australian working people who are the source of all the wealth that the banks supposedly look after can't just push a button and make their wages go up.

Workers produce all the value which banks can skim off so easily now. It's our money. The people who make the money should have all the power. We don't have that power because of years of policy choices, bad anti-worker laws, and relentless propaganda telling us that this is how it has to be.

It doesn't have to be this way. Join your union. Join the Communist Party of Australia. Let's change it.

Support the *Guardian*
by donating to Press Fund

Sunshine Coast Branch YES Campaign

Graham Holton

The Sunshine Coast Branch was very active in July with our YES campaign flier and banner drop. The region north of Brisbane covers a diverse number of towns and farming areas. For decades it has been a very conservative area with many people voting for Pauline Hanson and Bob Katter. This has been the first time in many decades that locals have become

aware of the CPA being politically active. We are back!

With such a huge diverse area the branch decided to display our banner and interact with the locals, town by town. We hung our huge YES banner outside Landsborough train station where it immediately aroused interest.

To be more daring we decided to hang the banner in the walk way across the highway leading to Nambour, next to the big pineapple. As it is a major road, we calculated

traffic of 3,000 per hour saw the sign. We hung the banner facing towards traffic going into Nambour and immediately had horns beeping in agreement. All it took was the effort and we got immediate positive response. Many of the branch who could make it joined in, creating camaraderie amongst us. We look forward to doing more banner drops in August. ✪



Revolving doors of greed

The public sector and parliamentary corridors are infested with personnel from private enterprise, and not just the Big Four accounting/consultancy firms. They weave in and out of the government, the public sector and private sector, raising the perception of multiple conflicts of interest and undermining the independence and democratic processes of government. The following are a few of the many examples:

POLITICIAN → BIG FOUR:

Christopher Pyne, former Liberal Defence (and Defence Industry Minister) joined Ernst and Young (EY) to give strategic advice. Became chairman of advisory board of small arms and munitions company Nioa, chair of advisory board of the Australian Missile Corporation, and board member of Xtek Ltd a body armour and unmanned vehicle manufacturer.

Craig Emerson, former Labor Minister for Trade and Competitiveness joined KPMG.

Natasha Stott Despoja, former Australian Democrats senator later became a principal at Deloitte.

BIG FOUR → POLITICIAN:

Steven Ciobo, worked for PwC and later became Liberal Minister for International Trade and Development.

Matt Canavan, worked for KPMG and later became National Party Minister for Resources.

PUBLIC SECTOR → BIG FOUR:

Kevin Rudd, Department of Foreign Affairs (including Australian diplomat in China), then senior China consultant for KPMG before entering Parliament as a Labor MP and then Prime Minister.

Tim Reardon, national transport and precincts leader at PwC had been secretary to NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet and Secretary of Transport for NSW.

BIG FOUR → PUBLIC SECTOR:

Jeremy Hirschhorn, second commissioner for client engagement at the ATO had worked for KPMG.

Rosheen Garnon, chair of Tax Practitioners Board had been National Managing Partner for KPMG Australia's Taxation Division.

Chris Jordan, commissioner of taxation, had worked for KPMG.

Alana Matheson, Fair Work Commissioner, former Liberal deputy mayor of Campbelltown had worked for KPMG.

SENIOR PUBLIC SERVANTS → BIG FOUR:

Tim Reardon, national transport and precincts leader at PwC Australia, was Secretary of Transport for New South Wales and former Secretary of NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet.

Pradeep Philip, Lead Partner for Deloitte Access Economics has been policy director for PM Kevin Rudd, associate director general at the Queensland Department of Premier and Cabinet, and secretary of the Victorian Department of Health and Human Service.

Jamie Norton, partner in EY's forensic technology and cyber security team, was previously assistant commissioner and chief information security officer at the Australian Tax Office. Prior to this, he was head of cyber security at NEC.

THE FULL 360 DEGREES:

Blair Comley, secretary of federal Department of Health and Aged Care, had worked for EY and before that secretary of NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet.

For more examples of revolving doors see "How power bleeds between politics and the big four," on *The Mandarin* or *Crikey* websites. For other examples that raise conflict of interest perceptions visit michaelwest.com.au.

Acknowledgements to *Crikey* and *The Mandarin* for information used in this article. ✪

Vale Peter Andrew

“Stop them damn pictures”



Tony Abbott cosies up to the coal industry.



Australia joined the invasion of Iraq on false intelligence. John Howard showed no remorse.

That’s what Boss Tweed demanded of his goons, but the cartoons exposing his gangster rule over politics kept coming. Tweed was a US politician most notable for being the ruthless boss of the Democratic political machine in the 19th century.

As political commentator Ralph Waldo Emerson noted in the time of Tweed, “Caricatures are often the truest history of the times.”

Peter Andrew and his biting eloquent cartoons gave the *Guardian* a sharp satirical edge (the IMF and World Bank sharks in their bankers’ suits arriving on East Timor’s shores comes to mind).

His weekly “Pete’s Corner” slashed with a razor blade exposing hypocrisy, or noted with a gentle humour his compassion for his fellow human beings. He laid bare the great class divide with its harsh inequality and exploitation (Tony Abbott as a baby with plate and spoon crying for more Coal Flakes).

He came to us in his down-to-earth way – we were a political newspaper in need of a cartoonist and he was a political cartoonist looking for a newspaper.

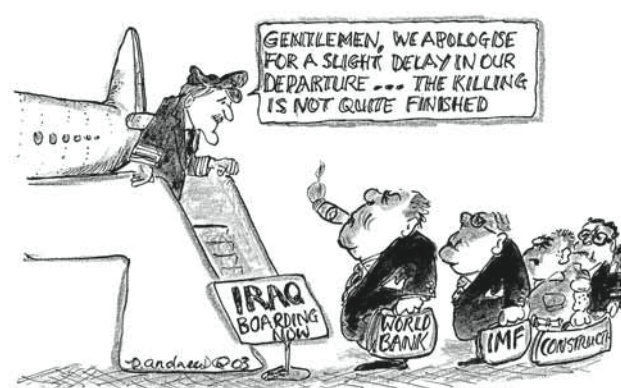
A collection of Pete’s Corner cartoons is available from the CPA bookshop.

And the *Guardian* – the *Workers Weekly* is still in need of a cartoonist.

Let’s start them damn pictures. ✪



Workchoices helped finish Howard as PM, but employers never stop asking for their kind of flexibility.



Julia Gillard was always fine with low wages.



Australia to build US missiles

In one of the latest developments in Australia’s absorption into the US war machine, Australia has signed up to become the Pentagon’s weapons supplier, producing guided multiple launch missile production, beginning in 2025.

US merchants of death (arms manufacturing corporations) Lockheed Martin and Raytheon have been selected as preferred partners for the missile plan which

the recent Defence Strategic Review called a priority.

The suggestion that the project will create local jobs is a farce.

US research shows that clean energy and health care spending create 50 per cent more jobs than the equivalent amount of spending on the military. Education spending creates more than twice as many jobs.

The so-called “alliance” between Australia and the US is not an equal

partnership between two sovereign nations but a relationship of total domination and subservience.

We are not even allowed to know if US nuclear weapons are in our own country.

Caitlin Johnson writes that “our national symbol should be the star-spangled kangaroo. Australia is not a real country. It’s a US military base with marsupials.” ✪

Guardian freelancers are fed up

No, no, not this *Guardian*! Since June 2021, Australian freelancers for *The Guardian*, the British newspaper which has an Australian operation, have been campaigning for a collective agreement to codify minimum rates and fair work conditions. There have been some wins along the way, but *Guardian* management still won’t give freelancers a say in how they are engaged, and The

(other) *Guardian* is beginning to fall behind as other publications negotiate with their freelance contributors as a collective. If you read *The Guardian*, drop them a line to demand they negotiate with their freelancers collectively. ✪

Cuba: revolutionary continuity



Vinnie Molina

The Australia-Cuba Friendship Society (ACFS) welcomed young Cubans, Marianniz Diaz and Ivan Barreto to Perth on 11th-14th August 2023. Their visit was the final leg of their Australia/NZ tour that took them to the main capital cities.

Marianniz Diaz is a research scientist at BioCubaFarma, a state organisation with over 20 thousand employees with the responsibility of developing medical supplies such as medicines and vaccines for the Cuban population.

Ivan Barreto is an official for the Asia-Pacific region of the Cuban Institute of Friendship with the Peoples, ICAP. Both visitors were invited and sponsored by the ACFS solidarity movement which celebrates its 40th anniversary this year.

Marianniz and Ivan's insights, shared at meetings with education and trade union organisations were well received. Their presentations delivered valuable first-hand information about the situation in Cuba.

Cuba has been under a criminal US blockade for more than 60 years. The entire world supports Cuba's motion to end the blockade, year after year, at the United Nations General Assembly. In 2022, 185 countries voted in support of the motion with only the US and Israel voting against the motion to lift the inhumane and obsolete criminal blockade.

In Perth Marianniz and Ivan delivered an inspiring address to a public meeting at the Perth Trades Hall on Saturday 12th August. More than 50 people gathered to learn more about Cuba and actively participated in the discussion. Ivan Barreto invited those present to visit Cuba to fully appreciate the effects of the US blockade on every single Cuban family. Most young people in Cuba have been born under the blockade

between the crises of the 90s and the COVID pandemic. They find it difficult to understand why the US doesn't let Cuba live.

The Southern Cross brigade to Cuba which spends 3 weeks in Cuba over December and January each year is a great opportunity to experience Cuba with a difference. This year again people travelling to Cuba on the brigade will spend part of the time with a troupe of artists as they deliver cultural activity and education in the provinces.

This year's brigade celebrates the 40 years since the first Southern Cross Brigade in solidarity with the people of Cuba; making it a very good reason to join this year. The brigade will also visit the Isle of Youth where Fidel Castro spent months in prison after the 1953 attacks on the Moncada Barracks.

The local branch of the Communist Party of Australia held a formal meeting to meet with the two young members of the Cuban Young Communist League and then joined ACFS members for a farewell BBQ.

The commitment of these young comrades for a better future, in peace and with mutually beneficial diplomatic relations between the people of the United States and Cuba is a guarantee that the Cuban revolution has a revolutionary continuity.

The CPA pledges to continue solidarity work with socialist Cuba until the US blockade is lifted. It also commits to promote and participate in the new international campaign to "Let Cuba Live" which aims to collect one million signatures demanding the removal of Cuba from the US list of countries sponsors of terrorism.

Cuba is not alone!

We encourage our party members and readers to join the campaign and add their names at www.letcubalive.info ✪

Talisman Sabre 23

Talisman Sabre 23 came to Australia amid a blast of PR media showing big war machines whipping through the seas along our coast or churning up the dust in our countryside plus the usual gallant soldiers rushing up beaches looking serious.

The reality was very different.

First there was a large pile-up on the Bruce Highway, the main north-south road along the Queensland coast. A truck loaded with a US tank caught fire after a collision. The fire spread to the tank which exploded. Six people were injured, and the highway was blocked for over a day.

The exercise, which began on 22nd July and was billed as "the biggest ever," continued to generate bad news when an ADF helicopter crashed into the ocean and killed four servicemen.

Behind the bad news is worse news. The Talisman Sabre war games are part of a tapestry of giant US military exercises all over the globe. So far this year there have been exercises in Europe, South Korea, Philippines, and now Australia.

The US is sending a clear message that it is preparing for the invasion of Russia, China, and North Korea. The war games are about aggression and intimidation, not defence or disaster response.

With a massive 30,000 military personnel involved, the main partners, Australia and the US, were joined this year by NATO states France, United Kingdom, Canada, and Germany as well as Fiji, Indonesia, Japan, Republic of Korea, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, and Tonga.

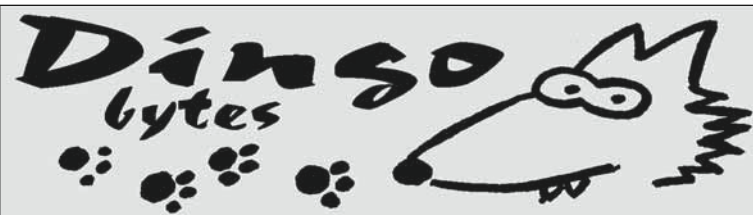
The biennial exercise is used to develop interoperability and to

strengthen military partnerships across the region.

While the macho footage of troops rolling across deserts, light forests and jungles or storming up beaches was diminished by the tragedy of four dead pilots, nevertheless countries including Germany and Japan, took the opportunity to showcase weapons and hawk for buyers.

Party members and others organised a rally against Talisman Sabre on 19th July in Sydney to highlight the issue of military exercises in this country.

As the world experienced its hottest ever July, the military was not deterred. It just kept on practicing for war, continued to burn up fossil fuels and turned its back on the need for global cooperation to bring the worst elements of climate change under control. ✪



Gambling harm is profound. It is not just financial, it is also social. It impacts mental health, leads to other health issues, and too often it leads to suicide, argues a leading campaigner. The parallels between big tobacco and gambling are chilling, said Reverend Tim Costello AO. "They are both predatory industries – industries that knowingly sell harmful products. They invest massive sums to sell and market addictive products. Most disturbingly, both tobacco and gambling companies invest huge sums to develop new, addictive products, designed to get young people hooked," he wrote in the online journal *Pearls and Irritations*. Costello argues that governments should treat gambling as a public health issue in the same way they do tobacco. "We successfully applied a public health approach, banned advertising, introduced plain-paper packaging, and funded research and public education. Eventually, the number of people smoking dramatically reduced and countless lives have been saved as a result," he said. "When we look at gambling harm today and the virtually unlimited and unrestricted marketing of gambling, it is as if we have learnt nothing from history." Gambling in Australia, he said, "is normalised and celebrated, which has led to the highest levels of gambling losses per capita in the world." Costello said the federal government should establish a unit in Health and spearhead the development of a comprehensive national strategy for gambling that encompasses prevention, awareness and education, treatment and research.

British five-year-olds are getting shorter and experts attribute the trend to austerity policies that have impoverished lives. Previous studies had shown there was a slower increase in the average height of British five-year-olds after 1985. But recent research has shown that since the mid-2010s, things have got dramatically worse and the average height of five-year-olds has gone down. "The link between height, nutrition and social circumstances can already be seen in childhood. There is a neat gradient – the greater the deprivation, the shorter the child," said Professor Michael Marmot, Director of the Institute of Health Equity at University College London. Marmot said "it is really bad to be poor in Britain" and that health inequalities have increased during years of austerity. Health among the poorest people is in a state of decline, he added. "Incomes of the poorest 10 per cent are way below those in other European countries. It means that people of low income cannot afford the basics of food, shelter and home heating. Both Conservatives and Labour in Britain put high priority on economic growth. I would rather see a reduction in health inequalities and growth in the height of five-year-old children. That way we will know that we have an economy that is really delivering for the health and wellbeing of all."

PARASITE OF THE WEEK: Business groups have mobilised against the *Secure Jobs, Better Pay Act*, which came into force in June. Employer groups have spent millions of dollars on a national advertising campaign against new IR laws that ensure labour hire workers are paid the same as employees doing the same job where they work.

100 RED YEARS

An online exhibition of the history of the Communist Party of Australia's 100 years

Visit:

www.100redyears.org

"an informative and fascinating look at the comrades' work over the last 100 years. Designed to inspire and educate."

Nurses against subs

NSW Nurses and Midwives Association delegates call for spending on healthcare, education, and the environment – not nuclear submarines. The NSWNMA has joined growing public opposition to AUKUS, the “security pact” between the United States, United Kingdom, and Australia.

Joining AUKUS comes with a *minimum* \$368 billion price tag – the official cost to Australian taxpayers of acquiring more than a dozen nuclear submarines capable of operating in waters near China.

As part of the deal, US and UK nuclear submarines (likely carrying nuclear weapons) will routinely begin accessing Australian ports from 2027. AUKUS will put Australia on the front line of any US-led war against China, critics say.

The AUKUS deal was negotiated in secret and announced by former Prime Minister Morrison in 2021 with no parliamentary discussion. Anthony Albanese immediately declared Labor’s full support and reaffirmed that support in March 2023.

In May, the NSWNMA’s Committee of Delegates supported a motion from Westmead Hospital branch calling on the Association to publicly oppose AUKUS and assist members to lobby federal Labor government MPs on the issue.

A sample letter drafted for the use of NSWNMA members calls on MPs to urge the government to withdraw from AUKUS, end the commitment to acquire nuclear submarines and direct money saved to healthcare, education, and protection of the environment.

The \$368 billion (minimum) submarine cost would fund construction of about 550 big-city hospitals (on the scale of Sydney’s Northern Beaches hospital, which cost \$660 million) or employ 65,000 nurses for about 30 years.

The federal government says it will build a nuclear submarine base on the east coast of Australia, and Port Kembla near Wollongong is widely considered the preferred location.

The South Coast Labour Council, which represents unions in the Wollongong area, opposes the submarine base as a threat to proposed job-creating offshore wind projects that would use Port Kembla harbour.

Secretary of the NSWNMA’s Wollongong Hospital



branch, Jamie Roberts, lives near Port Kembla and has a military background.

Jamie was in army signals intelligence for more than seven years before taking up a nursing career. She supports military spending to give Australia a strong defence capability but does not agree that Australia needs nuclear submarines.

She would like to see open discussion of conventionally powered alternatives to replace the existing Collins class submarines – as also advocated by former Labor PM Paul Keating.

Conventional subs would be cheaper, make us less of a nuclear target and probably do a better job of defending Australia, Jamie believes.

“\$368 billion is just the starting price for the nuclear subs – that amount is guaranteed to increase,” she says.

“Meanwhile, our state hospital system is crumbling and the federal health system is not being adequately funded.” Jamie says the Illawarra region’s hospital system is not equipped to handle a major accident at a nuclear submarine base.

“There are always incidents on any military base and any nuclear-related accident would be extremely serious. We just don’t have the local hospital infrastructure to cope with that.”

The Lamp ✪

US spies take over

Hannah Middleton

At the recent AUSMIN (Australia-United States Ministerial) talks in Brisbane, it was announced that US intelligence operatives will be integrated into Australia’s Defence Intelligence Organisation via a new branch called the Combined Intelligence Centre.

US and Australian spies will cooperate on monitoring issues “of shared strategic concern in the Indo-Pacific” – spin for Australia’s intelligence service being penetrated and colonised by the US.

The ABC reported that the spies will scrutinise the activities of states like China, Russia, and North Korea in the region.

The influence of US spies in the Australian intelligence community is clearly intended to help ensure that US perspectives dominate the thinking of Australian policy makers even more than they do already.

The new branch will impact Australian policy development and help ensure that Australia remains a compliant ally and reliable home to US forces preparing for war on China.

Defence Minister Marles, from

his usual craven “all the way with the USA” perspective, welcomed the new branch as a “significant step forward” towards “seamless” intelligence ties. This means national control being surrendered by an obedient client state.

Analysts have stressed that the Combined Intelligence Centre will create opportunities to skew the focus of intelligence gathering and shape its construction, in turn influencing the formation of Australian strategic policy. ✪

Five-minute strike wage loss

Queensland Catholic employers have been warned against major wage deduction of employees’ pay over a five-minute work stoppage next week.

Thousands of Queensland Catholic school teachers and support staff took a five-minute stop work action on Tuesday, 15th August.

The action is timed for 8:30 am to 8:35 am.

Independent Education Union – Queensland and Northern Territory (IEU-QNT) Branch Secretary Terry Burke slammed any employer deduction of wages beyond what they are legally required to do under the Act.

“Employees are taking lawful protected action – which means the employers are obligated to withhold pay for only the time employees take action,” Mr Burke said.

“In this case – that is five minutes.

“Instead, Queensland Catholic school employers have threatened to withhold employee pay of up to a full day if the action goes ahead.

“Such action should only occur if employees were taking unprotected industrial action – which is not true.

“These employees have followed the law and are legally authorised to take protected industrial action.

“They have done so as the only recourse available to them given the employer failure to address critical concerns as part of negotiations for a new agreement.

“Negotiations have reached a stage where the employers think it’s all over but there is no in-principle agreement and we are far from a ballot on an employer proposed document.

“Employees are taking the action as part of a campaign to address the workload crisis that is seeing teachers leave the sector in droves.

“Employees also want respect shown to their school support staff by employers paying them contemporary wages for the work they do.

“Five minutes is five minutes – not any more than that.

“Catholic employers are on notice that any wage deduction of more than five minutes is ill-conceived and inappropriate and will be fought vigorously,” Burke said.

Independent Education Union – Queensland and Northern Territory (IEU-QNT) ✪

GREEN NOTES

Anna Pha

The UN Convention to Combat Desertification (CCD) was one of the Conventions that arose out of the 1992 Rio Earth summit. It receives far less funding and public coverage or attention than the conventions on climate change and biodiversity. The Global Environment Facility describes desertification as a “silent, invisible crisis that is destabilising communities on a global scale.” That is no exaggeration. The scale at which desertification is occurring is unsustainable – at approximately 30 to 35 times the historical rate due to human actions. Between 2015 and 2019 the world lost at least 100 million hectares of healthy and productive land every year, affecting food and water security globally. If desertification and land degradation continue unabated, more than one billion hectares of productive land will be degraded by 2030. Even more daunting is an estimate that 95 per cent of the planet’s land area could be degraded by 2050 unless preventive and remedial steps are implemented immediately.

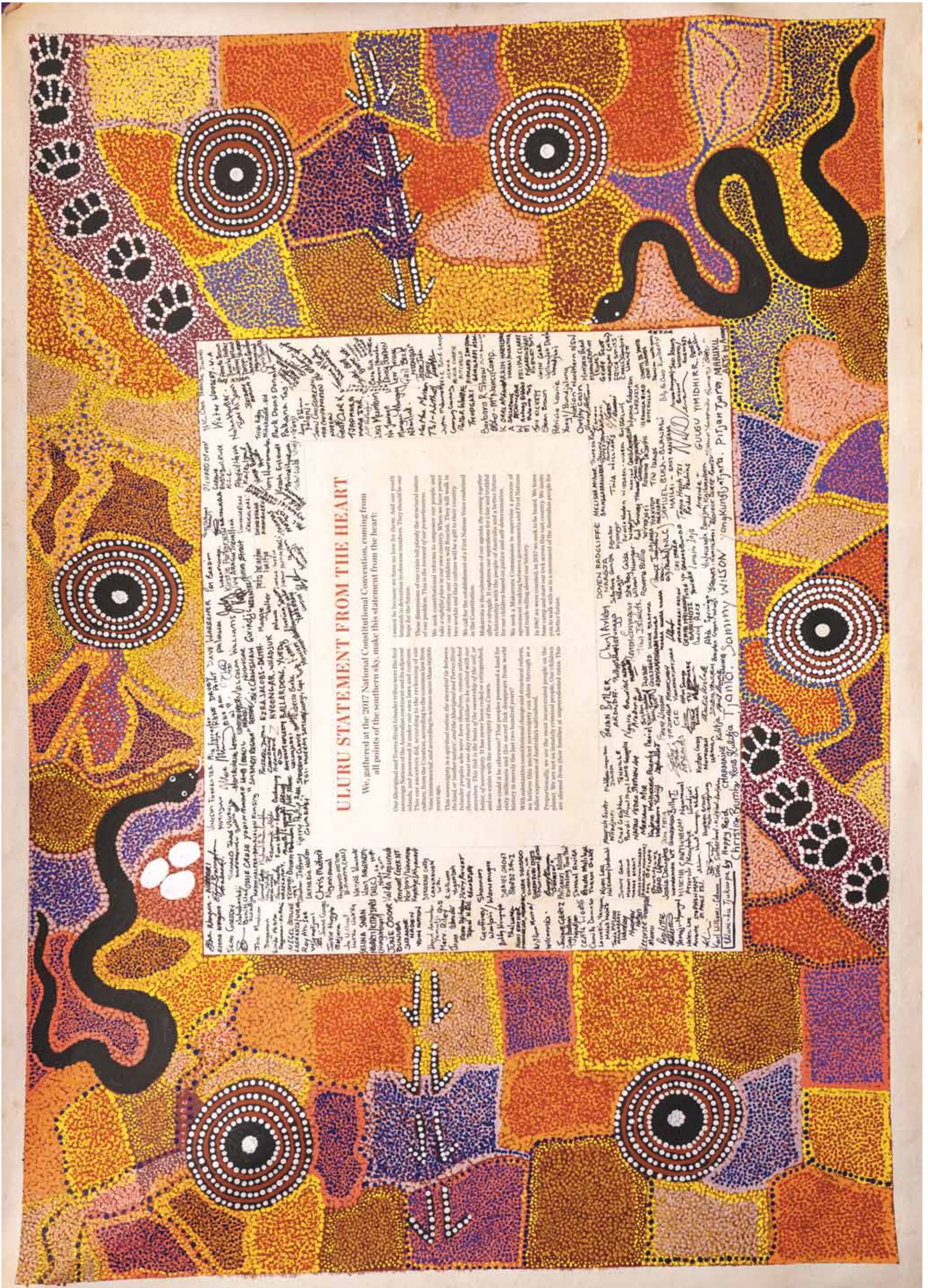
The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment stated that “desertification is potentially the most threatening ecosystem change impacting livelihoods of the poor.” The human population in drylands (arid and semi-arid areas) is projected to increase about twice as rapidly as in non-drylands where desertification is at its worst. The UN rapporteur on Human Rights and the Environment released a report in June 2023 on desertification, land degradation and drought (DLDD). The report says DLDD “reduce access to water for agriculture, drinking, cooking and hygiene, increasing the risks of food insecurity, malnutrition, waterborne diseases, conflict, and violence.” It notes that by 2030, “DLDD is likely to cause 135 million people to migrate.”

DLDD “undermine populations’ ability to adapt to extreme weather events, which are becoming increasingly common as the climate crisis worsens.” Drylands, which are home to three billion people in 169 States and cover almost half of the Earth’s land, are under severe threat from DLDD. Drylands provide fuel, food, building materials, and numerous ecosystem services including water filtration and retention and carbon sequestration. They hold 44 per cent of the world’s croplands, half of the world’s livestock and rich biodiversity. Many of the poorest countries are worst affected by DLDD while having the least resources to address the situation. They also tend to have the fastest growing populations.

Desertification is often driven by social, political, economic, and industrial forces in wealthy nations that benefit from the exploitation of resources in dryland regions. The causes of DLDD include climate change, unsustainable consumption of wealthy countries, intensive agricultural practices, population growth, and extractive industries including mining, oil and gas, and forestry.

“There are strong interactions between desertification and climate change. Climate change exacerbates desertification and land degradation by increasing the frequency and severity of heat-related events including drought, heatwaves, and wildfires. It also accelerates soil erosion on degraded lands. Conversely, desertification and land degradation impact climate change through reductions in vegetation cover, increases in sand and dust aerosols, and greenhouse gas fluctuations. The way these processes interact results in populations that are less resilient and able to adapt to desertification, land degradation and extreme events such as droughts and floods,” the report explains.

Policies to tackle DLDD require action on many fronts including climate change, biodiversity and conservation as well as removal of barriers to migration and increased finance for poorer countries affected. International cooperation is the only way forward with the rich countries acknowledging their responsibility. Indigenous peoples also have a vital role to play with their farming practices and knowledge of land management. Time is fast running out to tackle this “silent, invisible crisis.”



ULURU STATEMENT FROM THE HEART

We, gathered at the 2017 National Constitutional Convention, coming from all points of the southern sky, make this statement from the heart:

Our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tribes were the first sovereign Nations of the Australian continent and its adjacent islands, and possessors of their own laws and customs. This our sovereignty did, according to the recognition of our culture, from the creation of the Commonwealth, under the terms of the Constitution, and remains to this day.

This sovereignty is a spiritual notion that cannot be extinguished. It is not a mere legal right that can be taken away. It is a concept that is passed down from generation to generation, and it is the foundation of our identity as a people. It is the heart of our nation, and it is the heart of our future.

We, the people of the southern sky, gathered at the 2017 National Constitutional Convention, coming from all points of the southern sky, make this statement from the heart. We are gathered here to discuss the future of our nation, and we are gathered here to discuss the future of our people. We are gathered here to discuss the future of our children, and we are gathered here to discuss the future of our grandchildren.

We are gathered here to discuss the future of our nation, and we are gathered here to discuss the future of our people. We are gathered here to discuss the future of our children, and we are gathered here to discuss the future of our grandchildren. We are gathered here to discuss the future of our nation, and we are gathered here to discuss the future of our people. We are gathered here to discuss the future of our children, and we are gathered here to discuss the future of our grandchildren.

[A dense collection of handwritten signatures in various languages, including English, Indigenous languages, and other scripts, surrounding the central text.]

Niger: fourth anti-Western coup in region

Vijay Prashad, Kambale Musavuli

The coup in Niger follows similar coups in Mali (August 2020 and May 2021), Burkina Faso (January 2022 and September 2022), and Guinea (September 2021).

At 3 am on 26th July, 2023, the presidential guard detained President Mohamed Bazoum in Niamey, the capital of Niger. Troops, led by Brigadier General Abdourahmane Tchiani closed the country's borders and declared a curfew. The coup d'état was immediately condemned by the Economic Community of West African States, by the African Union, and by the European Union.

Both France and the United States – which have military bases in Niger – said that they were watching the situation closely.

A tussle between the Army – which claimed to be pro-Bazoum – and the presidential guard threatened the capital, but it soon fizzled out. On 27th July, General Abdou Sidikou Issa of the army released a statement saying that he would accept the situation to “avoid a deadly confrontation between the different forces which ... could cause a bloodbath.” Brigadier General Tchiani went on television on 28th July to announce that he was the new president of the National Council for the Safeguard of the Homeland (Conseil National pour la Sauvegarde de la Patrie or CNSP).

The coup in Niger follows similar coups in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Guinea. Each of these coups was led by military officers angered by the presence of French and US troops, and by the permanent economic crises inflicted on their countries.

This region of Africa – the Sahel – has faced a cascade of crises: the desiccation of the land due to the climate catastrophe, the rise of Islamic militancy due to the 2011 NATO war in Libya, the increase in smuggling networks to traffic weapons, humans, and drugs across the desert, the appropriation of natural resources – including uranium and gold – by Western companies that have simply not paid adequately for these riches, and the entrenchment of Western military forces through the construction of bases and the operation of these armies with impunity.

Two days after the coup, the CNSP announced the names of the 10 officers who lead the CNSP. They come from the entire range of the armed forces, from the army (General Mohamed Toumba) to the Air Force (Colonel Major Amadou Abouramane) to the national police (Deputy General Manager Assahaba Ebankawel).

It is by now clear that one of the most influential members of the CNSP is General Salifou Mody, former chief of staff of the military and leader in the Supreme Council for the Restoration of Democracy, which led the February 2010 coup against President Mamadou Tandja and which governed Niger until Bazoum's predecessor Mahamadou Issoufou won the 2011 presidential election. It was during Issoufou's time in office that the United States government built the world's largest drone base in Agadez and French



Photo: rawpixel.com (CC0).

special forces garrisoned the city of Irlit on behalf of the uranium mining company Orano (formerly a part of Areva).

It is important to note that General Salifou Mody is perceived as an influential member of CNSP given his influence in the army and his international contacts. On 28th February 2023, Mody met with the United States Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Mark Milley during the African Chiefs of Defense Conference in Rome to discuss “regional stability, including counterterrorism cooperation and the continued fight against violent extremism in the region.”

On 9th March, Mody visited Mali to meet with Colonel Assimi Goïta and the Chief of Staff of the Malian army General Oumar Diarra to strengthen military cooperation between Niger and Mali. A few days later on 16th March, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken visited Niger to meet with Bazoum. In what many in Niger perceived as a sidelining of Mody, he was appointed on 1st June as the Nigerien ambassador to the United Arab Emirates. Mody, it is said in Niamey, is the voice in the ear of Brigadier General Tchiani, the titular head of state.

CORRUPTION AND THE WEST

A highly informed source in Niger tells us that the reason why the military moved against Bazoum is that “he's corrupt, a pawn of France. Nigerians were fed up with him and his gang. They are in the process of arresting the members of the deposed system, who embezzled public funds, many of whom have taken refuge in foreign embassies.”

The issue of corruption hangs over Niger, a country with one of the world's most lucrative uranium deposits. The “corruption” that is talked about in Niger is not about petty bribes by government officials, but about an entire structure – developed during French colonial rule – that prevents Niger from establishing sovereignty over its raw materials and over its development.

At the heart of the “corruption” is the so-called “joint venture” between Niger and France called Société des mines de l'Air (Somaïr), which owns and operates the uranium industry in the country. Strikingly, 85 per cent of Somaïr is owned by France's Atomic Energy Commission and two French companies, while only 15 per cent is owned by Niger's government.

Niger produces over 5 per cent of the world's uranium, but its uranium is of a very high quality. Half of Niger's export receipts are from sales of uranium, oil, and gold. One in three lightbulbs in France is powered by uranium from Niger, at the same time as 42 per cent of the African country's population lived below the poverty line. The people of Niger have watched their wealth slip through their fingers for decades.

As a mark of the government's weakness, over the course of the past decade, Niger has lost over US\$906 million in only 10 arbitration cases brought by multinational corporations before the International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes and the International Chamber of Commerce.

France stopped using the franc in 2002 when it switched to the Euro system. But, 14 former French colonies continued to use the Communauté Financière Africaine (CFA),

which gives immense advantages to France (50 per cent of the reserves of these countries have to be held in the French Treasury and France's devaluations of the CFA – as in 1994 – have catastrophic effects on the countries that use it).

In 2015, Chad's president Idriss Déby Itno said that the CFA “pulls African economies down” and that the “time had come to cut the cord that prevents Africa from developing.” Talk now across the Sahel is for not only the removal of French troops – as has taken place in Burkina Faso and in Mali – but of a break with the French economic hold on the region.

THE NEW NON-ALIGNMENT

At the 2023 Russia-Africa Summit in July, Burkina Faso's leader, President Ibrahim Traoré wore a red beret that echoed the uniform of the assassinated socialist leader of his country, Thomas Sankara. Traoré reacted strongly to the condemnation of the military coups in the Sahel, including to a recent visit to his country by an African Union delegation. “A slave that does not rebel does not deserve pity,” he said. “The African Union must stop condemning Africans who decide to fight against their own puppet regimes of the West.”

In February, Burkina Faso had hosted a meeting that included the governments of Mali and Guinea. On the agenda is the creation of a new federation of these states. It is likely that Niger will be invited into these conversations.

Globetrotter ★

Talk now across the Sahel is of ... a break with the French economic hold on the region.

Fortress Europe

Kevin Ovenden

There was widespread relief at the underperformance of Spain's far-right Vox party in last month's general election. The centre-right also failed to meet expectations, leaving no bloc easily able to form a government and the likelihood of a second election later this year.

Boasts from some centre-left commentators, however, that the election marked a turning point in pegging back the continent's radical right were wide of the mark. The overall reality is not only a continuing advance of far-right forces but also a degree of convergence with a traditional right and centre that are adapting to them.

That is reflected in the decision-making structures of the EU. A reformation of the EU is underway. But it is not the dream of those who imagined it to be an essentially social-democratic driver of progress within and without.

Rather, the direction of travel is that sketched in the middle of the last decade by Viktor Orban in Hungary – a Europe of conservative reaction, strengthened national-chauvinism, hardened borders and greater militarism.

When Orban outlined that vision, he was appealing to like-minded politicians in Austria, Poland, and Slovakia to found a "Europe of fatherlands." Euro-enthusiasts dismissed it as an Eastern European hangover that would wither with the advance of liberalism and economic integration.

Not now. Giorgia Meloni's far-right Brothers of Italy is in government in Rome, where the founding treaty of the EU was signed. Her government is the fruit of decades of reorganisation of the right in Italy after the collapse of Christian Democracy, the radicalisation of conservatism under Silvio Berlusconi and previous gains by far-right parties.

Whatever qualms European leaders had about a Meloni premiership vanished overnight when two immediate red lines were met. The first was dropping provocative talk about Italy suffering due to the euro and the dominance of Germany and France in the EU.

The second was to quash any idea that Italy would unhitch itself from NATO's war in Ukraine or withdraw from its military commitments.

So, loyalty to the twin economic and military pillars of the European enterprise.

The minute those undertakings were given and acted upon, Meloni was transformed in the European media and diplomatic communiqués from a dangerous disrupter to a keen, young leader who is not so bad once you get to know her.

That in turn has boosted her role as a beacon for a range of racist and far-right formations looking to go beyond the fringes and actually to exercise power.

It has again revealed the retreat from the liberal values that are meant to undergird European institutions. That was already well underway regarding the highly reactionary government of Poland.

Its near-total ban on abortion and threats to the independence of the judiciary had brought murmurs of disapproval from Brussels and Berlin. There was even a hint at action when the Polish government looked like it might interfere with business interests and orthodox economic policy.

All of that evaporated last year with Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the emergence of Poland alongside Britain as heading the most bellicose NATO states in escalating the war and refusing moves to a ceasefire.



Prime Minister of Italy Giorgia Meloni. Photo: Vox España – flickr.com (CC0).

Far from the system of European alliances exerting some moderation upon the radical right in Poland, it is the Polish state that is able to leverage its militarism and geostrategic position to win concessions from apparent ideological opponents in European capitals.

Thus the German government, led by the social democrats, is providing more weapons to Poland, which has just announced it is deploying 10,000 troops on the border of Belarus. Instead of curbing Polish reaction, the EU and Nato are enabling the Polish state's ambition to be a major military and economic power in the eastern European region.

The concessions to Meloni are even more dramatic and far-reaching as they go to the heart of the mechanism that is generating support for the far right. That is Fortress Europe and the increasingly racist asylum and migration policy linked to the militarisation of the continent's borders.

In June EU states came up with a fresh tightening of anti-refugee and anti-migrant policy. Rather than this being some kind of liberal containment of Meloni, as optimists had vainly predicted, it was widely reported by diplomats to be a triumph for her on account of surrender to the viciously xenophobic Italian position.

There is to be a fast-tracked and stricter process to detain and expel those who are deemed in advance to be unlikely to be given asylum. Despite nominal EU commitments not to deport to countries with appalling human rights records, it is to be left to the "border states" of the bloc, like Italy and Greece, to assess those records.

This is the classic Europeanist hypocrisy of stirring language of human rights on paper to the tune of Beethoven's Ninth, but vitiated in practice. See relations with Saudi Arabia, Israel, Turkey, Egypt ...

And as the drowning of another 41 people off the coast of Europe this week underlined,

that is leaving aside the murderous efforts to stop people arriving in the first place or, as in Greece, to "push back" those who manage to.

In a nod to states such as Hungary and the Netherlands, countries not on the external EU border will be able to pay to avoid taking asylum-seekers relocated from those that are; that money is to go into "projects" outside Europe.

In other words, it is to fund the barbaric detention of people in Libya, Tunisia, and in the Sahel region. This is where France and Western imperialist interests are struggling to retain exploitation of vital raw materials while ensuring those uprooted in the process and through climate breakdown are locked out of migrating to where those commodities and the profits from them end up.

French troops have been stationed for decades in Niger to ensure uranium is extracted from the country while keeping the people in their place – literally.

EU Commission president Ursula von der Leyen visited Tunisia on a joint delegation with Meloni and Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte to sell the new migration arrangement to its president Kais Saïed.

A united front not against the far right, but including it in the interests of a Europe of exclusion and capitalist exploitation. Saïed has usurped power for the last two years, dismissing the parliament and imprisoning opponents, including the constitutional Islamist leader Rached Ghannouchi.

He has also launched a violently racist campaign against black African migrants, deploying a version of the European fascist "great replacement" conspiracy theory. Saïed's fantasy is that it is black Africans supposedly aiming to replace Tunisian Arabs in their own country.

Weeks after visiting Tunis, Rutte's government in the Netherlands collapsed as he tried to push through yet more restrictions on asylum and migration. The country is now heading for a general election in which anti-refugee and racist politics are set to dominate to the benefit of Geert Wilders and others of the radical right.

We are not talking about reaction on the fringes – politically and geographically – of Europe, but pulsing out from its centre.

Finland has its most right-wing government in its post-war history. There is an unravelling of once vaunted social-democratic consensus across Scandinavia. Three parties of the far right have entered the Greek parliament even as the traditional right also gained.

The extreme right AfD in Germany, which has a "fascising" wing led by Björn Höcke, is second in national opinion polls. It could even top the poll at next year's European elections, where the right and far-right are set to do well across the continent. Höcke says, "This EU must die so the true Europe can live." An echo of the Nazi slogan that soldiers had to die at Stalingrad so "Germany may live."

Now the leader of the centre-right CDU Friedrich Merz has broken what was an official cordon sanitaire by mooted possible co-operation with the AfD.

Despite public outrage, Merz's position is likely to grow in influence as the alternative for the CDU is to consider one in four voters useless for them when it comes to forming a government.

It is an illusion to imagine that the liberal-capitalist centre is going to come to the rescue. The German government, which includes the Greens, is reneging on environmental pledges, threatening to deport relatives of those convicted of a crime and witch-hunting the left opposed to German rearmament and imperialist expansion.

Capitalists in Italy, whatever their personal values, are content with a government that removes lesbian parents from birth certificates and clamps down on journalists. It was only when Meloni tried this week to introduce a windfall tax on the banks that there was a business backlash that forced the government to back down.

The outcome will be more hounding of those the capitalist class are content to see suffer – the poor, the sick and the disabled, all under the cover of scapegoating and distraction.

This poses a profound strategic question for the left. The failure of the left insurgency of the middle of the last decade – from the US to Greece – did not mean the end of "populist" irruptions into everyday life and the restoration of the liberal centre.

The growth of the new right and the radicalisation of the old one are proving that.

So it is not a question of whether there will be another round of insurgent politics. It is whether there is going to be a stronger insurgent left or not. One that can avoid the lure of conventionalism that proved so fatal last time. For there most certainly is a strengthening radical right and the collapse of the liberal centre in the face of it.

Morning Star 🌟

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UK: Stoking division and hate



Photo: Alisdare Hickson – flickr.com (CC BY-SA 2.0)

Berny Torre

LONDON: The British government was branded “morally reprehensible” last week for standing by Conservative Party deputy chairman Lee Anderson after he told asylum-seekers who don’t like the *Bibby Stockholm* barge to “fuck off back to France.”

The *Bibby Stockholm* is a floating detention centre anchored at Portland Port in Dorset, England. It was built to house fewer than 250 people but is now set to be packed with 500.

Anderson, who is a Member of Parliament for Ashfield, made the comments after just 15 migrants entered the floating accommodation off the Dorset coast, with 20 said to have not boarded as planned due to legal challenges.

Despite widespread criticism over his language, he was backed by Tory Justice Secretary Alex Chalk, and later suggested people who arrive in Britain after crossing the English Channel were not “genuine asylum-seekers.”

Hope Not Hate director of campaigns Georgie Laming said Anderson is “right at the heart of his party. They’ve defended his words and it’s morally reprehensible.”

“Hope Not Hate has recorded a huge increase in far-right anti-migrant activity. When will the government recognise their language matters?”

Nick Lowles, the group’s CEO, added: “This isn’t some fringe politician saying something completely out of step with his party.”

“This is the deputy leader of the Conservative Party and his words have been defended by government ministers. Absolutely repulsive.”

Stand Up To Racism co-convenor Sabby Dhalu said the group was

“disgusted” that Chalk defended Anderson’s “reprehensible” comments, adding: “This is racism reminiscent of the National Front and must be condemned in the strongest terms.”

The National Front is a neo-Nazi group that traces its heritage to the British Union of Fascists of 1930.

“It is part of a campaign to stoke up racism to scapegoat, divide, and distract from the government’s deliberate policy of making people worse off,” Dhalu said.

Freedom from Torture associate director of advocacy Natasha Tsangarides added: “Time and time again, we’re seeing government ministers ramping up the cruelty of their anti-refugee rhetoric to distract from their own catastrophic mismanagement of both the asylum system and of this country.”

She said the “dehumanising and inflammatory language ... is putting people seeking sanctuary in this country at real risk.”

Steve Smith, CEO of refugee charity Care4Calais, added: “These comments are not surprising from someone who seems to take pride in attacking anyone who has not landed in as privileged a position as he has happened to find himself in.”

“As he is deputy chairman of the Conservative Party, Lee Anderson’s latest outburst seems fairly consistent with the views of a government that’s chosen to serve Rwanda removal notices to Afghan veterans who served alongside our UK troops.”

So-called “Rwanda removal notices” refer to a Conservative government policy targeting all asylum seekers arriving by “irregular means” and forcibly shipping them to Rwanda.

A Momentum spokesman told the *Morning Star*: “Lee Anderson’s

comments reflect the Tories’ inhumane policies that attack the human rights and dignity of asylum-seekers.

“The labour movement stands firm against all xenophobic and racist policies, and the Labour Party leadership must commit to reversing this barbaric policy.”

While the opposition Labour Party did not comment on the remarks, London Mayor Sadiq Khan said the Tories were “stoking up more division and hate,” while former shadow home secretary Diane Abbott, who now sits as an independent MP, said the comments were “a new low, even for the Tories.”

The government has announced the detention barge, which was initially designed to house about 200 people, now somehow has a 500-person capacity.

Anderson is no stranger to controversy and was nicknamed “30p Lee” after controversially saying last year that foodbanks were for people who “can’t cook” and “can’t budget” and that you can make a meal for 30 pence (\$0.34).

Defending his latest comments, Chalk told LBC: “Lee Anderson expresses the righteous indignation of the British people. Yes, he does it in salty terms, that’s his style, but his indignation is well placed.”

The latest Home Office figures meanwhile showed the number of people in the UK waiting for a decision on their asylum application stood at nearly 173,000 in March, the equivalent of around 345 *Bibby Stockholm* barges.

This was up 57 per cent from 109,735 at the end of March 2022 and is the highest figure since current records began in 2010.

Morning Star ✪

Colombia peace process

The Colombian government and the National Liberation Army (ELN), the country’s largest left-wing guerrilla group, began a 180-day bilateral ceasefire on 3rd August. The truce will remain in force until 29th January, 2024. The historic step was agreed upon on 9th June during the third round of peace negotiations between the two sides in Havana, Cuba.

The development marked the most concrete progress to date for leftist president Gustavo Petro and his government’s plan to bring “total peace” to the country, and end over 60 years of internal armed conflict, during which more than 450,000 people have been killed.

During an event held in Corferias, Bogotá, the National Participation Committee, made up of 81 delegates from 30 different social movements, trade

unions, human rights organizations, victims’ movements, and business organizations, among other sectors from all over the country, was established.

Above all the committee seeks to help achieve a successful peace process that is accompanied by transformations in society.

The event was attended by President Gustavo Petro, the head of government delegation Otty Patiño, the head of the ELN delegation Pablo Beltrán, the high commissioner for peace Danilo Rueda, Senator Iván Cepeda, and other members of the peace delegations. The event was also attended by a number of government ministers and officials, representatives of the UN, the Catholic Church, and guarantor countries, and around 2000 citizens from regions across the country, who have historically suffered the most from the conflict. ✪



Global Briefs

YEMEN: Five United Nations officials who were kidnapped in the country 18 months ago have walked free, the UN said last week. In a brief statement, Farhan Haq, the deputy spokesman for UN secretary general Antonio Guterres, said all “available information suggests that all five colleagues are in good health. The secretary-general reiterates that kidnapping is an inhumane and unjustifiable crime, and calls for the perpetrators to be held accountable,” Haq said. The identity of the kidnappers was not revealed.

NORWAY: Authorities were on standby to evacuate more people in the south-east, where huge amounts of water, littered with broken trees, debris and trash, were thundering down the usually serene rivers after days of torrential rain. The level of water in swollen rivers and lakes continued to grow despite two days of dry but overcast weather, with houses abandoned in flooded areas, floating hay bales wrapped in white plastic, cars coated in mud and camping sites swamped. “This has been like a disaster movie,” said Aal mayor Solveig Vestenfor.

HAWAII: Emergency management records show no indication that warning sirens sounded before people ran for their lives from wildfires on Maui that killed at least 55 people. Instead, officials sent alerts to mobile phones, televisions, and radio stations – but widespread power and cellular outages may have limited their reach. Many survivors have said that they didn’t hear any sirens or receive a warning that gave them enough time to prepare and only realised they were in danger when they saw flames or heard explosions nearby.

MIDDLE EAST: The *Barbie* film went on general release in much of the region today but was banned in Kuwait and Lebanon. Kuwait said the movie promotes “ideas and beliefs that are alien to Kuwaiti society and public order,” while Lebanese Culture Minister Mohammed Mortada said it would be banned for “promoting homosexuality and sexual transformation.” The film does not depict sexual behaviour and the homophobic objections may only relate to some of the actors.

SCOTLAND: is the zero-hours capital of the UK, according to campaigning group Zero Hours Justice. Zero-hours contracts require workers to be available with no pay and no guarantee of work. Of the 1.18 million UK workers on zero-hours contracts, 109,000 are in Scotland. Zero Hours Justice has called Zero-hours contracts “a stain on the economy.”

MALAYSIA: The government intensified a crackdown on allegedly gay accessories today, announcing that anyone found with a product of the Swatch watch company with lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, or queer associations could face up to three years in jail. Malaysia raided Swatch stores in May, confiscating watches from its Pride collection with features such as rainbow straps.

MYANMAR: At least 17 people are dead and 30 are missing after a boat carrying Rohingya refugees out of the country capsized. They were trying to reach Malaysia, but the boat sank off the coast near Sittwe in Myanmar’s Rakhine state. Eight survivors were taken away by state security. Nearly a million Rohingya fled Myanmar for Bangladesh following an ethnic cleansing operation in 2017. Myanmar denies them citizenship, claiming that they are illegal immigrants.



Something to say?

Write to the Editor!

editor@cpa.org.au

Letters to the Editor
The Guardian
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Surry Hills NSW 2010

email: editor@cpa.org.au



Unlucky Australians

Dear Comrade Editor
I sent through this review for your new POTTED REVIEWS section via telegram, but it looks like the CPA has updated its technology since the 1930s! Here it is, nonetheless:

This book is a first-hand account by author Frank Hardy

about his experience and involvement in the the Gurindji strike, also known as the Wave Hill walk off, in 1966, initiated by 200 Gurindji stockmen, house servants, and their families. A writer of provocative charm and razor sharp political analysis, Hardy brings the reader along with him through all the grueling hours, joyous victories, and political intricacies of one of Australia's most significant political struggles. The book also contains extensive transcripts of interviews with indigenous activists like Vincent Lingiari and Robert Tudawali. A timely reminder for the role communists can play in the struggle for indigenous liberation.

In Solidarity.

Valentin Cartillier
France

China and APEC

Everything the US imperialists are doing these days is provocative. What they seem to be trying to do by not inviting sanctioned Hong Kong leader John Lee to the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Leaders' Meeting in San Francisco in November is to get China to not attend.

They could then tell the world that China is not cooperating with the "rest of the world".

We don't know what China is thinking. But they are Marxists and have studied Lenin.

Lenin's advice adopted by Russian communists in the early 1900s was to participate in the Duma and use this venue purposefully to

the benefit of the struggle against the Tsar.

China could be thinking of attending and exposing the negativity of the US aggressive approach to world affairs and especially to the need for peaceful cooperation to solve the world's economic needs.

In this case China's (according to a comment on the internet) "pretty damn soft" approach seems to be an appropriate move. War is waste and hardly a wise choice in the nuclear era.

As if they are saying, "We're all for cooperation for the benefit of a peaceful world. Conflict ending up in war is not a solution to the world's problems."

There's the challenge for the US and other Western nations. "Let's work together," China seems to be

saying. The profits will be much smaller, but the peoples of the world will be eternally grateful for a peaceful era where diplomacy is the reigning method with which to seek solutions to problems.

This is preferable to spending billions on armaments the manufacture of which will contribute to global warming and inflation.

Since peace is union business, we need to see a lot more union action for peace.

Bob Saltis
Adelaide

Capitalism's Global Food Crisis

Graham Holton

The world is suffering from a dire food crisis. On 20 July India, the world's leading rice exporter, supplying 40 percent of the global rice trade, banned the export of non-basmati rice. The grain export agreement, the Black Sea Grain Initiative (BSGI) between Russia, Ukraine, Turkey and the United Nations (UN), has expired and Russia has attacked grain storage facilities in Ukraine. To make matters worse, the El Niño weather pattern has produced climate-related crop failures, with major floods and heatwaves in Southern Europe, North Africa, the USA and Asia, and major droughts in South America and Africa.

The Stanford University Center on Food Security and the Environment, has found that over the past 40 years "a third of the world's high quality food-producing land" has been destroyed by drought, pollution, and soil erosion due to agriculture intensive ploughing and chemical fertilisers. These combined effects have destroyed the production of key agricultural commodities around the world, revealing the inherent weaknesses of the global agricultural system. The Capitalist system of monoculture agriculture, relying on a few plant species, and the global grain trade controlled by five corporations, has aggravated the global food crisis forcing up prices.

These higher international food prices will lead to further food riots and famines in developing countries, warns the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). The World Bank has announced a US\$12 billion fund to help alleviate the international food crisis, created by the high prices of wheat, oil, flour, and other staples.

Last year, major food shortages occurred in Sub-Saharan Africa, Iran, Sri Lanka, Sudan and Iraq. Significant floods and heatwaves destroyed key crops in the Americas and Europe. Droughts hit Spain and Portugal, which lost up to 80 per cent of crops in some areas. Eighty-two million East Africans and 42 million West Africans face acute food insecurity. Last year more than 8 million Somalis were in urgent need of food assistance. In other areas locust plagues, droughts, and fires have laid waste to food production areas.

These food crises are accentuated by the lack of competition in the international agricultural food trade forcing up prices. Nearly 90 per cent of the world's grain trade is done through five traders, the ABCD group of companies: Archer Daniels Midland, Bunge, Cargill, and Louis Dreyfus. They also trade



Photo: Sorapong Chaipanya – pexels.com (CC0).

in coffee, sugar, cocoa, oilseeds, and biofuels. In 2023 Bunge and Viterro agreed to a US\$34 billion merger, dramatically reducing competition.

Competition was further decreased with major global agribusinesses merging or being purchased. ChemChina purchased Syngenta, Bayer acquired Monsanto, and Nutrien purchased Landmark and Rural Co.

The United States produces 40 per cent of the world's maize, followed by Europe, Argentina, Brazil and China. As well as human food consumption, maize is used as an animal feed and in biofuels. Maize is not a natural feed for cattle and pigs. It is used to fatten the livestock animal before sale, to fetch higher prices. Forty per cent of the corn grown in the US is used for ethanol fuel, which makes up 10 per cent of the motor vehicle gasoline produced and consumed.

Wheat is the major grain crop traded around the world, with global wheat prices continuing to be high this year. The bulk (80

per cent) of the world's wheat is grown in North America, Argentina, Europe, China, India, Australia, and North Africa. The world's major wheat exporting countries are China, India, Russia, USA, France, Ukraine, and Australia. Australia is expected to sell a record 13.7 per cent of global wheat exports this year.

Russia is the world's top wheat exporter. From a record production of 92 million tons this year, Russia is exporting 45 million tons, primarily to the Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia. Due to the ongoing war with Russia, Ukraine's area under wheat is down significantly. Production is forecast at only 17.5 million tons, and its wheat exports are down 40 per cent to 10.5 million tons. The BSGI grain deal had helped Ukraine export 16.8 million tons of wheat last year, with 39 per cent transported through Eastern Europe, because of ease of shipment and the increase in regional demand owing to the drought.

India announced that it would stop

exporting non-basmati white rice, 25 per cent of India's rice exports, effective immediately. Parboiled rice (partially boiled) and basmati rice, are still allowed to be exported. Rice prices increased after devastating floods in Pakistan, which tightened global supply, said Joseph Glauber, senior research fellow at the International Food Policy Research Institute. The International Food Policy Research Institute said, "the ban is the latest blow to the global rice market," forcing higher global prices and increased food insecurity.

Global rice supplies will worsen, said ASEAN economist Eve Barre. US rice farmers, struggling with the drought, have planted soybeans and corn which require less water. The US supplies 70 per cent of its domestic rice market and imports arborio, jasmine, and basmati rice.

North America has experienced droughts over the past three years. In South America, Chile has had a food crisis since 2020. In 2021, Argentina banned all meat exports to curb food price inflation. In Uruguay the drought is so bad the reservoir level for the capital, Montevideo, has fallen to 2 per cent. Germany is planning to ban biofuels produced from food crops by 2030. To ensure its long-term food security, last year China acquired 50 per cent of the world's supply of wheat, 60 per cent of its rice, and 69 per cent of corn stockpiles. In the face of all this, Australia continues to make climate change worse through increased fossil fuel production. ☘

Capitalist monoculture agriculture, and a global grain trade controlled by five corporations, has aggravated the global food crisis forcing up prices.

Open spaces: Pentagon eyeing Australia as missile testing ground

The US could test its hypersonic missiles in Australia, US Army Secretary Christine Wormuth said recently. Such a move, under the three-member Australia, UK, US (AUKUS) pact, would represent a significant expansion of Washington's presence in the Asia-Pacific region.

China has accused the US of using the pact to "play up conflict and confrontation" with Beijing.

"One thing Australia has in spades is long distances and relatively unpopulated land," Wormuth told the AFP news agency. "A challenge for us in the United States when it comes to hypersonics ... is to find open spaces in the United States where we can actually test these weapons."

"Australia obviously has a tremendous amount of territory where that testing is a little bit more doable, so I think that's a unique thing ... that the Australians bring to the table," she added.

The US, UK, and Australia signed the AUKUS security pact in 2021, with the three powers agreeing to cooperate on nuclear submarine construction and hypersonic missile development. China views the alliance as an explicit threat, with Defence Minister Li Shangfu stating in June that by creating a "NATO-like" block in the Indo-Pacific, Washington and its allies are looking "to hold countries in the region hostage and play up conflict and confrontation."

It is unclear which weapons the US plans on testing in Australia as the Pentagon's various hypersonic missiles are still in development. Russia and China are widely recognised as winning the hypersonic arms race. Moscow has been using its Kinzhal missiles to strike Ukraine, while its Avangard strategic range glide vehicles have been fielded since 2019, and Zircon anti-ship cruise missiles deployed since last year.

The US considers China the

world leader in hypersonic technology, with the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) particularly concerned about Beijing's DF-17 medium-range ballistic missile. DIA chief scientist Paul Freisthler claimed in March that this missile's hypersonic payload could easily "reach US military forces in the Western Pacific."

The struggle for hypersonic supremacy is not the first arms race in which Australia has been used as a firing range. The UK conducted 12 nuclear weapons tests and more than two dozen smaller detonations of radioactive material in Australia between 1952 and 1958. A majority of Australians opposed the tests, which caused a spate of illnesses and deaths among nearby Aboriginal communities and site workers, according to the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons. ☸

Weapons corporations are making a killing

Eileen Whitehead

Weapons corporations are making a killing exporting terror around the world. While the USA's top five weapons contractors make profits topping \$200 billion, they're never going to stop.

US weapons makers dominate the global arms industry, which is why there is no intention of using diplomacy to stop the war in Ukraine, where Boeing is supplying ScanEagle unmanned aerial vehicles, Avenger air defence systems, Harpoon and Hellfire missiles, and ground-launched small diameter bombs.

Lockheed Martin and Raytheon are doubling production of Javelin anti-tank missiles, having already sent 8500 to Ukraine. These companies are just two of the four US-based corporations among the world's top five military contractors.

In 2022, Raytheon made \$67.07 billion profit; Boeing, \$66.61 billion profit; Lockheed Martin \$65.98 billion profit; Northrup Grumman \$36.60 billion profit; General Dynamics \$39.41 billion profit; and BAE (a UK company, also in the US) \$26.29 billion profit.

In the first half of 2023, the revenue of the top 25 Western defence contractors increased by 11 per

cent to \$212 billion. Little wonder we can see no end to US instigated wars! Now they are planning for the next one with China, leading Australia along the same path of madness.

Currently, on the back of arms deliveries to Ukraine and rearmament in Europe, total arms sales for these companies for 2023 are expected to amount to \$448 billion – a \$47 billion increase on last year.

By 2026, the amount could rise by more than 20 per cent to \$554 billion.

The arms industry is profiting from human suffering; the climate breakdown and emissions caused by their weapons is appalling. The US military is the highest carbon emitter in the world. Their weapons have a massive carbon footprint – both during manufacture and deployment. They are burning our planet.

Tanks, missiles, jets, bombs, grenades and chemical agents rip out forests, destroy ecosystems, pollute waterways and maim wildlife. The toxic waste that warfare leaves behind contaminates soil and water for decades. They are causing starvation and famine.

There are no eco-friendly weapons. They lay waste everywhere, and they become waste.

The only war we need to fight now is one to save the planet. ☸



Half the Sky

Rape myths persist

Anna Pha

A report on sexual violence court cases in NSW has found that **reforms to the justice system over the past 40 years have made improvements in reducing the trauma experienced by victims of sexual violence and enhancing just outcomes.** These reforms include closed court arrangements, the opportunity for complainants to give evidence via CCTV from a remote location, access to a support person, and use of pre-recorded evidence in retrials. **However,** "There is scope to do more to improve the experience for complainants, so that stereotypes and narratives that are out of step with contemporary values no longer feature in sexual offence trials," Professor Julia Quilter, one of the report's authors, says.

The report is based on a study of the transcripts from 75 sexual offence trials finalised in the District Court of NSW between 2014 and 2020. It includes trial by jury or by a judge alone. 96 per cent of trials involved female complainants and 71 per cent were aged 15-29 years. In 91 per cent of trials the accused was known to the complainant in some way prior to the alleged offence.

"We found that rape myths and stereotypes about how a genuine victim of sexual violence should behave featured prominently in the trials we examined," Quilter says. "Trials displayed a continuing strong focus on the conduct of the complainant, and whether they had consented, with less attention paid to the accused's 'knowledge' in relation to consent," the report notes. "Complainants were regularly cross-examined about having made a 'delayed' or 'incomplete' complaint (84 per cent of trials), having failed to physically resist (53 per cent) or verbally communicate non-consent (53 per cent), or having incomplete or inconsistent recall of events (76 per cent)."

Questioning of complainants and closing submissions that accuse the complainant of lying are still common, and in 73 per cent of trials the complainant was accused of fabricating the sexual offence allegation for an ulterior purpose. Complainants who were intoxicated at the time of the alleged offence faced additional scrutiny, including suggestions of "drunken consent" and unreliability based on impaired recall. Defence counsel were allowed wide latitude to question the complainant on a range of topics, including prior "flirtatious" behaviour and aspects of the complainant's past said to be relevant to credibility (e.g. substance use, mental illness, children in care).

The NSW state government introduced consent laws in 2022 and launched a "Make No Doubt" campaign, with particular focus on younger age groups. It remains to be seen how this works out in practice.

The report may be found on the NSW Department of Communities and Justice website (www.dcj.nsw.gov.au).

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Sydney Vigil

**STOP
USA BLOCKADE
ON CUBA**

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

Also stop Venezuela & Gaza blockades

12:30 pm Sunday September 17
Sydney Town Hall

“Keep Fighting AUKUS”

Interview with Korean peace activist Joon Shik Shin

Interviewer: FK

Joon Shik Shin's business card gives his profession as “peace activist.” He has been a long-time worker for unions and the peace movement in both Korea and Australia. Joon recently finished a 40-day tour of Australia, where he has been speaking to meetings of the Korean community, and attending peace actions around the country, including an anti-AUKUS event in Melbourne, and the Hiroshima Never Again Rally. Our interviewer caught up with him in Melbourne and interviewed him in the gaps in Joon's busy schedule.

FK: How did you become a peace activist?

Joon Shik Shin (JSS): In Korea I was a student activist. At the time – 1980s and early 1990s – we were acting against the Korean dictatorship and trying to make Korean society a democratic society. I was also a very strong union activist. Through the union movement I met many people. Sometimes I attended union rallies. I came to slowly understand the union movement and the peace movement. I came to understand what they did, so I moved on to the peace movement.

FK: What are your goals as a peace activist at the moment?

JSS: Generally speaking, world peace. Specifically, ending the Korean War. The Korean war stopped in 1953, but it's still not finalised, so we are pushing to end the Korean War finally. Ultimately we want the US, Japan, North Korea, South Korea, and China to sign up to a peace agreement to keep peace in the Korean Peninsula.

FK: What is the current situation with relations between South Korea and the DPRK (Democratic People's Republic of Korea, aka North Korea)?

It's very difficult now. The current government in South Korea wants to just win by getting more and more expensive weaponry from the United States. That will just start an arms race.

FK: What posturing and role is the US taking in the ongoing tensions in Korea and region?

JSS: The US is making the situation much worse by increasing militarisation. Recently the nuclear submarine *Annapolis* visited South Korea as a provocation. In response, the DPRK fired two missiles into the sea near the border between the two Koreas.

FK: What is happening with the many US bases in Korea and are the South Korea people resisting their presence?

JSS: One of the largest US army bases in the world is in Korea. Pyeongtaek (Camp Humphrey) is the largest US base outside the USA. [Editor's note: about 42 thousand people]

A lot of Korean people don't understand that it's a new Cold War, more dangerous than the old Cold War. The activists fully understand. We're mounting regular protests and trying to encircle the base.

FK: What's the situation concerning relations between the DPRK and South Korea?



Joon outside the Victoria Market, Melbourne

JSS: Very bad. The previous government tried to communicate – you know, an exchange program. This government wants to be a winner through military power, but we don't agree. North Korean people ... are people! We have different systems, but we are all Korean, we have to learn to get along.

FK: What are the chances for peace in Korea?

Because of Korea's history, we are very aware of the importance of peace. The Korean war is technically not finished, and young men do compulsory military service. Peace is possible, but it's very difficult just now. Peace is very important because Koreans have a lot of experience suffering through war and colonialism.

The government says that strong military power can make peace, but we don't agree. They want to militarise South Korea. I think the government believes it can win an arms race. Through that, they want to make peace, but it's nonsense.

North Korea gets nuclear weapons and the South Korean government just buys more and more expensive weapons from the US. We are very worried that the Korean peninsula is becoming the most dangerous battleground in the new Cold War.

The US and the government want to “upgrade” the military treaty we made with the US in 1953. That treaty just covers conventional weapons, but they want the treaty to contain the possibility of nuclear weapons.

FK: What is happening with the union movement and the ongoing intimidation of the South Korean government?

JSS: Most of the union leadership understands what we need to do. Korea has a different history to Australia. Union leaders, especially under the KCTU (Korean Council of Trade Unions) have to know about that bad, bitter history to organise people. They're very good at organising – keeping in touch with their members. Korean unions are very tough and very peace conscious.

The right-wing government in South Korea now has been harassing union leaders with false accusations of bullying and embezzlement. One construction union leader committed suicide because of the pressure he was under. He was very innocent and very pure, he was just working hard for union members. The government just makes propaganda about the unions.

I'm not sure of the exact figure, but I think there are over 30 people in detention centres, falsely accused of embezzlement and harassment of members.

KCTU arranged a general strike and many union members attended.

FK: What are the main disputes at the moment?

JSS: Construction unions are the biggest and strongest unions, so the government is putting pressure on them. Those unions learned a lot from Australian unions, like “no ticket no start.” Korean unions engaged me to reach unions here and lecture them on what I learned. Capitalist governments are scared of big effective unions, so they put pressure on them. KCTU and Korean unions never give up.

FK: Do you have much support from other countries?

JSS: Yes, we have support from America, from Germany, from many other countries.

FK: What are your goals as a peace activist?

JSS: I want the South Korean government to communicate with the leadership of the DPRK, and use communication – you know, exchange programs, meetings – to relax the tension – instead of competition. We don't want an arms race. We want a peace process.

FK: How do Koreans feel about China?

JSS: Korean people see China as a very good trading partner, and many Chinese tourists come to Korea. The political systems are very different, but we need trading partners. So Korean people want the two countries to become very good peaceful trading partners.

FK: What solidarity are the people of South Korea wanting from Australian activists to support them in the Peace and worker campaigns?

JSS: For peace, we are working on a huge petition to go to the United Nations and the countries that are officially belligerents in the Korean War. We want that war to be officially over. We want peace on the Peninsula.

It's a very bad situation for the new Cold War that Australia makes this bloody AUKUS agreement.

Also we Korean peace activists want you to keep fighting against AUKUS! ✪



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