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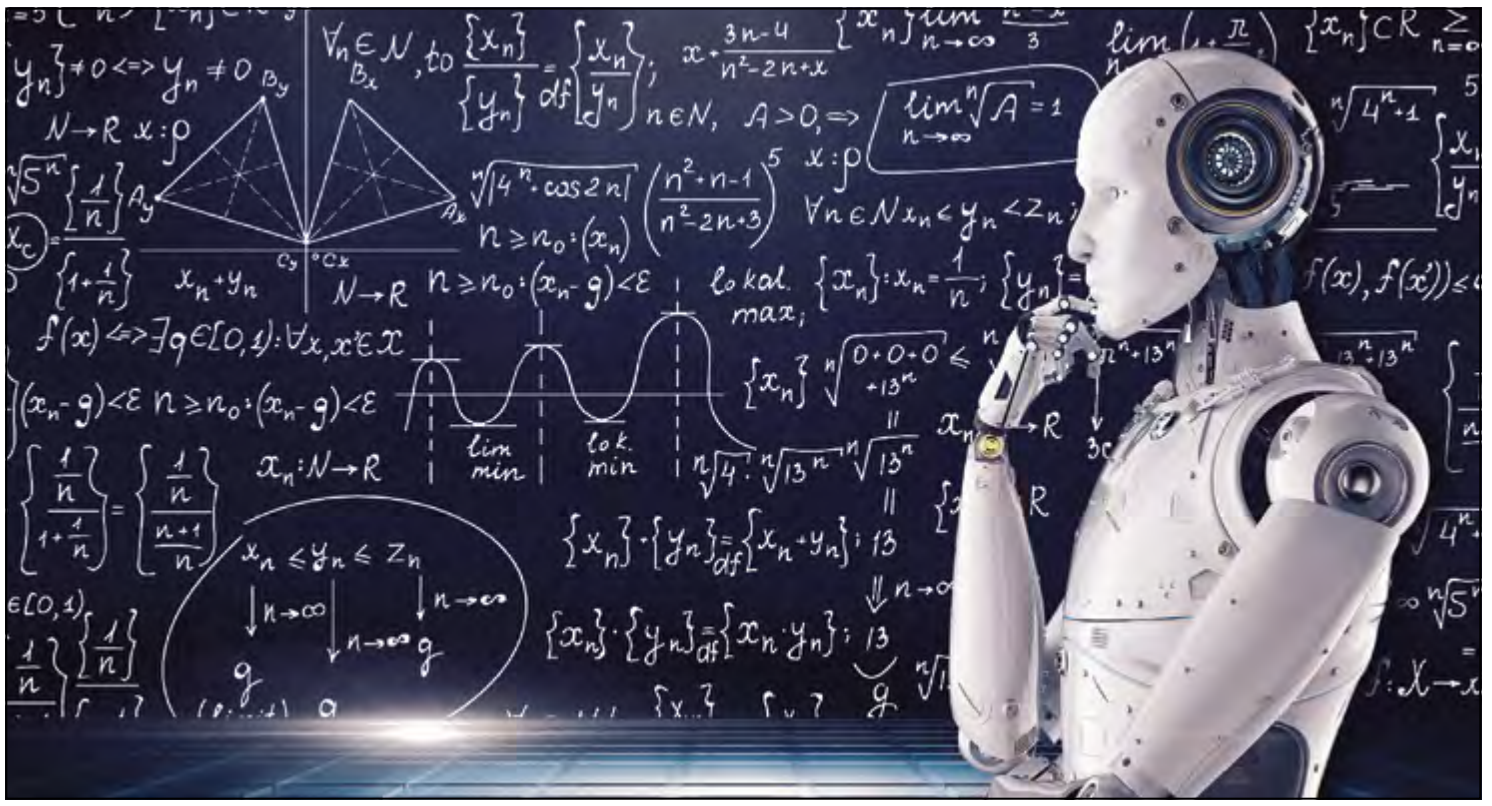
AI must deliver a social dividend

Warren Smith

Artificial intelligence and automation are not only a waterfront issue. They are becoming the central industrial question facing every worker: whether new technology will improve life for the working class, or be used by employers to destroy jobs, intensify work and funnel even more wealth to the ruling capitalist class.

The Maritime Union of Australia's (MUA) campaign at DP World makes this issue plain. The company's push to automate Australia's container terminals threatens skilled, unionised jobs in Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne, and Fremantle. It is not a neutral exercise in technological improvement. It is part of an employer strategy to cut labour costs, reduce union power and gain greater control over the workplace.



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TECHNOLOGY IN WHOSE INTERESTS?

Workers are not opposed to progress. We have always adapted to new equipment, new systems and new ways of doing the job. The real question is: who controls the technology, and who gets the benefit? AI could reduce dangerous work, make workplaces safer, cut monotonous tasks and give workers more time with family and community. It could support shorter shifts, earlier retirement, better training and full employment.

The *Guardian – the Workers' Weekly* has rightly argued that AI should be used to reduce work intensity, improve safety, increase workers' share of productivity and secure jobs, not serve the interests of multinational corporations and the boss.

But that is not how capitalism deploys technology. Under capitalism, automation is introduced to extract more work from fewer people. The employer calls it "productivity"; workers experience it as speed-up, surveillance, deskilling, job losses and impossible workloads.

The promise that displaced workers will simply move into "higher-value" jobs is usually a cover for redundancy, insecure work or a smaller workforce doing the work once shared by many.

The evidence is already visible across the economy:

Banks are replacing customer-service workers with AI voice systems while moving work offshore.

Creative workers face the theft of their work and the prospect of AI-generated substitutes.

Workers increasingly face biometric surveillance, algorithmic rostering, automated hiring and promotion decisions, wearable monitoring and digital work intensification.

On the waterfront, DP World seeks to use automation to replace or undermine a skilled and organised workforce. The common thread is not the technology itself. It is the class interest directing it.

A UNIVERSAL 28-HOUR WEEK

One answer and campaigning point must be to fight for a universal 28-hour week with no loss of pay. If AI and automation allow society to produce more with less labour time, then workers should receive the benefit through shorter hours, not unemployment. The productivity gains created by generations of workers, and now enhanced by new technology, must produce a social dividend: secure jobs, reduced fatigue, more time with families, safer workplaces and a better life.

A 28-hour week would not be a retreat from progress. It is the logical working-class demand for the age of AI. It says that workers will not accept a future where one worker is made redundant while another is expected to do the work of three. It says productivity must be shared.

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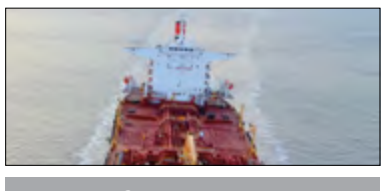
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Guardian

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Raise the rate

Australia needs to drastically raise the rate of unemployment benefits, also known as Jobseeker. This country can afford to raise the rate. Raising the rate would be good for the economy. It would help jobseekers look for work more effectively and stimulate demand. The reason it hasn't happened already is that our government is not governing for working class people.

At the moment, the rate is $56 per day. That's not enough to live on. It's also not enough to look for work on. Australian rates of unemployment benefits are the second lowest in the OECD group of comparable countries, just above those of Greece.

Let's look at cost. The Raise the Rate campaign suggests raising the rate to $82 per day. That's not a fortune. In fact, it's less than two-thirds of the minimum wage.

There isn't space here to list all the things our government spends money on which are less deserving than treating unemployed people fairly. The government says it can afford the wasteful and harmful AUKUS agreement, and has sent billions of dollars to the US and UK to prop up their submarine-building efforts. We're never going to get that money back, and we are on the hook for more.

Some say they worry that raising the rate would discourage people from looking for work. If you're working, just ask yourself if $82 per day as well as having to deal with Centrelink sounds tempting. Chances are it doesn't.

During COVID, the government raised the rate to about $100 per day. All manner of benefits followed. Poverty rates plummeted. There were far fewer deaths among unemployed people. None of the bad effects predicted came about. The number of unemployed didn't go up. People didn't stop looking for work.

What discourages people from looking for work is the rate of Jobseeker as it is now. Unemployed people are too busy staying alive to look for work. Many can't afford to get to interviews. A lot of unemployed people can't afford to get a hair cut or do other things to look good for job interviews. Assuming that there are jobs for them to do, starving and desperate people don't make good job seekers.

Unemployment is a class issue. The unemployed form a "reserve army" as Karl Marx said. They're there to keep the employed in line. Keeping the rate low makes the threat greater. This is the real reason the commercial media and political parties dislike the idea of raising the rate. The unemployed serve as a warning to the rest of us not to rock the boat by demanding wage rises or decent conditions. The low rate of Jobseeker reduces pay for others, especially in low-paid jobs.

In the months and years to come, there are going to be a lot more unemployed people. The unemployment rate has headed up to 4.7 per cent and is forecast to go higher. That's the official rate. There's also the hidden unemployed, people who aren't counted because they've given up or have worked a little in the month the figures were calculated. Add that to the underemployed, people who could really do with more work, and between 2.5 and 3 million people are looking for work.

So we'll say it again. Raise the rate now!

AI must deliver a social dividend

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The MUA's demand therefore reaches far beyond DP World. It provides a program for all workers threatened by automation in offices, warehouses, hospitals, transport, retail, manufacturing, education, public services, and the arts.

No worker should lose their livelihood because technology has increased society's productive capacity. Organisation is the answer. Employers and governments are already investing public money in private AI development while offering little protection to workers displaced by the technology.

This newspaper has reported federal support for AI business initiatives and algorithm-driven regulatory processes, while noting the absence of comparable guarantees for retraining, income security and jobs. That is why individual workers cannot solve this problem alone.

The response must be collective: strong unions, enforceable enterprise agreement clauses, workplace consultation, limits on surveillance and algorithmic management, and industrial campaigns that put workers in control of change. That fight must also be political and have demands of government for moratoriums on the use of AI and automation without agreement and appropriate outcomes for workers.

Every workplace in the country needs demands for:

- No job losses and no forced redundancies because of AI or automation.
- No loss of pay, conditions, hours or union-covered work.
- No automation without union agreement.
- A universal 28-hour week with full pay.
- Worker control over data, surveillance and algorithmic decision-making.
- Paid training, redeployment and genuine job security.
- Technology that improves safety and reduces work intensity.
- A social dividend from productivity gains, not another windfall for corporations.

THE FIGHT AHEAD

The question is not whether AI and automation will reshape work. They already are. The question is whether workers accept a future designed by corporations or organise to impose a different one.

The MUA campaign shows the way: fight for secure jobs, no loss of pay, no automation without agreement, and shorter hours as the rightful return on technological progress. AI and automation can either become tools for unemployment, surveillance and profit, or tools for liberation from excessive work.

The outcome will be decided through struggle. The fight against automation for profit is the fight of every worker. A universal 28-hour week with no loss of pay is the social dividend workers deserve.

Quote of the Week

"This is the idea of shaping the regulatory environment through contributions."

Political analyst Cayce Myers using a massive understatement to describe US trillionaire Elon Musk's efforts to buy lower tax rates and less regulations.

www.cpa.org.au

Survey Time! Prizes!

So that we know more about what the *Guardian*'s readers think, we have made a survey. You can access it three ways:

1. Through this link https://shorturl.at/kKVj4
2. With the QR code
3. If you'd rather do a survey on paper, please email info@cpa.org.au or call 0424 638 601 and we'll mail one out

Anyone who does the survey and provides contact details will go in a draw for either some Cuban coffee beans or a $50 shopping voucher.

West Gate disaster 56 year anniversary

Statement from the Construction Forestry Mining and Engineering Union

At 11.50am on 15 October 1970, span 10-11 of Melbourne's West Gate Bridge collapsed during construction, plunging 50 metres to the ground below. Thirty-five workers were killed. Eighteen others were injured.

Thirty-five men who went to work never came home. Families lost husbands, fathers, sons, and brothers. Workmates carried grief that would last a lifetime.

The Royal Commission exposed grave failures in design, construction, supervision and communication. It described the disaster as "utterly unnecessary."

For the CFMEU, those words carry an enduring obligation. These workers' deaths must never become just another chapter in construction history. Their memory demands action.

Safety is an employer's responsibility. Proper engineering, competent supervision and safe construction methods are fundamental duties. Workers must have the right to question dangerous decisions, raise concerns and stop unsafe work without intimidation.

Every time our delegates challenge a hazard, every time our health and safety representatives demand protection, we honour the workers of West Gate.

We remember the lives stolen, the families shattered and the survivors forever changed.

And we renew our promise: to stand together, demand accountability and fight for every worker's right to return home safely.

Thirty-five lives. Never forgotten.

The West Gate Bridge in Melbourne collapsed on 15 October 1970, killing 35 workers and injuring 18 others. A 112-metre span of the bridge collapsed falling 50 metres to the ground and into the Yarra river. Two halves of a steel span were being joined when engineers noticed a misalignment. Workers attempted to straighten the span, when the span destabilised stressing the structure. The span suddenly buckled and collapsed.

The Royal Commission of Inquiry found several causes. The steel box girder design lacked redundancy and was vulnerable to buckling. Engineers and site managers failed to recognise and properly address structural warnings. The use of 'kentledge' (iron or concrete slabs) and the removal of bolts weakened the structure further. There was a lack of understanding in Australia of structural behaviour, adding to the problem.

The main contractor was John Holland and Co, working under Freeman Fox & Partners (designers). Unions condemned both for engineering negligence and the lack of proper consultation with workers. Unions were highly critical of the engineering decisions, lack of safety protocols, and poor working conditions on the site.

The collapse was avoidable, directly caused by mismanagement, cost-cutting, and the disregard for safety. Pressure to keep construction on schedule was at the expense of workers' safety. The disaster strengthened union campaigns across Australia to improve Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) laws, mandatory union representation on construction sites, and stronger legal accountability for companies and engineers.

Graham Holton

Massive gap between private school and university funding

The Commonwealth will spend $20.6 billion subsidising private schools this year, almost two and a half times the $8.4 billion it provides to all 39 public universities, according to a new report from the National Tertiary Education Union.

The report, *The $12.2 billion divide*, finds the gap has widened over the past decade, with real government funding per private school student rising 24.8 per cent between 2013-14 and 2023-24 while real Commonwealth funding per university student fell 10 per cent.

The gap is widest in the courses hit hardest by the Morrison government's Job Ready Graduates (JRG) funding model.

In 2024 the Commonwealth contributed just $1,236 a year for each student in disciplines including journalism, communications, law, and economics, against average government funding of $15,262 for every private school student.

Across all disciplines based on headcount, the average spent on each university student is $10,038 compared to $15,262 for each private school student.

A student starting a communications degree in 2026 will cover 93 per cent of the cost of their place, compared with 33 per cent before JRG, after fees for journalism, communications and other society and culture courses rose by 113 per cent (for more on JRG, see page 8).

The report estimates the Commonwealth could make university fee-free for around $7.2 billion a year in additional investment, roughly a third of what it spends subsidising private schools.

"Job Ready Graduates turbocharged inequality in how this country funds public education," NTEU National President Dr Alison Barnes said.

"Governments keep pouring money into private schools while public universities are left chronically underfunded.

"That ever-widening gap has potentially disastrous outcomes that go well beyond staff and students. Underfunded universities hurt our sovereign capability, democracy, health system, and broader wellbeing of communities."

The lasting effect of JRG, which was introduced in 2021, has been to reduce the Commonwealth's share of base funding for Commonwealth-supported university places from 58 to 53 per cent and lift the share paid by students from 42 to 47 per cent.

During this time, university executives have chosen to merge departments, cut courses, and shed thousands of jobs.

"The evidence that Job Ready Graduates has been a disaster is overwhelming – it has even failed on its own misguided terms," Barnes said.

"With Labor now in its second term, we need urgent action to start rebalancing how we fund public education. Every day this policy stays in place makes the government's target of 80 per cent of the workforce holding a tertiary qualification by 2050 look vanishingly distant.

"Alongside greater investment, we need strong accountability measures so the warped priorities of university leaders can no longer drive unjustified course and job cuts and the litany of governance failures we've seen across the sector."

The NTEU is calling on the federal government to repeal JRG and replace it with a model that restores real per-student Commonwealth funding across every discipline, indexed to hold its value, and cut student fees to a fair level.

National Teertiary Education Union

South Australia's communists are celebrating the October Revolution and another year of struggle of the Communist movement locally and internationally!

When: Saturday November 7th, 6-10 pm.
Where: Fidel's, 66 Wattle Avenue, Royal Park, South Australia.
Entrance by donation, suggested $10 unwaged, $20 waged
Limited entry, RSVP essential!
RSVP: sa@cpa.org.au

Union call on Cleanaway

Peter Farmer

Australian Unions are calling on EQT Infrastructure to clean up Cleanaway. EQT agreed to buy Australia's largest waste company in a deal approved by the Board.

8 workers have died on Cleanaway's watch since 2021 and its safety performance has got worse under its current CEO. One workers, a mother of seven was left with permanent vision loss from toxic chemical exposure.

In May, Comcare fined Cleanaway $1.1 million over a fatal 2014 truck crash in Adelaide. It is the biggest fine ever handed down under federal workplace safety laws.

Unions are calling for EQT to fundamentally reform Cleanaway so it is a safe and model employer. To do this the CEO must go, the board must have skills and experience to reform a company to become safe, and workers must have their voice heard and a fair say on safety.

Transport Workers Union National Secretary, Michael Kaine called Cleanway's attitude towards its workforce "appalling." He said that: CEO Mark Schubert, "who still made over $4 million last year despite having his pay docked for the horrific deaths and injuries under his watch, must go."

Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union National Secretary, Steve Murphy said that safety "is a non-negotiable right," adding that "every worker deserves to return home to their loved ones in the exact same state they left – free from injury and free from illness.

"Cleanaway's new owners inherit an absolute responsibility to fix this broken company and ensure those accountable for past failures are held answerable."

ASU National Secretary, Emeline Gaske, National Secretary of the Australian Services Union called Cleanaway "a company that has lined its pockets off the back of privatising essential services." She said that EQT's purchase of the company comes with the responsibility to fix it."

All unions involved have engaged with EQT prior to the purchase, and all are ready to take action on safety and workers' rights after the sale goes through.

Bill to ban shackling during childbirth

Dechlan Brennan

A parliamentary inquiry has recommended that a bill to prohibit the shackling of women during childbirth in prison not be passed.

The private member's bill, introduced by independent senator Lidia Thorpe, would prohibit the use of restraints on people during labour and childbirth.

While some jurisdictions have policies and guidelines to restrict or prohibit the practice of shackling, Senator Thorpe noted that "these guidelines often create exemptions which lead to the person in question being shackled anyway."

"Shackling people during childbirth is cruel, inhumane, degrading, and traumatic. It strips people of their dignity during one of the most difficult and important experiences a person can go through," she told Parliament.

"Giving birth is already one of the most physically and emotionally intense experiences a person can have. Giving birth in prison or any other custodial setting compounds this. Giving birth while being shackled compounds it further still."

She argued that the Commonwealth could use its power to legislate national minimum standards and give effect in law to the human rights agreements Australia has ratified.

The inquiry recommended that the Commonwealth "consider appropriate pathways to engage with States and Territories, to address the issues raised by the bill," as well as recommending that the federal government work with the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare and the states and territories to collect data on how many women are pregnant and give birth while in custody in Australia each year.

However, it did not recommend prohibiting the practice via Commonwealth intervention, noting that this is the remit of the states and territories.

"Despite having views on the need for reform in this area, the committee has no choice but to not recommend this bill be passed," it wrote.

In response, Senator Thorpe said the evidence before the inquiry was unanimous: "Shackling during childbirth is dangerous, traumatising, degrading, and unnecessary, and the Commonwealth has clear power to end it."

"Every submission and witness recommended my Bill be passed," the Gunnai, Gunditjmara and Djab Wurrung woman said.

"Yet Labor and the Coalition have recommended that my Bill be voted down."

During the hearing, the family of Heather Calgaret, a 30-year-old Aboriginal woman who died in custody, gave evidence. The passing of the Noongar, Yamatji, Wongi and Pitjantjatjara woman – found to have been preventable by a coroner – came not long after she gave birth to her fourth child at Melbourne's Dame Phyllis Frost prison.

"My sister was not just restrained while giving birth," Calgaret's sister, Suzzane Calgaret, told the inquiry. "She was also shackled when holding my niece for the first time, so she only got to hold her with one hand, one arm.

"It definitely made a big psychological, emotional wreck of her when she came back into custody because she was only allowed two more hours with baby after giving birth and then sent back to prison."

Senator Thorpe asked: "How can the major parties hear stories like this and still decide to allow this torture? It's outrageous."

Thorpe said it was clear from previous issues around people in custody that the states and territories "will not take this on."

"They have already failed to stop this practice despite previous inquiries and recommendations," she said. "We are also seeing states and territories clearly moving backwards when it comes to respecting the rights of people in custody."

National Indigenous Times
nit.com.au/08-10-2026/26855/inquiry-rejects-bill-to-ban-shackling-during-childbirth

Check out the official
Instagram account of
the Communist Party of Australia

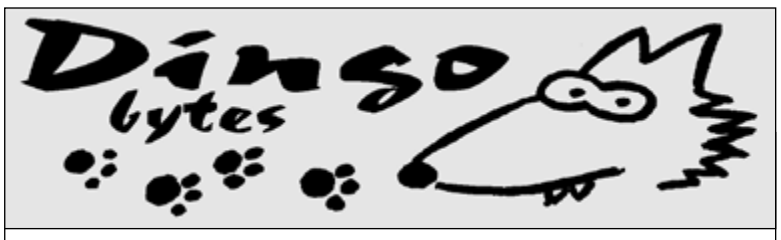
communist.party.australia
www.instagram.com/communist.party.australia/

Sydney Vigil

STOP USA BLOCKADE ON CUBA

4:15pm till 5:00pm Tuesday 17 November
USA Consulate, 50 Miller Street North Sydney
Call 0418 270 885

www.cpa.org.au



The media noise has recently become louder around the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. The present crisis has been long in the making. The historical context reaches back to the end of World War II, the Cold War, and the formation of NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation), the military strike force operating outside international law, formed by the US and Britain after WWII as an attack weapon against the socialist states, the Soviet Union first and foremost.

The issue behind today's strife is the fact that the presence of NATO and US bases, military forces, and nuclear missile systems put Russia's western border under continual threat. Over the past decade Lithuania, Poland, Latvia, Romania, and Estonia have provided a home to these weapons, maintaining a constant war footing. This is in complete violation of agreements made at the end of the cold war that NATO would not expand eastward.

NATO's expansion now includes not only Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic – in 2004 seven additional countries were added. NATO once numbered 12 members; now it comprises 28. When Ukraine announced it too would accommodate NATO nuclear missiles, Russia warned there would be a military response.

In February 2022 Russian President Vladimir Putin and his Chinese counterpart, Xi Jinping, issued a joint demand that NATO halt its plans for further expansion and end their continued push to whip up a "Cold War mentality."

Democratic mechanisms in Ukraine have been abolished. After the 2014 state coup, real policy is dictated by aggressive nationalist bands. Representing an absolute terrorist minority, they hold Ukrainian people in fear and impose rules of behaviour on members of the political establishment.

By now the attitude of the world community to the West's attempt to organise a boycott of Russia has become clear. We should know not only those who support sanctions, but also those who are against them.

Among these are the BRICS countries: Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. They account for 43% of the planet's population. China is the world's number one economy in terms of GDP, India is in third place. In fact the whole of Asia does not want to take the side of the USA. The only exceptions are Japan and Australia, whose governments accommodate US bases and US forces of occupation on their territories.

PARASITE OF THE WEEK: is the Commonwealth Bank. Workers at the CBA have finally been offered a genuine pay rise, after months of relentless pressure from staff and the Finance Sector Union (FSU).

Faced with the prospect of CBA workers protesting at the bank's AGM, management presented the union with an improved offer that will see workers on the lowest pay band get a 13% pay increase over three years.

This would be the highest pay outcome in the banking sector – an offer befitting Australia's richest bank, which recently posted a record $11 billion profit.

The new offer also includes up to an additional 6.5% guaranteed pay rise for higher paid Tier 3 and 4 employees compared to what CBA was previously offering.

The outcome is the result of months of negotiations with the union and a worker-led campaign to lift the lid on what it is really like to work at Australia's biggest bank.

Thousands of workers signed a petition addressed to CEO Matt Comyn and shared their stories about fears of homelessness, having to take a second job and turning off their heating to make ends meet.

The FSU has also secured commitments from the bank regarding key workplace conditions, including 5 days paid reproductive leave, a two-week increase to paid parental leave (20 weeks total for all parents), simplified performance pay, greater consultation when setting KPIs, and the introduction of an artificial intelligence committee.

78% of Australians back rent limits

FK

New polling from the Australia Institute has revealed that a majority of Australians support some form of rent regulation as well as increased funding for building more public housing.

About four in five voters (78%) support some government regulation of rents, including more than half (55%) who think rents should only be allowed to rise by inflation or less, and about one in four (23%) who support a temporary rent freeze. Less than one in five (14%) voters think there should be no limits on rent rises.

94% of renters support some type of regulation of rents.

Three in five voters (61%) think governments should be doing more to help renters, including a third (30%) who think they should be doing much more. Only one in ten (8%) voters think the government should be doing less.

More than four in five (86%) renters think governments should be doing more to help renters.

Three in four voters (75%) agree governments should spend more money directly building public housing including one in three (35%) who strongly agree.

Support for additional public housing is strong across voting intentions, including nine in ten (88%) Greens voters, four in five Labor (83%), and independent (82%) voters, and seven in ten Coalition, and One Nation voters (both 69%).

The Greens say the polling shows Labor's housing policies are out of step with ordinary Australians and call on the federal government to introduce rent caps and a massive, long-term boost in public housing, rented to people at prices they can actually afford.

Greens spokesperson for finance, housing and homelessness and Senator for South Australia, Barbara Pocock says it's "no surprise" that most Australians support rent regulation. She says that "people know the pain is real."

The current rental market is the most unaffordable in Australian history with some of the highest rates of rental stress.

"Labor is failing renters and their housing policies are out of step with what ordinary Australians want. The federal government must introduce rent caps and deliver a massive, long-term boost in public housing, with rents set at prices people can actually afford," says Pocock.

"Rents keep rising while real wages go backwards. Record high rents are forcing people to spend much more than a third of their income just to keep a roof over their head.

"Too many households are just one rent increase away from eviction or homelessness. Renters deserve secure and affordable housing.

"We must protect renters from excessive and unpredictable rent increases by limiting the amount by which rent can be increased annually."

Pocock says that Labor has "done nothing" for renters, and that Labor and Coalition governments have neglected investment in public housing.

She's calling for government to "get back into the business of building public housing directly."

The Communist Party of Australia recognises housing as a basic human right, a right enshrined in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights. In a modern, industrialised and relatively wealthy nation like Australia there is no excuse for homelessness or people being forced to live in sub-standard conditions. Even the idea of a free home provided for by the state should not be beyond discussion in a country like ours.

Public housing, Brunswick Street, Fitzroy, Naarm/Melbourne.
Photo: Caspia Jackmanson – flickr.com (CC BY 2.0)

Queensland Bill guts mining objection rights

Anthony Gough

Queensland's peak conservation group has warned new legislation would strip regional communities of their right to go to court to protect the local environment from invasive mining projects.

The Mineral Resources and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2026 would severely limit the ability of Queenslanders to object to damaging mining projects across the state, and put their right to a court hearing at the discretion of the state government.

The new Bill comes just weeks after the Queensland government passed new laws that significantly increased the powers of the state to seize private land and override existing laws to fast-track handpicked projects.

Queensland Conservation Council Acting Director Anthony Gough said,"This proposed law would absolutely gut the ability of the Queensland landholders and the community to protect their property and the local environment from mining projects."

This Bill dramatically restricts which members of the community can object to mining projects, including by limiting objection rights to people who own or occupy land within a 125km radius of the minesite, as well as Native Title holders covered by federal law.

This Bill also strips community members of their right to have their objection to damaging mining projects heard in court.

Right now, objections are automatically referred to the Land Court. Under this Bill, objections would only proceed to the Land Court at the discretion of the relevant Minister or the Director-General of the Environment Department.

That means the Minister of the day can pick and choose which community objections get heard in open court, and which mines get waved through without that scrutiny.

These measures severely limit the ability of Queenslanders to protect their local communities and ecosystems from potentially devastating mining projects.

The vast majority of objections are made by local groups and landholders to protect agricultural land as well as local bushland, native habitat or water resources. It was this process that led to the cessation of sand mining on World Heritage-listed K'Gari (Fraser Island).

In a state as vast and varied as Queensland, limiting objection rights to a 125km radius makes no sense at all. The impacts of mining on biodiversity, climate, and water resources have implications far beyond this arbitrary 125km limit.

Queenslanders should be able to protect every inch of the state from inappropriate and invasive mining. They shouldn't be denied that right simply because they live more than 125km away from a particular mine.

Queensland Conservation Council

Greens: Labor protects fuel giants' war profits

As Ampol war profits surge by 376 per cent the increasing price of fuel is pushing Australians further into the red, making impossible choices between paying for fuel or the rent.

The Greens have demanded Labor tax the windfall profits of corporations cashing in on war and climate wrecking.

Anthony Albanese was the first leader to back the US-Israeli war on Iran. Now he must decide if he wants to shield Australians from its devastating impacts or shield the skyrocketing war profits of fossil fuel giants.

David Shoebridge, leader of the Australian Greens said, "Everyday people didn't start this war. Families struggling to pay their bills didn't create this fuel crisis. Yet they are being forced to wear the cost while corporations make billions off chaos and war.

"Meanwhile Anthony Albanese is protecting those very corporations making a killing from the fuel crisis.

"Labor keeps telling people the time is not right to tax these corporations. If the right time isn't now, when multinational corporations bank billions at the expense of families skipping essentials to afford to get to work, then when exactly is the right time?

"The Greens want a windfall tax on war profits flowing from the energy crisis and a minimum 25 per cent tax on gas exports to fund cost-of-living relief and essential services.

"It's time for an Australian government to side with the Australian people, not a bunch of multi-national corporate donors."

Steph Hodgins-May, deputy leader of the Australian Greens said that Australians "are being forced to pay the price for a crisis they didn't create and a war they don't want.

"Corporations like Ampol are making billions while families are struggling to afford to fill up the tank. These companies have the money to bankroll Labor and lobby against the tax changes that would actually help households.

Hodgkins-May calls the situation "textbook corporate capture. It's why Labor has ignored the huge groundswell of support for a minimum 25 per cent tax on gas exports, and why it's refusing to tax the windfall profits fossil fuel giants are making off this war.

"Labor needs to finally decide whose side it's on. The fossil fuel corporations cashing in on blood-soaked profits, or the Australians left picking up the bill."

Australian Greens

Flags of convenience, and oppression

Graham Holton

A flag of convenience (FOC) is the national flag under which a merchant ship or a VLCC (Very Large Crude Carrier) oil tanker is registered. The country of registration has no meaningful connection with the ship's owners' operations and business activities.

The main countries where FOCs are registered include Panama, Liberia, and the Marshall Islands. None of these countries have a major national shipping industry.

Shipping companies use FOC to reduce their costs, and avoid regulatory obligations for working conditions, environmental damage, or maritime accidents. Ship owners pay lower taxes and crew wages, reduced shipping registration fees, and have lower regulatory oversight. A complex corporate structure makes it difficult to identify the owner. Even if they can be identified, the owner distributes their liability across several jurisdictions.

The International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) argues that the FOC system encourages low wages, poor safety and working conditions, and that crews work excessive hours. Internationally recruited crews face barriers to organising and collective bargaining.

Some shipowners leave crews stranded when vessels are detained, and when companies become insolvent, wages go unpaid. FOC countries have weak labour law enforcement and their safety regulations reduce the quality of safety equipment, maintenance training, maintenance, and working conditions.

The 1986 UN Convention on Conditions for Registration of Ships sought to strengthen the power of states to enforce their laws on FOC registered ships, including the accountability of owners and operators. It was never enforced as the required number of ratifications was not reached.

FOC illustrates how capital reorganises production internationally to reduce costs and strengthen its control over labour. A shipping company can change a vessel's registration or corporate structure much more readily than a seafarer can change their nationality, family circumstances, or bargaining position.

The shipowner may be incorporated in one jurisdiction, the ship registered in another, the crew recruited through a third, and the cargo owned by a company in a fourth. This fragmentation weakens the seafarers' ability to identify and challenge their employer.

The Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) works with the ITF on its flag-of-convenience campaign. Unions, maritime regulators, and port authorities want to prevent unsafe vessels from operating in Australian waters. Seafarers must receive the wages and working conditions they are entitled to.

Recently the ITF Australian Inspectorate reported that Vietnamese and Indian crew aboard the cargo ship *ATN GLORY* were being paid less than half the International Labour Organisation (ILO) minimum-wage cited by the union. Australian unions are working on increasing the number of trained maritime inspectors and the frequency of targeted inspections.

Australian unions are developing stronger links with seafarers' unions in India, the Philippines, Vietnam, China, and other major labour-supplying countries. Unions want owners, importers and exporters to use ships covered by enforceable labour agreements to reduce wage theft and unsafe working conditions.

When a shipowner repeatedly breaches regulations and agreements, campaigns are conducted at multiple international ports. International solidarity ensures an employer cannot replace one national workforce with another in order to defeat a campaign.

The problem is the fragmentation of the workforce by nationality, employer and ship registry. To fight the shoddy conditions on FOC, shipping unions depend on international collective bargaining. It also requires the Australian government to enforce its regulations on FOC vessels.

capital reorganises production internationally to reduce costs and strengthen its control over labour

Photo: pxhere.com (CC0)

Crisafulli attacks human rights

Human rights belong to all of us – no matter where we are. The State exercises extraordinary power over people in prison, making human rights obligations and accountability essential safeguards against further punishment and rights violations.

Yet the Crisafulli LNP government's *Protecting Queenslanders from Dangerous Prisoners and Strengthening Victims' Rights Amendment Bill 2026* would remove key human rights obligations from the conduct of prison authorities. It would also restrict access to parole, entrenching an approach to incarceration not connected to evidence.

ATTACK ON HUMAN RIGHTS

Despite the Bill's title, this exemption is not confined to so-called 'dangerous prisoners.' It broadly applies to prison authorities' conduct, ranging from placement and solitary confinement to strip searches, restraints, and disciplinary processes.

Removing these human rights obligations would create a class of people for whom ordinary safeguards against the abuse of State power don't apply. It sets a dangerous precedent about whose rights can be set aside. Given the mass incarceration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and people with disabilities, the proposed exemption is discriminatory and will subject over-incarcerated communities to further harm.

NO JUSTIFICATION

The Bill would also override the Human Rights Act (HRA), adding to a string of laws passed by the Crisafulli government that set aside human rights obligations in pursuit of evidence-blind policies that funnel more people into prison.

The proposed override is not justified by any state of emergency or exceptional crisis of the kind contemplated under the HRA. Instead, Queensland Corrective Services' briefing on the Bill confirms that the override is simply intended to reduce administrative obligations. It makes life easier for Corrective Services.

Administrative burden is no justification for trampling on human rights. Deprivation of liberty makes human rights protections more, not less, important. Harsher and more restrictive prison conditions do not make people safer; they compound disadvantage and undermine rehabilitation and community safety.

IMPUNITY

The proposed HRA exemption would remove key avenues for human rights scrutiny and redress. People in prison would be unable to rely on section 58 of the HRA to challenge conduct covered by the exemption.

The Bill also proposes changes to Queensland's anti-discrimination framework, including a more challenging test for establishing direct and indirect discrimination.

These changes would significantly weaken accountability for prison misconduct, and are particularly concerning given existing evidence of human rights failures in Queensland prisons.

UNDERMINING REHABILITATION

The Bill would make Queensland's parole framework even more restrictive, limiting a range of human rights, including the right to liberty and protection from arbitrary detention.

The Bill would retrospectively and automatically deny people serving a sentence of life imprisonment access to parole for at least five years. This would apply to children sentenced to life imprisonment under adult sentencing laws, once they become eligible for parole.

The Bill also omits key rehabilitation-focused factors for the Parole Board Queensland to consider in parole decisions, and limits consideration of relevant sentencing remarks to only "adverse" statements about the person in prison and their potential risk.

Taken together, these changes prioritise punishment and prolonged incarceration over rehabilitation and community supports, at the expense of people's rights and the evidence. The Crisafulli government must not proceed with the Bill.

Human Rights Law Centre

‘A catastrophic failure to plan’

Parents for Climate has condemned the Independent Planning Commission (IPC) of NSW approval of the full 19-year Hunter Valley Operations (HVO) coal extension, saying the decision locks in decades more climate pollution while offering no guarantee of long-term economic security for Hunter workers and families.

The extension will allow mining at HVO to continue into the 2040s and is projected to generate approximately 809 million tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions. Parents for Climate analysis estimates those emissions would cause around $212 billion in global climate damage, equivalent in scale to almost $120,000 for every child living in NSW today.

Parents for Climate said the decision follows months of intense political and industry pressure surrounding the IPC process. The organisation said the independence of the Commission must continue to be respected regardless of whether governments, industry or advocates agree with individual decisions.

Parents for Climate CEO and father of two Nic Seton said, “This is a catastrophic failure to plan, and our children will pay the price. The Hunter has been left without the properly funded transition it has needed for years, while another generation of children has been handed the climate bill of another 19 years of coal. This project means our kids will inherit even more heatwaves, floods, fires, and drought and economic burden whilst coal companies count their multi-billion dollar profits, that is completely unfair.”

“For HVO workers and their families who have spent months worrying about their jobs and livelihoods, there may understandably be relief today. But a 19-year mine approval is not a 19-year job guarantee. Coal markets change, companies change their plans and mines can close early.

“Real economic security for Hunter families doesn’t come from another date on a coal approval. It comes from having good, secure jobs and new industries ready before coal companies decide mining no longer stacks up.

“Glencore and Yancoal have already had more than two decades to prepare for HVO’s eventual transition. Today’s approval cannot become an excuse to waste another 19 years. They must start planning now, put real money behind supporting their workforce and give workers clarity about retraining, redeployment and pathways into secure employment beyond coal.

“The Hunter has powered NSW for generations. Its workers deserve better than being told their economic security depends on continuing to approve projects that damage the future their own children will inherit.

“Approving HVO is not a plan for the Hunter’s future, and it does not guarantee the Hunter’s economic security. Glencore and Yancoal must not use today’s approval as permission to postpone serious transition planning, and the NSW Government cannot spend another 19 years avoiding the difficult work of building what comes next.

“The cost of this coal mine on the children of NSW, and across Australia is unacceptably and excruciatingly high. This isn’t an abstract climate bill. Families will experience it through worsening fires, floods and heatwaves, rising bills and disrupted livelihoods.

Parents for Climate

Hunter Valley’s Ravensworth open-cut coal mining operations. Photo: Dicklyon – wikimedia.org (CC BY 4.0)

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GREEN NOTES

Norfolk Island struggles against Climate Change

Graham Holton

Norfolk Island is a small Australian external territory in the South Pacific, whose 2,188 inhabitants live on 35 sq. km of land, lying over 1,400 kilometres from Australia. The original Pitcairn settlers and Tahitian culture remain amongst the islanders. Norfolk was transferred to Australia from the United Kingdom in 1914.

On 12 March 2015 the Norfolk Island Legislative Assembly was replaced with a local council, extending most Commonwealth laws to Norfolk. The majority of the island voters objected to the increase in Australian rule without first being consulted. Today the Territory is dependent on Australia for its health and food supplies, and fuel imports. The Norfolk Island Hospital is the only medical centre on the island. Norfolk is heavily dependent on the Australian government funding for important environmental projects that tackle climate change.

For a community that contributes extremely little greenhouse gas emissions, it is now facing substantial costs to overcome the impact of global climate change not of its making. An environmental assessment of the subtropical island was published in 2021. It reported that by 2050 the average temperature will increase by 1.7°C. Rainfall will decrease by 13 per cent, making the island drier, placing pressure on water conservation and rainwater storage. Worsening growing conditions means a decrease in local food production.

Climate change is having a big impact on the island’s population health through heat stress, infectious-diseases, and water and food insecurity. The changing weather pattern has damaged beaches, reefs, ecosystems, infrastructure and the historic Kingston and Arthur’s Vale, a World Heritage listed convict settlement. The rising sea level due to climate change has increased coastal erosion.

These environmental changes are damaging the delicate biodiversity of the volcanic island. The Norfolk Island Region Threatened Species Recovery Plan began in March 2025. Only 10 per cent of native vegetation remains on the island. Many of the plants are found in small numbers, reducing the genetic diversity and species’ resilience. Conservation programmes are set up to restore habitats and aid recovery of threatened species, through the removal of invasive plants and feral animals that include rats, cats, crimson rosellas, and chickens.

The Australian Centre for Disease Control has made climate-related health risks a priority. Older people, infants, outdoor workers, and people taking certain medications are vulnerable to higher temperatures, which cause dehydration, heat exhaustion, heatstroke and worsens heart, lung and kidney diseases. Increased rainfall increases the risk of mosquito-borne infections, including dengue fever. The runoff overwhelms the island’s inadequate water treatment facilities, increasing the risk of gastrointestinal illnesses.

The island is limited in how it can prepare for global warming, but it can reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The Commonwealth has helped to end the reliance on imported diesel fuel for electricity generation. In 2022, the government provided a $5.3 million grant for a programme subsidising commercial and household solar and batteries, smart electricity meters, and improved electricity management. A renewable energy microgrid is using solar, wind and batteries. The energy efficiency in buildings, appliances and public infrastructure has been improved. The islanders are now shifting to EVs, and away from petrol and diesel vehicles.

The Australian funding gives access to technical expertise, and improved infrastructure, essential for the residents to endure future environmental impact. Water security includes rainwater storage, conservation, groundwater protection, and a renewable powered desalination plant. The threat to the small populations of native plant species is being offset by seed collection and propagation. The islanders are also turning to climate resilient local food production to reduce importing high-cost foods. While these steps are improving the islanders’ independence and survival, the islanders cannot control global warming not of their making.

Look past Albo's spin

M Santos

Every time you hear a government launch legislation or policy claiming to make something sustainable, improved, strengthened, people-centred, modernised, or improved in some way, it's worth taking a closer look at the details. What does this political spin cover up?

AGED CARE

Example: the 2025 Aged Care Act that started on 1 November 2025.

"The new Aged Care Act is strengthening Australia's aged care system. It ensures that people who access aged care services funded by the Australian government are treated with respect and have the quality of life they deserve," says the federal government.

Every older person will be entitled to not just care, but to dignity, respect, connection, individuality and cultural safety. So the claims go. It puts the rights of older people at the centre of the aged care system.

But what is the reality?

The government has increased the aged care budget allocation by 2.6% with inflation running at 4.0%, a savage cut in real terms at a time when the number of older Australians is on the rise.

The new legislation introduced copayments for non-clinical services such as assistance with cooking, shopping, cleaning, community, and other activities that enable people to participate in community and live in dignity.

The new Integrated Assessment Tool (IAT), an algorithm-based tool being used to determine funding packages for older Australians, reeks of the scandalous Robodebt. It is designed to cut funding to the elderly and leave them without adequate support.

This situation is nothing short of cruel and heartless. Hundreds of thousands of people wait up to 12 months or more for packages after being assessed as eligible. Cuts are being made, and services denied, as the release of packages is cruelly limited to the point where in 2025-26 the government underspent its budget allocation by $1.4 billion.

The cuts are in the name of "prioritising personal autonomy, safety, cultural respect, and freedom from reprisal."

NDIS

Parliament passed the *Integrity and Safeguarding* amendments to the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) Act in April 2026 and the *Securing the NDIS for Future Generations Act* in August 2026.

The government had identified rorting of the NDIS by providers, so set about cutting funding to participants in the scheme.

Every participant's funding is being reviewed through automated decisions based on an algorithm designed to cut funding. Everyone with a particular condition is now regarded as having the same needs regardless of other disabilities and circumstances.

It totally undermines the essence of the NDIS, which is to provide personalised support based on individual needs.

In addition, hundreds of thousands of participants will be thrown off the scheme and many more prospective participants denied entry through changed eligibility rules.

Rather than addressing the rorting, a consequence of the privatised system of providers, the government is slashing participants' funding by anything up to 50% instead of assessments based on an individual participant's circumstances, goals, support needs and capacity for community engagement.

The cuts are in the name of *Integrity and Safeguarding and Securing the NDIS for Future Generations*.

HEALTH CARE

The government's *Modernising the Private Health Insurance Rebate* has at the time of writing been blocked by the combined vote of the Greens, cross-bench and Coalition in the Senate.

The present maximum rebate on the means-tested private health insurance for Australians aged under 65 is 24.118%. Those aged 65 or older receive a larger rebate: 28.139% for 65 to 69-year-olds, and 32.158% for over-70s.

The aim of the legislation is to save around $3 billion over four years which the government claims would be redirected to aged care.

An estimated 1.2 million pensioners have private health insurance cover, costing thousands of dollars per annum, money many can least afford to pay. Why? Often through fear that they would not be able to access the chronically under-funded public hospital system when needed.

The change will affect more than three million people aged 65 or more. Depending on their level of cover, premiums paid are expected to increase by around $250 a year or more. The end result will be to force more people into the crisis-ridden public hospital system midst a cost-of-living crisis.

The government should be boosting the public hospital system first and *then* phasing out the $8 billion in private health insurance rebates. Its role should be public first instead of propping up an otherwise unsustainable private system and hitting pensioners and many others on low incomes with cuts to their rebates.

These cuts are in the name of *Modernising the Private Health Insurance Rebate*.

HIGHER EDUCATION

The *Universities Accord (Opening the Doors of Opportunity) Bill 2026* was passed in October 2026. It will place new caps on the number of domestic student places.

The government claims the legislation will enable the creation of up to 230,000 additional domestic student places over the next decade, with a particular focus on expanding opportunities for students from disadvantaged backgrounds and regional and rural communities.

Under the legislation the minister will determine the number of Commonwealth-supported places (CSPs) and the Australian Tertiary Education Commission will allocate places between universities.

'Commonwealth-supported' means the government part-funds domestic student places leaving students with hefty HECS-HELP debts running into tens of thousands of dollars each.

PM Albanese at the Pre-COP Pacific Summit, Tuvalu. Photo: facebook.com/AlboMP

The devil in the detail in this legislation is its failure to reverse the Coalition's Job-Ready Graduates' package (JRG) when the Morrison government turned fees on their head in 2021.

JRG more than doubled the fees of a basic three-year arts, commerce, law humanities and social science courses to $50,000 plus.

At the same time, it slashed fees by around 50% or more for so-called JRG courses including science, technology, engineering, maths, teaching and nursing degrees.

Then-Education Minister Dan Tehan said the government wanted to "incentivise students" to make more job-relevant choices that lead to more job-ready graduates. It failed dismally, with hardly any shift towards the stated priority jobs. Instead, it shut the doors to many potential students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Shutting those doors saved the government $1.1 billion in 2024 while students paid around $1.4 billion more than they might have prior to the JRG scheme.

Labor Education Minister Jason Clare described the JRG scheme as "unfair" and "failed" but has cemented it until at least 2028 in the *Opening the Doors of Opportunity* legislation.

Compare the Coalition's and Labor's reforms to the introduction of free tertiary education by the Whitlam Labor government in 1974. That really opened "doors of opportunity," with many women and working class Australians gaining access to free university education.

Unfortunately, that ended in 1989 when the Hawke Labor government began shutting the doors by reintroducing fees, which then continued to increase under successive governments.

Any government genuinely seeking to open the doors of opportunity for all students including regional and rural would abolish fees and fully fund domestic students out of central revenue.

CLIMATE CHANGE

It's not just in legislation where the government hits the spin button. The Albanese Labor government has approved 37 new or expanded or extended fossil fuel projects since coming to office in 2022 with at least 42 more in the pipeline. Fossil fuels – including oil, coal and gas – account for more than 75% of climate-heating global greenhouse gas emissions.

Last year, in the NSW Court of Appeal, a community-led group of residents succeeded in halting the expansion of the Mount Pleasant mine in the Hunter Valley until 2024, It had been approved by NSW planning authorities in 2022.

MACH Energy, which operates the mine, took it to the High Court which upheld the ruling taking into consideration the impact of global emissions from its exports of thermal coal. Up to then, only emissions within Australia were taken into consideration. Because the Mt Pleasant thermal coal is for export, the more than 870 million tonnes of carbon dioxide-equivalent emissions caused by its combustion will occur in other countries.

This landmark decision is consistent with that of the International Court of Justice which, in its 2025 advisory opinion on

decades of neoliberalism and subservience to the US

climate change, found licensing new fossil fuel projects can constitute an "internationally wrongful act."

The Australian government not only continues to approve massive expansion of fossil fuel production contrary to its international commitments but also subsidises it to the tune of more than $11 million per annum.

PM Albanese at the Pre-COP Pacific Summit held in Fiji and Tuvalu called for recognition of the threats posed to the existence of smaller Pacific Islands that are already seeing their lands recede due to rising oceans and damage to marine life and crops.

"Climate change isn't a future challenge for the Pacific. It's a daily reality," PM Albanese said at the Pre-COP Pacific Summit while in Tuvalu earlier this month.

"And here in Tuvalu the stakes are higher than any other part of the world. Working side by side with our Pacific neighbours, Australia is stepping up to play our part," Albanese had the two-faced gall to say.

Australia's extensive expansion of fossil fuel production for export is fuelling more rapid climate change. The world is already on track to hit 1.8°C post-industrial increase in global heating in the next few years according to a report by the UN Environment Program.

Although taking some measures to support renewables and claiming to be addressing climate change the government remains beholden to fossil fuel companies, increasing its contribution to climate heating.

WHY?

A final question: Why, in a country as rich as Australia is the government (and before that the Coalition) cutting funding to the aged, people with disability, the sick, and other essential services when the amount of wealth created by workers is on the rise?

There are two main reasons:

The first is decades of neoliberalism in which massive privatisation of programs increased costs and successive rounds of tax cuts for corporations and the rich that made significant reductions in the amount of revenue the government raised.

The second lies in both the Coalition's and government's sycophantic subservience to US imperialism in which more than $880 billion of military spending has already been committed over the next ten years to fund the US's war plans.

It is time to restructure tax scales so the rich and profit-mongering corporations pay more; to nationalise and fully fund essential services. It's time to end the US alliance and all relating offensive military spending including on AUKUS and US bases.

Colombian government escalates repression

Fears are growing over the far-right Colombian government's plans for a new 'anti-terrorism statute' that through increased state powers and a broadened definition of 'terrorism' could target legitimate protest and activism.

Announced on 7 October by interior minister Rodrigo Lara, the statute confirms the far-right administration of Abelardo de la Espriella's intention to escalate military confrontation against armed groups, drugs trafficking, and other criminal activity.

It also creates a national registry of terrorist organisations and enables authorities to seize assets and prosecute individuals accused of involvement.

Opponents fear the moves could enable state repression against the opposition or violence against civilians. Historic Pact senator Iván Cepeda, argues that the statute's 'vague nature could lead to all manner of human rights violations.'

The statute expands the definition of terrorism to activity that causes "fear, panic or terror, creating risks, threats or the use of violence." This is an extremely broad definition that could cover many illicit practices such as illegal mining, use of drones, sabotage, smuggling, drugs trafficking, and attacks on infrastructure or security personnel. It could also be used against social protest.

Having closed the Office of the High Commissioner for Peace, the state institution that led coordination of peace-building, De la Espriella plans to appoint a High Commissioner for Anti-Terrorism to oversee these operations. A list of registered terrorist groups will be freely available for public view, with any organisation or individual named subject to extensive sanctions. This could include "collaborators" or "intellectual authors." Special prisons with strict conditions will hold those convicted under the new laws.

ULTRA-MILITARISTIC

The government's proposals and its ultra-militaristic outlook have sparked concerns that they could be used to repress legitimate protest. "It is evident that [the statute's] vague and ill-defined character could result in – for instance, under the current government's interpretation – expressions of social protest being classified as terrorist acts," wrote Cepeda.

De la Espriella recently labelled student protests in public universities as a form of "urban terrorism." He has also reconstituted the ESMAD riot police unit after previous president Gustavo Petro changed its functions due to its extensive record of killings, torture and physical assaults during protests.

Colombia has joined the US-led 'Shield of the Americas' security coalition that claims to target terrorist groups and drugs traffickers, as well as permitted US military actions on Colombian territory. The Trump government has cited its own anti-terrorist legislation to kill over 200 occupants of small boats who it claims, without evidence, were transporting drugs. There appears little barrier to Colombia adopting a similar approach to domestic security.

Colombia's far-right president, Abelardo de la Espriella.
Photo: defensoresdelapatria.com – wikimedia.org (CC0 1.0)

"This raises concerns regarding national sovereignty, due process and possible political persecution," warned the Historic Pact party ahead of demonstrations against the new government. Opposition to the anti-terrorist statute is one of the core demands of the protests, which are being convened by trade unions, progressive organisations, and the Historic Pact.

While pledging to respect the rights of indigenous people, De la Espriella singled out the Cauca Regional Indigenous Council (CRIC), one of Colombia's most important indigenous organisations, as a hostile actor. The CRIC has faced long-running violence, including a number of recent incidents: on 1 September, CRIC human rights and women's program coordinator María Ovidia Palechor was murdered alongside her husband James Flor. Eight days later, the CRIC reported an attack on indigenous governor Willinton Andrés Tote Galindez in Popayán. On 4 October, a woman member of the CRIC, who was not named due to safety concerns, was abducted and assaulted.

Under Álvaro Uribe's authoritarian governments of 2002-10, security forces exploited anti-terrorist discourse to crush social dissent and political opposition. Uribe's government deliberately blurred the lines between guerrilla armed struggle, drugs trafficking, and legal political organising such as trade unionism. This legitimised violence against trade unionists, activists and others, who were widely smeared as terrorists over their political organising, with impunity for perpetrators.

Justice for Colombia

security forces exploited anti-terrorist discourse to crush social dissent

Letters to the Editor
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Chinese unions

Having some knowledge of the trade union federation with the most members in the world that achieves the most successful arbitrations for its members and has unionised a significant number of gig platform workers surely is of interest to all of us.

When a book seeking to provide such an insight is also available free via PDF download it deserves promotion.

The book's title is 'DIALECTS OF CHINESE LABOR Trade Unions under Market Socialism' by Immanuel Ness. It is available as open access publication via www.degruyterbrill.com

Ness deals extensively with the misleading western scholarly pigeonholing of China's government, its communist party and All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU) and extends this non-utopian critique to outlining the developmental work and challenges of the ACFTU.

Ness's writing is accessible to all readers interested in modern China, socialism and the trade union movement. Many a union activist and official I have engaged with over the years would, or at least should enjoy the read and take useful insights from it.

Graham Drew,
Blue Mountains

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

Marx's reading: *Hard Times*

Graham Holton

Charles Dickens disdained the dehumanising effects of unchecked industrial capitalism. Dickens had visited factories in Manchester in 1839, and was appalled by the conditions under which workers toiled. Karl Marx praised Dickens for exposing the realities of capitalist society in his *Hard Times* (1854), with its perceptive critique of Victorian capitalist society and its elevation of cold, measurable facts over human empathy.

Dickens aligns closely with Marx's own critique of capitalism's habit of reducing workers to commodities. Marx argued that exploitation was inherent in capitalism and could only be overcome through class struggle and the abolition of capitalist ownership of the means of production.

In *The Holy Family*, written with Friedrich Engels, Marx remarks that Dickens had "issued to the world more political and social truths than have been uttered by all the professional politicians, publicists, and moralists put together."

In *Hard Times* the fictional city of Coketown represents industrial capitalism at its most dehumanising. Workers are reduced to "Hands," a term that strips them of any individuality, and reflects what Marx later described as the commodification of labour. The repetitive factory environment alienates workers from their labour, their products, one another, and their own humanity.

The philosophy of facts promoted by the school board superintendent, Thomas Gradgrind, is the ideological expression of capitalism. "Now, what I want is Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts." Education is a mechanism for producing disciplined, efficient workers for factories rather than creative, fulfilled human beings.

Gradgrind's educational system functions as part of the ideological "superstructure," reproducing the economic system by teaching obedience, calculation, and acceptance of existing social relations.

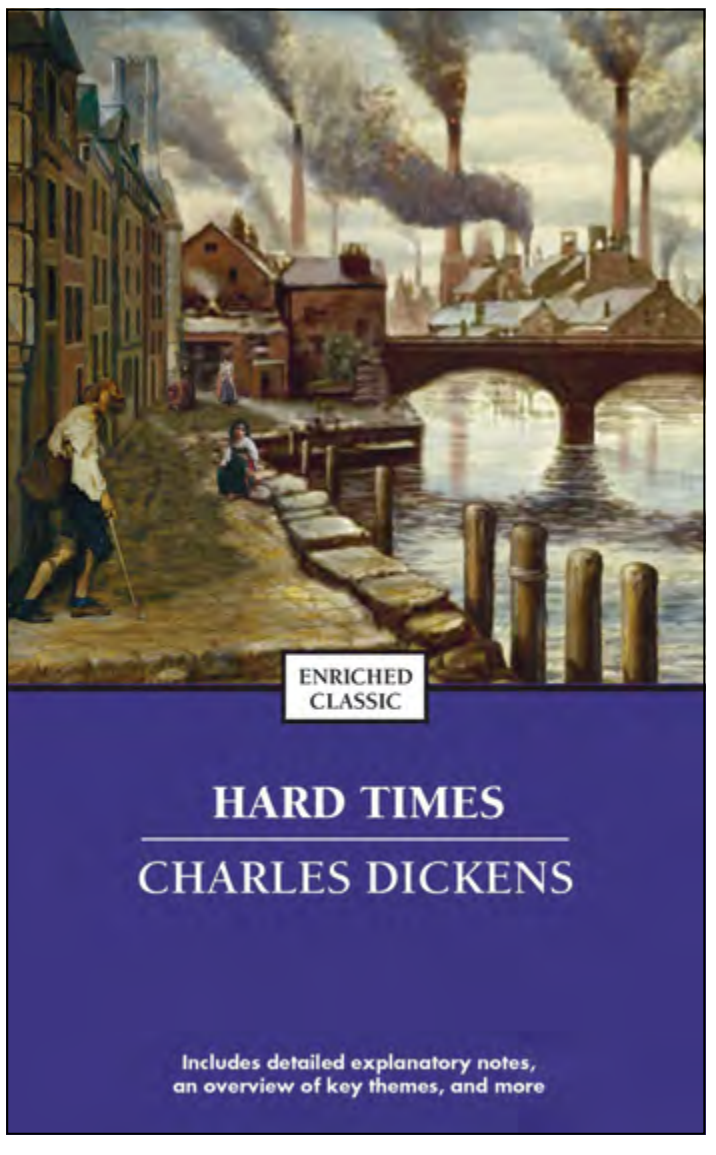
The novel presents three principal social groups: industrial capitalists represented by Josiah Bounderby, "a man perfectly devoid of sentiment." The working class is represented by Stephen Blackpool, and the middle class is caught between capital and labour.

Almost every relationship is mediated by money or utility. Marriage is an economic arrangement, education is vocational training, and workers are valued according to their productivity. Human qualities such as imagination, affection, and solidarity are subordinated to economics.

The novel's shortcoming is that it portrays labour organisers with suspicion, which weakens Dickens's social critique by suggesting that conflict arises from moral failings and not structural exploitation.

Dickens sought to humanise capitalism rather than replace it, thereby failing to see that the problems faced by his characters could be solved through class struggle or a socialist revolution. Even so, *Hard Times* is an important precursor to socialist literature, as it vividly portrays the suffering and contradictions generated by capitalism.

Dickens aligns closely with Marx's critique of capitalism



Book Review:

A Collective Bargain
by Jane McAlevey

Graham Holton

Jane F McAlevey's *A Collective Bargain: Unions, Organizing, and the Fight for Democracy* (2020) is an important study on how trade-union power can be improved in the United States.

McAlevey, who passed away in August this year, was an American union organiser, and a Senior Policy Fellow at the Berkeley's Institute for Research on Labor and Employment. She argues that workers and the community are a whole, and the union movement needs a grassroots mass organisation of workers to succeed in collective bargaining.

Working for the AFL-CIO, she developed "whole-worker" union organising, in which union members and the community work as a whole. McAlevey explains: "What almost no union does is actually organise their members as members in their own communities to build community power. I teach workers to take over their unions and change them." She turned passive unionism into a collective power to win workers' struggles.

McAlevey argues that the decline of unions was caused by legislation, employer union-busting, and an increase in union passivity. This weakened the collective worker organisation.

Looking at Donald Trump's first term (2017-2020) McAlevey examines union organisation and how to defeat union-busting to show that ordinary workers can win collective power in the workplace.

Despite obvious and significant differences in the institutional structures unions operate under in the two countries, McAlevey's book should be of interest to Australian unionists.

Some critics have said her political commentary lacks the perspective of the rank-and-file, although her stress on teaching workers to build community power would bely this.

Mass participation in industrial action creates greater bargaining power and this can be applied to teachers, nurses, construction workers, transport workers, and public servants.

The best part of the book was her examination of campaigns and how to defeat union-busting, far worse in the US, but on the increase here. I found much of *A Collective Bargain* very interesting and well worth the read.

News Quiz

1. Would raising Jobseeker to $82 per day put it above, below, or at the poverty line?
2. What system has Trump threatened Ukraine over?
3. Which state has excluded prison staff from Human Rights Legislation, supposedly to protect people outside the prisons "from dangerous prisoners"?
4. How many books have been destroyed by Israeli bombing in Lebanon?
5. Which anti-Trump protest group was mysteriously blocked by Instagram on the eve of an important demonstration?
6. Which country has arrested Ukrainians on suspicion of planning attacks on oil facilities?
7. Which worker-killing disaster has turned 36 this year?
8. What percentage of the Disability Royal Commission's recommendations have been implemented, 3 years later: 1%, 20%, 3-7%
9. The Albanese Labor government has approved 27 new or expanded fossil fuel projects since 2022. How many more are in the pipeline?
10. What did the International Court of Justice call an "internationally wrongful act" in 2025?

Answers on page 13

Student and worker rebellion rocks France

Fabien Gay

On Saturday 17 October, hundreds of thousands of French people flooded the streets, roundabouts, and public squares all across the country.

High school students, university students, workers, retirees, yellow vests, trade unionists: a real and determined convergence against the high cost of living, austerity, and the government's contempt.

This day did not come out of nowhere. It is rooted in weeks of high school revolt over the lack of resources for public education, in anger at soaring prices at the pump, in the memory of the yellow vest struggle, and in the social movement's rejection of a budget calling for 54 billion euros (AU$86 billion) in cuts.

The people refuse to keep paying the bill for a system that enriches oil companies' super-profits and shareholders while strangling public services and wages.

Deaf to the country's demands, President Emmanuel Macron's address this weekend made clear, this government – delegitimised by the 2024 legislative elections – has chosen police repression once again.

Its response to the mass demonstrations has been grenades, tear gas, kettling, thousands of arrests, and injured protesters – among them a 17-year-old who lost a hand. It's almost as if the president and his cabinet believe clubbing young people and the working class will solve the crises in purchasing power, in our schools, or in our hospitals.

State violence, like Prime Minister Sébastien Lecornu's ultimatum to choose between "the Republic" – which he reduces to the police alone – and "the side of the rioters," confirms that Macron's government is at a dead end; it is cornered.

On the other side, the hundreds of rioters, who are a minority, committed intolerable acts of destruction and looting. Smashing shop windows and setting fire to public buildings has nothing to do with legitimate social anger. These actions harm the broad social movement that is growing across the country and hand an easy pretext to those who want to discredit it.

These provocateurs divert attention from the real issues and make those who want to get involved hesitate. Above all, the rioters allow the government to play the "restore order" card while smothering social demands.

The strength of the protest lies in its peaceful, popular determination. These incidents must not obscure what we saw in the marches: smiles, songs, inventive slogans, new forms of solidarity. High school students talking with retirees, yellow vests marching alongside trade unionists. That is the strength of the movement.

"One hero alone: the people," *L'Humanité* said, and it is true.

This day must not be left without a sequel. On 5 November, the inter-union coalition is calling for a new day of strikes and demonstrations.

We must amplify, unite, and radicalise our demands: schools, wages, public services, taxing super-profits, an end to austerity. Capital and its political representatives will give way only under the pressure of a broad and determined popular movement.

L'Humanité

Fabien Gay, is the paper's director. He is also a member of the PCF's national executive committee and a French senator representing Seine-Saint-Denis, the working-class suburbs north of Paris.

Book Review:

Marxism In Music by Gregor Gall

Reviewer: David McKinstry

This book is an important study of the seminal left-wing band The Redskins (1982-86), who formed to inject a much-needed revolutionary socialist message into Thatcherite Britain.

Gall's book captures the spirit of the era and the cultural and political environment into which the band inserted themselves. This was an era of mass unemployment under a government that was hell-bent on seeking confrontation with trade unions and embarking on post-imperial adventures in the South Atlantic.

The band's first single, "Lev Bronstein" (1982), whose title referred to Leon Trotsky's birth name, signalled its musical manifesto. They were tenuously aligned with the Socialist Workers Party, so nods to Troskyism peppered their work at times. The band's political ties with the Socialist Workers' Party were often strained, however, due to the party's rather austere views of working-class culture and its possibilities.

It was the 1983 follow-up single, "Lean on Me" that really marked The Redskins' breakthrough into the pop mainstream. It reached number three on the independent charts.

Gall provides a very good analysis of the band's attempts to mix politics with pop music during the 1980s. He makes the broader observation that it is difficult to use music explicitly to convey left-wing messages, even during a decade when pop music was more overtly political and left-leaning.

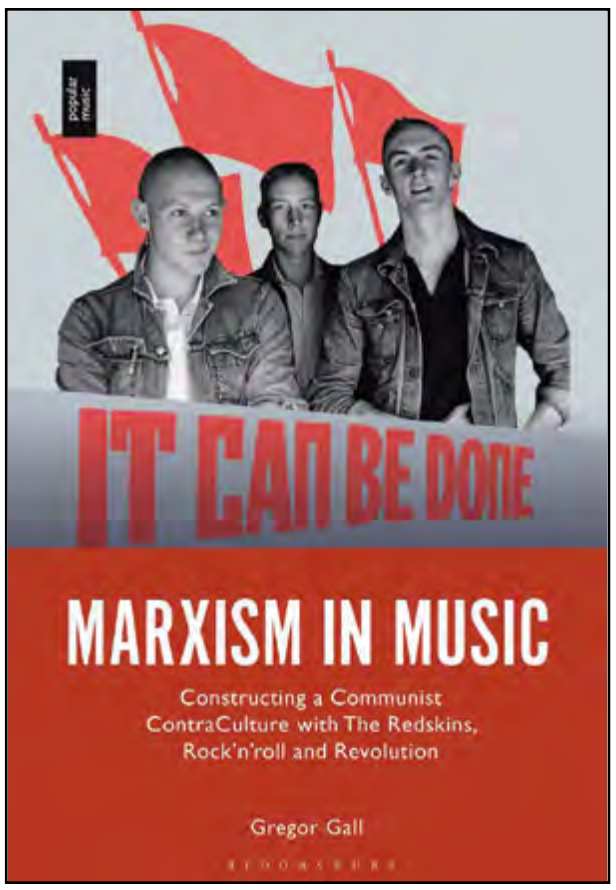
In his thorough research, he reminds us of the band's involvement in Billy Bragg's Red Wedge project. Despite its political idealism, Red Wedge was nevertheless an unsuccessful attempt to turn Britain's youth culture towards supporting the Labour Party and its diluted form of social democracy.

Regardless of the difficulties involved in using three-minute pop songs to convey political complexity, The Redskins made some highly danceable political pop. Songs such as "Keep on Keeping On" in support of the miners' strike of 1984-85, filled dance floors while also serving as a political anthem for young people on the left during that period of working-class crisis.

If you want to learn about The Redskins, the band that aimed to "sing like The Supremes, walk like The Clash," *Marxism in Music* is an excellent starting point.

Morning Star

an era of mass unemployment under a government hell-bent on confrontation with trade unions



Hollywood mega-merger approved

Chauncey K Robinson

"In years to come, we'll be able to point to this failure to put consumers over the monied interests of corporate consolidation as the tipping-point moment for media in this country."

Those were the stark words from the Block the Merger coalition after Judge Martínez-Olguín removed the last roadblock to the Paramount Skydance-Warner Bros. Discovery merger.

On 6 October, the $110 billion+ merger closed, creating what is now Skydance Corp. Billionaire CEO David Ellison will now control an estimated 17 media entities, including CNN and CBS.

Although many opposed to the merger vow to keep fighting, a dark cloud looms over Hollywood as the newly formed monopoly could cost some 4,500 film and TV jobs in LA alone over the next three years.

Unions and artists spoke out strongly against the consolidation, saying it would mean fewer jobs, less competition, and less diversity.

At the time of the suit, California Attorney General Rob Bonta expressed concern about one company controlling so much of the corporate press, asserting, "Combining cable news channels would mean fewer journalists informing our electorate and fewer opportunities for Americans to hear the full breadth of information and opinions on a subject."

This sentiment carried extra weight given David Ellison and his father Larry Ellison's close ties to President Donald Trump. The Trump administration has been seen as waging a war on journalism over the years, peaking recently with the president's attempt to ban several press outlets (including CNN) from White House coverage. Trump's head of the Department of War, Pete Hegseth, hinted at this closeness at a press conference, saying, "The sooner David Ellison takes over that network [CNN], the better."

In 1983, fifty companies owned 90% of all US media. As of last year, that ownership had dwindled to the "Big 6," which included Warner Bros. Now, with this mega merger, it will be a mere five. One could argue it reflects the larger phenomenon of a majority of the wealth in the United States – and the world over – being concentrated in the hands of a few. Economic reports in recent years noted that the richest one per cent have more wealth than the bottom 95 per cent of the world's population put together.

Despite what appears to be a done deal and Ellison carrying on with building what the corporate press calls a media "empire," many who fought the mega merger vow to keep fighting.

The WGA stated that "though we were not successful in blocking the merger, our advocacy brought more attention to the harms that this merger – and others like it – will cause. We will continue to fight the harms of industry consolidation."

The Block the Merger coalition, led by political activist and movie star Jane Fonda, proclaimed that "the ripples of this merger will be far-reaching, long-lasting, and impossible to contain" but said the silver lining was that people were now "wide awake and paying attention."

"We are going to build on this movement to stand united as creatives, policy experts, and public advocates to achieve enduring media policy change that funds and diversifies our media and safeguards its independence. We are going to ensure the government protects the interests of everyday people and prevents them from continuing to be bulldozed for those of oligarch billionaires. We are going to continue the fight."

People's World

(edited for space)

Indonesia promises to stop deforestation

Chris Lang

Indonesia's special envoy for climate and energy, Hashim Djojohadikusumo has announced that the government "does not need to expand the further cultivation of rice in so-called forest areas."

At the Indonesia International Sustainability Forum in Jakarta, Hashim, who is President Prabowo Subianto's brother, talked about 100 gigawatts of solar power capacity that Indonesia is planning, as well as "a very ambitious nuclear programme." He also mentioned biofuel, "which has extra impetus because of the current war in the Middle East."

Then he moved on to his "major announcement." Indonesia has achieved President Prabowo's target of rice self-sufficiency three years early.

Hashim said that,"The so-called 2 million hectare food estate program is a program that we have already achieved without even planting two million hectares. I've been told that we've been planting in swamp areas of Papua, in swamp areas not peat areas but swamp areas of Papua and Kalimantan."

Got that? Swamp. Not Peat.

Hashim said the phrase "so-called forest areas" three times in his short speech.

Later in the day, the President's special envoy for multilateralism and international trade, Mari Pangestu added, "To have increased food and biofuel production, moving forward we will be using degraded land. We have over 12 million hectares of degraded land that can be used for this. ... It is part of the Forestry Ministry program of afforestation, reforestation, and revegetation. There's a lot of investment opportunities within that and I hope that moving forward we can be more precise on that, in explaining where the investment opportunities as well as international cooperation in this area."

THE GOOD NEWS

Obviously, it is good news that Indonesia has decided not to clear 2 million hectares of forest in order to replace it with rice fields.

In a statement, Glenn Hurowitz, CEO and founder of Mighty Earth commented that, "President Prabowo and the Indonesian government have made a globally significant decision for people, nature, and climate today by ending deforestation for its food and energy development. This decision renews Indonesia's leadership in showing how to expand agriculture while protecting nature."

NOT SO GOOD NEWS

The Indonesian government has not yet said anything about what Hashim's announcement means for projects that are already underway in West Papua and Kalimantan.

"A distinction needs to be made between new expansion plans that require the clearing of forest areas, activities that are already under way, and increasing production on agricultural land that is already available," Ristianto Pribadi, the Ministry of Forestry's head of public relations and international cooperation told *The Straits Times*. "Therefore, we cannot yet say that all activities in the two regions will automatically stop, nor confirm when they will stop."

The Straits Times reports that thousands of hectares of forest, "including swamp forest and peatlands," have already been cleared to make way for new rice fields. Based on a recent visit to Kalimantan, *The Straits Times* writes that some farmers are "struggling to grow rice on acidic peat soil and peat forest areas that had been cleared."

Merauke Solidarity has been monitoring the deforestation in South Papua associated with National Strategic Project that is part of the government's food and energy PROGRAM. Almost 50,000 hectares of land has been cleared.

One result is a surge of fire hotspots inside food and energy concessions in South Papua this year.

Merauke Solidarity questions the government's use of the phrase "degraded land" and raises the concern that this could be defined without taking into account ecological functions, biocultural values, and the knowledge of the people living in the area.

In a statement, Merauke Solidarity writes, "Local people should also determine and decide the development and utilisation of nature in the region. They are the rights holders as well as knowledge holders who grow from intergenerational experiences in living together, using, maintaining and caring for their living areas."

Merauke Solidarity calls for the cancellation of the National Strategic Project in South Papua, stopping the construction of a 135-kilometre access road between Wanam and Muting, and withdrawing the thousands of soldiers that the government has deployed in Papua to force through the replacement of forests with monocultures.

Reddmonitor
reddmonitor.substack.com/p/indonesia-promises-to-stop-deforestation

Rice fields in the forest. Mount Lempuyang/Seraya. Bali, Indonesia.
Photo: Vyacheslav Argenberg/vascoplanet.com – wikimedia.org (CC BY 4.0)

local people should determine the development and utilisation of their living areas

US leaves Iraq, keeps control of oil money

Manfred Ziegler

Quietly on 30 September, with little fanfare, the last US troops left Iraq – and this time, the withdrawal is supposed to be permanent. After 23 years of war, civil war, occupation, and chaos, Iraq celebrated the end of an era.

In Erbil, in the country's Kurdish north, where the last US soldiers had been stationed, a handover ceremony was held. There, Iraqi Prime Minister Ali al-Zaidi hailed the start of a new chapter, one defined by Iraq's sovereignty.

Yet the United States still holds Iraq's fate in its hands – not through its military, but through its control over the country's oil revenue. Money from Iraq's oil sales does not flow directly into Iraq. It is paid into banks in New York and must pass through three separate steps before it reaches recipients in Iraq.

At each of those steps, the US Treasury Department can delay or block the payments, citing "administrative reasons." Currently, around AU$2.84 bn of Iraq's oil revenue is under direct US administration and control.

Only part of Iraq's foreign reserves is still held in the United States. But that is enough for Washington to continue dictating Iraqi policy. The best example is the selection of Prime Minister al-Zaidi himself.

The original candidate for the post was former Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki. He had the backing of the largest bloc in Iraq's parliament, the predominantly Shiite Coordination Framework. Although he was once regarded as Washington's man, al-Maliki had moved closer to Iran. That drew fierce opposition to his candidacy from President Donald Trump.

If al-Maliki were chosen, Trump warned on his Truth Social platform, Iraq would have "ZERO chance of success, prosperity, or freedom." Al-Maliki rejected Trump's threats in a post on X, denouncing what he called "blatant US interference in Iraq's affairs." It was no use.

Trump did not stop at threats. For months, the US withheld Iraq's funds, and the outcome was predictable: Al-Maliki was not elected prime minister.

In his place came al-Zaidi, a millionaire with no prior political profile. He is seen as Trump's pick, and the two share a line of business: Al-Zaidi made part of his fortune in real estate. As if to make the connection unmistakable, the US released Iraq's funds just in time for al-Zaidi's visit to Washington.

Iraq's newly-won limited sovereignty also runs up against hard limits in its relations with Iran. Iran is a major trading partner, with two-way trade totalling $10 billion a year. Perhaps even more important are the religious pilgrimages between the two countries.

Even so, the Iraqi government initially complied with US sanctions on Iran, banning flights to and from the country. That sparked fierce protests and demonstrations, and the government then asked the US Treasury Department for an exemption. Under a waiver initially limited to one month, airlines – with the exception of Iran's Mahan Air – may now operate flights between Iran and Najaf, a major Shiite pilgrimage site.

Muqtada al-Sadr, the influential cleric, politician, and former militia leader who withdrew from politics years ago, has now welcomed what he called Iraq's new "independence." He is calling on his fellow Iraqis to demand compensation from the US military for everything it has done to their country over the past 23 years.

Unsere Zeit

Tens of thousands rally against Trump

Tens of thousands joined No Kings protests opposed to President Donald Trump in cities and communities across the United States.

Hundreds of No Kings events were billed as non-partisan, though they sought to build on nearly two years' worth of No Kings marches and demonstrations by people against Trump's presidency.

At a huge rally in Atlanta, City Councilman Michael Julian Bond told the crowd to urge others to vote ahead of the 3 November mid-term elections.

"The constitution gives you one power, right? That is the power to vote. Are you gonna use that power?" he said.

"You don't see Superman giving up his power. You don't see Black Panther giving up his power. You don't see Wonder Woman giving up her magic lasso.

"So why would you give up your right, your power, your obligation to vote?

"Be a super hero, use your power. Go to the polls and vote."

President Trump has long been suspicious of mail voting and has claimed without evidence that mail voting fraud cost him the 2020 presidential election.

On 16 October, Trump sued, asking a judge to bar the state from counting mail-in ballots for the midterm elections from people whom the federal government claims are "likely" non-citizens until their immigration status can be confirmed.

The Justice Department warned that local officials who process and tabulate ballots submitted by suspected non-citizen voters are putting themselves at risk of criminal investigation and potential prosecution.

Morning Star

Communist Party of Ireland:

Statement on public sector strike

The Industrial Committee of the Communist Party of Ireland stands in full solidarity with public service workers striking over pay and declining living standards.

The government allowed the previous agreement to expire without obtaining a credible successor and must now make substantive movement. Workers are right to reject any settlement that leaves them poorer in real terms.

The objectives should be clear: real pay increase for members, protecting workers and their families against inflation, honouring unmet commitments, and preventing pay negotiations from becoming a blank cheque for the government on labour deployment, restructuring and change.

Industrial action is justified, and additional escalation should remain available where government refuses to move. But militancy should not be measured by strike length or ever-larger demands. Measure it by whether industrial action strengthens workers' bargaining power, secures concrete gains, and builds confidence and collective power for the long battles ahead.

Communists reject any artificial separation between industrial and political struggle. The fight over wages and working conditions is the central arena of class conflict. Our task is to give that struggle a clear political voice whilst supporting disciplined, hard-headed bargaining aimed at winning the strongest achievable outcome for workers.

News Quiz Answers

1. Below
2. Starlink
3. Queensland
4. 3 million-hectare
5. No Kings
6. Iraq
7. West Gate Bridge Collapse
8. 3-7%
9. 42
10. New fossil fuel projects

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Global Briefs

USA: The No Kings coalition organised nearly 3,000 events nationwide to encourage early voting ahead of 3 November US midterm elections. Held under the slogan 'No Kings: Vote early,' the campaign drew millions of participants, according to *US Today*. The demonstrations were backed by a broad coalition of organisations, including the American Civil Liberties Union, the American Federation of Teachers, Black Voters Matter Fund, Invisible, Move On, Public Citizen, State Voices and Voto Latino.

IRAQ: Iraqi security forces arrested seven Ukrainian citizens in late July on suspicion of planning attacks on oil facilities in the Persian Gulf states. Ukrainian trainers have been working in various countries to train local armed groups in the use of drones and to prepare them for military operations. Ukraine's intelligence agencies have expanded cooperation with armed groups in several African countries as well, including Mali, Libya, and South Africa, using heavy 'Baba Yaga' drones capable of carrying large amounts of explosives and ammunition.

CANADA: A "serious incident" at a military base in western Canada killed and injured multiple people and spread a huge fire on 17 October, the government said. Canada's defence minister David McGuinty offered no details on the number of casualties or the nature of the incident. "We will have more to say in the coming hours and days," McGuinty said.

SOUTH AFRICA: South Africa is planning to transfer around 2.5 million hectares of state-owned agricultural land to Black farmers. The farmers will get formal ownership deeds as part of efforts to address historical racial inequalities in land ownership and expand participation in commercial agriculture. President Cyril Ramaphosa pointed out that access to land alone would not guarantee success and there is a need for financing, training, technology, expertise and access to markets in order to develop sustainable commercial operations. At the moment, Black farmers account for only around 10% of total commercial agricultural production.

WEST BANK: Israeli settlers attacked and injured veteran photojournalist Heidi Levine working for *The Washington Post* when she was with a group of Palestinians in the occupied West Bank during the annual olive harvest. In a video statement from hospital Levine described how she was kicked repeatedly while lying on the ground as the attackers, masked men, stole and damaged her belongings. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), Israeli forces have killed 241 journalists and media workers across Gaza and the wider region since 7 October 2023. The figure includes 189 Palestinian journalists killed in Gaza, and media workers killed in Lebanon, Yemen, and Iran. The CPJ said Israeli forces were responsible for the vast majority of journalist deaths worldwide since 2023.

LEBANON: A national campaign, 'A Million Books For Lebanon,' is currently underway in Lebanon. The number of books destroyed by Israeli bombings of libraries, religious and cultural institutions since October 2023 has exceeded 3 million copies, according to Hadi Bekdash the founder and coordinator of the National Network for the Protection of Libraries, Archives and Cultural Heritage in Lebanon. "There are reports of the burning of more than 700,000 books belonging to Lebanese and Arab publishers, as well as more than 3 million books from homes, libraries, religious centres, family collections, researchers' libraries, and universities, publishers, cultural institutions and private collections since 2023," Bekdash said.

ITALY: Italian police used tear gas and water cannons during clashes with protesters amid nationwide demonstrations against the rising cost of living. Organised by Italia in Piazza, a movement of students and young workers, the rallies began across Italy on 22 September to protest high fuel and energy prices, soaring rents, low wages, and deteriorating healthcare and education. Demonstrators also voiced opposition to military spending.

Navi Pillay takes aim at Trump over sanctions

Nobel Peace Prize winner Navi Pillay has hit out at Donald Trump's "illegal" sanctions against the International Criminal Court (ICC), saying the US president needed a lesson in international law.

Pillay also said it was no coincidence the US sanctions on the ICC were announced just hours after her Nobel, as a "reaction to the fact that the award was not given to President Trump."

Asked what her message was for Trump, the 85-year-old judge told Agence France-Presse (AFP): "Call in your legal advisors to explain to you what international law is."

"He should call in his advisors to tell him why we say that it is unlawful for him to interfere with an independent international court."

The US has announced sanctions against the ICC aimed at crippling the day-to-day operations of the court, which tries individuals for war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide.

Trump's administration has vowed to dismantle the court "brick-by-brick," furious that judges have issued an arrest warrant for Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for alleged crimes in Gaza.

Pillay noted that previous US administrations had welcomed an ICC arrest warrant against Russian President Vladimir Putin, saying, "that's selective, that's double standards, and that's wrong."

The sanctions, which will hit the court's technology and banking operations, take effect in six months. Dutch Prime Minister Rob Jetten has urged talks with Washington during that time to discuss reforms to the court, based in The Hague.

Pillay said the idea of reforms to the ICC was "euphemistic," adding that what Trump wanted was "an undertaking that they won't pursue investigations of US citizens."

"You can't do that, because you can't have double standards. You can't selectively pursue one lot of people and not the other," Pillay told AFP.

"It will be such a bad, dangerous precedent."

Pillay also hit back at Israeli officials who reacted with outrage to her Nobel, after she headed the UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry (COI), which found last year that genocide was occurring in Gaza.

Netanyahu called her a "bigot" while Israel's foreign ministry said Nazi propagandist Joseph Goebbels must be "applauding from hell" at her award.

"I think it's very hurtful and insulting," said Pillay.

"Goebbels had blood on his hands ... responsible for the death of thousands of people. Not only Jews, but people of colour like me," she added.

She acknowledged there was little political appetite to arrest Netanyahu to face the ICC accusations, which he furiously denies.

Asked if Netanyahu was ever likely to appear in the ICC dock, Pillay said "all my life, I've seen people get around difficulties, so I'm confident it will happen."

IOL

Navi Pillay. Photo: Antônio Cruz (Agência Brasil) – commons.wikimedia.org (CC BY 3.0 BR)

Trump's administration has vowed to dismantle the court 'brick-by-brick'

China protests war shrine offerings

Liu Xin

China has lodged a strong protest with Japan over Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's offerings to the Yasukuni Shrine and recent visits by Japanese officials and lawmakers to the war shrine.

Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said that such moves exposed Japan's attempts to absolve war criminals, whitewash aggression and pave the way for remilitarisation.

"The Yasukuni Shrine is a spiritual tool and symbol of Japanese militarism's wars of aggression against other countries. It honours 14 Class-A war criminals who bore grave responsibility for those wars. Japanese leaders and politicians know this full well, yet continue to make offerings and visit the site, exposing their deeply rooted, erroneous understanding of history and their sinister intentions to absolve war criminals, whitewash aggression and pave the way for remilitarisation," Mao said.

"This year marks the 80th anniversary of the opening of the Tokyo (war crimes) Trials. We once again solemnly demand that Japan face up to history, reflect on its culpability, stop reversing the course of history and earn the trust of its Asian neighbours and the international community through concrete actions," she said.

The remarks came after Takaichi made a monetary offering to the notorious Yasukuni Shrine, while a cross-party group of Japanese lawmakers also visited the war shrine, Japanese media reported.

Takaichi, as leader of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, paid for the offering out of her own pocket. The report also noted that Takaichi "is expected to forgo a visit during the shrine's three-day autumn festival." It also reported that on the same day, a cross-party lawmakers' group visited the site.

Despite strong opposition from China and South Korea over her offering, Takaichi made another offering to the notorious site which amounts to a brazen provocation toward countries victimised by Japan during WW2, Da Zhigang, a research fellow at the Institute of Northeast Asian Studies of the Heilongjiang Academy of Social Sciences, told the *Global Times*.

Since Takaichi took office, Japanese lawmakers' visits to Yasukuni Shrine have become increasingly brazen, signalling a dangerous trend. "Given Japan's history of external aggression, neighbouring countries and regions must remain highly vigilant," Da said.

Global Times

Chile: 29 detained at anniversary march

At least 29 people were detained on 18 October during a march in Santiago marking the seventh anniversary of Chile's 2019 social outburst, the largest wave of protests since the return to democracy.

The march brought several thousand people to Plaza Italia, organised by social and student groups to remember the roughly thirty victims who died and the thousands injured by security forces during the 2019 demonstrations.

The protests were originally triggered by a public transport fare increase during Sebastián Piñera's government, adding to decades of accumulated discontent with the country's neoliberal model.

This year's event was the first commemoration of the social outburst during the term of far-right President José Antonio Kast, who has consistently condemned the 2019 protests and refers to them as a "criminal outburst." Slogans at the march targeted his government's fiscal adjustments. Demonstrators called for a fairer economic model and greater social rights.

The government has announced cuts in health, education, science, culture, scholarships, bonuses and subsidies, the closure of a women's program, and the end of a plan that for 17 years provided computers to low-income schoolchildren.

Kast, seven months into his term, has a 64% disapproval rating, driven by unfulfilled promises, falling economic indicators and rising unemployment, while rejection of social and public assistance cuts grows.

A poll by the firm Criteria has found that 68% of respondents believe the demands that sparked the 2019 unrest remain unresolved in Chile.

Telesur

132 million could fall into extreme poverty by 2030

Laura V Mor

The Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) has warned that more than 132 million people risk falling into extreme poverty over the next four years as intensifying droughts and severe floods batter agrifood systems worldwide.

It's a warning, not a prediction. The FAO insists the scenario can still be avoided.

FAO Director-General Qu Dongyu issued the warning on 12 October at the opening of the plenary sessions of the World Food Forum 2026 in Rome.

Qu Dongyu told delegates of the 2026 World Food Forum (WFF) that extreme weather now threatens global food security at a scale the world has rarely confronted. The agency's technical models identify a single driver behind the projected plunge, the hardening of droughts and floods that strike agricultural systems.

According to the agency's projections, the intensification of extreme weather events is hitting agrifood systems hard and threatening global food security. Qu described the impact of these phenomena as severe, stressing that the consequences fall most heavily on the Global South.

The forum brings together government delegations, farming communities, scientists, and international investors. Their goal is to design structural responses to a climate crisis that, in the FAO's assessment, punishes vulnerable regions with particular harshness.

According to the FAO, this outcome can only be avoided if governments and financial actors multiply and accelerate investments in three areas: technological innovation, the strengthening of rural and smallholder resilience, and the adaptation of local crops to changing climate conditions.

PREDATORY

The agency also cautioned that ecological imbalances, aggravated by predatory development models, are deepening inequality gaps and threaten the human right to food. Both dynamics, it said, converge in extreme poverty.

That framing sharpens the demand for deep change in international agricultural governance. Whether the projected outcome can be averted depends, according to the FAO, on urgency converting into investment.

The FAO's projection adds to a growing body of warnings from international organisations about the links between climate change, food insecurity and poverty.

United Nations

Black Panthers celebrate 60th anniversary

Veterans of the iconic United States Black Panther Party for Self Defence have come together on the 60th anniversary of its founding.

They gathered in Oakland, California, to highlight the programs they put in place to support black communities ravaged by racism and economic exploitation.

From free medical clinics and pushing nationally for sickle cell anaemia testing to providing free breakfasts for children and community schools promoting education and literacy, the Black Panthers understood what was needed during the racially turbulent 1960s, said Fredrika Newton, widow of co-founder Huey P Newton.

She said: "We sought to meet the basic needs of the black community, not only the black, but all oppressed communities.

"Children were going to school hungry. People couldn't get medical care. People were sleeping in the streets, just like today."

Huey Newton and Bobby Seale were students at Merritt College in Oakland when they formed the Panthers on 15 October 1966.

The Panthers demanded political and economic empowerment and initiatives to improve life for the city's black residents in addition to standing up to what they saw as racist policing of the black community.

Newton said: "We knew that black people were getting brutalised by the police.

"We wanted to make sure that they were getting educated and taught how to protect themselves."

The Panthers folded in 1982 after years of violent state surveillance and attacks.

Fredrika Newton said: "We want to let young people know exactly what we did and what could be done," adding that it was vital to "organise around the needs that exist today."

Morning Star

Something to say?
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editor@cpa.org.au

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Cool

It's a good idea to cool things that are too hot – things like porridge, soup, coffee, or arguments. So when the Reserve Bank of Australia (RBA) says it wants to "cool the economy" that sounds good too. We don't want our economy to explode or melt.

Not so fast. What 'cool' means here is that the RBA is trying to shrink the economy even if it means recession.

Higher unemployment is not cool.

Pockets (of stress)

It's a good week for the RBA, production of weasel words is booming. Somewhere in the bank is a giant database of words that make inflicting unemployment and relative poverty on thousands of people seem either no big deal or even better a good thing.

From the 'no big deal' file, we have 'pockets of stress.' The bank has said that most Australian households with mortgages are "well placed to manage more difficult conditions," but adds that there are "pockets of stress." Those pockets are people who are having to make the food-medicine-or-bills calculation thanks to our Reserve Bank's focus on trying to reduce inflation by hurting Australians.

If you're under housing stress, just remember that for the RBA, your problems are pocket-sized.

Settlers

... is the accepted and widely used term for Israelis who illegally set up towns in someone else's country and then attack the locals. Try this anywhere else without the Israeli 'Defence' Force to back you up, and you'd be called a terrorist.

Community (in the)

This column has talked about the journalistic trick of finding a couple of social media posts and writing about them as though reporting on a runaway trend. Like 'on social media,' 'in the community' sounds real but can be conjured up from nothing. It's like the Donald Trumpism "many people are saying." Trump never says how many people are saying whatever it is, and he has no interest in how many of these people actually exist.

Likewise, when the *Australian Financial Review* says that former Treasurer Josh Frydenberg has "respect in the community," they aren't interested in how much of the community think about Frydenberg, let alone respect him. It just sounds more serious than saying "we like Josh," which is all it really means.

Performance reasons

One thing employers hate more than dogs hate cats is having to justify sacking someone. An ABC investigation into women sacked pretty much just for being pregnant found that a pregnant woman was told "performance reasons" were the reason for her dismissal after months of praise and no mention of poor performance.

They say "performance reasons," but if they don't say what those reasons are, it just means "we wanted to sack you and we can't justify it."

Transitioning out

After five days as Donald Trump's press secretary Katie Zacharia has got the boot. She's been given the heave-ho. Or, if you're the White House, she's transitioning out of her job, which makes the whole "you're fired" thing sound so much more technical and professional.

Conclusions (premature, or jumped to)

There's video of somebody being attacked by a mob. Their presence in that country is legal, the mob's isn't. The mob are Israeli 'settlers' (see above) on the West Bank. The somebody is a French politician who was attacked while harvesting olives in solidarity with a Palestinian Christian community.

Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu has warned against "premature conclusions". What he means is "don't draw the obvious conclusion that this attack happened."

Delhi police jail Communist leadership

Andrew Harrison

They came for the communists first. By 10 October Delhi Police had hauled in virtually the entire CPI(M) Central Committee, along with thousands of ordinary protesters, in a crackdown the party describes as the worst against India's left in decades.

But the arrests didn't happen at Jantar Mantar, the site of the protests. Most of the leadership never got there. General Secretary M A Baby, Polit Bureau members Brinda Karat, K K Shailaja, M V Govindan and P K Sreemathi were grabbed as they marched out of Kerala Bhavan, where CPI(M) leaders stay when in the capital.

Kerala's Leader of the Opposition Pinarayi Vijayan and MPs John Brittas and K N Balagopal got a little further before police stopped them mid-route. Brittas filmed from inside the police vehicle as they were driven around the city, not told where or why.

The satirists were intercepted before they even touched the ground. Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) leaders Abhijeet Dipke, Saurav Das, and Ashutosh Ranka were taken off their plane on the tarmac at Delhi airport. Others were picked up near the BJP headquarters and around Safdarjung. West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee was detained after sitting down in a roadside dharna near South Avenue.

It wasn't only Delhi. Tushar Gandhi was detained in Mumbai, Manish Sisodia in Chandigarh. Trains bound for the capital, including services from Kerala, were terminated before they arrived. The CPI(M) Polit Bureau's own statement is headed "Condemn Brutal Repression in Delhi and Other Places," which tells you the party read it the same way.

Party accounts say the arrested leaders were roughed up, refused food, water, and essential medication for hours, and had their phones confiscated. The obvious aim was to decapitate the protests before they could begin.

The protests, dubbed "Jantar Mantar 2.0," demanded the resignation of Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar and an immediate halt to the Special Intensive Revision of the electoral rolls. Opposition and civil society groups say the revision has quietly stripped millions of voters from the lists, hitting Muslims, Dalits, and the poor hardest. Protesters also want deleted voters restored and a return to paper ballots.

The state response was to seal off the capital. Metro stations closed. Internet throttled. Trains cancelled. Tens of thousands of police flooded the streets. Estimates of those detained range from 2,000 to over 5,000.

It didn't stop there. On 11 October police picked up CPI National Secretary Annie Raja and student activists, with witnesses reporting women protesters being beaten. When CJP activists broke through the barricades at Jantar Mantar, they were sent to Tihar Jail for five days. Then, on 12 October, the government took the extraordinary step of cancelling Jantar Mantar's status as a protest site altogether, shunting demonstrations to three remote, paid venues far from the city centre.

International reaction has been sharp. The UN human rights office voiced concern over the detentions and called for the right to peaceful assembly to be respected; New Delhi told it to mind its own business.

Brinda Karat and other CPI(M) leaders being detained.
Photo: CPI(M) X/Twitter account (@cpimspeak)

Communist parties from Greece, Turkey, Pakistan, Iran, Bangladesh, and Britain have condemned what one statement called an "orgy of repression" and demanded everyone be released.

The courts, meanwhile, have offered little relief. The Supreme Court declined on 5 October to suspend Kumar, though it has asked the Election Commission to respond to the legal challenges.

None of this has slowed the movement. Fresh actions swept the capital on 16 October, CJP founder Abhijeet Dipke was detained again and released on conditional bail, and the Congress-led INDIA bloc now has permission to rally at Ramlila Maidan from 25 October.

A government that has to jail an entire central committee to protect its election chief is telling you something. It fears the people. Solidarity committees across Australia should add their voices to the calls coming off the streets of Delhi. Free all the detainees! Hands off India's communists! No democracy worth the name survives a stolen roll. ✪

Cuba's 34th resolution against the US blockade

Graham Holton

In July 2026, the UN General Assembly debated Cuba's proposal to hold a debate to end the United States blockade. The General Assembly approved the proposal with 136 in favour, 9 against and 30 abstentions (including, disgracefully, Australia).

The debate will be held on 27-28 October 2026. It will be Cuba's 34th annual resolution, 'Necessity of ending the economic, commercial, and financial blockade imposed by the United States of America against Cuba.' The vote is non-binding and has no power to stop the US sanctions, which can only be done by the US government and Congress.

In the previous debate in October 2025, the General Assembly voted 165 in favour, 7 against, with 12 abstentions. Australia voted to end the US blockade, while emphasising that it does not approve of Cuba's alleged human rights breaches (and keeping silent about US human rights violations).

US sanctions began soon after the Cuban Revolution. In January 1961 the US broke diplomatic relations with Cuba. In April the US backed the Bay of Pigs invasion, which failed to overthrow the government. Two years later the US Treasury Department's Cuban Assets Control Regulations restricted financial transactions.

In 1992 the *Cuban Democracy Act* restricted trade by US company subsidiaries, and restricted foreign ships from trading with Cuba. The 1996 Helms–Burton Act expanded these restrictions, to cover any foreign company dealing with property confiscated by the Cuban government.

In February 2026 the second Trump administration declared a national emergency alleging threats to US national security. On 1 May 2026, Executive Order 14404 expanded US sanctions to include supporters of the Cuban government.

On 20 August, Washington further restricted Cuban access to finance and technology. Three officials associated with the Cuban Institute of Friendship with the Peoples and nine state entities in metals, mining and construction were added to the sanction list. In September the US Treasury increased financial restrictions on Cuban state entities.

The US blockades and sanctions have devastated the Cuban economy, heath, and the welfare. Cuba has drastically restricted access to US and markets, finance, investment, technology and some international supply chains. US and international corporations and banks which violate the sanctions face tough compliance costs.

Cuba's dependence on foreign currency, increases the costs of imported fuel, food, machinery and medicines. The US fuel blockade has caused power shortages and electricity blackouts. To assist Cuba, Mexico, Belize, Colombia, China, and Russia have supplied fuel, and humanitarian aid, including food and essential supplies.

Despite its economic problems, Cuba has been a good global citizen, giving support where needed worldwide. It has provided doctors, teachers, scholarships, disaster relief and technical assistance to countries across Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean and the Pacific. Through these programs Cuba builds diplomatic relationships, and promotes international cooperation and national sovereignty.

Cuba's Henry Reeve International Medical Brigade has responded to numerous international emergencies. During the 2014-2016 Ebola outbreak in West Africa, Cuba responded with doctors and medical aid. In 2017 the World Health Organization recognised the brigade with its public-health award. Cuba's *Yo, sí puedo* ("Yes, I Can") literacy teaching method has been used in more than thirty countries, including in remote Australian regions.

Since 1992, the UN General Assembly has repeatedly adopted resolutions calling for an end to the US blockade. The blockade has survived long international opposition, presidential changes, and diplomatic rapprochement. Cuba's UN supporters argue Cuba's international contributions demonstrate the value of its international cooperation. This is in sharp contrast to the US which limits Cuba's ability to obtain medicines, equipment, fuel, and financing.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio is known to have called some leaders directly in an attempt to pressure them into voting against the resolution, which has been passed 30 times in the past. Rubio can pressure all he likes, but the world has seen Cuba's actions, and it likes them. ✪

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