



Budget 2025-26

A SHOCKER

Anna Pha

“We’re astounded that the centrepiece of tonight’s budget is more dollars for everyone except those with the least,” Australian Council of Social Service CEO Cassandra Goldie said. “In the face of a serious cost-of-living crisis and overwhelming evidence to fix JobSeeker, to give \$7 billion in tax cuts and do nothing to lift people out of poverty is simply shocking.”

“We also need to ensure help goes to people who need it most. The government’s total \$6.8 billion spend on energy bill rebates could have funded energy upgrades for every social housing property in Australia, permanently reducing bills by thousands of dollars each year,” Goldie said.

“People in Australia are yearning for more substantial reform. They’ve weathered difficult times and deserve a government willing to make bold investments in our shared future,” Goldie added.

Labor has no vision or plan to improve the wellbeing of the working class or develop Australia’s economic independence and self-reliance in an unstable world.

As Jim Chalmers put it in his budget speech, “The private sector is resuming its rightful place as the main driver of this growth.”

TAX CUTS

There’s a pledge to cut the 16 per cent tax rate for those Australians earning over \$18,200 to 15 per cent next financial year and 14 per cent the year after.

“Our \$17 billion in tax cuts are the biggest part of the responsible cost-of-living package in this Budget,” Chalmers said. These cuts apply to **all tax payers**. They would reduce the marginal tax rate on income between \$18,200 and \$45,000 from 16 per cent to 15 per cent in July 2026, and to 14 per cent from 1 July 2027.

Workers earning less than \$18,200 – most likely women, people with disability and Indigenous Australians – will receive nothing. Likewise the unemployed and those on Youth Allowance are overlooked, continuing the punitive approach towards the most vulnerable.

The \$17.1 billion in tax cuts are misdirected spending. It would cost less than \$5.5 billion to increase JobSeeker to 100 per cent of the Age Pension in 2025-26.

COST-OF-LIVING CRISIS

The major drivers of the cost-of-living crisis are low wages, unaffordable housing, inflated grocery prices, the cost of healthcare, and rising energy bills. In the face of those things, tax cuts stand out for what they are – rank political opportunism.

The Budget is silent on any support for an increase in the minimum wage, let alone a substantial one to meet the cost-of-living crisis. Instead Chalmers boasts about what Labor has done in the past.

There will be an additional \$2.6 billion to fund pay rises for aged care nurses from March this year. This is welcome, but more is needed. Pay rates for other aged care workers need to be increased.

Low paid NDIS workers are overlooked and there is nothing to end the rorting of the NDIS by private sector providers and coordinators. Costs will continue to be reined in by cutting packages, knocking people off the scheme, and denying access to people who need the NDIS.

The budget fails to curb skyrocketing rents, instead allocating additional funds for home buyers – an indirect subsidy for developers. A massive public housing program for rental accommodation with controlled rents is necessary to solve the housing crisis.

There is a commitment to cut 20 per cent off all student loan debts, raise the minimum repayment threshold and reduce repayment rates. As with many other measures, it tinkers with the existing system of student loans. Structural change is needed. All higher education should be free and outstanding debts wiped.

The government expects the banning of non-compete clauses to make it easier for workers earning less than \$175,000 per annum to change employers or set up their own businesses in pursuit of higher income – a move supported by the trade union movement.

HEALTHCARE

The reduction in the cost of PBS scripts for the general population from \$31.60 to \$25 is welcome, but again it is too little. Likewise the freezing of the charge for pensioners and concession cardholders at \$7.70. Prescription medications should be free, just as they were when the PBS was first introduced. (See *Guardian* #2139, 01/04/25)

There are other positive reforms such as an increase in the bulkbilling Urgent Care Clinics providing long hours and availability on weekends, which hopefully will reduce the number of unnecessary visits to public hospital emergency departments.

Scholarships for trainee nurses, increased funding for public hospitals, and women’s health are worthwhile commitments.

But the Budget lacks structural changes to bring back universal bulkbilling which goes to the heart of Medicare, or incorporate dental health as part of Medicare. Mental health is all but neglected without adequate provision of facilities and necessary access to specialists. ❌



Photo: Theen Moy – flickr.com (CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

TERMINOLOGY EXPLAINED

Budget: The Budget sets out government policy measures which then require parliamentary approval. It takes the form of income (revenue) from taxes and other sources and spending (expenditure) as estimated for coming years and reports on the outcome of the previous year.

Budget deficits and surpluses: A surplus occurs when the government has more income or revenue than it spends, and a deficit is when it spends more than it receives. It is calculated over a period of 12 months. Deficits are usually funded by the issuing of securities (bonds) that are purchased by financial institutions and members of the public. They carry a set interest rate and the debt is repaid at a preset date.

Government debt: The total amount a country’s government owes to its creditors, both domestic and foreign, accumulated over time through cumulative deficits.

Off-budget spending: This refers to government spending not included in the regular budget, often classified as investments and often used to artificially improve the budget bottom line and avoid reporting deficits. Although not reported in the budget, it does contribute to total government debt.

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Guardian

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Still Stolen

Time is a funny thing. Conservative Australians love to live in the past when it comes to ANZAC day and the Kokoda Trail. Those events are 110 and 83 years behind us respectively, but are always with us now, proving that Australians are war heroes and that our military deserves reverence. On the other hand, the Stolen Generations and colonisation are often dismissed as being in the past, with nothing for us to learn from or apologise for.

The Stolen Generation is described by Wikipedia as going from 'approximately 1905 to 1967', so it finished a long time after the eternally relevant Gallipoli campaign. It turns out we don't even have to go back to 1967 to see the stolen generations. It's ongoing.

A Human Rights Watch report,, titled 'All I know is I want them home' and highlighted by 'Women's Agenda' has found that the WA state government has been removing children from Aboriginal families instead of supporting those women when women present at hospitals for suspected domestic violence injuries.

Anyone who ever complains about Aboriginal people getting "special treatment" should take note. According to the report Aboriginal children are more than 20 times more likely to be living in out-of-home care than non-Indigenous children. Indigenous mothers in WA have become afraid to seek help when they need it.

There are no quick fixes when it comes to domestic violence, but there are factors that we know make a difference. One is housing. Being in sub-standard and/or unstable housing makes domestic violence more likely to happen and worse when it does. The Communist Party of Australia advocates substantial investment in *public* housing. Instead we have a system set up to make housing a scarce resource that's used for 'wealth creation' through skyrocketing prices. The government contribution to housing is pathetic compared to the scale of the problem. Housing should be plentiful, stable, and affordable. The report describes Aboriginal women as struggling with unstable accommodation. Never knowing when you're going to have to move is a huge stress.

Another factor that makes a difference is legal representation. Australians are told to be proud of our 'rule of law,' but it's way more difficult for working class people to get access to adequate legal representation. Here again, Aboriginal people are overrepresented.

Another thing that would make a difference is having a voice in decisions. One thing that has persisted from the past until now is decisions being taken *for* Aboriginal people, not by or with the people whose country this is. The Human Watch Rights report says that the government "should guarantee that First Nations people are central to decision-making on child protection policy."

The Communist Party of Australia has been standing with Aboriginal Australians since the 1930s, long before other political parties started caring or pretending to care. The CPA supports Aboriginal people having control and autonomy, public housing, and resources like legal support where they are needed, not based on postcode or skin colour.

There should never have been a Stolen Generation in the first place. There should not be one now.

Overstaffed? No way!

The Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) has slammed Jane Hume's suggestion that the Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) is overstuffed and that recent staffing increases in the Department should be wound back.

The Coalition was found by the *Royal Commission into Defence and Veterans' Suicide* to have failed veterans while they were in government, after they oversaw a backlog of veterans' claims blow out to almost 42,000.

"In the case of DVA, we believe the Australian government of the day failed to resource its policies efficiently. It failed to ensure that its public sector workforce, inclusive of labour hire staff, was 'structured for maximum efficiency and productivity.' And it failed veterans by pursuing a policy that substantially contributed to claims processing delays."

Royal Commission into Defence and Veterans' Affairs Interim Report

This left many veterans' waiting years for the support they needed and had devastating consequences on ex-serving members' lives.

The backlog of claims blew out thanks to the Coalition's arbitrary staffing cap on the Australian Public Sector (APS), meaning DVA was understaffed, and most claims processing staff were in insecure labour hire roles.

With the addition of 1,000 more jobs in DVA, the backlog is finally under control. However, the volume of claims from veterans is continuing to increase and the average time it takes to process claims is still outside the agency's target.

At a recent Senate Estimates hearing, Department officials confirmed:

"If staffing numbers were reduced ... it would obviously have a very rapid impact on the decisions that were starting to sit for longer then. New backlogs would begin to emerge."

In its most recent budget submission, the CPSU has called for an end to temporary staffing boosts and a commitment of ongoing funding for DVA to ensure that the agency can continue to meet the needs of veterans.

CPSU National Secretary, Melissa Donnelly called it "shocking" and "an insult to veterans" for Senator Hume to claim that the DVA is overstuffed, pointing out that in government, Hume and Dutton "oversaw a backlog of veterans' claims blow out to almost 42,000."

"It is clear that Peter Dutton and Jane Hume learnt nothing from a mistake that had devastating consequences, and they are gearing up to do it all again."

"Veterans and their families cannot afford a Dutton government."

Community and Public Sector Union ✖

Employer group calls for limited wage growth

Peter Farmer

The above may be least surprising headline you'll see all year.

Employer groups are fond of saying that if only they get what they want as far as industrial relations goes – ie the whip hand, no protected conditions, non-existent or powerless unions – the economy will boom and we'll have a 'high-wage economy,' which sounds pretty good.

Now the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry are telling the Fair Work Commission that

they don't want any wage increase over 2.5 per cent. Apparently any increase over that amount would wipe out a lot of small to medium businesses. Anyone who has paid attention to ACCI comments on wages over the year will have a sense of deja vu – any wage increase the employer bodies aren't happy with has always been about to destroy small and medium businesses. Yet here we are.

The Australia Institute estimates that real wages have fallen by around 4 per cent since 2020, but real wage cuts don't bother the employer bodies much. They just cash the profits and keep on complaining. ✖

Quote of the Week

AUKUS is ... beginning to take on the core characteristic of a séance: it will only work if everyone believes in it, and fail if there are any sceptics there to harsh the vibe.

Bernard Keane, Crikey

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Op-Ed: Labor vs Communism: the Socialist Budget reply

A Carruthers

We are a land of duopolies. We seem to have two of everything: two major supermarkets, (Woolworths and Coles), two major parties (Labor and Liberal). Two is our lucky number. Two will do.

But, will it? Is two the best we can do?

Labor's latest Budget reveals that they're another poor choice in a decimated political landscape. While Dutton spells catastrophe and would be worse, that doesn't mean we can't call out Labor, because Labor is doing the kinds of things that will lose so much support among the people as to warrant a change of government in the upcoming election. If Labor doesn't change its ways we'll always be one election away from far-right governments.

Let's look at what Labor does and what a socialist government would do, on three of the major topics:

1. COST OF LIVING

Labor: A "voluntary" sign up for a "Code of Conduct" for supermarkets who then can volunteer to abide by the code, if they like, but which "does not override existing rules in Australian Consumer Law." Labor entrusts the ACCC with this "code." This is really code for "leave the supermarket duopoly" alone, and use tax cuts as an excuse for doing nothing on the supply and production end. This is consumer-end reform, not producer-end reform. Will this fix the cozzie livs? Hell no. We all know it won't work. Will the big supermarkets really sign up for a Code that's just voluntary? Of course not.

Communist: Regulate and slap hefty fines on Woolworths, Coles, and IGA immediately. Make the monopoly supermarkets serve the Australian people and pay their own workers more, not line their pockets with stolen wages and obscene profits. Regulate them with the aim of retiring them, favouring instead smaller enterprises who can sell at fixed prices, and pioneering larger state firms that are subject to scrutiny. Nationalise foreign supermarkets that are flooding the market, compete the remaining private entities out of existence through state enterprises that can run at little to zero profit and keep prices low. Prioritise local producers. Break the monopoly. Fix the cost of living once and for all from the production end. Administer supply-side structural reform. This is a production problem, not a consumer problem. Too much to ask? It takes guts and big moves to end the curse of cozzie livs, a government that can stand up to the monopolies.

2. HOUSING CRISIS

Labor: Set no benchmarks. Let the market dictate. See what happens. By 2029 Australia will need 1.2 million homes to avoid major fallout as the population grows. About 30 per cent of Australians currently own a home outright, and that number is going down. Renters are now the majority, and are struggling worse than ever before, with rent climbing to above \$800 per week in some cities, while houses are well over \$1 million and beyond reach of the majority. It's completely unsustainable.



Queensland Housing Commission dwelling, Mount Gravatt, Brisbane, c 1954. Photo: Public domain

Homelessness is climbing to catastrophic levels. So what has Labor got in store? Some great solutions: one of them is "\$120 million from the National Productivity Fund for states and territories to remove barriers to modular and prefabricated construction." Why does it cost \$120 million to "remove barriers?" Who is getting paid this much to remove barriers? Whoever is being paid to remove them, can we negotiate a lower price? Just remove them! Labor's "Help to Buy" scheme is not any better. It will largely go to developers, not to state-built public housing. Instead Labor is using the Housing Australia Future Fund, a kind of Super for housing. How much will that get us? "Combined, Round 1 of the HAFF and Accord and Round 2 of the HAFF are expected to deliver approximately 18,000 social and affordable homes." Given the scale of the housing crisis this is peanuts.

Communist: In line with tried-and-tested policies in socialist countries, we would aggressively bump up home ownership to 95 per cent using methods long studied and understood from a socialist governance perspective: boosting public housing through state planning and direct builds. It is objectively known that socialist countries have the highest percentage of home ownership in the world. Vietnam for instance is in the 90 per cent bracket. China is 97 per cent. How did they do it? By cracking down on real estate profiteers, but then simultaneously issuing aggressive housing rights legislation which provides free rentals in the short term and permanent housing for all in the long term. How to build it? Through aggressive state

intervention. State-owned-enterprises lead the way. Forget "lifting barriers" and "cutting red tape." The issue is bigger than that. We need to build political will and popular awareness of why every Australian, even those who are moving for work, deserves to own a home. Why should Australians have to sacrifice everything to put a roof over their head? Shouldn't it be easier to have a place to live? It shouldn't cost us an arm and leg to keep the rain out? This is a crisis that never had to happen.

3. INFRASTRUCTURE

Labor: Of all the blunders in this Budget, nothing is more pathetic than the section marked "Building a stronger economy." Labor could once have pretended to be an infrastructure Party. Turning through their pages on infrastructure now is tragic. Roads: this is all they can think of when they think infrastructure: roads and highways. I'm not dissing roads in general. Roads matter to a nation's development. What we need now are not just highway upgrades: we need a comprehensive transport overhaul. We need High-Speed Rail (HSR), universal EV bus fleets, next generation Concentrated Solar Power Towers (CSPs). Instead, we have \$330 billion, yes billion, over the next decade for the Australian Defence Force, presumably for the Great War against China, and huge amounts of money wasted on a "National Productivity Fund" which again, like the other Future Funds, guarantees nothing. The amount of targeted infrastructure that could be built with all these billions is staggering. Labor's do-nothing approach on

infrastructure sets us up for failure at a time when we need to be rapidly transforming the economy.

Communist: Socialist governments are infrastructure governments. Communists build things. That's what we're known for. Modern communist governments build ecological infrastructure. Ecological development is part and parcel of socialist programs, and we're not just talking about China. China is off the charts (we're talking flying taxis, total EV transformation, real science fiction stuff...). But even if we did half of what China did, that would be progress. We need to harness what Marx and Engels called *the advanced productive forces*. That means the new, green productive forces that are the stuff of the future. We need to be rapidly accelerating green energy production and construction. We need scientific governance. Why doesn't Labor talk about science? We need a just transition, which means creating new jobs in the new green economy. Everything has to be focussed on this transition.

Of course, Labor will say that being a Party of Government they know best. We've had Labor and Liberal governments since time immemorial, and we still have the same problems that we've always had. What we need is ambition. What we need is a socialist, communist, Marxist-Leninist style government that can do the kinds of revolutionary things we need to transform Australia and become a nation of the twenty-first century, rather than a slowly decaying relic trapped in the past.

*editor's note: don't write in. 'Cozzie livs' is slang for 'cost of living' 🇺🇸

Why doesn't Labor talk about science? We need a just transition.

Aussie Post profits built off the back of workforce

The union representing postal workers said Australia Post's positive interim profit has been possible due to the hard work of Australia Post's workforce.

This year Australia Post reported an interim profit of \$249.1 million, an increase of \$215.5 million on the year before.

Communication Workers Union (CWU) National President Shane Murphy said while there is still much work for the company to do, the transformation and uptick in profitability has been made possible due to collaborative consultation with CWU members across the country.

"CWU members have played a huge role in ensuring Australians continue to receive the quality postal service they expect and deserve, whilst maintaining secure and sustainable jobs for our communities right across the nation," Murphy said.

"While of course there are still improvements that can be made, the collaborative role CWU members have played in this process has certainly been responsible for the positive turn around we've seen at Australia Post."

Murphy said CWU members have played a significant role in the development and roll-out of the New Delivery Model at Australia Post.

"CWU members have taken the lead in localising the roll-out of the New Delivery Model across 119 sites nationally so far, and there's still more to come.

"There's no question the expertise and hands-on role of the



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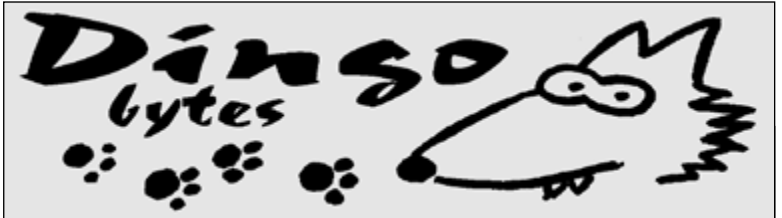
frontline workforce has had a huge hand in helping Australia Post navigate the changing landscape and the challenges it has been facing.

"Listening to the experts – the frontline workers who understand their customers and the business better than anyone – clearly works. This isn't just a lesson for the Australia Post bosses, but should be a

lesson for bosses in industries and workforces across the board.

"Australians deserve a reliable, quality postal system and while of course there are still improvements that can be made, thanks to the hard-work and dedication of CWU members, that's being made possible."

Communications Workers Union



Temu Trump or Mini Musk?

Opposition Leader Peter Dutton has been accused of being 'Temu Trump' with various attempts to come across as Trump-like before giving it away because someone asked around and found that a Trump-alike wasn't what really did it for Australian voters. It was always a bit unfair. Dutton was using xenophobia for political gain long before Trump became President, and daft ideas like expensive nuclear power or forcing public servants to take public transport so they could do Zoom calls from the office instead of their homes were all his own.

Maybe 'Mini Musk' is more appropriate. Musk has famously, and unelectedly, asked US public servants to send him an email about good things they've done or face dismissal (we wonder if anyone answered that at least they hadn't turned a \$44 billion US company into a \$10 billion company the way Musk has with Twitter/X). Now Dutton is getting headlines insisting that the ABC "show excellence" or he "won't support the waste". We hope the ABC doesn't have to find out what Dutton's idea of showing excellence is. The Richardson review found that under Dutton's leadership, Home Affairs made multi-million dollar contracts with companies suspected of criminal activity, including drug smuggling, and corruption. Perhaps he's not the one Auntie should be taking lessons on waste from.

PARASITE OF THE WEEK: is the Commonwealth Bank (Bankwest's parent company). The CB has announced it is axing 130 roles over the next three months in the Bankwest Business Banking Transition Team, with 122 of those jobs lost from Western Australia.

The transition team has helped migrate customers from Bankwest to CBA following the bank's decision to withdraw Bankwest from business banking in 2022.

This totals almost 400 roles slashed since CBA viciously closed Bankwest's entire retail branch and ATM network in WA early last year.

At the time, CBA promised the West Australian government it would create 500 more jobs following the closures, yet has continued to savagely cut jobs and send work offshore instead.

Finance Sector Union (FSU) National Assistant Secretary Jason Hall said CBA's actions cast serious doubt as to the integrity of its commitments to the West Australian government.

"Unfortunately, the WA government has been sold a pup here – 500 group roles were promised in return for Bankwest going completely digital," he said.

"Instead, the bank continues to cut local jobs. Clearly that commitment was an empty promise by CBA to take the heat off for abandoning an entire community. Is that really acceptable to the WA community and government?"

"Since its decision to withdraw business banking three years ago, Bankwest customers and staff have faced uncertainty. Workers are fed up of being at constant risk of losing their jobs.

"Our members have told us time and time again they are under pressure and overworked in many areas of Bankwest due to the bank's relentless slew of job cuts and offshoring. These latest job cuts leave fewer than a dozen workers – barely a skeleton staff – remaining to pick up the pieces.

"The FSU calls on CBA to redeploy as many of the 130 roles cut to areas that are already under pressure and short staffed." The union said it would be writing to WA Treasurer Rita Saffioti to seek an urgent meeting and to immediately intervene on the matter.

The FSU has also repeatedly called on the federal government to urgently implement the recommendations from the Senate Rural and Regional Affairs Inquiry into regional bank closures of May last year, which include declaring banking an essential service and developing a mandatory industry code so banks can be held to account for their actions.

ANU staff overwhelmingly vote no confidence in leadership

Australian National University staff have overwhelmingly supported a vote of no confidence in the leadership of the Chancellor, Julie Bishop, and the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Genevieve Bell.

More than 800 ANU staff participated in the vote, which was open to all union members. Of those, more than 95 per cent voted 'No' to the question "Do you have confidence in the leadership of the Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor?"

ANU has been scandal-plagued recently, including revelations the Vice-Chancellor held a second job at Intel, and the Chancellor used ANU funds to pay her business partner as a consultant. ANU recently revealed its 2024 budget forecast – the basis of job cuts and a failed attempt to take away a staff pay rise – had overestimated the size of the 2024 deficit by more than \$60 million.

NTEU ACT Division Secretary Dr Lachlan Clohesy said the ball is in the University's court:

"It is now up to ANU Council to deliberate on whether they believe the positions of the Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor are still tenable.

"It's not just the very serious conflicts of interest. It's the culture of fear and intimidation, the financial mismanagement, the job cuts, blaming staff and referring to them as "inefficiencies," the parking fee hike, the childcare closures, and attempting to take away a staff pay increase.

"ANU leadership overestimated the size of the

2024 deficit by more than \$60 million. They then disestablished the College of Health and Medicine, attempted to take away a staff pay increase, and cut jobs and courses based on their erroneous budgeting. ANU staff demand accountability."

ANU Branch President Millan Pintos-Lopez explained that morale at the ANU is "at rock bottom." "This is a great university, with great staff and great students," he said, "however, we've been let down by ANU leadership and this vote result is a clear reflection of that.

"We need ANU Council to take the concerns of staff seriously.

"Decisions taken by university leadership have damaged and continue to damage the university.

Given what we now know about the true state of the books, there is no financial reason for job cuts."

NTEU National President Dr Alison Barnes wondered what it takes to lose your job as the boss of an Australian university in 2025. "The ANU scandals have piled up higher than the Telstra Tower yet the Council continues to back in a vice-chancellor and chancellor who have both failed to take any responsibility for terrible mismanagement.

Barnes called the ANU crisis "emblematic of the deep governance crisis we are seeing right across the country, and argued that real reform is needed to stop conflicts of interest and cultural decay of our public universities."

National Tertiary Education Union

Coalition's climate car crash policy

Opposition Leader Peter Dutton is set to send another wrecking ball through Australia's hard-won, climate policies, with reports indicating he plans to destroy the New Vehicle Efficiency Standards.

Climate Council CEO Amanda McKenzie said: "Before these standards, Australia had become a dumping ground for the dirtiest vehicles in the world – with the cars the US, China, and Europe reject landing in our driveways. On average, new passenger cars in Australia use 20 per cent more fuel than in the US."

"The New Vehicle Efficiency Standards are changing that, by bringing in a wider range of choices of more efficient vehicles that use less petrol, are cheaper to run and reduce pollution. These standards are already a win for families concerned about their rising petrol costs and their kids' wellbeing."

The Standards, which came into effect on 1 January 2025, are expected to:

Save Australians more than \$100bn in fuel and maintenance by bringing in more efficient vehicles, whether they are petrol, diesel, or electric; and

Reduce climate pollution by 321 million tonnes over 25 years.

"We are well down the road to cleaner, cheaper to run vehicles, but Peter Dutton's policy swerve is a climate car crash. In promising to wind back standards he is actually giving foreign petrol and car corporations the green light to continue dumping their most

gas guzzling, polluting vehicles in Australia," McKenzie said.

This U-turn on cleaner vehicles would mean:

- Less choice when Australians buy their next car
- Higher petrol costs for families
- Increased pollution and
- Greater reliance on foreign oil.

"Australian kids have the most to lose if Peter Dutton puts Australia's signature clean transport policy into reverse. Research shows that air pollution from vehicles causes 11,000 premature deaths of Australians every year and our kids are most at risk," she said.

"This announcement is more chaos from the federal Coalition on energy and climate. First they were ripping up plans for critical transmission infrastructure, now they are set to backtrack on cleaner, cheaper to run transport. They have committed to publicly fund nuclear reactors (at a minimum cost of \$331 billion), but didn't allocate a single dollar in their budget reply to the scheme. And of course, we are yet to see a single policy that cuts climate pollution anywhere in their platform."

"The Coalition's policies are a climate dead-end and will generate more pollution from energy, more pollution from vehicles and more pollution from industry. Australians will pay a high price with worsening extreme heat, fires, and floods. We cannot risk going back to the dark days of climate delay and denial."

Climate Council ✖



Photo: Khunkorn Laowisit – pexels.com (CC0)

**air pollution causes
11,000 preventable
deaths every year**

WHAT IS THE VEHICLE EFFICIENCY STANDARD?

The New Vehicle Efficiency Standard limits the pollution that new cars in Australia collectively release by setting a limit on the average annual emissions across a manufacturer's new car sales.

Over time, the maximum amount of pollution allowed is reduced, which means car makers must offer Australians a wider range and more choice of new low and zero emissions vehicles.

Fuel efficiency standards like this were already in place in 85 per cent of the world's car markets before Australia followed suit.

Safety issues in early childcare

A recent *Four Corners* episode highlighted serious safety issues in the early education and care sector. Below is a response from United Workers Union's National President, Jo Schofield:

Reports by ABC's *Four Corners* are placing a much-needed focus on the systemic issues created by for-profit companies in early childhood education and care.

Educators, United Workers Union and parents are united in wanting an early childhood education and care sector that gives children the best start in life.

Educators across the sector are familiar with some of the issues that have been raised

in the reporting, including understaffing due to a failure to attract and retain staff, largely because of low wages.

However most educators' experience has been that educators in for-profit providers face greater pressures than their peers in not-for-profit providers. This can result in higher turnover and educators being placed in situations where it is hard, if not impossible, to provide the quality of education and care needed by families.

United Workers Union's early educators will be shocked and saddened by the experiences shared by parents in the reports, and no parent should have to go through what has been reported.

These same educators will also see the issues as a betrayal of the safety processes and considerations they embed in their daily routines to ensure children's safety.

The reporting raises questions about the leniency of a waiver system that allows almost one in five centres to operate without a full complement of staff.

United Workers Union has repeatedly raised the issue of educator shortages impacting the quality of education and care children receive, the issue of for-profit centres putting profits before children, and high levels of staffing waivers across the sector.

United Workers Union acknowledges the federal Labor government's move to stabilise

the sector by increasing educators' pay by 15 per cent, which has already resulted in improved retention and hiring outcomes, and is addressing some of the understaffing plaguing the sector.

A sector that has appropriate numbers of educators also starts to remove the sector's reliance on waivers, and is a vital first step in addressing some of the safety issues being aired today.

United Workers Union ✖

Health Services Union: what's missing from the Budget

The Health Services Union (HSU) has strongly endorsed the Albanese government's record investments to strengthen Medicare in this year's federal budget, while noting a missed opportunity to provide cost-of-living relief for disability support workers.

The budget locked in a 12 per cent increase in public hospital funding – a record increase of \$33.9 billion in our public hospitals – and \$644 million for 50 more urgent

care clinics to relieve pressure on our acute care system.

Meanwhile, an \$8.5 billion boost for Medicare will make nine in every 10 GP visits bulk billed, and make reproductive health cheaper for 300,000 women.

HSU has called the positive parts of the budget "groundbreaking," but says that what's missing from the Budget is an investment in better pay and conditions for disability workers with the sector facing an acute workforce crisis.

The HSU is campaigning for a new workforce compact for disability workers which would facilitate a desperately needed pay rise, with one in four disability workers considering leaving the sector.

The HSU is also calling on a re-elected Albanese government to expand paid placements to other allied health professionals, beyond social work, nursing and teaching.

HSU National Secretary Lloyd Williams described what Labor has done as "a real plan to make

health cheaper for everyday Australians, cut waitlines for critical health services, and reduce the gender pay gap, all while taking the pressure off frontline health workers."

Williams added that "there's unfinished business, with disability workers desperately needing a fair pay rise to stop them leaving the sector in huge numbers."

The HSU is still working to raise its members' wages above the minimum wage, but they're

not impressed with the Liberal party's plans.

"The Liberals ... are planning massive cuts which will take workers backwards with rampant gig work and winding back workers' opportunity to win fair pay rises," said Williams, "Peter Dutton's cuts to services could bring the health system to its knees and reignite widespread rorts across the NDIS."

Health Services Union ✖

Four keywords on China-WA relations

Long Dingbin
Chinese Consul General in Perth

In March 2025, significant events unfolded in both China and WA.

In the Northern Hemisphere spring, China's Two Sessions concluded successfully, sounding a clarion call to advance Chinese modernisation and build a community with a shared future for mankind.

In Australia's summer, the four-yearly state election was held as scheduled. The WA Labor Party secured a third consecutive term, with Premier Roger Cook steering the state toward new horizons.

At this new starting point, as Chinese Consul General in Perth, I would like to describe the future China-WA practical cooperation through four keywords.

First Keyword: Economic Development.

In 2024, China's GDP surpassed 130 trillion yuan for the first time, reaching 134.9 trillion yuan (approximately AUD \$30 trillion) with a year-on-year increase of 5 per cent. China ranks among the world's fastest-growing major economies, continuing to contribute about 30 per cent to global economic growth.

For 2025, China has set a GDP growth target of around 5 per cent, injecting momentum into a sluggish world economy.

WA leads the nation in economic and population growth, with the lowest unemployment rate, solidifying its role as Australia's economic powerhouse.

China, as WA's longstanding largest trading partner, enjoys an enormous market, a complete industrial system, a wealth of manpower and talent, and vast space for future growth through demand upgrades, structural improvements, and a shift to new growth drivers. It remains a vital opportunity for global development, including Australia.

China and WA have every reason to continue joining hands, driving mutual economic growth and shaping a future of shared prosperity.



Celebrations to welcome in the Chinese Lunar New Year, 25 January Boorloo/Perth. Consul General Long Dingbin with Vinnie Molina.

Second Keyword: Advanced Manufacturing.

China is vigorously developing new quality productive forces, fostering industries of the future such as embodied AI and 6G, and emphasising high-quality growth through technological innovation, industrial upgrading, and green transformation. This aligns closely with the WA Labor Party's 'Made in WA' initiative.

China and WA share immense potential in emerging fields such as green development and the digital economy.

Both can strengthen cooperation in traditional sectors like mining and agriculture, unlock new opportunities in trade, investment, innovation, and energy transition, and cultivate growth areas in AI, quantum technology, and life sciences – advancing manufacturing toward greater technological sophistication, intelligence, and sustainability.

Third Keyword: Improving People's Livelihoods.

The Chinese people's aspiration for a better life is our nation's unwavering goal. This year's Two Sessions outlined plans for aged care, youth employment, education, healthcare, and housing quality, addressing public expectations.

Meanwhile, the WA government is prioritising solutions to housing shortages, healthcare access, and cost-of-living pressures, striving to ensure affordable housing and equitable medical services.

With shared missions and goals, China and WA can learn from each other, exchange best practices, and enhance cooperation in prefabricated construction, healthcare, and aged care to better enhance the well-being of both peoples.

Fourth Keyword: Mutual Benefit and Win-Win Cooperation.

Amid a world undergoing profound

changes, some countries prioritise self-interest, escalating trade and tariff wars, and fuelling unilateralism and protectionism, undermining the international order rooted in the UN Charter and international law.

China remains firm in pursuing a strategy of opening up for mutual benefit, opposes hegemony and power politics, rejects unilateralism and protectionism, injecting stability into an uncertain world through its own development.

China believes that friends should be permanent and we should pursue common interests. At this new juncture, China stands ready to collaborate with WA's new government to elevate practical cooperation to higher quality and vitality, enhance the welfare of both peoples, and advance a more mature, stable, and productive China-Australia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. 🇨🇳

On the election beat in Western Australia

Richard Titelius

On Saturday 8 March West Australian comrades helped the Greens hand out how-to-vote material. I chose a booth at a Primary School in the north eastern suburb of Ballajura in the seat of West Swan held by the State Treasurer and Deputy Premier, Rita Saffioti.

There was also a Liberal Candidate. There were two Romanians helping out the Romanian-born candidate for Pauline Hanson's One Nation Party, Cristina Pomana, and

a stream of young polite Christians who were helping out the Australian Christians Party (main policies anti-abortion, pro-bigotry). The One Nation people tried to paint their party as 'moderate right.' They're far right.

One Nation claims it would cut immigration, create affordable housing, reduce taxes and regulations, ban foreign ownership, protect our freedoms and 'stand with our farmers.' There is the pretence at nationalism but it didn't get them very far.

There was definitely a hiccup in the results, as by 8 pm some booths only had about 10 per cent of their

ballots counted and it took until 9.30 pm for Roger Cook to claim victory and for Liberal Leader Libby Mettam and Nationals Leader Shane Love to concede.

In the Legislative Assembly the ALP secured 46 seats, the Liberals 7 seats, and the Nationals 6. The seat of Fremantle in which ALP apparatchik Simone McGurk suffered a 27 per cent swing against her as voters swung towards independent

Kate Hulett who campaigned on climate change and the environment. McGurk was re-elected, but the swing should give Labor pause for thought.

In the Legislative Council the

Greens look like electing a further four representatives to assist lawyer Brad Pettitt. Legalise Cannabis Party leader Brian Walker has been re-elected, as have Australian Christians lead candidate, Maryka Groenwald and One Nation's Rod Caddies.

The full vote took some time. From experience I would say it is not all the Electoral Commissioner's fault but rather the government caught napping on inadequate resources and pay of electoral officials and not foreseeing that the Electoral Commissioner was going to need some extra help.

The government of Roger Cook

is now well and truly out of the shadow of Mark McGowan and the Liberals are well and truly in the wilderness where they are likely to stay for a while. High profile media personality and former Perth Lord Mayor Basil Zempilas, who barely got over the line in the Western Suburb of Churchlands. This election also bodes well for an ALP and Greens win in the Federal election to be held in May.

However, the ALP has to make it a campaign about what Anthony Albanese can offer the Australian people, rather than making it all about not risking Peter Dutton. 🇺🇸

Jodie Bell: championing women in hunting across Australia

Documentary producer Jodie Bell is planning to produce a new show, *Hunting Tidda Style*, which highlights the important role Aboriginal women play in hunting across Australia.

The idea was brought to her by co-directors Kimba Benjamin and Kate Ten Buuren, who both have deep ties to Indigenous culture. "They wanted to show a different side to hunting, one where women are at the forefront, connecting with the land, and continuing cultural traditions," Bell explained.

The show will see Emily Wurrumara, a singer and community figure, host as she travels to various communities, learning from local women.

The show aims to challenge the typical portrayal of hunting, which is often male-dominated, especially in mainstream media.

Jodie points out that "women have always been a part of the hunting tradition, and this show gives them a chance to showcase their skills and knowledge of country."

Each episode will not only cover the

hunting aspect but also dive into broader conversations about land management, biodiversity, and environmental issues that these communities face.

The show is designed to bring awareness to how First Nations people have been looking after the land for thousands of years and how their methods could benefit modern Australia.

Though still in development, *Hunting Tidda Style* has already gained some momentum. After participating in the Australian National Documentary Conference,

the team won a \$2,500 prize and attracted interest from broadcasters.

Jodie reflects on the process, stating, "It's a long road, but we're focused on getting this project made, and it's about pushing forward even when you don't have all the support you'd like."

With the help of community and industry connections, Jodie and her team are optimistic about securing funding to bring this important project to life.

Ngaarda Media 🇺🇸

Palmer pushes climate lies

Peter Farmer

It's not unusual for people to notice Clive Palmer's billboards for his renamed political party, 'Trumpet of Patriots' and wonder what's in it for Clive. He's obviously spending a lot of money on the billboards and YouTube ads.

One thing he gets out of it is climate change denial.

The ABC's 'News Verify' section has reported that Palmer's seemingly one-man party has spent a minimum of \$175,000

on a twenty-year-old video which attempts to promote scepticism on climate change based on a single interview with an ice-core scientist.

In the video, professor Jørgen Peder Steffensen of the University of Copenhagen criticises a single ice-core experiment for starting at the coldest point. The video Palmer is energetically promoting uses this comment to justify doubt about climate change in general. Steffensen says he stands by his comment, but does not agree with the narrative of the video, and did not agree with it at the time.

What the video does not include is Steffensen's comment about data from Greenland and Antarctica. He told the film maker that if temperatures from those two areas started increasing and rising in unison, it would be "a strong indication of man-made climate change."

Professor Steffensen says that's exactly what happened, but there wasn't time for it in the video Palmer is putting so much money into. ❌



Union tells Dutton to 'come clean' on education cuts

The Australian Education Union (AEU) is calling on the Leader of the Opposition Peter Dutton to immediately come clean on his plans for cuts to public education.

Following the actions of Donald Trump, Peter Dutton has signalled cuts to the Federal Department of Education, should he become Prime Minister, and has provided no commitment on the funding of public schools.

On Sky news Dutton said:

"People ask ... Why have you got a department of thousands and thousands of people at a department called the Department of Education in Canberra if you don't run a school?"

Dutton also said that under his leadership there would be "conditions on our funding" to state governments for education if schools teach what he terms "indoctrination."

"We have had no clarity on the cuts Peter Dutton plans to make to education, nor will he come clean on what his plans are for public education," AEU Federal President Correna Haythorpe said.

"Peter Dutton has had three years as leader and has never supported public education in that time."

"Now he is taking a leaf from the Trump playbook by going for the Department of Education by threatening to cut thousands of jobs, control what teachers teach – and pull funding if they don't comply with his ideology."

"Peter Dutton's proposed control of the school curriculum is chilling, when we see what is happening in the US with book banning and the destruction of teacher's professional autonomy."

"The AEU has written to Dutton, calling on him to provide bipartisan support for the Albanese government's commitment to full funding of public schools. Weeks later we have had no response."

"Last week we joined 31 organisations in an open letter to Peter Dutton, urging him to support the public school funding agreements recently announced by the Albanese government."

"We called on Peter Dutton to give bipartisan support to the Albanese government's commitment to lift the federal share of public school funding to 25 per cent of the Schooling Resource Standard (SRS) – the amount needed for every child to succeed no matter their circumstances."

"There has been silence in response. The only conclusions that can be drawn from the Opposition leader's comments thus far is that public schools funding and the Federal Department of Education are gravely at risk if a Dutton government is elected."

"It's clear that public schools can't risk a Dutton government."

Australian Education Union ❌

GREEN NOTES

Labor budgets for fossil fuels

Anna Pha

Jim Chalmers' Budget Speech failed to mention the words 'climate change' and 'environment' although \$7.3 billion is allocated in recovery payments for 'natural' disasters that have already hit the country in the past few years. According to Deloitte, natural disasters currently cost the Australian economy more than \$38 billion a year. This figure is expected to grow to at least \$73 billion a year by 2060. Labor failed to honour its 2022 election promise to strengthen environmental laws. In fact it has weakened them and pursues a 'transition to renewables' via gas, declaring gas will be part of the energy mix until at least 2050.

The Clean Energy Finance Corporation receives an injection of \$4.4 billion in capital to invest in projects such as renewable power and storage, energy efficiency, and other low emissions technology. Spending in all other areas of the Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water Department portfolio including the Bureau of Meteorology, the Department itself, and the Clean Energy Regulator will be cut over coming years. The allocation of \$3 billion for investment in green iron and aluminium, and \$3 billion for rail projects in Western Sydney and Melbourne is positive but falls far short of what is urgently required. The \$7.3 billion in recovery payments for natural disasters that have already hit the country in the past few years is a warning that we cannot afford climate warming to continue.

Additional funding in the millions – not billions – is allocated to respond to climate change, including disaster preparedness, the national aerial firefighting fleet and disaster response resources. There is \$450 million partnering with the US (Trump permitting) on a satellite program to gather data on natural disasters, climate change, and agricultural production.

The government will continue to hand out diesel fuel rebates costing \$10 billion this year, and \$44 billion over the next four years. Compare this to the \$19.7 billion spend over 10 years (average \$1.97b a year) on "Making Australia A Renewable Energy Superpower" with the focus on renewable hydrogen, low carbon liquid fuels, refining of critical minerals, solar and battery supply chains. The government's hydrogen and mineral tax incentives (subsidies) are expected to cost \$13.7 billion over more than a decade.

While \$1.8 billion of further electricity bill rebates will provide temporary relief for households, they are not a substitute for action on climate change. The government must make commitments to subsidise rooftop solar, household batteries, electrification, and energy efficiency. Such measures will permanently lower power bills and slash climate pollution. A gas-fuelled transition is neither cheaper nor cleaner, nor is Dutton's nuclear power with ongoing fossil fuels for decades to come.

As Climate Councillor and economist, Nicki Hutley, said: "Australians deserve long-term solutions that help permanently lower energy bills and climate pollution. We don't have to choose between cost of living relief and climate action – we can and must address both together."

"The climate crisis is negatively impacting all aspects of modern life, contributing to disruption of ecosystems, biodiversity and human societies through sea level rise, extreme weather events, desertification and changing weather patterns, and threatening food security, water, the economy, social cohesion and the well-being of humans and other living things. These impacts will escalate in the future," the Greens warn. "The climate crisis requires us to seize the opportunity to transform Australia into a greenhouse gas-negative powerhouse that creates new jobs and a cleaner planet."

The second half of the 2020s is critical to saving humanity and ecosystems. Energy companies must be nationalised enabling governments to control prices, transition to renewables, and phase out fossil fuels as quickly as possible.

On 3 May, vote first for candidates who support strong measures to address climate change. Put conservatives and Coalition last.

www.cpa.org.au

Dirty Ashtray, Exploding Vape



Marcus Browning

In 2023, British American Tobacco (BAT) and Meta were dishonourably distinguished with a Dirty Ashtray award and the inaugural Exploding Vape award at a ceremony in Perth.

Presented by the Australian Medical Association (AMA) and the Australian Council on Smoking and Health (ACOSH), the awards spotlight industry and organisations which undermine Australia's tobacco and vaping control strategies.

British American Tobacco, the force behind the deceptively named Responsible Vaping Australia (RVA), received its award for initiating and financing a concerted astroturf campaign to undermine public health policy on vaping in Australia.

Meta, the owner of Facebook, Instagram, Threads, and WhatsApp, won its award for failing to enforce its own policy banning the promotion of tobacco or nicotine products on its platforms.

ACOSH Co-CEO Laura Hunter said RVA is a front for British American Tobacco which wants vapes available in retail settings. "BAT, through the RVA, pretends to be concerned about the black market in e-cigarettes and the rise in youth vaping.

"Hiding behind RVA, BAT has lobbied governments and co-opted various community sectors and organisations who may be unaware big tobacco is behind their astroturf lobby campaign. For this reason they are worthy winners of the 2023 Dirty Ashtray Award."

The inaugural Exploding Vape Award exposes those who support and further the message of the tobacco industry. Meta has an enormous power to influence.

Hunter noted: "In a policy proudly displayed on its website, Meta expressly commits to disallow e-cigarette advertising or promotion on its platforms. It only takes a few seconds to see this is not being enforced.

"Meta's platforms are being used to promote the use and sale of e-cigarettes, and making them easily accessible to a younger and younger audience."

AMA President Professor Steve Robson said the government had taken important steps to ban nicotine vaping products, and only allow access to them with a doctors' prescription.

"Tobacco remains the leading preventable cause of death and disease in Australia, while the evidence of health threats from e-cigarettes continues to grow, hooking younger generations onto an addictive product.

"Big tobacco is still in big business and we saw its attempt to undermine the TGA's recent vaping reform consultation. Hundreds of individual submissions parroted text from an astroturf campaign.

"The dirty ashtray and exploding vape awards illustrate the need to address unregulated advertising of nicotine products on

social media and stop tobacco industry players from funding political and lobby groups.

"We in health, and our colleagues in tobacco control, stand behind the government in their rollout of new tobacco and vaping reforms for the sake of the health of all Australians," Professor Robson said.

DEADLY PRODUCTS

The fight against big tobacco's deadly profitable products gained greater momentum during the 1980s. By the 2000s, in the face of scientific evidence, tobacco companies were still lobbying against health warnings.

In 2004 they were silent about a wide range of newly-revealed diseases caused by their products – at the same time noisily opposing new packet health messages which would inform smokers about these dangers.

A landmark US Surgeon-General's report showed for the first time that smoking causes diseases in almost every part of the body – with conclusive links to leukaemia and cancers of the cervix, kidney, pancreas, and stomach; as well as abdominal aortic aneurysm, pneumonia, cataracts, periodontitis and more.

The tobacco industry lobbied hard for warnings to be weakened and delayed for as long as possible – though it was clear their consumers were harmed as a result of ignorance about the many and varied harms caused by tobacco.

The warnings, originally proposed by the government to take effect in mid-2004, were then delayed until mid-2005. This was followed by a revised Regulation Impact Statement by the Federal Treasury proposing manufacturers be given until 2006.

The Cancer Council said, "All smokers have basic consumer rights to truth and safety. Yet both have been denied and fought by tobacco interest groups to protect their own commercial self-interests."

The National Heart Foundation warned: "We urge the government not to cave in to the interests of tobacco companies but to put public health and consumer rights first – without further delays."

The government then announced – after six years of consultations – that it would ignore the advice of health authorities and accept the tobacco industry's favoured position that the new graphic warnings should occupy only 30 per cent of the front of packets – not the 50 per cent proposed by health experts.

FRUIT-FLAVOURED CANCER STICKS

Health groups then had to call on the government to ban the sale of fruit-flavoured cigarettes, saying the new brands are to influence teenagers to smoke, following revelations that the government had softened the planned health warnings.

The three major tobacco companies in

Australia had a word with the government and the warnings were downgraded.

The tobacco companies demanded the warnings be made smaller, Imperial Tobacco Australia telling the government the warnings were a "heavy-handed proposal to placate the anti-tobacco lobby." Philip Morris Ltd was so eager to help the Health Department that the tobacco giant put its own health warning proposals to the junior minister.

Then Health Minister Tony Abbot refused to give any reasons for the warnings being changed.

The new fruity brand, called "DJ Mix," imported from Hong Kong, distributed in Australia by the Sydney-based Trojan Tobacco Company, featured "a range of fruit flavours" and were clearly aimed at hooking young people.

Then Federal Parliamentary Secretary on Health, Christopher Pyne said there was nothing the government could do to stop the fruit cigs – that it was up to state and territory governments to act against them.

In 1989 the federal government was forced to ban the most cynical attempt at sleight-of-hand by the pedlars of death – smokeless tobacco – by amending the Trade Practices Act.

BIG TOBACCO UNDERMINES TREATY

In 2005 the major tobacco companies tried to manipulate and undermine the world's first treaty – the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) from the World Health Organisation – to reduce the growing tobacco epidemic worldwide – particularly in developing countries.

A report, *Big Tobacco's Attempts to Derail the Global Tobacco Treaty: Cases from Battleground Countries*, accused major companies of meddling in health policy around the world – including in many developing countries – by aggressively using their economic muscle to derail the treaty process.

The report was produced by Corporate Accountability International (CAI), a membership organisation in the World Health Organisation's initiative. The report named corporations like Philip Morris (now Altria), British American Tobacco and Japan Tobacco International (JTI) among those seeking to bring down the treaty in the eleventh hour.

The report says tobacco corporations attempted to craft a "socially responsible" image and claim publicly to support the treaty, while encouraging policymakers to draft legislation that would fail to fulfil the treaty's central obligations – notably the ban on tobacco advertising, promotion, and sponsorship.

The report also points out that in some countries – including the USA – that has not ratified the treaty, big tobacco was aggressively increasing political interference and expanding operations.

"Tobacco companies are actively promoting themselves as 'socially responsible' corporations whilst behind the scenes they are undermining health policies – particularly in poorer countries," Anne Jones, Chief Executive of Action on Smoking and Health Australia, stated at the time.

"Although Australia has ratified the treaty, it is not immune to such tactics," she warned – pointing out that tobacco companies are promoting themselves widely at expert forums as "socially responsible" corporations; they have also gained further delays to new health warnings for consumers as well as a partial ban only on their use of misleading and deceptive terms.

PROFIT ABOVE ALL

No amount of deaths will stop the drive for more and more profits. In 1999 the tobacco companies in the US lost a class action damages case brought against them on behalf of half a million diseased smokers and the heirs of smokers who had died from their addiction.

A jury found the tobacco companies had conspired to keep the dangers of smoking hidden from the public.

The jury decided that the tobacco companies had made and marketed a defective and addictive product and were consequently liable for damages.

Considering how many millions of people have suffered early – and usually painful, wretched – deaths, and how the tobacco industry persisted in pushing its deadly product as hard as ever long after health experts identified the mortal effects of cigarettes, any amount of damages would seem small.

Surely it ought to be an offence to spend lots of money glamourising a deadly substance to convince people to become addicted to it.

It is the public health system that has to shell out the millions for victims of tobacco company greed. For the tobacco industry, public health, even the very lives of its customers, matter not a bit. All that matters was and is profits. In the cause of bigger profits any act is justifiable.

They target youngsters, perversely using sport to get them hooked on a product that will ruin their health.

Unable to sell their cheaper, high-tar-content and more carcinogenic smokes in developed countries because of awareness campaigns by the medical profession, they happily went off and marketed them in developing countries.

The tobacco companies fought the case for five years.

This article is dedicated to the memory of Sebastian, who died in February at 38 from lung cancer, leaving behind a partner and their two children. ❄️

Tobacco remains the leading preventable cause of death and disease in Australia ... evidence of health threats from e-cigs continues to grow

Final declaration of the 40th National Consultation of the Australia-Cuba Friendship Society

This meeting of participating delegates to the 40th National Consultation of the Australia-Cuba Friendship Society meeting in Adelaide, South Australia:

Focused on the constant struggle against the unjust economic, commercial and financial blockade imposed for more than 60 years by successive US administrations, against the heroic people of Cuba, and, inspired by the legacy of Jose Martí, Fidel Castro, leader of the Cuban Revolution, and the unwavering and determined struggle of the Cuban people to maintain their sovereignty, and a socialist state firmly based on principles of social justice and equality, makes the following declaration:

WE DECLARE

We reaffirm our commitment to continue defending and supporting the Cuban Revolution and its people.

We denounce the total economic, financial and commercial blockade that the United States has unjustly and illegally imposed on Cuba for more than 60 years, despite having been almost unanimously rejected by the United Nations General Assembly on more than 30 consecutive occasions. We demand the total, unconditional and complete lifting of such unilateral coercive measures.

We demand that Cuba be removed from the list of US state sponsors of terrorism, which, as part of the US blockade, penalises individuals or organisations financially dealing with Cuba and strangles trade and travel, causing direct and continuing harm to the Cuban people.

We demand the return of Cuban sovereignty to the territory illegitimately occupied by the US in Guantanamo, and used as a

detention and torture centre. The US should bear the cost of the environmental remediation, including the removal of all land mines, of the land surrounding Guantanamo Bay as well as the cost to remove its facilities from Cuban territory.

We demand the payment of fair economic compensation by the US Government to the Cuban people for the economic and human damages caused by the criminal practice of the blockade and other aggressions for more than six decades, which currently amounts to more than \$1.3 trillion.

We demand an end to the financing of programmes of political interference aimed at destabilising Cuba, and to the funding of all groups recognized as politically and economically dependent on the US government or other foreign powers, that are falsely promoted by the media as 'dissidents.'

We denounce the falsification and manipulation of information which is directed by the mainstream media against the Cuban Revolution. We condemn the double standards of such policies, and the silence of the mainstream media on the social achievements and examples of international solidarity that Cuba offers to the world. In particular, we denounce and demand the immediate cessation of media manipulation and measures against the selfless participation of Cuban doctors whose noble contributions have saved thousands of lives in situations of natural disaster, epidemics and other crisis situations on all continents.

WE AGREE

To work, in coordination with Cuban institutions and Cuban mass organizations, to take Cuba's example of emancipation,



CPA comrades who gathered in Kaurna land on the occasion of the ACFS National Consultation, 29-30 March 2025.

social justice, equity, social development, international solidarity and human rights to the world.

To work with and mobilise all the forces which express genuine solidarity with Cuba, including trade unions, parliamentarians and Australian society in general.

To continue to develop practical solidarity by sending donations, and by implementing cooperative projects with the Cuban people, and by participation in the events of the Movement of Solidarity with Cuba at the international level.

To continue working to combat false narratives about Cuba promoted by mainstream media and linked to major political and economic powers. We will continue to fight for and demand public access to information

about Cuba and its people that is accurate, unbiased and truthful.

To continue defending and disseminating the ideals of the Cuban Revolution, led by Fidel Castro, his political contributions and the ethical and political example that is his legacy to the peoples of the world. We will support the fundamental contribution made by the Fidel Castro Ruz Centre in Havana.

To continue to support the Southern Cross Brigade, which for more than 40 years has built bridges between the peoples of Cuba and Australia, and to consolidate in unity the work of the ACFS as a sign of solidarity and affection towards the people of Cuba.

Adelaide, March 30, 2025. ✨

Solidarity on display in South Australia

Comrades in the South Australian Communist Party Central Branch and the Port Adelaide Branch joined in a meeting with the Party president, Vinnie Molina, Party secretary, Andrew Irving and Guardian editor Floyd Kermodé at the Party's Fidel's centre in Adelaide. Importantly the coordinator of the CPA Women's Collective, Elizabeth Hulm was also present.

As many key Party members were in Adelaide to attend the 40th National Consultation of the ACFS (Australia Cuba Friendship Society), they took the opportunity to meet with local Party members, many of whom are involved in South Australian Branch of the ACFS as part of the total CPA unwavering support for the Cuban people and their six-decade long struggle against the cruel and illegal commercial

blockade imposed by the malevolence of US imperialism.

After a successful National Consultation, where the special guest was the Cuban Ambassador, Dr Tanieris Dieguez La O, the CPA members came together. Party president, Comrade Vinnie Molina expressed his pleasure in attending and reflected on how constructively Party members worked in community and mass organisations.

Comrade Vinnie drew attention to the preparation needed for the Party Congress in February 2026 and also for the forthcoming Cadre School as part of building the Party, in particular as a woman friendly organisation.

A highlight was the presentation of a Medal of Honour from the Party to Bob Saltis, former Party secretary and a longstanding active member for 95 years. Bob was just 18 when he joined the party. He was living

in a working-class area in Adelaide where many migrants of Greek and Italian background were living. Friends led Bob to join the Eureka Youth League. Not long after joining he went to Czechoslovakia where he worked in factories and agriculture and became a member of the Czech equivalent of the CFMEU, as well as the Czech Communist Party which had a policy of educating workers. Although Bob had ambitions of becoming a fitter and turner, he ended up going to university to become an English teacher.

In 2022, the 100th anniversary of the Party in South Australia, Bob received a Loyal Service Award from the Port Adelaide CPA Branch and from the 2025 ACFS National Congress a Solidarity Award presented by the Cuban Ambassador.

On returning to Australia, and rejoining the Party, Bob became involved in the SPA (Socialist Party

of Australia, later the Communist Party of Australia). As a lifelong Marxist, he is still active in the Party.

Of great interest, Comrade Andrew explained how the Party had digitised some of its important documents so that these are now available online as an attractive resource for members and scholars. Looking to the future, he saw the Cadre School with 36 young participants as preparing a new generation to focus on issues that unite rather than divide the Party. In looking at activism in the community, Comrade Andrew noted that key people in our society are often women, notably in the peace movement, making gender balance even more vital.

In looking at the *Guardian*, the editor, comrade Floyd, said that although the Party newspaper was run by the Central Committee, it

was really the paper of the membership, recording Party activities and sharing the Party position on issues, for example on Palestine and Cuba, with the community. Members can readily contribute through letters to the editor, reviews of books, games, movies, and TV programs, while photos are always welcome. Union issues are always important, as unions, especially militant ones, are under attack.

Speaking as the coordinator of the Women's Collective, Comrade Elizabeth emphasised how important it was for both men and women to work together in confronting capitalism.

Productive exchanges like this only serve to give the Party added strength.

Ron Hall, Secretary Port Adelaide Branch ✨

ACFS Consultation 2025: Solidarity, learning, action, and dance

The 2025 Australia-Cuba Friendship Society Consultation, in Fidel's clubhouse in Adelaide, brought together delegates from all over Australia for learning and solidarity.

Delegates learned in detail about the Cuban success in combating adult illiteracy and the 'Yes I Can' program being used worldwide including Australia now. We also learned about the impact of the latest Trump blockade measures.

An important feature was a report back from the 2024 Southern Cross Brigade, whereby people from Australia and New Zealand visit Cuba in order to see the island for themselves and demonstrate real support. If you want to see Cuba the way no tourist does, the Brigade is highly recommended. The next Brigade will run from December 21 to January 9 and will include meeting up with international Brigades from the UK, Germany, and the Nordic countries.

Cuban Ambassador Tanieris Dieguez La O reported on Cuban cooperation with Australian universities and states on medical science, and on her diplomatic activities around the nation. She stressed the importance of Parliamentary Friends of Cuba, so if your MP is in it, thank them (if they aren't, ask them to join).

The conference started with a welcome dinner at Fidel's and celebrated Cuba with

music and dance on the Saturday night at the Semaphore Workers' Club.

Delegates left energised and ready for actions to support Cuba in 2025 and 2026. FK ✨

Letters to the Editor
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human rights, and bombs and strafes without compunction. Any who speak up against this atrocity must face the prospect of losing their jobs, being expelled from university, large fines and gaol sentences because of a hoax carried out by organised criminals. There is no basis to enact draconian and anti-free speech laws. Free Gaza! Free Speech!
 Yours sincerely
Denis Doherty

Spooky Solidarity

Dear Comrade Editor,
 I wish to congratulate Comrade CB in his *Worth Reading* (31-03-2025) for his great taste of horror literature.

HP Lovecraft had a great impact on pulp literature and horror stories in 1920s up to the present. His collection of letters to fellow horror writers are worth reading. Lovecraft had a great influence on Steven King. Edith Nesbit's *The House of Silence* had a great influence on bizarre ghost stories. Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959) introduced the idea of a scientist investigating a haunted house and the impact on his subjects. *The Legend of Hell House* (1973) starring Roddy McDowall is the best adaptation.


Graham Holton
 Queensland

Could I get back into the US? No!

Dear Comrade Editor,
 I have travelled to the USA numerous times since 1974, and have seen a lot of the country and made many American friends. Could I now get back into the US under the Trump administration? I would have to firmly answer, No!

United States Customs and Border Protection (CBP) requires all non-Americans to hand over the password to phones and laptops so CBP can check for anti-Trump or pro-Palestinian comments or images. Camera memory cards are also accessed to check for pro-Palestinian images. I must answer if I have any connection to the Communist Party? Refusing to comply leads to an arrest.

On all three, I would fail. I have made numerous anti-Trump comments and have written numerous articles in the *Gurdian* attacking Trump. I have often attended pro-Palestine rallies, taken photos and written



Sydney Vigil
STOP USA BLOCKADE ON CUBA
 4:15pm till 5:00pm Thursday 17 April
 USA Consulate, 50 Miller Street North Sydney



Something to say?
Write to the Editor!
 editor@cpa.org.au

Caravan Con

Dear Editor,
 For weeks the 'caravan con' has wracked the NSW Government. A caravan, packed with explosives containing a list of addresses of synagogues in Sydney, was discovered by police after a tip off.

This set off a massive explosion of hyper-ventilation by the NSW government, the Prime Minister and the Federal Opposition Leader about 'hate speech,' antisemitism and we are all going back to Germany 1933.

Peter Dutton calling on all his skills with hyperbole said, "potentially the biggest terrorist attack in our country's history." The resultant noise has ended in NSW enacting the most draconian anti-hate speech laws in the country.

There is only one problem. The perpetrators of the caravan terrorist threat turned out to be a group of criminals interested in trading information for a lightening of sentencing. It turned out that the explosives were 40 years past their use by date and had no detonator. Far from causing an explosion that would have cause a major civilian casualty event it would have been hard pressed to make a noise bigger than a cockroach's fart.

NSW police believe at least 14 other anti-semitic incidents, including the firebombing Jewish leader Alex Ryvchin's former home were in fact orchestrated by organised crime figures.

Was there any attempt to repeal the laws enacted as part of the scare campaign and the revelations that the attacks were the work of criminal not terrorists or ideologues of any sort? Of course not, Premier Minns declared proudly that his laws should stand.

As this letter is being written, genocide is continuing in Gaza as Israel cuts off water, food and electricity in complete disregard of

articles in the *Guardian*. And of course I have been a proud member of the CPA, holding executive positions in the Brisbane and then the Sunshine Coast branches and the Queensland State Committee. When the CBP checks their data bases they would find I went to Washington D.C. to research my doctoral thesis in the US State Department archives. My thesis examined US geopolitics in the Caribbean. I have published numerous academic articles on what the US government has been doing in Latin America. I have also visited the DPRK, which will raise another Red Flag.

After the CBP officer sees these warnings I would be handcuffed, arrested and sent to a detention centre without charge. Held for weeks, I would face interrogation, be roughly treated and be forced to sleep on a concrete floor with no blanket. After that I would be deported, with no reason given. My only crime would be freedom of speech.

Under the Trump administration this is happening daily to hundreds of people who are not criminals.

Thinking about this possibility saddens me. My maternal ancestors, the Sargent family, came from New York City in the 1870s and settled in Melbourne, Victoria. A distant cousin left Melbourne to fight in the US Civil War, and was buried near a major battlefield. A branch of the family on my paternal side settled in the US in the 19th century. The town of Holton is in Kansas.

That I cannot go back to visit friends in the States is disappointing. But there is the internet and of course that would be checked by the Secret Service. I find it interesting that I have a greater historical connection to the United States than does the Trump family, which migrated to the US in 1885. I smile, but I am aware of how dangerous President Donald Trump really is.

Graham Holton

'CHEZ CHENZYS'

Internationalist footie result weekly lasso

Allo! I'm Chez, the new certified football expert here at the Guardian! Drinking warm ginger beers at the bleachers at my local club was just the start of my new ambition to show the readers of this paper what the other teams under socialism are up to across the many seas from our sunburnt country within a continent. Enjoy my first round up!

A surface level understanding is just a beginning
 - Chenz



				
CHINA VS AUSTRALIA	CUBA VS TRINIDAD & TOBAGO	LAOS VS SRI LANKA	DPRK VS UAE	VIETNAM VS CAMBODIA
World Cup Qualifiers 25/03/25 China - Nil Australia - 2	Concacaf Gold Cup Qualifier 26/03/25 Cuba - Nil T&T - 4	International Friendly Games 20/03/25 Laos - 1 Sri Lanka - 2	World Cup Qualifiers 26/03/25 DPRK - 1 UAE - 2	AFC Asian Cup Qualifiers 25/03/25 Vietnam - 5 Laos - 0
Our Aussie Aussie Aussie (Oi Oi Oi) team really showed the Chinese team that Footie is indeed our national sport not cricket according to government. 12 Shots from the China team, but in the end none of them was worth counting.	I put down a fiver on Cuba for this match, purely because between the two countries in the same general region it was the bigger one. The bet was sadly misplaced but I will say the Trinbagonians won fair and square. The Cuban goalie had a workout - if the game was measured by how many blocks the goalie took on the head and arm. Cuba would have easily prevailed as the winner. Just a bit unfair 'innit.	Sri Lanka (formerly Ceylon) pulled it out of the bag and became the hot dinners after a intense scrimmage with the Laos team. First goal was at 16:10 by Sri Lanka by a decisive tumble and a head butt. The Laos team may have suffered due to Laos itself not recognising Daylight Savings, thusly being an hour behind as their only goal was in the last few minutes of the match.	This match was huge in how neck and neck it all was. The Emiratis securing the last goal moments before the match ended. The Korean team performance is only getting better however despite the loss I don't think the punters can safely put their bees and honey on them winning some matches in the future.	This game I feel more than ever has the most historical significance. The match wasn't a ball of chalk in the park for Vietnam but throughout they showed cohesive strength. Its almost poetic how like the Pathet Lao and the Viet Cong turned on each other instead of the yanks. Luckily this fine match didn't create the outcome of extended conflict in the Indochina region. Just a good game.

The Jakarta Method – recipe for mass murder

Graham Holton

***The Jakarta Method: Washington's Anticommunist Crusade & the Mass Murder Program that Shaped Our World*, by Vincent Bevins**

In the 1960s the CIA set up a world-wide network to eradicate Communism from the world and used the 1965 coup in Indonesia as a blueprint. Indonesia at the time had the third-largest communist party in the world, after the USSR and China. It was established in 1914 as the Indies Social Democratic Association, the first Communist party in Asia, and later the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI). The PKI was a mass-based, ideological movement that rejected the armed struggle, ignored Moscow's directions and embraced electoral politics. The mass murder of up to 3 million people in 1965 was so well covered up that today very few Indonesians are aware of it.

President Sukarno saw "neocolonialism" as imperial control without formal rule. He called it NEKOLIM, in reference to neocolonialism, colonialism and imperialism. The PKI followed a mixture of Marxism and the Koran, with opposition to foreign control by the Dutch, and strove for independence. In 1954 Indonesia with Burma, Ceylon, Pakistan and India formed the Colombo Group. By 1955 Indonesia had become the centre for what was termed "The Third World."

The nations that came together for the Bandung Afro-Asian Conference represented half the members of the United Nations.

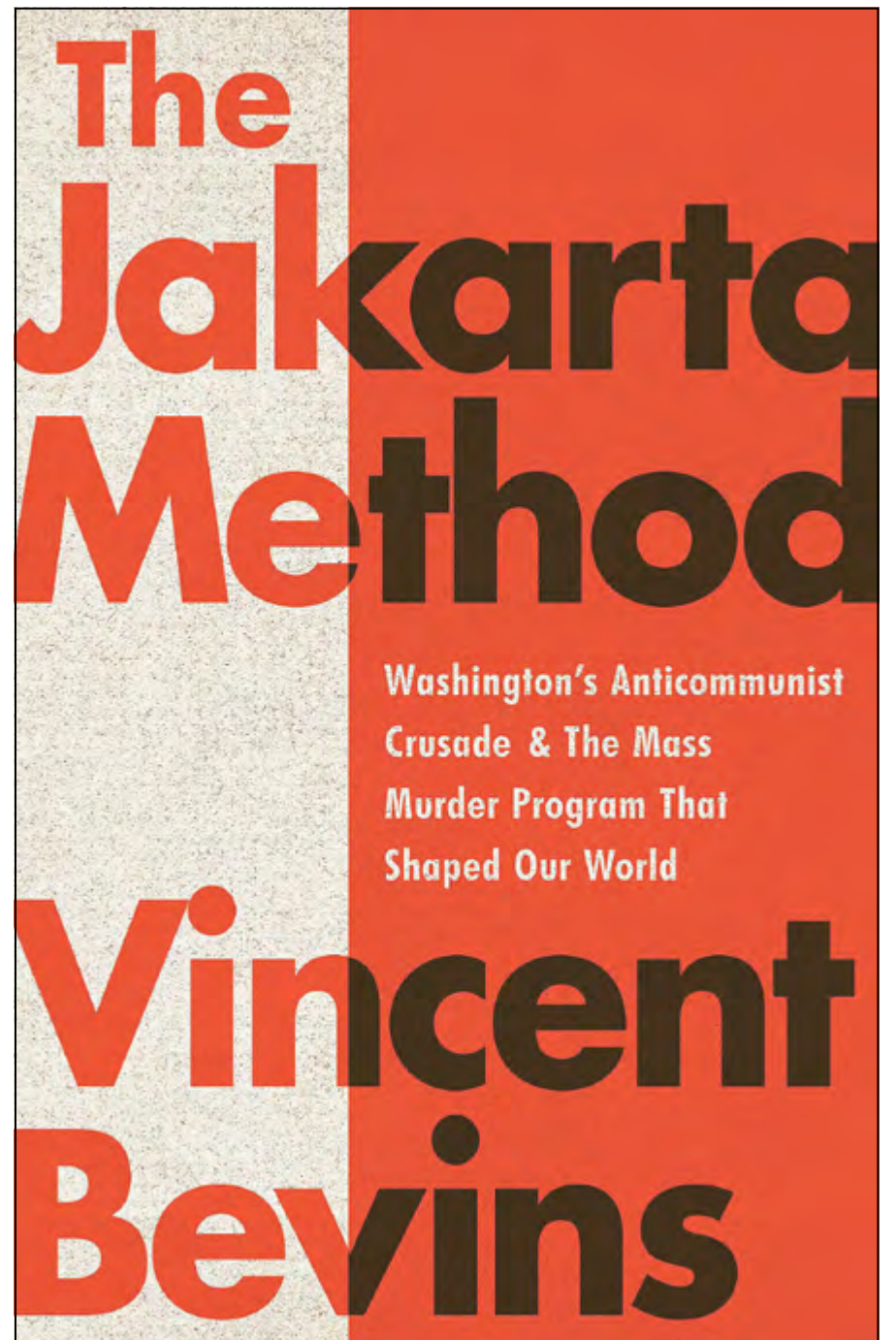
The conference represented the anticolonial struggle and the fight against global capitalism. The Bandung Conference grew into the Non-Aligned Movement, founded in Belgrade in 1961.

The US government considered peasant land reforms in Indonesia as communism that had to be stamped out. The CIA spent millions of dollars supporting groups, especially the military and radical Islamists. Sukarno became publicly anti-American and formed close ties with Asian socialist countries, especially the Ho Chi Minh government of northern Vietnam. US President Johnson considered Indonesia a more important target than Vietnam.

In October 1965 General Suharto staged a coup attempt in Indonesia, inspired by the military coup in Brazil in 1964. Mass killings in Indonesia reached their peak in 1966. In Bali 5 per cent of the population was exterminated.

Washington was the prime mover in this slaughter. The response from Howard Federspiel at the State Department was: "No one cared, as long as they were Communists, that they were being butchered." The eradication of communism in Indonesia, writes Vijay Prashad, "had an enormous impact on the Third World." The "Jakarta Method" served as a model for "clandestine CIA interference campaigns" in Chile, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Afghanistan.

Bevins' book will make you angry, angry that the US still operates with indifference to mass killings. It will make you wonder why the Australian government makes military deals with the US, such as AUKUS, and allow them to set up military bases here. *The Jakarta Method* is well worth reading. ✪



in Bali, five per cent of the population was exterminated

Leaked messages, and illegal attacks

The leaked messages among top Trump administration officials about US strikes in Yemen earlier last month, which were held via a private sector messaging app in breach of national security protocol and inadvertently included a journalist, sparked considerable discussion among political commentators and social media users – but as the initial shock regarding the Signal conversation faded, advocates and policy experts said lawmakers' attention should turn to the illegality of the attacks on Yemen.

The advocacy groups Just Foreign Policy, DAWN, and Action Corps released a joint statement calling on Congress to take action to stop US military action in Yemen by upholding "its sole authority to declare war under Article I of the Constitution and the 1973 War Powers Resolution (WPR)."

The chat messages sent between officials including Vice President JD Vance, Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, and National Security Adviser Michael Waltz stunned the public and Washington insiders this

week because they had accidentally also been sent to Atlantic journalist Jeffrey Goldberg, but the three groups pointed out that the chat also included an admission from Vance that the strikes were not defensive – contrary to claims by President Donald Trump:

"I think we are making a mistake ... 3 per cent of US trade runs through the Suez. 40 per cent of European trade does. There is a real risk that the public doesn't understand this or why it's necessary. The strongest reason to do this is, as POTUS said, to send a message ..."

Vance's comments bolster the three groups' position that "the strikes also violate Chapters I and VII of the United Nations Charter, which prohibit states from launching a war unless in self-defence or authorised by the UN Security Council."

Even before the chats were leaked, said the groups, it was clear that Trump had not sought congressional authorisation for military strikes in Yemen, which have killed at least 53 people since the US launched attacks on 15 March.

The War Powers Resolution of 1973, which was introduced after

former President Richard Nixon's secretive bombings of Cambodia, requires congressional authorisation for "the introduction of the United States armed forces into hostilities, or into situations where imminent involvement in hostilities is clearly indicated by the circumstances," while Article I of the Constitution grants Congress the authority to declare war.

"President Trump has not only launched us into a new military escapade in the Middle East, he's done so in breach of our Constitution," said Isaac Evans-Frantz, director of Action Corps. "Congress should demand an end to this reckless, unauthorised war that will both harm US interests and continue to terrorise the Yemeni people who have already suffered years of US-backed violence."

The groups' comments echoed those of Michigan State University professor and Quincy Institute fellow Shireen Al-Adeimi, who is Yemeni-American.

"With all the noise about the Signal leak, is anyone in Congress or the media concerned that actually bombing Yemeni people and Yemen's infrastructure is unconstitutional?" she asked. "Anyone?"

The Trump administration claimed that the strikes in Yemen were made because the Houthis' blockade on Israeli ships – established in retaliation for Israel's breaking of a ceasefire in Gaza – was an attack on US economic interests and economic security, but the three groups noted that "there is no evidence that Houthi forces attacked any US ships or personnel from the beginning of the Gaza ceasefire in January 2025 through 15 March."

The Houthis struck cargo ships they deemed to be tied to Israel starting in November 2023, in response to Israel's relentless assault on Gaza. They stopped the attacks for the duration of the ceasefire, which lasted nearly two months starting in mid-January.

"The cessation of Houthi attacks during the short-lived Gaza truce underscores their primary focus to defend Palestinians from genocide – a reality obscured by Trump's rhetoric to justify unauthorised military action and deepen US aggression in a widening conflict," said Sarah Leah Whitson, executive director of DAWN. "The best way to protect global maritime navigation through the Red Sea is to ensure

the Israeli government ends its genocidal violence in Gaza."

Along with Vance's apparent admission that the strikes were not in self-defence, the Signal discussion included what observers called a "confession" to alleged war crimes by Waltz, who said the residential building of the girlfriend of a Houthi leader had "collapsed" after a US strike. As reported, Waltz and Vance celebrated the strike.

Etan Mabourakh, a fellow at Action Corps, called on Congress to introduce a Yemen War Powers Resolution. The House and Senate both passed such a resolution in 2019 to bar the US from participating in the Saudi war in Yemen.

"Congress should take the necessary steps to stop these illegal, ineffective, and unauthorised airstrikes in Yemen," said Mabourakh. "Rather than debating the Trump administration's violation of security protocols in their Signal chats, they should do their job and challenge another unlawful new war in the region that is making everyone less safe."

Common Dreams ✪

Argentina: rebellion grows on the streets

The central committee of Argentina's oldest and largest trade union confederation, the CGT, announced that there will be a general strike on 10 April, to protest against the anti-worker policies of President Javier Milei's right-wing administration.

The organisation's leadership has been put under considerable pressure by its constituent unions to take action as thousands of jobs in both the public and private sectors have been lost.

Since the last general strike almost a year ago, the real value of wages has fallen dramatically in the face of persistent inflation, and legislation has been introduced to curtail employment rights, during which time there has been a growing perception that the CGT was missing in action.

An announcement by the Ministry of Labour that all wage negotiations in Argentina's centralised sectoral bargaining framework would henceforth be limited to a maximum of 1 per cent per month (February's inflation figure was 2.4 per cent) undoubtedly tipped the scales in favour of industrial action.

Although nearly 40 per cent of the Argentine workforce is in the informal economy, ie not registered with social security, meaning that they have no rights to pensions, benefits or protection against dismissal, the CGT still has sufficient numbers in key areas to bring the country to a standstill.

On 20 March, when the strike was called, the CGT also stated that it would formally support the demonstrations every Wednesday outside the national congress by retired people protesting against swingeing cuts in the value of their pensions.

These demonstrations gained international prominence on 12 March when protesters supported by a coalition of football supporters were savagely assaulted by the massed ranks of paramilitary police who used batons, tear gas, and water cannons against the crowd.

Among hundreds of people injured were an 87-year-old woman, clubbed to the ground, and a photojournalist, critically ill in hospital after being deliberately targeted by a policeman firing a tear gas grenade.

Unsurprisingly, some elements of the European press swallowed the government line that the police had merely reacted to being attacked. If President Milei and his psychopathic security minister, Patricia Bullrich believed that the brutal show of force would dissuade the protesters, they were very wrong.

On the following Wednesday, thousands more pensioners and their supporters massed outside the congress building. Again, there was a huge police presence, though it appeared that the authorities had learned their lesson and wanted to avoid the wave of negative publicity that followed the police riot on the 12th.

Instead of attacking the crowd, a triple wall of metal barriers was erected to keep demonstrators well away from the parliament

and surrounding streets were cordoned off. Loudspeaker messages were directed at passengers arriving at Buenos Aires' main railway terminus, warning them to keep away.

There were more huge crowds marching on 24 March, the day when Argentines commemorate the beginning of the military dictatorship in 1976. For the second year running the CGT gave the event its official support, when previously they had never done so.

Over 400,000 thronged the streets of the capital and in Argentina's second and third cities of Cordoba and Rosario, an unprecedented number of people turned out under the slogan of "nunca mas" ("never again").

As they did in 2024, the government responded to Memorial Day by broadcasting a video that was aired on social media and television, claiming that the official figure of 30,000 people disappeared during the seven years of the dictatorship was a myth and that the military was fighting terrorist insurgents.

In reality, the majority of those killed or disappeared were trade unionists, students, militants and leftist intellectuals who were not involved in armed struggle. The coup was prepared and designed by large corporations and a group of economists from Argentina and the US, led by Jose Alfredo Martinez de Hoz who would become the military junta's economy minister.

Aided by a generous loan from the IMF immediately after the coup, Martinez de Hoz imposed a series of neoliberal policies that benefited the business class in much the same way that Milei is doing today, the difference being that Milei does not have a military dictatorship to support him.

On 19 March, amidst tumultuous scenes, the chamber of deputies approved an executive order that would allow Milei and the government to seal a new agreement with the IMF about which no details were provided, despite a 2001 law stipulating that all loans had to go through congress. Milei's use of an emergency decree enabled him to conceal the content of the negotiations, meaning that the deputies voted on something they knew little about.

More recently, the current economy minister Luis Caputo said that the loan was \$20 billion to be disbursed straight away, a claim that was almost immediately contradicted by the IMF stating that it would be issued in tranches as per their normal procedure. Caputo was undoubtedly trying to bolster market faith in the Argentine economy and reduce the inflationary pressures that threaten to overwhelm the government's economic program.

Unfortunately for him, it is the IMF who will ultimately decide if there is to be a complete liberalisation of the dollar exchange rate that would inevitably have an inflationary effect and occasion balance of payments difficulties.

The interest on debt repayment in 2024 was nearly \$13 billion and even though it has never been easier for foreign capital to



Milei, shown here with his favourite prop

enter Argentina, the inward investment from abroad in 2024 was the worst of the century.

Milei's popularity abroad among the ranks of the ultra-right has probably never been stronger and he is feted by the European and US financial press for his economic "reforms." At home, his popularity has waned, though not as much as might be expected given their effect.

Poverty levels are at record highs and organised crime is filling the gaps in deprived urban areas where the removal of basic social security and education grants has left young people without income or hope. The question is where the opposition to Milei will come from.

He has done an excellent job in rubbishing what he refers to as the political "caste" and there is little resistance from politicians who have been comprehensively delegitimised or, alternatively, effectively bought off.

The mainstream unions are compromised by the corporatist structure within which they operate and are prone to adopt bland positions in the "national interest" rather than engage in any form of class struggle. It would appear then that change will have to come from the streets.

The years of the pandemic and the effects of the digital age have weakened Argentina's social cohesion, but the tradition of street protest is still alive. When Milei maligned the LGBTQ community at Davos, it precipitated a huge protest march in Buenos Aires and, last year, there were similarly large turnouts by students in support of their beleaguered institutions.

Whether these disparate groups can ever come together to mount a serious challenge to Milei's awful regime remains to be seen.

Morning Star 🇨🇺

Poverty levels are at record highs, and organised crime is filling the gaps in deprived urban areas.

Myanmar earthquake: death toll expected to exceed 10,000 as Plan International Australia launches urgent response

Plan International Australia

Plan International has launched a major emergency fundraising appeal to support the delivery of life-saving aid and support to thousands affected by this devastating earthquake.

The powerful 7.7-magnitude earthquake that struck Myanmar on 28 March has had devastating impacts, with confirmation over 1,700 dead, 3,500 injured and countless people unaccounted for, with many modelling experts and media reporting an expected death toll well over 10,000 people.

The International Committee of the Red Cross has called it the most devastating earthquake Asia has experienced in over a century.

Prior to the earthquake, Myanmar was already the worst humanitarian crisis in our region with 19.9 million people in need of assistance. This earthquake brings an additional devastation to the conflict-affected Myanmar, and we are increasingly concerned about the toll another crisis will take on children, especially girls, and their families.

Plan International CEO Susanne Legena said: "This is a

devastating and unprecedented time for the people in Myanmar, and we are doing everything we can to raise awareness of the crisis and support communities on the ground, as we coordinate with local authorities and international agencies to ensure an effective response."

A full picture of the earthquake will take weeks to emerge, with continuing high levels of stress and anxiety, as people search for their relatives.

Latest reports indicate that public infrastructure has been damaged including roads, bridges and public buildings. Approximately 51,000 buildings have been severely damaged or collapsed – 90 per cent of which are residential according to the UN Resident Coordinator (UNRC). There is growing concern for the integrity of large-scale dams, and electricity and telecommunications is intermittently down.

Plan International Humanitarian Director Unni Krishan said powerful earthquakes such as these reconfigure lives and landscapes – nothing is ever the same again.

"Right now, the provision of safe water is crucial as most if not all affected locations have reported a disruption in water supply, with

repairs predicted to leave families without access to clean drinking water for the next few days," he said.

The humanitarian needs from this crisis will be significant and we are working hard to make contact with communities in the hardest hit areas. This includes taking part in a joint needs assessment with the United Nations and peer humanitarian agencies.

Haider Yaqub, Country Director for Plan International in Myanmar who is currently in Yangon, said:

"This is very serious, the airports are not functioning, roads and bridges destroyed. The people of Mandalay are terrified, both because of aftershocks and because the houses they live in might not hold. Most have fled to the mountains to be in a higher place.

"The death toll will rise, as the rubble is assessed and the situation will worsen in the coming days."

Plan International, which has worked in Myanmar since 2008, has experienced staff in the country. It is working urgently to get additional teams on the ground, assess needs and stands ready to provide support. ✪

'Don't buy a Swasticar' – Tesla protests spread

Protesters against billionaire Elon Musk's purge of the US government under President Donald Trump have demonstrated outside Tesla dealerships throughout the US and in some cities in Europe.

The protesters were trying to escalate a movement targeting Tesla dealerships and vehicles in opposition to Musk's role as the head of the newly created Department of Government Efficiency (Doge).

Musk has gained access to sensitive data, and has closed entire agencies in his attempts to slash government spending.

The biggest portion of Musk's estimated \$340 billion (AUD \$544bn) fortune consists of his shares in the electric vehicle company, which he continues to run while also working alongside Trump.

There were protests in California, New Jersey,

Massachusetts, Connecticut, New York, Maryland, Minnesota, Washington, Chicago, Indianapolis, Cincinnati, Seattle, Virginia, Pennsylvania, Colorado, and the car maker's home state of Texas.

Pictures posted on social media showed protesters brandishing signs such as "Fight the billionaire brologarchy."

"We're living in a fascist state," said Dennis Fagaly, a retired high school teacher in Oakland, "and we need to stop this or we'll lose our whole country."

Anti-Musk sentiment extended beyond the US. In London a person in a Tyrannosaurus rex costume held another sign with a picture of Musk's straight-arm gesture that said, "You thought the Nazis were extinct. Don't buy a Swasticar."

Morning Star ✪



Global Briefs

FRANCE: A Paris court has sentenced right-wing politician Marine Le Pen to a four-year jail term for embezzlement, half of which is without parole. Le Pen is also barred from running for president in 2027. She was not the only high-profile politician to be sentenced. The French National Financial Prosecutor's Office also requested seven years in prison and a 300,000 euro fine for former president Nicolas Sarkozy. He is accused of financing his election campaign with Libyan money in a corruption scheme. The prosecutor also requested 5 years of political disqualification for the 69-year-old Sarkozy. Sarkozy served as president from 2007 to 2012. The former president maintains his innocence and argues that the offences he is accused of lack solid evidence. The defence is ready to present its arguments.

SOUTH AFRICA: South African President Cyril Ramaphosa has signed off on sweeping reforms to the country's intelligence services. The new legislation – the General Intelligence Law Amendment Bill – dissolves the existing State Security Agency (SSA) and establishes two separate entities: the Foreign Intelligence Service (FIS) and the Domestic Intelligence Agency (DIA). The FIS will be responsible for gathering intelligence overseas to detect potential threats to national security, while the DIA will focus on counterintelligence and assessing domestic risks.

ECUADOR: the Pachakutic movement and the Citizen Revolution party officially signed an agreement to support presidential candidate Luisa Gonzalez in the upcoming second round of elections due on April 13. The alliance highlights the growing solidarity among various political forces and signals a shift to a more inclusive future for all Ecuadoreans. The agreement aims to forge a path towards addressing such pressing issues as social justice, resource management and political inclusion. The Pachakutic ("Revolution" in Quechua) movement was founded in 1995 by Ecuador's Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities.

UKRAINE: Ukrainian soldiers have been issued with what they were told were French medical insurance forms before being sent to the Kursk region in Russia. As a Ukrainian prisoner-of-war Andrei Chemer said: "They promised you that if you were wounded, you would go to the best French clinics." In reality, the soldiers were carrying French-language consent forms for organ transplantation in a clinic, in Ontario Canada.

GREECE: The International Olympic Committee (IOC) held its session in Greece and elected a new president. Two-time Olympic champion Kirsty Coventry from Zimbabwe will be the first female to head the IOC. She will take office on 24 June. Until then the IOC will be led by its current president Thomas Bach of Germany. The future IOC president has been Zimbabwe's Minister for Sport, Recreation, Arts and Culture since 2018.

GERMANY: The German and Austrian interior ministers have broken off a planned visit to Syria because of a possible terrorist threat to the delegation, German authorities said.

CHINA has made a major showing at the German technology trade fair, Hannover Meesse. More than 3,800 exhibitors from about 60 countries and regions attended the event. Chinese exhibitors accounted for about one-quarter of the participants, second only to the host Germany. Artificial Intelligence was a main topic.

www.cpa.org.au

Latin America: cutting edge of the struggle against Trump

Tim Young

In his first presidency, Trump targeted what his national security adviser, John Bolton, called the “troika of tyranny” – namely, Cuba, Venezuela, and Nicaragua. Economic sanctions to wreck a country’s economy are a key – but not the only – weapon used. Trump brought in 243 new sanctions against Cuba, for example, while his “maximum pressure” policy against Venezuela devastated their oil sector, reducing Cuba’s petroleum subsidies from its ally.

In reality, those “sanctions” should be called illegal coercive measures. They are contrary to the UN Charter and customary international law, particularly as they illegally apply domestic legislation extra-territorially against other countries.

Today, Trump has a new secretary of state, Marco Rubio, to front his attack. A long-time crusader against all three countries, Cuba in particular, as a senator Rubio was the mover of a series of bills increasing sanctions.

On Cuba, Trump’s attack lines are clear. He has already redesignated Cuba as a State Sponsor of Terrorism – Biden had lifted this in the dying days of his presidency – which has a massive effect on Cuba’s tourism industry, a major money-earner. Further, he has lifted the suspension of Title III of the 1996 Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act, which grants US nationals with claims to property nationalised in Cuba after the revolution the right to sue in US courts individuals or entities dealing with that property.

Other measures include blocking business transactions by US and companies from other countries with Cuban companies and entities, as well as blocking remittances from flowing to Cuba.

Visa restrictions on Cubans,

participating in cultural, academic and scientific exchanges in the US have also been imposed.

Finally, Rubio is again trying to use sanctions to stop countries from hiring Cuban doctors – hitting not just those needing medical care but also a major income earner for Cuba.

Turning to Nicaragua, when the US-funded and supported coup against the Ortega government failed in 2018, Trump imposed sanctions and declared a national emergency, labelling Nicaragua’s actions to defeat the coup “a threat to the national security and foreign policy of the US.”

Biden added more sanctions in 2021 and 2022, to block both Nicaragua’s gold trade with the US and investment loans to the country, and in 2024 declared that Nicaragua still posed a threat to the US.

From Trump, we can expect that he will continue these punitive measures but apply them with greater speed and ferocity.

One pending measure is a Bill rebooting earlier sanctions legislation that would extend the US government’s authority to impose sanctions on Nicaragua through to 31 December 2028.

The old sanctions stopped most loans from the IMF, World Bank, and the International Development Bank. The new sanctions seek to restrict loans for economic development from the Central America Bank for Economic Integration which funds roads, water and energy projects, and housing in the country.

The other targets are Nicaragua’s private sector and companies exporting goods to the US, and imports from the US.

Rubio has also been talking about expelling Nicaragua from DR-CAFTA (the free trade agreement between the US, Central America, and the Dominican Republic) which would have a catastrophic effect on Nicaragua’s US exports, although whether



United States Secretary of State, Marco Rubio. Photo: Gage Skidmore – flickr.com (CC BY-SA 2.0)

DR-CAFTA treaty permits this is an open question.

Lastly, we have Venezuela. Direct sanctions were first applied against Venezuela by President Obama in 2015, justified by deeming Venezuela an “unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security and foreign policy of the US.”

Trump ramped up these illegal coercive sanctions into a series of increasingly severe measures. Starting in 2017, Trump barred the Venezuelan government from borrowing from financial markets, blocked assets, and prohibited US businesses from dealing with Venezuela’s oil company, PDVSA, the state’s largest source of revenue.

The disruption to Venezuela’s reliance on oil exports, by cutting PDVSA off from international markets and blocking it from servicing

debt, cost Venezuela billions of dollars in revenue as Trump turned the sanctions programme into a blockade akin to that imposed against Cuba since the 1960s.

Biden maintained these sanctions until the oil crisis occasioned by the war in Ukraine led him to ease the sanctions very slightly – only to reapply them when Venezuela was falsely accused of breaching an agreement over ground rules for its 2024 presidential election.

Now, with Trump back, the future is unclear. An early visit to Caracas by Trump’s special envoy Richard Grenell resulted in Chevron’s licence to operate in Venezuela being renewed, six US prisoners in jail being released and Venezuela accepting some deported migrants.

But less than a month later, Trump gave Chevron and a number of other oil companies operating in

Venezuela 30 days’ notice to wind down operations, as a concession to foreign policy hardliners ahead of a crucial budget vote.

The sanctions regime against Venezuela, and the freezing or disposal of its confiscated assets, is therefore still rolling on. Although Trump has other concerns, such as the flow into the US of illicit drugs and his “migration crisis,” it is unlikely that the long-term goal of “regime change” has been abandoned. We wait to see what Trump and Rubio will do next. Solidarity with Venezuela, Cuba and Nicaragua in defence of their sovereignty remains a critical necessity, in this country and worldwide.

Tim Young is a member of the Venezuela Solidarity Campaign executive.

Morning Star (edited for space) ✨

South Africa: old song, new controversy

An old anti-apartheid song that called on black people to resist oppression has made fresh headlines in South Africa after becoming subject to an order by the country’s highest court.

The song has been contentious for years in South Africa because of its central lyrics “kill the Boer” and “shoot the Boer,” using a word for a white farmer.

In modern-day South Africa, it has mainly been sung by black leaders of the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) at political rallies.

The party did so again, prompting South African-born business tycoon Elon Musk, a top adviser to US President Donald Trump, to write on X that the song was “actively promoting white genocide.”

It was the latest of a number of posts in which Musk has condemned the song over the years.

The EFF says the song commemorates the fight against apartheid and shouldn’t be taken literally.

A court declared the song to be hate speech more than a decade ago, but that ruling was overturned in 2022, when a

judge said there was no proof that it incited violence.

The Constitutional Court rejected an application by a group representing some of South Africa’s white minority to appeal against the latest ruling and have the song outlawed.

Morning Star ✨

USA: Hegseth both-sides Iwo-Jima

Peter Farmer

2025 is the 80th anniversary of the end of World War II, justly called “the World Anti-Fascist War” in China and elsewhere. It’s a time to reflect on war and to celebrate a decisive victory over fascism. A decisive victory, unless perhaps, you’re Pete Hegseth, US Secretary of Defence.

At a memorial service commemorating the 80th anniversary

of the Battle of Iwo Jima, Hegseth claimed that the “courage” of the two militaries in this battle needs to be “revered” and their “valour and sacrifice” should be remembered. Hegseth also praised the “shared warrior ethos” of both the US and Japanese troops involved in the battle.

Chinese news outlet, *Global Times* argues that Hegseth’s comments amount to whitewashing the “atrocities of the aggressors” in that war. Hegseth, they say, is “erasing the heroic sacrifices” made by US

forces in repelling the Japanese during that bitter battle.

It’s understandable that Chinese commentators find praise for WW2 Japanese forces “valour and sacrifice” repulsive. China, along with Korea and other Asian countries, suffered immensely from the aggression of Japanese fascists at that time.

It’s not only about history. The US has long treated Japan as an “unsinkable aircraft carrier,” and in recent decades has been not bothered at all by the stealthy ongoing

attempt by Japan’s ruling party, the Liberal Democratic Party to re-militarise Japan. As the *Global Times* points out:

“Japan has yet to fully confront or atone for its wartime crimes, with right-wing factions even attempting to dilute the record of aggression through textbook revisions and visits to the controversial Yasukuni Shrine where 14 convicted Class-A Japanese war criminals from WW2 are ‘honoured.’”

Hegseth’s comments will be music to the ears of Japanese

revisionists, and no comfort at all to the many Japanese who heroically resist the campaign to rewrite school history textbooks to erase wartime atrocities, and to remilitarise the country.

We’ll leave the last word to *Global Times*:

“Eighty years ago, people around the world paid with blood for the victory over fascism, a triumph whose core value lay in holding aggressors accountable and in defending a lasting peace.” ✨

Canada: we don't have to negotiate the weight of our chains!

The political winds have certainly turned the tables on Canada's federal election.

In autumn, the only hope for the Liberal Party seemed to lay in buying time before a House of Commons that was ready to throw it out with the garbage. Pierre Poilievre and the Conservatives, on the other hand, were eager for an election as soon as possible.

Against that backdrop, Justin Trudeau announced both his resignation and the prorogation of Parliament until 24 March. This manoeuvre, which most perceived as clumsy, was deliberately engineered. The Liberal's best hopes are linked, on the one hand, to a new leader and, on the other, to the situation created by Donald Trump's arrival in the United States. The latter has galvanised Canadian nationalism and, above all, presents the Conservatives and Poilievre as Trump's fifth column.

It's a gamble that seems to have borne fruit. Banker Mark Carney, voted the best candidate to face

Trump, raised nearly \$2 million in his campaign for the leadership of the Liberal Party – promoting an all-Conservative socio-economic platform.

So, with the tables turned – the predicted moment of Conservative hegemony having clearly dissipated – the Liberals were tempted to call an election sooner than expected.

But does this mean that the working class has to choose between one or other of capital's competing options? Each of these options is only looking to shift the burden of capitalism's crisis onto the working class. And the more that crisis deepens, the more apparent becomes imperialism's panicky agenda, and the more blurred become the nuances between Liberals and Conservatives.

The NDP continues to play its milquetoast role of "guarantor of social peace," while the Green Party is calling for a shift away from social issues and towards an environmentalism that is inoffensive to the bosses but certainly anti-worker.

The Bloc Québécois is reaching for the nationalist one-upmanship card – regardless of whether the rhetoric is left-wing or right-wing – to satisfy the interests of a section of Quebec capital that sees independence as the best avenue to secure its fortune in the North American imperialist stronghold.

The Communist Party of Canada knows that working people don't have to settle for such a limited approach. We don't have to negotiate the weight of our chains, especially when it's clearer than ever that capitalism has run its course. In an imperialist regime, no section of capital is patriotic. No section of capital is progressive. And no conflict between the largest corporate monopolies can be resolved other than by war.

The way out of this capitalist crisis is through continuous and determined struggle. For Canada's communists that struggle needs to be in the streets as well as in the political arena.

People's Voice ✪

US expands blockade against Cuba under guise of 'maritime security'

Elizabeth Naranjo

Under the guise of ensuring maritime security and law enforcement, the US Federal Register announced the imposition of new conditions for the entry of vessels from Cuba, effective 2 April.

"These stem from a US Congressional law authorising defence spending in 2024, which included an amendment by anti-Cuban legislators Carlos Giménez and María Elvira Salazar, approved without debate and through deceptive methods," said Rodney González Maestrey, director of Legal Affairs and Analysis at the Cuban Foreign Ministry's US General Directorate.

Under the Maritime Transportation Security Act and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), as well as Title 46 of the US Code, Section 70108, as amended, and the island's inclusion on the infamous list of state sponsors of terrorism, the Department of Homeland Security, under which the Coast Guard operates, must assume that ports in countries like Cuba do not comply with effective counterterrorism measures.

But the real objective of the new manoeuvre is to

damage official cooperation between Cuba and the US on matters of national security between both countries. It also expands the extraterritorial nature of the blockade by attempting to deter US and foreign maritime vessel operators from engaging with the island.

The already complex interaction is further complicated because, while states have the sovereign right to regulate access to their territorial waters, intensifying these restrictions reveals an insistence by the US government on promoting the false idea that Cuba is a threat to US security.

Bilateral cooperation in maritime security was formalised between 2015 and 2016, with the Department of Homeland Security as the key agency implementing the relationship. Since then, the Coast Guard has maintained fluid and effective ties with the Cuban Border Guard Troops, especially in combatting illicit trafficking of migrants and drugs.

"Cuba has also been a partner in US national security," said González Maestrey, pointing to areas of joint work such as combatting terrorism, human trafficking, port and airport security, and the flow of people and goods between the two countries.

Granma ✪



Special Budget/Election edition

savings (= cuts)

It's good to make savings. It's also bad to take forever to process Veterans benefit claims, or make the process of contacting Centrelink purgatory because there aren't enough public servants there for the place to operate effectively, but the people who've announced the savings don't care about that. They aren't veterans, they aren't unemployed and they have staff to look after the annoying phone calls.

Efficiencies

See savings. One person's efficiency is often someone else's six hours on the phone waiting for an understaffed government department to pick up.

achievable

Peter Dutton says the Coalition "has an achievable plan to get our country back on track." Good-oh, if you have a plan it might as well be achievable and not impossible.

green-teal

Don't panic, this is not a new colour you have to know about if you're choosing paint for your new kitchen. It's Peter Dutton's slur for candidates who are 'teal' (as the community independents are called), implying that they're just Greens in disguise. It's also an attempt to slag off the Greens. Fair play to Dutton, 'green-teal' while inaccurate and petty, is better than Labor's tactic of constantly calling the Greens 'The Greens political party' as though we're going to be appalled to discover the Greens are – gasp! – political.

wasteful spending

Not a weasel word as such, but in the hands of Peter Dutton many words are weaselly. 'Wasteful spending' is pretty rich coming from a man who wants to spend at least \$600 million on back-of-an-envelope plans for nuclear power, also from a man who was part of a government that dished out \$20.8 billion on consultants because they don't like cheaper public servants.

stealth tax

Stealth means that thing A can sneak up on thing B without being detected. Depending on who or what A and B are, this can be a good thing or a bad thing. It's fun when James Bond is stealthy and escaping from bad guys. It's annoying when someone sneaks into the tea room and takes your biscuits while you're working.

Stealth is a weaselly thing when used to describe 'bracket creep,' because far from being stealthy, bracket creep is one of those things that never changes and which people never shut up about. You have more money now, so you're paying more tax – that's it. It could be done away with by indexing tax rates to inflation, but until that happens bracket creep is a stealth tax in the same way that Taylor Swift's last global tour was a stealth tour.

the good guy

Independent MP Andrew Gee in Calare in NSW has 'done an Angus' and posted a social media message thanking himself for showing a fictional young voter who "the good guy" is. It's the sort of mistake anyone could make – especially if 'anyone' is Angus Taylor, Shadow Treasurer, who famously answered one of his own messages with "Fantastic. Well done Angus. Great move".

Incentives

Incentives are always weaselly, but even more so at budget time. 'Incentive' sounds so much nicer than what's really happening, which is 'a handout' or 'a bribe'. To de-weasel this word, just ask 'incentive to do what exactly?'

the focus

The Liberals, like Labor, hate talking about possible minority government. Peter Dutton, trying to avoid chatting about the possibility of him having to negotiate with various independents, said that "the focus is on how we can present our positive plan to the Australian people." Oh really? Is that where the focus is? Thanks for letting us know. The focus is certainly not on Dutton's insane nuclear policy. Someone must've told him it's not popular.

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Syria's nightmare: the view from the country's communists

Ben Chacko asked Nizar Trabulsi of the Syrian Communist Party about the situation there.

Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) swept to power in Syria surprisingly quickly following a civil war of well over a decade. Was this because the previous Assad government had lost all support? Were there other reasons?

The regime's downfall has many internal and external causes. Its most important internal causes include the deteriorating economic situation in Syria due to the long and ongoing blockade since the beginning of the crisis. This includes the US, European, Arab, and international blockade, in addition to the unjust US Caesar Act against the Syrian people.

There was also a shortage of basic and daily necessities due to the US and Turkish occupation and the seizure of essential resources such as oil, gas, wheat, and cotton. This was aggravated by the deteriorating internal situation, including theft, war gangs, exploitation by warlords, bribery, and other factors that led to the regime's collapse. In addition, there were external factors, including attempts by the United States, the West, and some Arab countries to overthrow the regime, the introduction of terrorists and armed groups into Syria to destabilise the security situation and create a state of fear and panic, and the shortage of aid and supplies, to the point of complete non-existence. All of these factors accelerated the fall of the regime.

Western governments say the HTS led by Ahmad Sharaa has changed since it was an al-Qaida affiliate and abandoned extremist Islamist ideology for a more moderate political orientation. What is your view on that and how would you characterise the new government?

What we have seen since 8 December, the day Hayat Tahrir al-Sham entered the capital, Damascus, is the issuance of polished political statements and positions, sweetened with honey. However, the reality on the ground is something else, and sometimes the actions are completely contradictory.

Their actions fall far short of the minimum aspirations, ideas and expectations of the Syrian people. Even the behaviour of some faction members indicates that they have not changed and remain committed to al-Qaida's extremist ideology. They are negatively impacted by

the group's statements. They often even declare that these actions are individual acts.

This cannot convince Syrians, and the legitimate president must control these elements. Syrian society is a cohesive society of participation and political, cultural, social, and religious diversity. All of this constitutes this distinctive Syrian mosaic. As for the current Syrian government, it is of one type and colour, consisting of Islamists and the Idlib group. We have seen that, even if it were a transitional government, it should have been comprised of all Syrian political, trade union, cultural, artistic and other groups and components.

I understand your party has been banned by the new authorities. What was the justification for this according to the new government, and what is the real reason in your view? Have other political opposition groups been banned?

Unfortunately, this was one of the victory decisions announced by the appointed president: the dissolution of the National Progressive Front and its parties, including our party, the Unified Syrian Communist Party, and the rest of the Front's parties.

It should be noted that these parties are licensed and public and operate according to the party law in effect under the previous regime. It should be noted that our party's history has exceeded 100 years since its founding. Their goal is to abolish the daily political life practised by the Syrian people through their political parties, whether within or outside the Front.

The killings of Alawite civilians in coastal areas recently have been shocking. What was the trigger for this extreme violence? Was the new regime responsible?

What the Syrian coast has been exposed to in recent days reflects the extent of sectarian hatred and the effort to mobilise the Islamic street for a destructive sectarian war against the Alawites. This is evidence of President Sharaa's lack of control over these armed and extremist groups, whose ranks include extremist foreign Islamic terrorist elements from Uzbekistan, the Uighurs of Asia, and some Arab and Islamic countries, who adhere to al-Qaida's ideology.

The horrific massacres and killings committed against humanity reflect systematic hatred and malice, under the pretext of the existence of remnants of the regime and its supporters. The largest number of victims were unarmed civilians, including



Children in Syria continue to live a life riddled with fear. Photo: Wasfi Akab – flickr.com (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

women, children, the elderly and entire families. There were also Christian victims.

A large number fled to the mountains and a portion crossed the Lebanese-Syrian border into Lebanon. An estimated 10,000 went to the Russian base in Hmeimim, Latakia.

We have warned and we warn again of the danger of the stagnant situation, which is liable to explode at any moment in a more violent and horrific manner. This requires calm. We must defuse the fuse of war, violence and sectarianism. We must begin a real and transparent investigation, bring the criminals to justice, and expel the extremist and foreign armed groups and elements from the country. We must restore confidence and spread reassurance among the citizens.

The government says it is holding an inclusive nation-building conference to determine Syria's political future, and that a transitional period without elections will last five years. How inclusive is the conference and how are its members selected? What is your view on the postponement of elections?

First, the five-year transitional period announced is a long time. The dialogue conference that was held was merely formal and had no connection to any dialogue, as the majority of participants were selected from a single background and orientation.

Given that the number exceeded 700 people, what could they discuss over four hours? It was merely folklore and the recording of positions. We demand a comprehensive national dialogue for all political, cultural, social and union groups, free from exclusion and marginalisation.

It should have a comprehensive programme that explores a path for a modern Syria. It should produce binding decisions that encompass the transitional period, which we have set at a maximum of two years. Constitutional committees should be appointed, preparations should be made for parliamentary and presidential elections, and a transitional national unity government should be formed to prepare for the modern civil process in Syria, in accordance with international resolutions and Security Council Resolution 2254, which is internationally agreed upon and is set for a period of 18 months. This is the transitional period, during which all issues identified in the transitional period will be resolved.

The new government seems indifferent to the continued US and Turkish military presence in Syria and even to the expanding occupation of land by Israel in the south. Why? Is Syria likely to be dismembered?

Regarding the American, Turkish, and Israeli military presence, they are all occupying armies and must withdraw from the occupied

territories. This is especially true due to the repeated Israeli attacks, especially after the fall of the regime and the destruction of all existing Syrian army capabilities.

Israel exploited the chaos and collapse of the army and violated the 1974 armistice lines, penetrating into Syrian territory and approaching the capital, Damascus. This is in addition to the presence of American and Turkish occupying forces in northern Syria.

This is in addition to their attempts over the years to plunder Syria's wealth, including oil, gas, wheat, barley, cotton, and other resources. The previous Syrian government was forced to deliberately purchase its national wealth from the Americans. This, in addition to the internal economic crisis, was partly responsible for the theft of these resources from the Syrian people.

As for the partition projects sought by the Israeli, Turkish and American occupiers, these plans are not new, and these circles have hinted at them for years to divide Syria into sectarian and ethnic cantons to weaken Syria and force it to normalise relations with the Zionist enemy, and to achieve Israel's expansionist programme in the region. Unfortunately, the threat of division still exists and is being promoted on many occasions.

With Navid Shomali
Morning Star (edited for space) ✳

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