



# Rules for exploitation



Most gig workers must pay their own insurance and cover their own sick leave, annual leave, and superannuation. Photo: Taylor Herring – flickr.com (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0).

Anna Pha

**Labor's second tranche of the Closing Loopholes Bill laying down the rules for exploitation, was finally passed on 12 February following Labor's acceptance of the Greens' 'right to disconnect' amendment and more than 20 amendments from independent Senator David Pocock. The media have focused on the 'right to disconnect' provisions, but there is much more to the bill.**

As with the first tranche which was passed in December 2023, there are a number of positive reforms, and others which fall short. The legislation is also noteworthy for what it does not include. The original bill was broken into two tranches when Labor realised it would not be passed by the Senate last year.

The first tranche contained the relatively non-contentious issues of the original bill, including 'same job, same pay' for labour hire workers, certain workplace delegate rights, criminalisation of intentional wage and superannuation theft, enhanced discrimination protections, regulation of silica-related disease, conciliation conferences prior to industrial action, a new federal criminal offence of industrial manslaughter, and right of entry changes for union officials assisting health and safety representatives.

When the original bill was presented in September 2023, employer bodies and anti-worker media outlets such as News Corp and the *Australian Financial Review* (AFR)

ran a hysterical scare campaign warning the bill would bankrupt businesses, undermine the economy, and spell the death of tradies. They even dishonestly claimed that union officials would be raiding employers' homes!

It is no different this time, with more false claims and hysteria.

## CASUAL TO PERMANENT

There are 2.73 million casual workers. More than half a million of them want to be permanent. Over recent decades casualisation has become a method of doing business, enabling bosses to intimidate and threaten workers who seek better pay and working conditions, or who want to join a trade union. Casuals are insecure and vulnerable, at the mercy of their bosses.

The Closing Loopholes Act (CLA) sets out to overcome decisions of the High Court in 2022 when the focus on defining casual work shifted from looking at the various conditions of employment in practice to focusing on the wording of the employment contract.

A casual employee is defined as one for whom there is firm commitment to continuing and indefinite work, and who is entitled to a casual loading or a specific rate of pay for casuals as specified in an agreement.

The definition does not exclude workers with a regular pattern of work. The focus is on the totality of the employment relationship. The CLA also specifies how a worker may seek to become an ongoing part-time or full-time employee.

Casual employment or labour hire

should only be an option for top-up labour, or a replacement for someone on temporary leave, not a business model.

## DEFINITION OF EMPLOYMENT

For the first time the Fair Work Act (FWA) defines the term 'employment.'

One of the aims is to end what is known as 'sham contracting' whereby workers to all intents and purposes are employees but are required to become self-employed as contractors with an ABN and loss of many basic rights that other workers have.

The courts will have to consider the 'reality' of the situation, not the contract, in determining if a worker is an employee and entitled to back pay.

The onus of proof will be on employers to prove they reasonably believed the contract was a contract for services.

## 'EMPLOYEE-LIKE' WORKERS

More than 15 gig workers have died on Australian roads since the gig economy began in 2017. These workers are 'independent contractors,' deemed to be providing services for a company, and technically not employees of that company. Gig work is unregulated and undercuts awards and enterprise agreements at the same time as making it extremely difficult to unionise workers.

Workers are required to take out an ABN and are denied many of the entitlements of other workers who are covered in modern awards and enterprise bargaining agreements. They must pay their own insurance and cover their own sick and annual leave and superannuation. Sham contracting is rampant in the construction industry.

Under Closing Loopholes, gig workers or trade unions can now apply to the FWC for a minimum standards order for pay and conditions. These conditions may include payment terms, deductions, consultation, insurance, delegates' rights and recovery of costs.

However, rosters, overtime rates, penalty rates, and payments for time prior to the acceptance of an engagement or between engagements are excluded. Workers' flexibility to work when they choose cannot be affected.

This applies where the pay is at or below the rate of an employee performing comparable work, or when a worker has low bargaining power in negotiations in relations to their services contract under which the work is performed.

It does not include workers who have a high degree of bargaining power, are comparatively well paid, or have a significant degree of control over their work. For example, it excludes tradespeople even if they work on a digital platform.

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# Guardian

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19 February 2024

## We're being gouged

Are you feeling gouged, like prices are higher than they need to be? You should be – it's been going on for a while. Thanks to the recent inquiry into price gouging conducted by Alan Fels for the ACTU, we have good reason to think we've all been gouged.

The inquiry was no spur-of-the-moment thing. Fels conducted public hearings in five cities, received more than 750 public submissions, and 20 contributions from academics, experts, and other organisations. The inquiry started last August and the report was handed in on 6 February. It's a serious look at price gouging in this country. Not to put too fine a point on it, we – working class Australians – are being done.

According to the ACTU, Fels found that some businesses have too much power over “their customers, their supply chain, and their workers”. For customers, the big supermarket chains Coles and Woolworths form a duopoly, controlling 75 per cent of the market between them.

The power affects customers, with businesses using all sorts of dodges to get more out of us (see ‘How do I gouge thee?’ on page 3 of this issue). The duopoly has been found making it harder for shopping centres to lease to competitors.

Together, Coles and Woolworths form a near ‘monopsony,’ meaning that if you want to sell food, they're almost the only game in town. The big two bargain hard, which is allowed, but they have long been known for gouging suppliers, holding the threat of de-registration over them, and extracting fees for favourable positioning in the store.

None of this is a surprise to communists. Marx, Engels, and Lenin describe clearly how capitalism moves towards monopoly. The business lobby in Australia love to talk about their love of competition, but what they're in business for is profit, and monopoly is the end result of the competition they claim to enjoy.

So you're going to hear a lot about gouging and inquiries. The solution? Usually what's suggested is some regulations to get more competition going – because all the major political parties assume that competition is how we get to a neoliberal utopia, with happy competing companies, and happy consumers, workers, and suppliers. This widespread idea is wrong.

It's true that individual regulations can stop *some* bad practices from occurring. What they can't stop is the capitalist tendency to monopoly, and exploitation of workers, customers, farmers, and small businesses.

It doesn't have to be that way. Under socialist planning, supply chains can be organised for the benefit of people, not for that of capital. Socialist planning can also anticipate large-scale events. In China, socialist planning meant that the country got through the Global Financial Crisis almost unscathed, and through the pandemic with several hundred less deaths per thousand than the United States did. Forward-thinking, people-centred socialist planning has also had successes in Vietnam and Laos.

The Communist Party of Australia welcomes the release of the Inquiry into Price Gouging, and this paper will celebrate if particular abuses are curbed, but socialist economic planning is necessary for long-term stability, and the only way we can create a national economy for the future that can bring security to farmers and customers and bring down the cost of living.

# Rules for exploitation

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Instead of minimum standards orders the FWC can make minimum standards guidelines. These are non-binding and are restricted to the same areas as binding orders. Time will tell just how big a loophole this is.

A Digital Labour Platform Consultation Committee will be established so that representatives of government, digital labour platform operators, and workers performing digital platform work can consult on workplace relations matters.

The Closing Loopholes covers unfair deactivation where workers are cut off the platform unfairly. They may be reinstated if found to be unfairly sacked, but not compensated. Gig workers such as delivery drivers are under pressure to beat the clock if they want to gain work at the busiest times and hence earn more income or avoid being cut off.

Just how this will work in practice remains to be seen, but it could prove to be riddled with loopholes. An employer might give a worker next to no work rather than disconnecting them. The difficulty in unionising gig workers remains an issue.

## ROAD TRANSPORT

In 2023, 54 truck drivers lost their lives on the road. The FWC will be able to make guidelines setting standards for road transport employee-like truckies such as owner drivers. The Transport Workers Union has fought hard for companies using owner drivers and other contractors to be regulated.

There are unfair termination provisions which apply after six months of a service contract in accordance with a Code to be drawn up by the relevant minister. Unfair termination could result in reinstatement or compensation if deemed appropriate.

Unions representing platform-based workers or truckies can make consent-based collective agreements with platform operators and businesses. There are provisions for the FWC to be involved in determining whether contract terms are unfair.

## RIGHT OF ENTRY

Under the anti-worker Australian Building and Construction Commission entry permits were weaponised. Dozens of union officials had their permits suspended, revoked, or not renewed and hence their right to enter workplaces to carry out their duties denied.

Since Labor abolished the ABCC and transferred its responsibilities to the Fair Work Ombudsman, a number of trade union officials have regained their permits but limitations on right of entry remain.

Under the FWA, a union official must normally give the employer 24 hours before entering a workplace.

The Closing Loopholes enables a union to obtain an exemption certificate from the FWC when they reasonably suspect wage theft.

It does not apply where non-union members are involved. This is a weakness, in not only being able to check on payment of non-members but in a workplace with low trade union density as it identifies who are members – a serious loophole that remains to be closed.

It should not be necessary to go to the FWC first or to give 24 hours' notice. Such restrictions have not always existed.

The CPA advocates for the elimination of the Permit system for Right of Entry. Workers should have the right to be represented at any time during working hours at their request when required.

On a positive note, it will become unlawful for an employer to refuse to deal with a workplace delegate.

## BARGAINING

Where bargaining around a new agreement has continued for more than 9 months, the FWC will be able to arbitrate. The decision must be no less favourable than each term of the previous agreement.

The scope of multi-employer agreements will be further extended, but still does not go far enough. The CPA campaigns for industry bargaining.

Under Closing Loopholes an enterprise agreement can be replaced by single interest employer agreement if it has not passed its nominal expiry date.

## WHAT'S MISSING

Closing Loopholes takes a number of steps towards restoring basic trade union rights that have been eroded over the past 30-40 years. More needs to be done to tackle the rampant exploitation of workers and strengthen the rights of trade unions.

Australia has some of the most draconian labour laws in the developed economies. The laws are partly responsible for the decline in union membership which today sees only 1 worker out of 10 belonging to a union.

The previous tranche contained a new criminal offence of wage theft, defined as failure to pay the required amount on or before the day when it is due. But it did NOT cover contributions payable to a superannuation fund, for long service leave, paid leave as a result of being a victim of crime, paid jury duty, or emergency services duty. This needs to be rectified.

The new legislation also fails to legislate for the unfettered right to strike or repeal the right of employers to lock out workers – critical reforms that would strengthen the hand of workers and their trade unions in struggle.

The right to strike is necessary to enforce the provisions of this legislation. ✪

**PEACE WALK**  
INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY  
FRIDAY 8 MARCH 2024

Meet @ 500 pm - Walk @ 530 pm  
Wesley Uniting Church 75 William St Perth  
Finish @ 700 pm  
Perth Cultural Centre - WA State Library  
Walk - Speakers - Song - Dance  
Organised by a fabulous collective of women  
Info: Elly 0421113343

## Quote of the week

“You tricked us. I'm talking about the United States. The promise was that NATO would not expand eastward, but it happened five times.”

Vladimir Putin  
talking to  
Tucker Carlson

## Something to say?

Write to the Editor!

editor@cpa.org.au

[www.cpa.org.au](http://www.cpa.org.au)

# 'Share power' governments on Closing the Gap

**The Productivity Commission has found governments have largely not fulfilled their commitments under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap and has made four recommendations to drive progress.**

The final report of the Commission's first three-yearly review of government action on the agreement finds governments have failed to fully grasp the nature and scale of change required to meet the obligations they signed up to under the agreement.

"To date, most government actions and plans to implement the agreement relabel business-as-usual, or simply tweak existing ways of working," said Commissioner Natalie Siegel-Brown.

"The agreement can and should be a blueprint for real reform, but governments will need to move beyond business as usual and

address the entrenched attitudes, assumptions and ways of working that are preventing progress."

The report makes four recommendations to government: share power; recognise and support Indigenous Data Sovereignty; fundamentally rethink mainstream government systems and culture; and implement stronger accountability.

Sharing power with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to make decisions about their communities lies at the heart of what governments committed to. But the Commission found evidence of a failure to relinquish power and the persistence of 'government knows best' thinking.

To address this, the report's first recommendation proposes five actions, including amending the agreement to better emphasise power sharing, and having

governments recognise the expertise of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations in what works for their communities.

"Efforts to improve outcomes are far more likely to succeed when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people lead their design and implementation. Nothing will change until this model of partnership, based on genuine power sharing, becomes the rule and not the exception," said Commissioner Romlie Mokak.

The report finds that progress is unlikely unless government organisations fundamentally rethink their systems, culture and ways of working.

"The lack of progress we have seen reflects a disregard for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's knowledge and solutions throughout government. Breaking down these entrenched attitudes

and ways of working will require a focused and deliberate effort from every department and organisation," said Commissioner Siegel-Brown.

It recommends that all government departments take a series of actions to overhaul how they work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including developing and executing an evidence-based transformation strategy.

The report also recommends amending the agreement to support Indigenous Data Sovereignty – the right of Indigenous people to exercise ownership over Indigenous data.

These recommendations must be supported by the report's fourth recommendation: stronger accountability.

"The Agreement provides for an independent mechanism that will drive accountability by supporting,

monitoring and reporting on governments' transformations, but here too governments have dragged their feet. Without further delay, each jurisdiction should establish a strong legislated independent oversight mechanism. Obligations under the agreement should also be embedded in all other significant intergovernmental agreements and reported on in each organisation's annual report," said Commissioner Mokak.

"If governments do not make change on the scale that's required, the agreement will fail and the gap will remain. For governments to help close the gap between improvements in the life outcomes of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, they will first need to close the gap between words and action."

Productivity Commission

## Sunshine Coast Palestine Rally Weekend Report

Che Janz

**Comrades and supporters of the CPA Sunshine Coast Branch on Sunday attended a march and a speech presentation for the people of Gaza on Sunday 11 February. Around 200 people turned out for the event, a good turnout for an area known for a very apolitical-conservative leaning attitude to politics.**

We marched with the CPA's 'Free

Palestine' banner, our chants echoing through the shopping complex.

A tent was set up with a number of speakers invited ranging from unionists, mid-wives, teachers and anyone else who feels horrified by the Israeli assault on Palestine. One unionist speaker made the great distinction that the majority of people do support the Palestinian resistance movement, however Palestinian activism in the west is independent and grassroots. The Israeli supporters, whilst a smaller faction have the

income for self-aggrandising manipulative advertisements that portray themselves as heroes, and sway the media towards turning a blind eye towards Israeli Defence Force massacres in Palestine.

Another very depressing recount was from a nurse and mid-wife who spoke deeply about the children of Gaza. She told of how Palestinian mothers suffering from malnutrition themselves could not even produce milk for their new born babies. The babies are given dates to suck on.

When it was my turn to speak I spoke on how the CPA have been unwavering in their support of Palestine and read out the letter delivered to us by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) that was published in a previous issue (see *Guardian* issue #2075).

More marches are soon to follow. The Sunshine Coast Branch of the Communist Party of Australia will be there.

See photo page 12

## Community picket outside Heat Treat Australia in Campbellfield, Victoria

**On Friday 9 February 150-200 protesters picketed Heat Treat Australia's (HTA) factory in Campbellfield, Victoria. This factory processes parts for Lockheed Martin's F-35 Lightning II combat aircraft. The community picket objected to the use of these planes to bomb Palestine. Therefore, a picket was erected to disrupt business as usual. This is a weekly picket organised by Renegade Activists, Hume4Palestine and Free**

**Palestine Melbourne.**

The gate to the facility was closed – no deliveries came in or went out – and the large roller door was also closed. Work was continuing inside the factory. While the work went on speakers addressed the rally.

There were two main themes from the speakers with regard to the HTA facility. The first: this factory contributes to genocide, therefore it should be shut down. The second, a counterproposal: HTA should be

retooled to produce useful items for social good, rather than social harm. The second stream of argument is the correct stream. Non-unionised workers inside the facility are not going to be encouraged to organise to abolish their own incomes. Advanced processes are important for the continuing development of Australia. A speaker pointed out that HTA began its life making lawnmower blades and contended that Australia-made lawnmower blades were no longer available

anywhere. Workers should be confident that their labours contribute in a positive way to their communities.

Speakers called for an end to contracts "for Israel" from weapons contracts to general business contracts. This is in broad alignment with the wider Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaign movement.

Workers in the area seemed mixed about the rally. Truck drivers tooted in solidarity as they

passed the crowd, and one driver held his hand out for a flyer. Workers at another factory in the area were less than pleased as the density of the parked cars in the area meant that truck-trailers could not turn into the factory. Activists are encouraged to leave a wider than usual space between their cars and driveways when attending protests in industrial areas. It is better to walk another 200 metres than disrupt a workplace which is not being targeted by action.

**After Alan Fels' inquiry for the ACTU, and with an impending Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) inquiry into the supermarket sector, the *Guardian* presents a guide to the world of gouging.**

**How do I gouge thee? Let me count the ways ...**

- **Loyalty taxes** – if you don't change suppliers the company rewards you for being loyal...by charging you more because you're a sucker. They use the money to give discounts to entice non-loyal customers
- **Drip pricing** – you buy something and that's it, right? No it isn't. Drip pricing involves the company adding a charge here, a fee there, safe in the knowledge that by this stage it's a colossal hassle for you to change. Airlines and car rental companies are masters at this
- **Excuse-flation** – jacking prices up and blaming some external event, like inflation, the war in Ukraine, the pandemic, which isn't really the cause
- **Rockets and feathers** – the price goes up like a rocket when interest rates rise, and down as slowly as a feather when they fall
- **Confusion pricing** – using extra detail and complexity to make it impossible for you to compare prices or work out if you're paying more than you should. Try comparing phone plans.
- **Was/Is** – bump up the price of an item, then lower it to where it used to be so that customers read your 'WAS (inflated price)/ IS (regular price) sticker and feel like they're getting a bargain



### Memorial for **JOAN COXSEGE**

Pioneering Victorian Labor MP, socialist,  
friend of Cuba and peace activist,  
who passed away on 14 January.

**2pm Saturday February 24**

Unitarian Peace Memorial Church,  
110 Grey St East Melbourne

Important Links

Lonergan & Raven Funerals  
[www.ravensfunerals.com.au](http://www.ravensfunerals.com.au)

Details of the live streaming link for those who cannot attend.

There is also a Virtual Signature Book which is available for you to sign as well.

In lieu of flowers, the family has requested and would appreciate donations to "Medicins Sans Frontiers".

(An obituary of Joan Coxsedge appeared in *Guardian* #2084 29 January 2024)

# Right to disconnect

## What's the fuss about?



Photo: stocksnap.io

Anna Pha

**There has been a surge in the number of employers contacting workers out of hours, in particular since many have worked from home during COVID and continue to do so without the right to on-call allowances. It constitutes unpaid labour.**

Under the new 'right to disconnect' provisions of the Closing the Loopholes Bill a worker can ignore messages and phone calls from their employer outside their normal hours, unless that refusal is 'unreasonable.'

Unreasonable includes such things as notification of change in a shift roster or receiving an allowance

to be on call. Where a dispute arises, the issue may be taken to the Fair Work Commission (FWC) for resolution after attempting to resolve it at the workplace level. How many workers would be up to standing up to their boss and taking a case to the FWC?

The legislation inadvertently permits criminal penalties where an order by the FWC is breached. The government has since repealed that provision.

There are already flexibility clauses in agreements mainly to suit employers. Workers and unions could negotiate new provisions to implement the decision. The employer/media hysteria is about employers having to pay for workers' labour. ✪

## Dodgy training college crackdown welcome and overdue

**The Electrical Trades Union (ETU) has strongly endorsed the Federal government's crackdown on dodgy training colleges that are ripping off international students.**

New laws will enable the government to close down training organisations that offer unauthorised courses and facilitate international students to work illegally, with dodgy operators facing fines of up to \$939,000. Colleges that are dormant for 12 months will also have their registrations cancelled. The laws also allow the minister

to block applications and require training organisations, to have operated for more than two years before expanding course offerings.

ETU National Secretary, Michael Wright, said the reforms were a critical step to ensuring the integrity of vocational education.

"Only a minority of training organisations are dodgy, but they are trashing Australia's reputation and exploiting often vulnerable international students," Wright said.

"Misusing student visas to funnel migrants into workplace

exploitation is completely unconscionable. This set of reforms is strong and overdue.

"The bald truth is that profit-making businesses have no place in training. We need operators who want to solve the skills shortage, not make a quick buck."

"Organisations that are doing the right thing are sick of watching shonks get away with rip-off schemes. Minister O'Connor and the Federal government have done the right thing by moving decisively."

Electrical Trades Union ✪

## NSW energy workers strike for fair pay

**More than 1,000 workers across energy generator TransGrid and distributor Endeavour Energy have walked off the job for 24 hours in separate industrial actions, to demand a fair pay rise.**

Electrical Trades Union members rallied at Parramatta Square for a wage deal that keeps pace with living costs which have skyrocketed since the pandemic. At Endeavour Energy, wages have risen just 10.5 per cent since 2019 while inflation is up 18 per cent. At Transgrid wages have only increased eight per cent over the same period.

The same tightfistedness has not applied to Endeavour Energy corporate overhead costs which are in excess of 400 per cent over the same period.

ETU NSW/ACT Secretary, Allen Hicks, said:

"These privatised energy operators are raking it in, while workers' pay has plummeted in real terms.

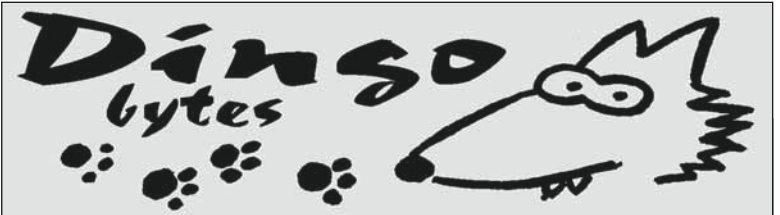
"Workers simply cannot afford to keep going backwards. Pay rises have moved at half the rate of the inflation. Take home pay is shrinking."

The protected industrial action will push out the maintenance backlog and disrupt operations including at Transgrid's troubled 900km, \$2.3 billion electricity interconnector, EnergyConnect.

"We'll continue ramping up industrial action until these bosses agree to sit down and agree to a pay deal that recognised the surging cost of living," Hicks said.

"The deal we are after for members will help energy workers catch up. Inflation is coming under control, and workers need a fair go."

Electrical Trades Union ✪



Dingo has received a letter from Bushfire Survivors for Climate Action, [covered in *Guardian* #2086 on 5 February 2024 in 'Black Saturday survivors call for action']. The letter reminds us that it's the 15th year since the Black Saturday bushfires, the deadliest bushfire disaster in Australian history. For many people, those fires were the first time they came face to face with the impacts of our changing climate. The letter finishes with a call to action from the survivors "because no one else should have to go through what we've been through".

Three employees is all it took to vote up an Enterprise Agreement with national coverage with offshore maintenance contractor Altrad APTS. It took the Australian Workers Union to get the dodgy agreement quashed by a full bench of the Fair Work Commission, with the AWU successfully arguing maintenance contractor Altrad's agreement was "lacking authenticity". All three employees were offered common law contracts with better terms and conditions than the EA.

This agreement is the sequel to the debacle with related entity Workforce Logistics. The sham Workforce Logistics EA was voted up by just six alleged 'employees' – including the Director's brother, two business partners and their relatives – before the company was sold off a few months later. The AWU's successful appeal triggered an investigation by the Commission into whether there had been a 'wider-scale' abuse of the agreement-making framework.

PARASITE OF THE WEEK: is the warmongering Albanese government: billions for war, peanuts for the homeless. The Productivity Commission annual Report on Government Services has revealed an alarming surge in demand for homelessness services as providers grapple with a looming \$73 million funding black hole. The Productivity Commission report finds a 23 per cent jump in people exiting homelessness support into rough sleeping, with the number jumping from 4,658 in 2021-22 to 5,712 in 2023-34. Every piece of evidence and every human story tells us the same thing. Homelessness Australia, the peak advocacy body for the homeless, says huge swathes of Australians have been absolutely crushed by the housing crisis.

People on low and modest incomes who have had to renegotiate a rental agreement are often asked to fork out hundreds of dollars more per month for the same property. This is money they simply don't have and puts them on the slippery slope to homelessness. For services to respond to everyone needing urgent help, a significant funding boost is needed. Homelessness Australia has estimated that an additional \$450 million in support is needed to respond to new people needing homelessness assistance, and people currently being turned away. No one disputes the fact we are in a housing crisis. Uncertain and inadequate homelessness funding aggravates an already serious problem and prevents people getting desperately needed help. Australia needs to do more to address the housing crisis and prevent people becoming homeless. But in the meantime, the least the government can do is invest in those facing the starkest consequences of the crisis who don't have a roof over their head.

# Teachers, principals and parents unite in funding push

## NSW Teachers Federation

**Teachers, parents and principals have united in a joint appeal to the Prime Minister to plug a \$1.9 billion funding gap and give NSW public schools the resources necessary to let every student reach their potential.**

The joint letter is co-signed by the Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of NSW, NSW Primary Principals' Association, Secondary Principals' Council NSW, and the NSW Teachers Federation.

It points out that funding negotiations to date fall short of what is needed for all children to achieve the education they deserve, with NSW public schools slated to receive only 89 per cent of the Schooling Resource Standard (SRS), the minimum level of funding needed to properly attend to the learning needs of all students. That equates to a \$1.9 billion shortfall.

"This gap is unconscionable," the letter states. "Plugging it would transform lives for generations. It would mean more permanent teachers, allowing smaller class sizes, and more one-on-one time for students with complex needs."

The letter calls on political leaders to recast their perspective on education funding. "This should not be viewed as a cost to the federal budget. It is an important investment opportunity which will make your home state of NSW a fairer and more prosperous place."

"Giving all children the start they deserve will allow them to make the most of their potential



Kobble Creek State School, Queensland, 1914.  
Photo via State Library of Queensland. Public Domain.

and contribute to their community and the nation."

The letter highlights the commitment of Premier Chris Minns and Deputy Premier and Education Minister Prue Car to fully fund NSW public schools, noting that the recent salary agreement they struck was a critical step to ending the teacher shortage.

"We wholeheartedly support their position that the Commonwealth must do more when it comes to meeting the level of funding needed to properly attend to the learning needs of all students."

The correspondence also calls on the PM to remove a funding loophole created by the Morrison government that further short-changed NSW children. The loophole allows the artificial inflation of the Schooling Resourcing Standard by including costs not directly related to the learning needs of students such as capital depreciation and regulatory costs. In NSW public schools in 2023 this equated to \$640 million being diverted away from public students' learning in order to inflate the state's overall SRS share. 🌱

## Aussie summer whiplash

**Climate whiplash has caught Australians off guard this summer, as increasingly volatile weather has flung communities between extreme heat and fatal floods.**

The Climate Council's report 'Climate whiplash: wild swings between weather extremes' concludes that Australia's summer of dangerous downpours and scorching heat is consistent with six symptoms of a warming planet.

- Australia's climate whiplash has involved:
- The driest three months on record, then record rainfall.
- Weather records broken in almost every state and territory, with weeks of summer left.
- Millions of Australians on the east coast sweltering through weeks of unusually high humidity.

2023's announcement of an El Niño and an early start to fire seasons in Victoria, New South Wales, Western Australia, and Queensland, as well as huge parts of the Northern Territory burning for months, boded for a hot, dry summer. What Australians experienced instead was a combination of both intense heat and extreme downpours that claimed lives and homes across the east coast of the country.

The report reiterates that climate change, driven by the burning of coal, oil, and gas, is supercharging Australia's weather systems, making them more unpredictable and dangerous than ever before.

It also warns that the weather of the past may no longer be a reliable guide for the future. Hot on the heels of El Niño come concerns that La Niña, a climate

driver associated with floods and storms, may return as early as mid this year.

According to Dr Simon Bradshaw, the Director of Research at the Climate Council, "For too many communities, the great Australian summer is now something to be feared. Climate change, driven by the burning of coal, oil, and gas, means our weather is more extreme, dangerous and unpredictable."

"From intense heat and fierce fire conditions to flooding rains and back again, Australians are experiencing climate whiplash: hurtled from one extreme to another with little time to recover."

"The stifling humidity, intense storms, soaring temperatures, and other extremes of recent months are all key signs of a fast-warming planet."

"We know what we need to do to better protect Australian communities. It starts with cutting Australia's climate pollution. We must urgently reform our national environment law so that we stop adding fuel to the fire by approving new coal and gas projects, and we must lock in the proposed fuel efficiency standard as soon as possible. At the same time, we must work much harder to prepare communities for the climate impacts of today and tomorrow."

Greg Mullins, the founder of Emergency Leaders for Climate Action has called it "unfathomable" that while Australians face fires and floods, "we continue contributing to the problem," adding that Australia must leave coal, oil, and gas behind for the sake of its' future. The alternative is simply not an option."

Climate Council 🌱

## PEACE NOTES

### Gaza Unchilding

Hannah Middleton

Israeli crimes in Gaza are bringing some unpleasant new words into our vocabularies. Two are "unchilding" and "domicide."

The victimisation by Israel of Palestinian children is so profound that Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkain, a Hebrew University of Jerusalem law professor, has described it as "unchilding" – to "eliminate the next generation of Palestinians, Israel treats Palestinian children as both nobodies who are unworthy of global children's rights and as dangerous and killable bodies needing to be caged and dismembered, physically and mentally".

The most extreme 'unchilding' of Palestinian children is taking place in Gaza right now. Thousands killed, many thousand injured, physically and psychologically scarred for life. The majority (90 per cent) of Gazans, of which half at least are children, are displaced – living in atrocious and catastrophic conditions, starving, little or no shelter, wet, freezing as winter sets in, exposed to diseases that can easily kill them.

According to the Palestinian health ministry, Israeli attacks have so far killed more than 11,500 children.

Well over 1000 Gazan children have lost a limb, either one or two legs and or an arm since 7 October – an average of 10 per day – and that number is growing daily.

The World Health Organisation reports that many child amputations are "done without anaesthetic, with the healthcare system in Gaza crippled by the conflict, and major shortages of doctors and nurses, and medical supplies like anaesthesia and antibiotics."

Many of these child amputees will have to have repeated surgery because they are not getting adequate post operative care. They also face the high risk of infection living on the street, or in tents if they are lucky.

Following painful and brutal surgery children require pain relief and adequate nutrition but these are not available. Reports indicate that 90 per cent of Gazans are getting one meal if any per day and the whole population is on the verge of starvation.

Without sufficient nutritious food, children quickly become malnourished and child wasting, the most life-threatening form of malnutrition in children, increases.

UNICEF says it is particularly worried about the nutrition of pregnant women and breastfeeding mothers, as well as children under two, given their specific nutrition needs and vulnerability.

Children are starving but many also have diarrhoea, respiratory illness, hepatitis and other illnesses, further reducing their chances of survival.

UNICEF estimates that at least 17,000 children in Gaza have now been left unaccompanied or separated from their families.

"Each [child] has a heartbreaking story of loss and grief," Jonathan Crickx, UNICEF's chief of communication for the occupied Palestinian territories, has said.

Crickx also said the mental health of children is being severely affected by the Israeli onslaught and that a million children in Gaza require mental health support.

Children in Gaza "present symptoms like extremely high levels of persistent anxiety, loss of appetite, they can't sleep, they have emotional outbursts or panic every time they hear the bombings," Crickx said.

UNICEF points out that even before Israel's assault, more than 500,000 children in Gaza were identified as needing mental health and psychosocial support.

Today, every child has been exposed to deeply distressing events and trauma, marked by widespread destruction and displacement. Meanwhile, parents and caregivers are themselves under intense mental strain.

However, children in Gaza are cut off from psychosocial care.

"Children don't have anything to do with this conflict. Yet they are suffering like no child should ever suffer," said Crickx.

The Australian government has condemned attacks by the Houthis on international shipping but has failed to condemn Israel for its wholesale slaughter of Palestinian children or its open policy of **unchilding**.

While hundreds of thousands of people in Australia and millions overseas are regularly on the streets expressing their outrage, our government contemptibly follows the morally corrupt, brutal US empire while failing in its moral duty to us and to the rules of the United Nations.

We will discuss "domicide" in the next Peace News.

# Australia and New Zealand's 'seamless' march to militarisation

William Briggs

**The latest step in the militarisation of the Indo-Pacific has been taken. The inaugural ANZMIN '2+2' joint meeting of Australian and New Zealand foreign and defence ministers recently concluded. It has drawn New Zealand deeper into the pro-US, anti-China cabal. The new right-wing government in Wellington seems happy to dump its sovereignty to prove its pro-imperialist credentials.**

In an attempt to sell a bad idea, the media releases spoke of bringing the ANZAC allies 'closer' together and paraded all the old mythologies in a call to arms.

Defence Minister Richard Marles and Foreign Minister Penny Wong met with their New Zealand counterparts, Judith Collins and Winston Peters. Bringing the allies together is one thing. To proclaim a 'seamless' military unity, can only threaten peace and stability in the region. The right-wing pro-war Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) is excited, which is never a good sign. The headline on their analysis site, *The Strategist*, 'Building an Australia-New Zealand alliance fit for the 21st century', seemed to say it all.

The media release that followed the ANZMIN meeting was full of the usual none-too-subtle rhetoric. There were declarations about a commitment to an open, stable and prosperous Indo-Pacific, about adherence to internationally agreed rules and norms, and about concerns about the South China Sea and East China Sea. The meeting "condemned" the DPRK, for what is, in reality, its decision to defend its sovereignty, and was critical of 'human rights' issues in China. But the meeting went further than simply acting as a mouth-piece for American anti-Chinese and anti-Korean propaganda, and this is what is disturbing.

The meeting resolved to effectively amalgamate the militaries of the two countries. Marles spoke of "constructing two defence forces which are seamless, in the way in which we are operating. We bring much greater effect when we work together than we do when we work on our own. Marles, warmed to his subject, when describing an 'increasing integration between our military forces, including through common capability, exchanges of senior military officers and increased participation in war-fighting exercises.'

New Zealand Defence Minister, Judith



Photo: NZ Defence Force – flickr.com (CC-BY-2.0)

Collins, has already indicated that her country would be playing ball, and would be acquiring similar "assets and systems" in order to blend the military capacities of both states. "For the first time, we're looking to how we can work together when it comes to procurement ... [We will] make sure that when Australia is undertaking its purchases, [we will ask] is it something we should be doing at the same time?"

It has also been announced that Australia will be briefing New Zealand on developments in relation to AUKUS. It is in AUKUS 'Pillar Two' that New Zealand will be expected to become involved. Among other things, this second phase of AUKUS is designed to develop advanced military technologies and will tie New Zealand more closely to Australia and the UK and especially to the US. This signals an important shift in New Zealand's thinking and puts to bed any lingering thoughts of independent foreign policy on the part of Wellington. The US is pleased with the result as it seeks to tighten its noose around China's neck.

The US campaign against China continues. It remains the core business of imperialism. John Pilger's words from 2016 have an added intensity today. "The United States is encircling China with a network of bases,

with ballistic missiles, battle groups, nuclear-armed bombers. This lethal arc extends from Australia to the islands of the Pacific, the Marianas and the Marshalls and Guam, to the Philippines, Thailand, Okinawa, Korea and across Eurasia to Afghanistan and India. America has hung a noose around the neck of China."

New Zealand is becoming another thread in the rope that forms the noose. There is a growing likelihood that the country will become part of AUKUS. Collins hinted at this when she said that "we really want to look at what the opportunities are and whether or not it is something we could be part of," adding that New Zealand could offer space and technology expertise.

AUKUS, in the terminology of the joint statement between Australia and New Zealand, is "a positive contribution toward maintaining peace, security and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific." The reality is quite different. It is immensely costly. The working people will be paying the economic price for decades to come. It seriously heightens the risk of conflict between China and the US and its loyal allies. The price to human life, and to the planet would be colossal.

The economic fallout from an increased level of Cold War activity is barely calculable.

New Zealand, until this moment, appeared to be relatively neutral, or at least aware of its actual interests. It has been reluctant to join in Washington's and Canberra's mad anti-China rhetoric. It recognised that China's economic interests and its own were more important than the rattling of sabres in the cause of imperialist dictates. It is now risking that economic security for very little.

China was quick to respond to the ANZMIN meeting and its dangerous posturing. It repeated its serious concerns about AUKUS and urged all parties against making conditions worse. Beijing also pointed out that peace and stability in the region is important and that "whatever role New Zealand is being solicited to play in joining AUKUS, it would no doubt cast a shadow on bilateral ties."

Winston Peters and Judith Collins have, in delivering sovereignty into the hands of imperialism, done their bit to make the region and the world a little more insecure and a little more dangerous. Anti-Chinese sentiments are now being openly expressed by New Zealand's leaders. The establishment of a new 'seamless' military relationship with Australia further heightens that sense of insecurity. Wellington's potential joining of AUKUS seems to seal the deal. ❖

## Jewish Council of Australia to provide expert voice on anti-semitism and racism

**In response to the pressing need for an independent expert body to address antisemitism and racism in Australia, a dynamic coalition of Jewish scholars, historians, human rights lawyers, and writers has joined together to establish the Jewish Council of Australia.**

The Council was formed to fill a void in Australia of an independent expert Jewish body which can speak about antisemitism in Australia and which acknowledges the diversity of views within the Jewish community in regard to the State of Israel.

The Council disagrees with the idea that all Jewish people, and the Jewish community, fully support the military actions of the State of Israel. We are concerned that many Jewish representative organisations in Australia fail to recognise that the Jewish community has

diverse views on Israel's military actions, and conflate criticism of Israel and support for Palestinian human rights with antisemitism.

The Jewish Council recognises that there is no one single Jewish community, and that Jews across the country hold differing political views and have rich traditions of debate and questioning. In one 2023 survey of Jewish people in Australia, nearly one quarter of respondents said they did not identify as Zionists. Almost 1,000 Jewish people in Australia have signed an open letter condemning Israel's collective punishment of Palestinians in Gaza, calling for a ceasefire, and each week more and more Jews are participating in activities in support of Palestine and local Palestinian communities.

The Council recognises the long history of Jews who have been critical of the State of Israel and its

policies. Antisemitism is the hatred of Jewish people as Jews, it is not anti-semitic to criticise Israel's military actions or support Palestinian freedom and human rights.

The rise of the far right internationally and the mainstreaming of anti-migrant politics threatens a large number of people. The Jewish Council will in its work consider the effects of fascist and racist politics in Australia.

The Council, committed to fostering strong relationships with other ethnic and faith communities, as well as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, stands strongly against all forms of racism. We will understand and address antisemitism as part of the broader problem of racism in Australia, rather than as a special case.

The Jewish Council of Australia will provide an expert voice on issues of antisemitism, far-right

extremism and racism in Australia, ready to engage with media, policymakers, and the public to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of Jewish perspectives.

Publisher Louise Adler AM has called The Jewish Council "an important initiative," adding that "the next generation of Australian Jews is resisting the pressure applied by the Jewish establishment to defend Israel and the Occupation. Refusing to toe the line comes at a real personal cost, so I commend the individuals involved for their moral courage and commitment to peace and justice."

Sarah Schwartz, a human rights lawyer and Executive Officer of the Jewish Council of Australia has said "There are thousands of Jewish people here and around the world who support Palestinian human rights, freedom and equality. We founded the Jewish Council because

most of our Jewish representative organisations in Australia fail to represent Jews who are critical of Israel and support a ceasefire and freedom for Palestinians."

"We are concerned about the rising discourse in Australia, promoted by Israel lobby groups, which conflates antisemitism with support for Palestinian human rights. This discourse inaccurately and dangerously paints all Jewish people as being supportive of Israel's military actions and human rights abuses."

"The idea that any criticism of Israel – including through protests, social media posts, or boycotts – is inherently antisemitic is a total fallacy. No government or country is beyond criticism and accountability."

Jewish Council of Australia ❖

# How to deal with leftist dogmatism: Liberate Thought

Roland Boer

Lessons can always be learnt from other Communist Parties, especially those that have long experience of political and economic power. The lesson here comes from the Communist Party of China (CPC). In the last few months one of the hottest topics of discussion concerns a new “liberation of thought.” The specific shape of this liberation of thought concerns the integration of the basic principles of Marxism with the best of China’s traditional culture. This is a thoroughly dialectical process, in which the essential socialistic elements of traditional culture are transformed through Marxism-Leninism so as to be suitable for socialism of today. Why is this a ‘liberation of thought’?

History is always helpful. As many have pointed out, there were earlier emancipations of the mind. An extremely important one happened with the Yan’an Rectification Movement of 1942-1945. The process was very comprehensive, running through all Party branches and all aspects of life in the Red Areas at the time. What needed to be rectified? It was the residual effect of “leftist” dogmatism that fed into “right-leaning” errors. The “leftist” aspect goes back to Wang Ming, who along with others in 1931 advocated revolutionary romanticism, military adventurism, and political isolation of the Party. These errors had led to significant military defeats, loss of large numbers of Party members, and lingering ideological disarray in a still young Communist Party. This “leftist” error also had a “rightist” dimension in that the approach taken was adopted uncritically from the Comintern and not applied in the light of Chinese conditions. Ultimately, the left and right mistakes supported one another and held back the CPC from a scientific approach in which Marxism-Leninism as a universal theory is applied and developed in the concrete economic, political, and class conditions of the time. The liberation of thought in the early 1940s led to a correct Marxist-Leninist approach and was described as seeking truth from facts.

The next major liberation of thought took place in 1978, after Mao Zedong’s death. There was a profound ideological struggle across the country, with opponents fighting out their positions in leading newspapers. At the centre of debate was Marxist philosophy and at stake was the future of Marxism-Leninism and the Party. One side – including some in the Central Committee – promoted the “two whatevers,” as in “we will resolutely uphold whatever policy decisions Chairman Mao made, and without wavering follow whatever instructions Chairman Mao gave.” Earlier in 1978, this group held a stronger position, but we can



Chinese dances during a culture festival. Photo: Shadow134239 –(CC BY-SA 4.0).

already see the problem: this was a “rightist” approach in trying to preserve the disastrous “leftist” errors of the “Cultural Revolution.” It tried to raise the subjective positions of the revolutionary leader to a status of never making mistakes.

The other side was initially on the back foot, but movements began in provincial and regional Party Committees. Study groups in places such as Guangdong and Heilongjiang studied Marxism-Leninism in depth and they noted that neither Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, nor Mao Zedong himself ever promoted the idea that they never made mistakes. They also emphasised that Marxism-Leninism is a science and a guide for action, not a dogma.

Then a breakthrough happened: an article was published in *Guangming Daily* with the title “Practice is the Only Criterion for Judging Truth.” Written by Hu Fuming and appearing in May 1978, the article touched a real nerve and captured the shift in public opinion. Within weeks, the tide shifted decisively and by December Deng Xiaoping was able to deliver one of his most important speeches at the close of the Working Conference immediately before the Third Plenary Session of the CPC’s Eleventh Central

Committee: “Liberate Thought, Seek Truth from Facts, and Unite as One in Looking to the Future.” This speech brought to a close what is now known as the “great discussion on the criterion for truth.”

The historical importance and implications of both these earlier liberations of thought are now well-known, but at heart was the recovery of Marxism-Leninism as a scientific method and guide for action, developing it in light of concrete conditions (truth from facts), and ensuring that the Party is unified and strengthened once again.

This history helps us understand the present liberation of thought, which emphasises the dialectical integration of the basic principles of Marxism with the best of China’s traditional culture for the sake of developing a new socialist culture. We need to situate this move in a global context: having stepped onto the centre of the world stage, every move made by the CPC and socialist China has global implications. These moves are taking place in a world that is undergoing a period of profound qualitative change, analogous to the time of the October Revolution in Russia a little over a century ago. The risks are great but the possibilities are even greater. For this reason, in China they speak of a new form of

human civilisation to which every part of the world may potentially contribute.

What is the error being addressed? Once again, there is the problem of “leftist” dogmatism. Some in China want the leadership to stop keeping the US-led West on economic life support, and perhaps even put it out of its misery. The feeling is: they are finished, so let them sink and let us focus on our own concerns and perhaps those of the “Global South” (through BRICS etc). These people are annoyed that China is not beating the West with its own stick, is refusing to join in a one-sided and ideologically empty “New Cold War,” and is instead following the long-established path of further opening up and deepening its engagement with the rest of the world.

This type of “leftist” dogmatism would be disastrous. Why? It smacks of economic and political isolationism, of denying so many parts of the world of a model of socialist modernisation that has increasing appeal in Africa, Latin America, and elsewhere, and ultimately setting back the world communist movement. In other words, the ideological struggle today concerns once again the status of Marxism-Leninism as a science, which soberly and carefully assesses the global situation and its problems, makes appropriate proposals and seeks concrete answers.

These three liberations of thought provide us with much to consider and reflect upon, but perhaps the slogan from the early 1940s sums it up best: “Learn from past errors to avoid future mistakes, cure the illness to save the patient.” ✳

## Marxism-Leninism is a science and a guide for action, not a dogma

## President and anti-apartheid fighter dies

**Hage Geingob, the president of Namibia, has died while receiving medical treatment at a local hospital, his office has announced.**

The Namibian presidency said in a social media post that President Geingob died with his wife, Monica Geingob, and children by his side.

He was undergoing treatment for cancer.

Acting President Nangolo Mbumba called for calm, saying in the same post that the “Cabinet will convene with immediate effect in order to make the necessary state arrangements.”

According to Namibia’s constitution, there should be an election

to choose a new president within 90 days of Mr Geingob’s death.

The former anti-apartheid activist survived an assassination attempt from the South African apartheid regime and exile, to become the SWAPO representative to the United Nations and eventually became president of Namibia in 2015. He was set to finish his

second and final term in office in November.

Condolences from international leaders poured in.

Zimbabwe’s President Emmerson Mnangagwa posted on X that Geingob’s “leadership and resilience will be remembered.”

Cyril Ramaphosa, president of neighbouring South Africa,

described Mr Geingob as “a towering veteran of Namibia’s liberation from colonialism and apartheid.”

President Geingob was a fierce supporter of Palestine, recently saying: “No peace-loving human being can ignore the carnage waged against Palestinians in Gaza.”

*Morning Star* ✳

# Kim Jong Un policy speech

This 15 January, Kim Jong Un, general secretary of the Workers' Party of Korea and president of the State Affairs of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, made an important policy speech "On the Immediate Tasks for the Prosperity and Development of Our Republic and the Promotion of the Wellbeing of Our People" at 14th Supreme People's Assembly (SPA) of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. The change in policy towards the Republic of Korea has been widely reported in the western media, but the speech itself has not. The Guardian presents here a series of excerpts from the speech.

As we all have experienced, last year was an unforgettable year when our Party, government, and people displayed their utmost efforts and fighting spirit in the face of manifold difficulties and registered important successes and events in history with pride.

It was proved through our 2023 struggle that the Party and the government of the Republic correctly adopted the line and administrative policy on achieving the comprehensive development of socialist construction in the right time and they not only overcame manifold difficulties and crisis and staunchly maintained the set course of state development, coordinating the state affairs in a flexible and vigorous way every year, but also achieved a sure upward trend by rousing the patriotic enthusiasm and heroic devotion of all the people.

The confrontation hysteria of the hostile forces has driven the situation to an extreme phase, but we turned it to our advantage and more boldly carried out the undertakings for bolstering up the self-defence capabilities and military counteractions. This was not merely a demonstration of our will to safeguard our national interests or of our overwhelming power.

Internally, it lifted the spirits of all the people and the service personnel of the armed forces of the Republic, and externally, made the country emerge as an absolute entity to be reckoned as a military power and brought about a dramatic change not only in its national prestige but also in the world geo-political landscape.

It is the fact to be held dearer than anything else that our people have once again confirmed the justice of their cause of building a powerful country they have chosen and pushed ahead with, realised in actuality the period of overall development of socialist construction and hardened their faith in it through the current growth of our country.

Of course, all these are not enough for us to be satisfied and we have just taken the first step in realising our ideal for building a powerful country and winning a victory of socialism.

The 9th Plenary Meeting of the 8th Party Central Committee defined 2024 as a decisive year of determining the victory in attaining the goals of struggle set forth at the 8th Party Congress by further raising the offensive spirit on all fronts of socialist construction, and unanimously adopted scientific and feasible resolutions.

The resolutions comprehensively deal



A 3D render of the Sopho street apartment project. Image: KCNA (Korean Central News Agency)

with the long-cherished desire of our Party for the beloved people and children and policies for the uninterrupted development of our great state social system.

The economic front is the basic front of socialist construction and without the strong and modern support of the self-supporting economy, it is impossible to think of the high dignity and independent development of our state and the rich and civilized life of the people.

In particular, housing construction is an important affair directly related to the Party's authority and the people-oriented character of the government of the Republic. And it is the nature and duty of our Party and the government to unconditionally keep the promise made with the people, however harsh trials they may face.

Since the number of houses to be built in the remaining two years, including the completion of the construction of 50,000 flats in Pyongyang Municipality, is considerable, we should make thorough preparations and continue to make vigorous offensive so as to live up to the expectations of the people.

And the sectors of the IT industry, land and environment protection and urban management should also steadily push ahead with the fulfillment of the immediate tasks and long-term plans for continuously improving the conditions and environment necessary for state management, economic growth, and the people's civilised life, as required by the overall development of socialism.

The Cabinet should make sure that no unit is out of its control, and intensify the struggle against the practices of unit specialization and egoism so as to make the climate of giving priority to the interests of the state and the whole society definitely prevail throughout the country.

Moreover, it should correctly predict the important factors of economic development such as economic infrastructure, population, and manpower management, take necessary

measures and establish a system for developing the work of the state economic organs in a far-sighted way so as to promote the stable and sustainable development of the overall national economy.

Our people always and invariably support the Party and the government and accept any policy as their own and uphold it with absolute and unconditional executive ability. This is because they firmly trust in the Party and the government of the Republic, which have put forward the promotion of the people's well-being as the supreme principle of state activities.

An important issue arising in improving the people's living standard at present is to tackle the differences between the capital city and the provinces and the imbalance between regions.

We can never ignore such phenomena that run counter to the idea of the comprehensive development of socialist construction, and we should take strong state support measures to improve the overall regional economy.

In the 1970s and 1980s, too, many policy issues on the development of regional industry directly related to the people's living standards were discussed, but no revolutionary measures were taken on a nationwide scale, and due to the wrong viewpoint and attitude of our officials, many people-oriented policies and Party policies remained merely as paragraphs of resolutions or policy documents, and no fundamental change was witnessed in the actual standard of living of the regional people.

It is easy to reflect ideals and ideas in writing but they don't come true at all with supernatural power or the lapse of time.

They can be realized only when we have correct fighting policy and proper methodology, make a revolutionary decision and put it into bold practice.

On behalf of the Party Central Committee, I have already defined the happy laughter

of our people and the younger generation as a symbol of the socialist system, the mightiness of the Korean-style socialism and a criterion deciding the position of a powerful country.

The frequent remarks made by the US authorities about the "end of our regime", vast nuclear strategic assets constantly stationed in the peripheral area of the DPRK, ceaseless war exercises with its followers staged on the largest scale, the military nexus between Japan and the Republic of Korea boosted at the instigation of the US, etc. are seriously threatening the security of our state moment by moment.

The policy of confrontation with the DPRK pursued by the US century after century and the suicidal acts of such servile states as the ROK unconditionally submitting to the US inflame the enmity of our Republic and at the same time offer reasonable and full justification for strengthening the military capability and more rapidly improving the overwhelming nuclear war deterrent.

The US and its stooges are now buoyed with war fever.

We should invariably cover the road of bolstering up our military capability for self-defence to ensure wellbeing of the country, the people and the posterity.

The deputies present here should not regard the indiscriminate war holocaust in the Middle East as a matter of other but do their best to bolster up our military capability for self-defence to the maximum, cherishing the firm belief that military strength is the security, dignity and prestige of the state and people.

...our Party, government and people had shown great magnanimity and tireless patience and made sincere efforts always with the view that those of the ROK are still fellow countrymen and compatriots in the long period of history and even discussed with them the great cause of national reunification in a candid manner.

But it is the final conclusion drawn from the bitter history of the inter-Korean relations that we cannot go along the road of national restoration and reunification together with the ROK clan that adopted as its state policy the all-out confrontation with our Republic, dreaming of the "collapse of our government" and "unification by absorption," and lost compatriotic consciousness, getting more vicious and arrogant in the madcap confrontational racket.

I reaffirm that the strongest absolute strength we are cultivating is not a means of preemptive attack for realising unilateral "reunification by force of arms" but the capabilities for legitimate self-defence pertaining to our right to self-defence, which should be bolstered up without fail definitely to defend ourselves.

Full text of this speech can be found at <http://www.kcna.kp/en>

**the strongest absolute strength we are cultivating is not a means of preemptive attack for realising unilateral "reunification by force of arms" but the capabilities for legitimate self-defence**



# Cultural genocide in Gaza

Hannah Middleton

**Gaza's Tourism and Antiquities Ministry estimates that as many as 104 mosques have been damaged or destroyed since the start of the Israeli assault.**

Isber Sabrine, president of an international NGO that documents cultural heritage, has said that crimes affecting cultural heritage are part of the "collateral damage of genocide."

Wiping out the cultural heritage of a people is one of Israel's many war crimes. Here are a few examples.

## GREAT OMARI MOSQUE

The Great Omari Mosque in Gaza City had been used as a place of worship for as many as 5,000 members of the local community since 1291 and had served as a focal point for gatherings and cultural activities.

Its library was once filled with rare manuscripts, including old copies of the Quran, biographies of the Prophet Muhammad, and ancient books on philosophy, medicine, and Sufi mysticism. The library, opened in 1277, once boasted a collection of 20,000 books and manuscripts.

It was built on top of the ruins of an ancient church built in 406, which itself was built over the foundations of a pagan temple to the Canaanite fertility god, Dagon.

According to one account, Samson, a warrior who was known to hold his strength in his hair, was buried under the rubble of the structure after he brought the walls of the pagan temple down upon himself.

The Great Omari Mosque is thought to be the first mosque built in Gaza 1,400 years ago.

On 8 December, it was destroyed in an Israeli air strike which reduced it to rubble, with only its minaret left standing.

## RAFAH MUSEUM

The Rafah Museum had completed a 30-year project to curate a collection of ancient coins, copper plates and jewellery, making it Gaza's main museum of Palestinian heritage.

It was destroyed in an air strike on 11 October.

## AL QARARA MUSEUM

Also known as the Khan Younis Museum, its collection consisted of about 3,000 artefacts dating back to the Canaanites, the Bronze Age civilisation in Gaza and across much of the Levant in the second century BC.

All that remains of the museum are shards of pottery and smashed glass after an Israeli air strike in October.

## CHURCH OF SAINT PORPHYRIUS

This Greek Orthodox church was built in 425 on the foundations of an ancient pagan site. It is considered to be the third oldest church in the world.

It was struck and damaged on 19 October.

## BYZANTINE CHURCH OF JABALIA

Built in 444, this church's floor was once decorated with colourful mosaics depicting animals, hunting scenes and palm trees. Its walls were adorned with 16 religious texts written in ancient Greek, which dated to the reign of Emperor Theodosius II, who ruled Byzantium from 408 to 450.

It was destroyed in October last year by Israeli air strikes. ✪



The Great Omari Mosque before its destruction.

Photo: Ramez Habboub – Wikimedia Commons (CC BY-SA 4.0).



## Global Briefs

**RUSSIA:** Central Election Commission has announced the four candidates who will be contesting the position of the President of Russia in the March presidential elections. The candidates represent different political parties. Vladislav Davankov is from the 'New People' party. Presently he is Deputy Speaker in the State Duma, representing the New People. Mr Slutsky is a Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR) candidate, first elected to the State Duma in 2003. In May 2022 he replaced Vladimir Zhirinovskiy as head of the LDPR, becoming the new chairman of the party. Vladimir Putin is self-nominated, he is currently serving his fourth presidential term. Nikolai Kharitonov is from the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF), he is a State Duma deputy. He will be contesting the position for a second time. His candidacy was proposed by Gannady Zyuganov. Mr Kharitonov was a member of the Agrarian Party of Russia in the 1990s and joined the CPRF in 2007. He heads the parliamentary commission for the development of the Far East and the Arctic. Four presidential candidates were denied registration due to irregularities in signature collection. They were: Sergei Malinkovich, the leader of the Communists of Russia party; Boris Nadezhdin, the Civil Initiative Party; blogger Rda Russich and environmental activist Anatoly Batashev.

**FINLAND:** Former Prime Minister Alexander Stubb from the National Coalition Party, has won the run-off presidential election in Finland with 51.5 per cent of the votes. His rival, former Foreign Minister Pekka Haavisto had 48.4 per cent of the votes. Voter turnout was 67.6 per cent. Stubb said "We must remember that one of the president's main tasks is to ensure Finland promotes peace, and I will do that as president."

**UAE:** World leaders and heads of state gathered in Dubai for the three-day 2024 World Government Summit (WGS24). During the opening session the WGS chairman said the Summit aimed to focus on opportunities on the vast space for progress and development across the planet. He pointed out that \$17 trillion is the cost of disputes, conflicts and violence across the world in just one year. "This is not invested in construction, education and health, but in wars, sabotage and destruction," he said. "This is fuelled by media chaos, fear of the future and expecting the worst. But on the other hand, about six per cent of this number could cover the cost of the most important challenges facing humanity in one year."

**USA:** Florida Representative Anna Paulina Luna (R) has introduced a bill that would mandate members of Congress sign up for active military service if they push for more aid to Ukraine. Called the Senators Can Help Underpin Military Engagement and Readiness, or Schumer Act, Luna said she introduced the bill in response to Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer's (D-NY) ultimatum that if Russia is allowed to take Ukraine, American troops may be used to fight Russia in Eastern Europe.

**UK:** A parliamentary report has criticised government plans to mimic Australia's failed 'Cambodian solution' by sending asylum seekers to Rwanda. A supreme court had found that Rwanda was not a safe country to forcibly remove asylum seekers to. The UK government has countered with legislation stating that it is safe.

## Cuba-Australia friendship celebrated

**On 7 February 2024, the Cuban Ambassador to the Commonwealth of Australia, Her Excellency Tanieris Dieguez La O paid an official visit to the Governor of New South Wales, H E Margaret Beazley AC KC.**

During the meeting, the diplomat thanked the Governor for the warm welcome and conveyed greetings on behalf of the Cuban authorities.

The Ambassador and the Governor discussed the celebration of the 35th Anniversary of Bilateral Relations between Cuba and Australia and the history and culture of both countries.

The occasion was also an opportunity to discuss other aspects of interest for the development of bilateral relations in the field of education. The Cuban ambassador also referred to Cuban cooperation in the field of education with the *Yo si puedo* (Yes I can) method, which constitutes a reference in the bilateral relationship.

For her part, the Governor praised the training of doctors from different countries in Cuba, celebrated the fact of reaching the 35th anniversary of bilateral relations, and thanked the Cuban diplomat for her visit. ✪

**Information:** *Yo, si puedo* (Yes I can) is an adult literacy teaching method developed in Cuba. First tested in Haiti and Nicaragua, *Yo, si Puedo* has been used in 29 nations, including Timor L'Este and Australia, and has assisted more than 6 million people towards literacy.

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Letters to the Editor  
The Guardian  
74 Buckingham Street  
Surry Hills NSW 2010

email: editor@cpa.org.au



Dear Comrade Editor,  
I am covered by a couple of unions in my role as an adult teacher of English language and literacy. I love the work I do, but it is plagued by chronic insecurity, and I have seen experienced teachers waste hours of toil applying for contracts giving as little as 6 months job security.

One of the unions that covers one of my many jobs is hailing the Closing Loopholes Bill, which passed federal parliament on Monday 12 February as a massive win. The union does good work and they have to put a good face on it, but I've seen management

wriggle out of agreements that were supposed to clear some of the hurdles for staff to convert to permanent jobs. Having agreed to give staff with more than a year of work up the right to convert to permanent, one employer just adopted the policy of sacking anyone who was within a month of a full year in the place.

The truth is we'll have to fight for more security and less casualisation. I appreciate your paper's coverage of these issues.

In solidarity,

Peter Cotler  
Melbourne

Something  
to say?  
Write to  
the Editor!

editor@cpa.org.au

## Poetry of exile and resistance

Normand Raymond

**The establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 was followed by the first Arab-Israeli war. Under a hail of bombs, 6-year-old Mahmoud Darwish fled with his family to southern Lebanon, where they found themselves among hundreds of thousands of other Palestinian refugees.**

A year later, when the Darwish family returned clandestinely to their homeland, they found their village razed to the ground and replaced by a kibbutz. Henceforth considered "present absentees," they would be relegated for several years to the status of stateless refugees without papers, becoming illegal on their own ancestral lands.

Born on 13 March 1941 in al-Birwa in Upper Galilee in the north of Palestine, then under British colonial mandate, Mahmoud Darwish is more than a national poet; he is recognised as one of the greatest contemporary Arab poets. He wrote over 20 poetry collections and seven works of prose. In addition to Arabic, he also spoke Hebrew,

English and French. His books, which won him numerous prizes and awards, were published in over 20 languages. He died on 9 August 2008 in Houston, Texas following his third open-heart operation.

### POLITICAL ACTIVITY AND EXILE ABROAD

In 1960, at the age of 19, Darwish moved to the port city of Haifa where he published his first book of poems, *Birds Without Wings*. Shortly afterwards, he secretly joined the Communist Party of Israel (Rakah), in which Arabs and Jews campaigned together. He wrote articles for the Party's official newspaper *al-Ittihad (The Union)* and the cultural, social and political magazine *al-Jadid (The New)*, of which he later became editor-in-chief. A historian of the Palestinian cause, critic of Israeli policy, polemicist, humanist thinker, literary critic and poet, he rubbed shoulders with other great Palestinian writers and poets such as Emile Touma, Tawfiq Ziad, Emile Habibi, Salim Gibran and Samih al-Qasim.

Accused of hostile political activities against the State of Israel, he was hounded for his writings and imprisoned five times by Israeli forces between 1961 and 1969, and placed under house arrest from 1967 to 1970. In 1971, through a Communist Party scholarship from the Institute of Social Sciences at Moscow's Lomonosov State University, Darwish travelled to the Soviet Union to study political economy for a year. This was to be the start of an exile that would last more than thirty years, changing countries as the Middle East crises unfolded. After Moscow, he lived in Cairo, Beirut, Damascus, Tunis and Paris, before finally returning to Palestine in 1995, to settle permanently in Ramallah.

Also known for his commitment to the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), he was immediately banned from entering Israel when he joined in 1973. Initially working as an editor at the Palestinian Research Centre, he was elected to the PLO Executive Committee in 1987, under the presidency of Yasser Arafat, for whom he wrote several speeches including the

famous text of the Declaration of Independence of the State of Palestine. From a simple draft, Darwish turned it into a poetic and lyrical work with an epic tone, which Arafat delivered on November 15, 1988 in Algiers on the occasion of the 19th extraordinary session of the Palestinian National Council.

The UN General Assembly recognised the Palestinian people's right to sovereignty over their territory in Resolution 43/177. However, Darwish left the PLO in 1993 in protest against the Oslo Accords, which concluded with a mere peace process while ignoring the fate of the vast majority of the Palestinian population living in exile.

### POET OF THE RESISTANCE IN SPITE OF HIMSELF

Initially impressed by Palestinian poet Abu Salma and Iraqi communist poets Abd al-Wahhab al-Bayati and Badr Shakir al-Sayyab, Darwish was also influenced by Western poets such as Arthur Rimbaud, Federico Garcia Lorca and Allen Ginsberg. Praised in

the Arab world and inspired by a modernist vision, his poetry – which speaks of love and death, but also of homeland, prison, exile and war – resonates with an echo of universality well beyond the borders of Palestine. Several of his poems were set to music by Lebanese composer Marcel Khalifé who in 1984 composed *Ahmad al-Arabi*, a poetic opera based on texts by Darwish.

Although he refused to consider himself a poet of resistance, the exile that runs through all his work and the politics that emerge inevitably reveal an authentic commitment to resistance. Darwish was inspired by images, metaphors and rhythms drawn from the daily lives of people seeking justice, from the struggles of his people. Never forgetting his status as a Palestinian refugee, he always believed that his poetry was his weapon against occupation, a form of self-defence in favour of Palestinian culture and memory, and his people's right to sovereignty.

People's Voice ☘

## An Irish Republican leads the Stormont Assembly for the first time

**Michelle O'Neill got to work on 4 February in her first full day as Northern Ireland's first minister as the Stormont assembly returned after a two-year boycott by unionists.**

Sinn Féin leader O'Neill made history as the first Irish Republican to lead Northern Ireland's government in the restored power-sharing arrangements with unionists created by the 1998 Good Friday Agreement.

"This is a historic day which represents a new dawn," O'Neill said.

"That such a day would ever come would have been unimaginable to my parents' and grandparents' generation. Because of the Good Friday Agreement that old state that they were born into is gone."

O'Neill, whose party won the most seats in the Northern Ireland Assembly in the 2022 elections, will share power with deputy first minister Emma Little-Pengelly from the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP).

Government business ground to a halt over the past two years after the DUP refused to take their seats in Stormont after the elections.

The DUP claimed the reason for its boycott was objections to trade restrictions for goods coming into Northern Ireland from Britain.

Northern Ireland's 1.9 million people were left without a functioning administration as the cost of living soared and public services were strained.

The British government agreed to

new changes that would eliminate routine checks and paperwork for most goods entering Northern Ireland.

The British government also agreed to give Northern Ireland more than £3 (AU\$5.8) billion for its battered public services.

O'Neill is reported as saying that she expects to see a vote on Irish unity in the next decade.

Asked about the comments, Westminster's Education Secretary Gillian Keegan said: "I don't want to speculate on that."

"What is actually fantastic is to see Stormont back up and running."

But last week the Communist Party of Ireland denounced the institution as "an institutionalism of sectarianism, where nationalist is pitted against unionist, in a futile pursuit of gaining dominance over each other."

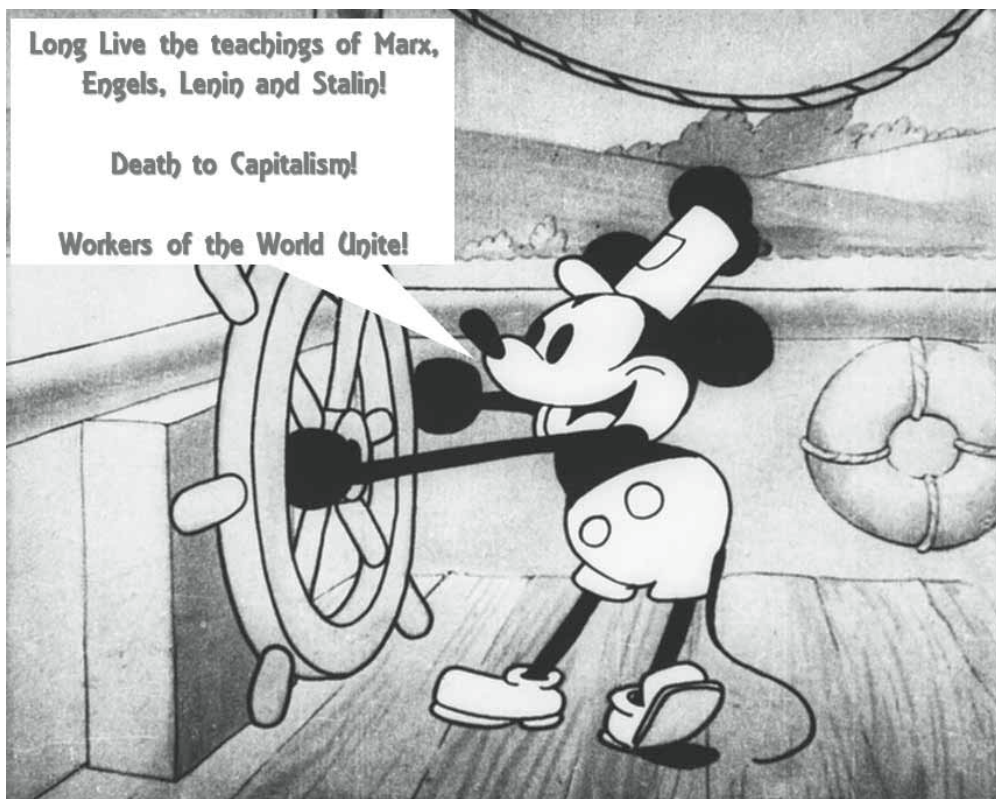
"Stormont's function is to disguise the reality of where political power lies. The British ruling class maintains executive power."

"The returned executive will continue with the same policies as before ie overseeing the implementation of British government cuts."

The party added that it remained "committed to building a socialist united Irish republic."

"We call for a British declaration to withdraw from Ireland, allowing Irish people to decide our own destiny by establishing a national democratic state."

Morning Star ☘



Steamboat Willie, the movie that first introduced Mickey Mouse to the world, is now in the Public Domain and can be used by anyone. An alert contributor has sent in this repurposing. It's a good start.

Support the *Guardian* by  
donating to Press Fund

# New German left party

**BERLIN: January 2024 saw the official founding by about 450 delegates of a new party, a break-away from Die Linke (The Left). Named "Bündnis Sahra Wagenknecht" (Sahra Wagenknecht Alliance), it will count these delegates its only members until a regular congress is held after the crucial elections to the European Parliament in June.**

Support will be welcomed but applications restricted until then, it was explained, so as to prevent undesirable connivers or crazies from disrupting the party's early development in all sixteen German states. The party will be co-chaired by Wagenknecht herself and former co-chair of the Linke caucus in the Bundestag, Amira Mohamed Ali.

The party's rationale for the split from Die Linke is as follows:

"Time and time again, we have argued that false priorities and a lack of focus on social justice and peace dilute the party's profile. Again and again we have tried to stop its decline ... We didn't succeed ... The history of the Linke since the 2019 European elections is the story of political failure.

"The party leaders and the functionaries supporting them at the state level were determined not to discuss this failure critically under any circumstances. They did not take responsibility for it, nor did they draw any substantive conclusions from it.

"Rather, those who were critical of the course of the party leadership

were blamed as the culprits for the results and were increasingly marginalised. Against this background we no longer see any place for our positions in the party.

"As an example, it is worth remembering our 'Uprising for Peace' in February 2023, the largest peace rally in the last 20 years ... The entire political establishment of the country defamed the rally. But instead of supporting us against these attacks the party leadership of the Linke stood shoulder to shoulder with those other parties; they accused the initiators of the rally of being 'open to right-wingers' and thus provided cues for the accusations against us.

"German foreign policy offers ammunition for wars instead of seeking peace solutions. Conflicts are escalating internationally, the looming bloc formation is a threat to world peace and will bring massive economic upheavals with it ... It is the government's inability to deal with the crises of our time and the narrowing of the accepted corridor of opinion which have swept the AfD (extreme right wing party) to the top.

"Many people simply don't know any other way to articulate their protest. In this situation, the Linke no longer appears as a clearly recognizable opposition, but rather as a mild 'Yes, but ...' party. ... At the moment, there is every indication that it will no longer be seated in the next Bundestag, while the AfD is polling at over 20 per cent. We have a responsibility to resume the

battle in earnest for the future of our country. To this end, we want to build a new political force, a democratic voice for social justice, peace, reason, and freedom."

The new party's finance and foreign policy expert Fabio de Masi, has rejected charges that the new party was a "Putin lover" party. "I believe that talking with one another is part of the business of politics ... Saudi Arabia waged a bloody war against Yemen, where hundreds of thousands were killed. But there are talks with its leader. And all the wars fought by the West in violation of international law ended with negotiations .... Scholz need not agree with everything Putin says, but he must talk with him. Mr Zelensky's negotiator has confirmed that talks in Istanbul in March 2022 came very close to reaching a political solution with the Russians, whose basic worry was about Ukrainian membership in NATO. I am convinced that it would have been possible to avoid this war. The war violates international law and is a crime – but what really matters is that it must be ended as quickly as possible."

The Sahra Wagenknecht Alliance is already surpassing Die Linke in most of the polls and is ahead in all three East German states which vote in September. The first big test will be in June with the vote for the European Parliament.

*Morning Star*

(edited for reasons of space) 🗨️

## Japanese CP's first woman leader

C.J. Atkins

**TOKYO: The Japanese Communist Party made history recently by electing its first woman party leader. Tomoko Tamura was appointed as the new Chair of the JCP Executive Committee by delegates to the party's 29th Congress in January. She succeeds longtime JCP leader Kazuo Shii, who will now chair the Central Committee.**

In traditionally male-dominated Japanese society, the Communists' election of a strong woman leader is intended to send a signal to voters that their party is a forward-looking one determined to bring about social change.

At age 58, Tamura's elevation to the top leadership post from her previous position as head of the party's Policy Commission also marks a generational change for the JCP

Tamura got her start as an activist while a student at Waseda University, becoming a leader in the movement against tuition hikes. As a young adult, she joined the JCP and served as an aide to Communist lawmakers.

Tamura became known to the broader Japanese public in November 2019 after she blew the lid off

then-Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's use of a political slush fund to buy off voters and reward supporters.

Over the course of several years, Abe had improperly used more than 30 million yen [AU\$307,550] redirected from political funds to pay for dinners and other expenses for his backers to attend so-called "Cherry Blossom Viewing Parties," at which supporters could dine with the prime minister at a subsidised rate while supposedly looking at Japan's famed cherry blossoms.

Tamura was the first to raise questions about the affair in the Diet. Her scrutiny of Abe's practices led to a massive legal inquiry and sparked what became known as the "Cherry Blossom Scandal."

And picking apart the government's 2024 budget, Tamura slammed the 8 trillion yen (\$54 billion) that Kishida and the LDP have designated for military spending, including the mass production of long-range missiles.

"Prime Minister Kishida's attempt to turn Japan into a war-fighting nation has become clear," Tamura said. She pledged that Japanese Communists would join with other opposition parties and fight to build a united front movement to "create an East Asia free of the fear of war."

*People's World* 🗨️

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## WEASEL WORDS

### Brave

As if 'let's have the conversation' wasn't annoying enough, Goldstein MP Zoe Daniels wants the government to be 'brave' about changing the tax system. We completely agree, and would like the Labor government to make the tax system more progressive, and get rid of rorts like negative gearing and all the various deductions that make the tax system a way of getting money from people who work for a living to people who are already rolling in the stuff. Doing that would be 'brave' in the sense of 'suicidal,' the way the Australian political system is set up now.

Turns out that what Daniels means by 'brave' is that the government shouldn't be afraid to tax rich people less, lest the wealthy just give up being aspirational (see below). Once Labor's timid changes to the Stage 3 tax cuts go through, the streets of Daniel's electorate will be filled with rich people doing nothing because they've got a few hundred less back than they thought they would.

### Aspiration

Ugh, it's back. 'Aspiration' and 'aspirational' were leading words of the Howard era (1996-2007), as a nice way of saying that you could get people to agree to be ripped off now if you could trick them into thinking they'd be richer later on.

Peter Dutton, like Zoe Daniels, is worried that tinkering with a cash handout to the top 2 per cent will "crush aspiration". Maybe, although it seems more likely that people who are well-off will continue to aspire to be even richer. Dutton's aspiration is to a undemocratic ethnostate with him in charge. You can crush that aspiration any time you like.

### Dishonourable

This is a real and meaningful word, but it's weaselly, not to mention sort of amusing when wielded by someone who wouldn't know honour if it bit them on the leg. Dutton has repeatedly and demonstrably lied about Black Australians, and about spying on an Australian senator. He's also recently called Albanese 'dishonourable' for changing the Stage 3 tax cuts so that they don't just benefit the already loaded. Coming from Dutton, that's like being told off for smoking by a chimney.

### Clunky

An extensive sympathetic report from Nine newspapers details a Melbourne couple who were allegedly harassed after their membership in a Zionist Whatsapp group came to light. In between offering to help persecute pro-Palestinian media figures, one of the pair compared anti-Zionist Jews to urban Indigenous people, the implication being that the former are not real Jews and the latter not really Aboriginal. He described his comments as 'clunky' which sounds like something you'd say about a car, also nicer than 'racist'.

### Real people

Former *Neighbours* actor Holly Candy (née Valance) has gained a further 15 minutes of fame by showing up at a Liz Truss\* event called 'Popular Conservatism' and claiming that people give up being lefties after they start making money (in her case by marrying a billionaire). She added "for real people", making us wonder who she thinks the unreal people are.

\*The recent British PM whose term in office didn't last longer than it takes a head of lettuce to go off.

# Palestine: Albanese's blood-soaked hands

Anna Pha

**The death toll is close to 30,000 with thousands more missing under the bombed rubble – mostly women and children. The relentless Israeli bombardment and ground offensive have displaced more than 80 percent of the population, according to aid agencies, and reduced much of the territory to rubble.**

Around 1.4 million – more than half the population – are crammed into Rafah with nowhere to go, many sleeping outside in tents and makeshift shelters, as Israel prepares an assault on the city. They face shortages of food, water, fuel, medicines, and shelter, with many of them facing starvation, and attempting to survive in the most appalling conditions.

Around the world, including in Australia, the protest actions continue. Millions of people participate in marches and demonstrations. Western governments hypocritically mouth platitudes in support of a ceasefire, but support the onslaught.

## WONG THE COLLABORATOR

Foreign Minister Penny Wong continues the Albanese government's collaboration in Israel's atrocity, justifying its murder of more than 11,500 children and traumatising and orphaning many thousands more. Israel, as occupying power, has no right to self-defence.

Worse still, following Israel's unsubstantiated claims that 12 of the UN's aid agency UNRWA took part in the 7 October attack on Israel, Wong quickly acted to cut off funding to UNRWA.

When questioned about her actions, Wong made a pathetic show of concern for the Palestinian people: "Australia voted for immediate humanitarian ceasefire [at the UN]. We want the hostages returned. We want humanitarian aid in. We want civilian lives protected."

PM Albanese with his blood-soaked hands has also hypocritically repeated the calls for Israel to 'minimise' civilian casualties.

Within Labor ranks there are strong concerns over the government's position. Labor backbencher MP Josh Wilson is the latest to break ranks. He condemned Israel's bombardment of Gaza as "unconscionable" declaring that the besieged territory is "being bombed into rubble."

"The wholesale destruction of Gaza is not self-defence," Wilson said. The entire population was "being squeezed further and further south, in starvation conditions without basic medical services."

The Australian Greens are the only parliamentary party to speak out against Israel's criminal actions and defend the Palestinians.

Some trade unions have also expressed support.

## UNRWA UNDER SIEGE

As for UNRWA terminating the employment of its accused workers, commissioner general Philippe Lazzarini explained that he followed "reverse due process" in sacking nine staff members.

When asked at a press conference in Jerusalem if he had looked into whether there was any evidence against the employees, he replied: "No, the investigation is going on now."

"Indeed, I have terminated without due process because I felt at the time that not only the reputation, but the ability of the entire agency to continue to operate and deliver critical humanitarian assistance was at stake if I did not take such a decision," he said.

"My judgement, based on this going public, true or untrue, was I need to take the swiftest and boldest decision to show that as an agency we take this allegation seriously."

Lazzarini said the agency was operating in a "hostile" environment. Since the allegations were made, an Israeli bank account belonging to UNRWA has been frozen and the agency warned that



Sunshine Coast rally in support of Palestine.

its tax benefits would be cancelled. A consignment of food aid from Turkey, including flour, chickpeas, rice, sugar, and cooking oil, that would sustain 1.1 million people for a month had been blocked at the Israeli port of Ashdod.

Israel has long sought to remove UNRWA from Palestine. Israel's foreign minister, Israel Katz, did not mince words. "We have been warning for years: UNRWA perpetuates the refugee issue, obstructs peace, and serves as a civilian arm of Hamas in Gaza."

The UN's Office of Internal Oversight Services is investigating the allegations while a separate independent review of the agency's risk management processes is being led by the former French foreign minister Catherine Colonna.

UNRWA is set to run out of funds by the end of February or early March.

## US UNIONS

The AFL-CIO, the largest labour federation in the US, has issued a statement calling for "a negotiated ceasefire in Gaza." The statement

also condemned the attack on Israel by Hamas, and demanded that desperately needed food, shelter, medicine, and other assistance be provided to the people of Gaza. The federation also called for the release of hostages and emphasised the need for a two-state solution.

Hypocritically, the US has kept Israel supplied with weapons and withdrawn funding to UNRWA.

The actions of Australia, the US and other western allies that have cut off aid breach the intent of the International Court of Justice ruling. Israel is required to take all reasonable measures to prevent genocide against Palestinians in Gaza, enable the provision of basic services and humanitarian assistance, and prevent and punish incitement to commit genocide. Supporting Israel militarily and cutting aid facilitates genocide.

## 'GREATER ISRAEL'

Hamas proposed a ceasefire of four and a half months, during which all hostages would go free, Israel would withdraw its troops and an agreement would be reached

on an end to the Israeli offensive. Its offer was a response to a proposal drawn up by US and Israeli spy chiefs with Qatar and Egypt.

Hamas is also seeking the release of the more than 10,000 Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli jails, half of them imprisoned since 7 October and many of them children.

Israel rejected the proposal outright. Despite growing pressure around the world Israel shows no sign of letting up. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu rejecting proposals for a humanitarian ceasefire, said there could be no solution to Israel's security issues except "absolute victory" over Hamas.

The ultra-right Zionist government does not care about Palestinian lives. It has no intention of letting up while any Palestinians remain. To them Palestinian lives are less than human. Their aim is 'greater Israel' with no Palestinians in Gaza, the West Bank or East Jerusalem.

More Israeli raids in the occupied West Bank have led to the arrests of dozens of Palestinians and the number held in Israeli jails has more than doubled since the Hamas attack on 7 October.

Aid agencies are warning of catastrophic humanitarian consequences of looming Rafah ground invasion.

**Urgent! Write NOW to Penny Wong and Anthony Albanese:**

**Demand they restore UNRWA funding.**

**Demand they expel Israeli diplomats.** ✖

# "The wholesale destruction of Gaza is not self-defence."



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