

For ecosocialist action

green left

NUMBER 1381 | MAY 23 2023

\$3 | \$5 SOLIDARITY PRICE

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**SPECIAL
FEATURE**

Kohei Saito at Ecosocialism 2023



LABOR'S CLIMATE FAIL




A WORLD BEYOND CAPITALISM

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July 1-2
Victorian Trades Hall
Naarm/Melbourne

WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY



Djilang/Geelong
June 4, 11am
The Carousel

Muloobinba/Newcastle
June 3, 10am
Nobbys Beach

Gadi/Sydney
June 5, 12pm
Hyde Park North



Sydney

FREE JULIAN ASSANGE 10 AM WED 24 MAY HYDE PARK FOUNTAIN

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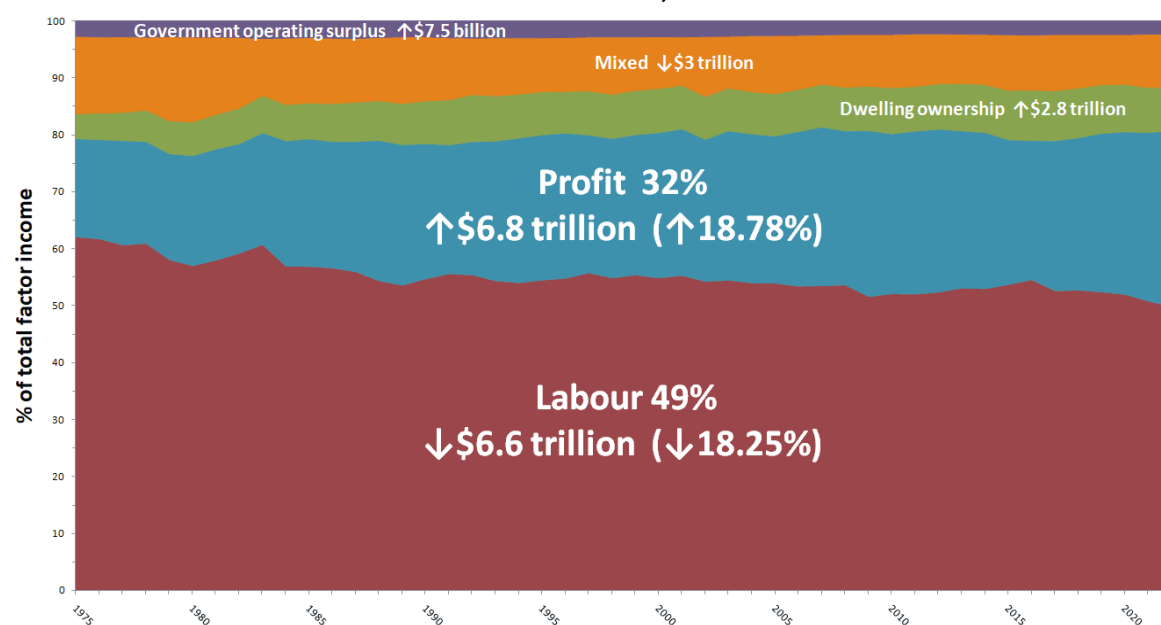
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Income shares of GDP, 1975–2022



Figures are in 2021 dollars. Total factor income equals gross domestic product less (a) taxes minus subsidies on production and imports and (b) the statistical discrepancy. It averaged 90.3% of GDP between 1975 and 2022. Source: ABS 5204.0 Australian System of National Accounts

The big lie at the heart of every federal budget

PETER BOYLE & PAUL OBOOHOV

THERE IS A big lie at the heart of every budget delivered by Coalition and Labor governments alike: that it is a plan to manage the economy for the collective good of the nation.

In reality, these governments — and other institutions like the Reserve Bank of Australia — are fundamentally managing the economy on behalf of the minority capitalist class.

Even when a Labor government delivers a budget that includes a headline-grabbing “\$14.6 billion cost-of-living plan”, that Treasurer Jim Chalmers claims is building a “fairer society”, it remains a budget that fundamentally serves the interests of the corporate rich.

The latest budget will not make a significant difference to rising poverty levels, according to Associate Professor Ben Philips of the Centre for Economic Policy Research at the Australian National University.

The small changes to welfare payments, Philips estimated, will add “around \$2 billion a year into low and middle income families”.

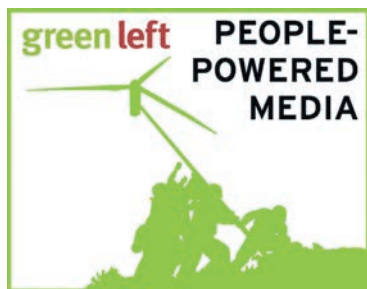
However, this will be less than half the increase in taxes paid by workers as a result of the removal of the Low and Medium Income Tax Offset from July 1, which will be \$1500 a year in extra taxes for many workers.

The working class will also bear the burden of the \$3 billion a year rise in tobacco tax.

By contrast, the gas companies, which reaped an estimated windfall profit of between \$26 billion and \$40 billion last year, will pay just \$3.1 billion more in the ridiculously low Petroleum Resource Rent Tax.

Labor’s budget also does not retreat from the Coalition’s notorious Stage 3 tax cuts for the rich (to cost \$254 billion over 10 years from 2024).

Labor and Coalition



governments have been doing such a good job managing the economy for the corporate rich that the corporate profit share of national income has been steadily increasing since the mid-1970s, while the wages share has been declining.

Green Left calculated, on the basis of Australian Bureau of Statistics data, that the total rise in profit share since June 1975 was \$6.8 trillion, while the decrease in wages share was \$6.6 trillion.

This is a massive income transfer from one class to another.

How did these governments do this? By systematically reducing the right of workers to collectively bargain for better wages and conditions and by reducing welfare payments to well below the poverty line.

It was the Bob Hawke-Paul Keating Labor government that struck the critical blow against the power of collective bargaining, through its imposition of enterprise bargaining in 1991.

Union membership collapsed as a result, from 52% to 12.5% of the workforce and, these days, trade unions have to negotiate a legal minefield to take even the most minimal industrial action.

Workers’ collective power has been weakened to the point that, even with the low unemployment rate today, real wages are still falling.

The bipartisan commitment to economic management for the capitalist class has consequences that extend beyond social injustice, poverty and inequality.

It also means that Coalition

and Labor governments systematically ignore the common interest to protect the power of the ruling class.

We can see this in the latest budget, which continues the Coalition government’s insane drive to support the United States in a war against China with the planned acquisition of nuclear-powered submarines and long-range missiles.

The common interest is also systematically betrayed by Coalition and Labor governments. While a few billion dollars is committed to helping big business take advantage of the renewable energy transition, the budget “doesn’t meet the scale of the climate emergency Australia faces” according to the Climate Council (CC).

“Climate change is already reshaping our world, the government needs to fundamentally re-shape budgets to tackle it,” said the CC’s Amanda McKenzie.

Government for the corporate rich is simply incompatible with a just, peaceful and climate safe future.

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ABOUT GREEN LEFT

In a desperately unequal world facing a climate emergency, everyone has to pick a side.

Our side is – and always will be – that of the 99%.

Our goal is not only to expose the lies, hypocrisy and bias of the billionaire class and their media: we seek to help the organising efforts of all those actively resisting the increasingly authoritarian rule of the corporate rich, here and overseas.

An ecologically, socially just world is impossible under capitalism. Our goal is an ecosocialist world, run by and for people. If you like our work, support us.

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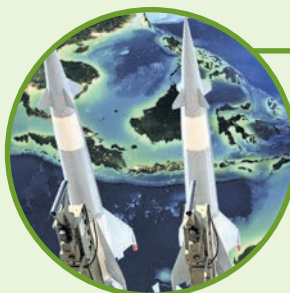
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Responsibility for electoral comment in this issue is taken by N. Spencer, 22-36 Mountain St, Ultimo, NSW 2007.

Green Left is published by the Green Left Association. Printed by Spotpress Pty Ltd, Marrickville NSW 2204, (02) 9549 1111. ISSN 1036-126X, 2209-6507(online). Closing news date was Friday May 19, 2023. Covers: Josh Adams and Viv Miley. Front cover image used with permission of Alan Moir, moir.com.au.

Activist report

Photos and stories from the frontline



Gadi/Sydney. Photo: Zebedee Parkes



Meanjin/Brisbane. Photo: Alex Bainbridge

Protests mark 75 years of *Al Nakba*

KERRY SMITH

THOUSANDS CAME OUT across Australia on May 13 to commemorate the 75th anniversary of *Al Nakba* (the catastrophe) in 1948, when Zionist terrorist gangs began to carry out massacres, ethnic cleansing and the seizure of Palestinian land to create the state of Israel.

Palestinians and supporters held signs and chanted against Israeli apartheid, for an end to the murderous raids on the West Bank, to defend the right of return, to stop illegal settlements on Palestinian land and to lift the siege on Gaza.

Ballarat Trades Hall stands with Palestine

RON GUY

UNIONISTS AT BALLARAT Trades Hall Council (BTHC) marked 75 years since the Nakba with a solidarity photo on May 9.

A solidarity statement was read out, and included in the BTHC minutes.

Palestine's flag was flown at Trades Hall on May 15.

[Read the full statement at greenleft.org.au.]



Wadawurrung/Ballarat. Photo: Supplied



Gadi/Sydney. Photo: Zebedee Parkes.
Inset: Naarm/Melbourne. Photo: Prasanna, Tamil Refugee Council/Facebook

Tamils commemorate Mullivaikkal massacre

CHRIS SLEE & ZEBEDEE PARKES

TAMILS RALLIED ON May 15 to commemorate the massacre of tens of thousands of Tamils by the Sri Lankan armed forces in Mullivaikkal in the north of the island of Sri Lanka in May 2009.

Tamil activist Prasanth told the Naarm/Melbourne rally that war criminals remain in Sri Lanka's leadership today. Tamil areas are under military occupation, with one soldier stationed for every six civilians.

Pushpa, a Tamil woman refugee, spoke about the hardship of living in Australia for 11 years without a permanent visa.

Speakers at the Gadi/Sydney rally called for permanent protection for refugees, not deportations, and for the Australian government to stop supporting the Sri Lankan government.



Thousands protest new AFL stadium

ROBYNNE MURPHY & ROSE MATTHEWS

IN ONE OF the largest rallies to take place in Tasmania's capital, between 6000-7000 people protested in front of Parliament House to say "no" to a new football stadium – costing \$715 million – in the heart of the waterfront. It was organised in 7 days.

Protesters carried signs indicating where they want funds spent: "Build homes, not a stadium" and "Hospitals, Housing, health care, education – not a white elephant".

The protest was an indication of the deep level of community indignation over secret deals between Premier Jeremy Rockliff and the Australian Football League to put sports and gambling profits above the health, education and affordable housing.

Plibersek approves new coal mine

DAVID KILLINGLY

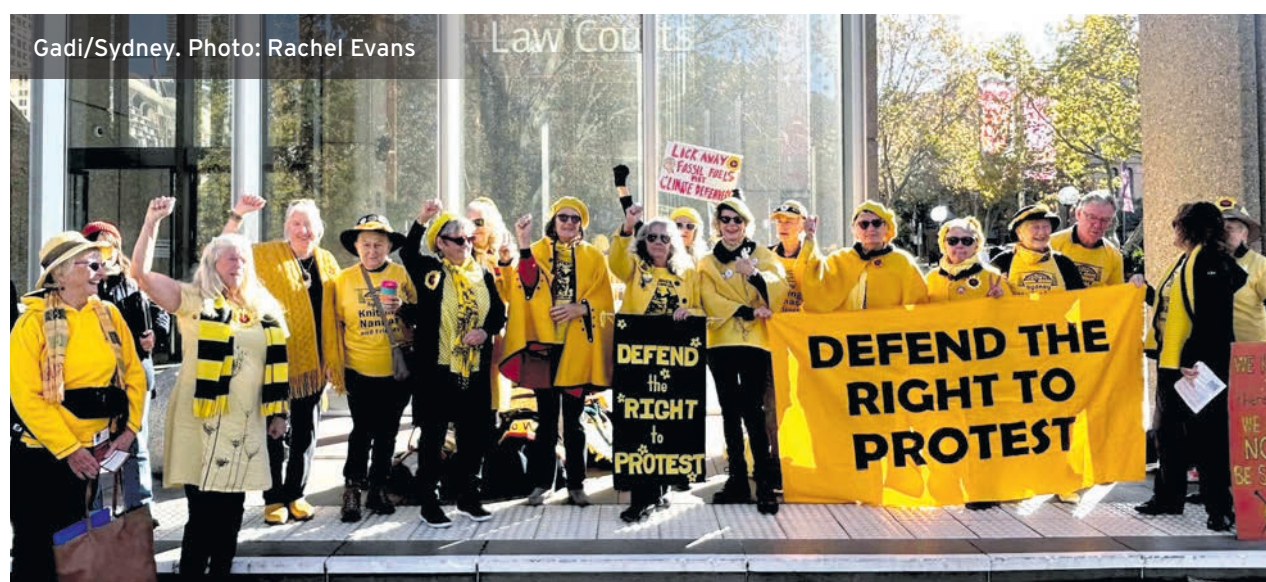
PROTESTERS CONVERGED ON Minister for the Environment and Water Tanya Plibersek's electorate office on May 12 after she approved a new coal mine in Central Queensland's Bowen Basin.

The development of the Isaac River coal mine is the first coal project she has approved under Labor. However, she is refusing to reconsider the approvals of the Mount Pleasant open cut coal mine near Muswellbrook in New South Wales, an expansion of the Narrabri coal mine by Whitehaven Coal and a life extension of the Ensham coal mine in the Bowen Basin.

Protesters said any new coal projects would worsen the current climate emergency and that the three coal projects which are pending approval must not be given the go-ahead.



Gadi/Sydney. Photo: Rigmor Berg



Gadi/Sydney. Photo: Rachel Evans

Knitting Nannas challenge anti-protest laws

RACHEL EVANS

KNITTING NANNAS AND supporters gathered outside The New South Wales Supreme Court on May 10 to support climate activists and Nannas Dominique Jacobs and Helen Kvelde challenge to NSW's undemocratic anti-protest laws.

The challenge is being filed by the Environmental Defenders Office which believes the laws are "so broad that a group of people could face serious criminal charges simply by protesting near a railway station and causing people to be redirected around them".

The Coalition government with the support of Labor amended the *Crimes Act* to make it an offence to peacefully block major roads, bridges and infrastructure. It contains fines of up to \$22,000 and up to two years in prison.

The NSW Civil Liberties Council said the Knitting Nannas will ask the Supreme Court to declare these new sections of the *Crimes Act* unconstitutional, as they "impermissibly burden the implied freedom of political communication of the NSW community".

The case will be a test for new Premier Chris Minns, whose party is internally divided on this new law.

AUKUS a step towards war

JIM McILROY

MEL BARNES, FROM Wollongong Against War and Nukes (WAWAN) and Pip Hinman, *Green Left* editor and Sydney Anti-AUKUS Coalition activist were the panellists at a lively discussion about AUKUS and the vast sums being spent on a new war drive on May 16.

Hinman said Australia is fast becoming a more significant part of the military encirclement of China, and AUKUS is a part of this.

"AUKUS shows Canberra is not being dragged by the US into a new war: it is willingly helping ensure the US maintains its power and privilege in the Asia-Pacific."

Barnes explained the origins of the Illawarra-based WAWAN, which is campaigning to prevent a nuclear submarine base from being built at Port Kembla.

"We don't want to wait until it's a 'done deal'," she said. "We want to build a strong community campaign that says we don't want a military base in our town, nor should any community have one [foisted on to it]."

Both speakers said the May Day march in Port Kembla on May 6 marked the beginning of a new broad-based campaign which had the potential to unite unions, environmental groups and others against AUKUS.

Meanwhile, US President Joe Biden said he will now not come to Sydney for the Quad, ostensibly because of the US budget crisis. However, the US, Japan, India and Australia may meet on the fringes of the G7 meeting in Japan over May 20-21.

NT Labor gives fracking the go-ahead, despite First Nations' objections

PIP HINMAN

FIRST NATIONS PEOPLE, farmers and communities across the Northern Territory have condemned NT Labor's decision to approve exploration permits for shale gas fracking in the Beetaloo Basin.

NT Chief Minister Natasha Fyles said on May 3 that as the *Scientific Inquiry into Hydraulic Fracturing* had concluded industry risks "could be managed" if 135 recommendations were implemented, the territory would welcome "jobs" and "secure energy".

Fyles said opening up more of the NT to fracking would be part of the "transition to renewable energy technology". She cited David Ritchie, a member of the inquiry, who had "provided advice" that "ensures an onshore industry will be operating to world's best practice".

While onshore gas has been mined across the NT for some time, the Beetaloo Basin had been ruled out after campaigns to protect the recharge area of Mataranka Springs — supporting important freshwater aquatic ecosystems — and extensive tropical savannah woodlands forced the NT government to place a moratorium on exploration in 2016 and hold an inquiry.

The inquiry report, released by Hon. Justice Rachel Pepper in 2018, provided a set of recommendations to "mitigate to acceptable levels" identified risks with onshore shale gas development.

Fyles said "tough and uncompromising" new measures would "create a sustainable environment", including \$2 million a year for a new "Petroleum Operations Unit".



The Nurrudalini Aboriginal Corporation are fighting to stop fracking in the Beetaloo Basin. Photo: Nurrudalini Aboriginal Corporation

She also insisted that First Nations people would be able to veto developments. However, experts in Native Title law say it is not as simple as that, as rights to control what happens on country varies according to land tenure.

The federal *Aboriginal Land Rights Act* gives Traditional Owners rights to control activities on their land. But as most of the Beetaloo Basin where gas companies want to mine is on a pastoral lease, which is covered by Native Title law, a veto is not possible. About half of the NT comes under the *Native Title Act 1993*.

Even the Pepper report found that: "If Traditional Owners want development on their country, they are forced to make a decision at a time when there is limited information available about what the size of the final project will be."

Nurrudalini Native Title Aboriginal Corporation (NNTAC) chair Johnny Wilson — whose organisation represents more than 60 native title holders from 11 native title determination areas throughout the Beetaloo Basin — is concerned about the lack of a veto right for native title holders. "When our old people said yes, many years ago, they had no idea of the many thousands of wells we are looking at now," he said on May 6.

Lock the Gate (LtG) said many fracking companies have been attempting to gain approvals over the last decade to explore and develop the large onshore shale gas reserves believed to exist in the Roper-Gulf Region.

"Affected communities in the northern area of the Beetaloo Sub Basin include Katherine, Barunga, Beswick,

Mataranka, Jilkminggan, Minyerri and Ngukurr," LtG said. "The central area includes communities in Larrimah, Daly Waters, Dunmarra, Newcastle Waters, Marlinja and Elliott. Communities affected in the east include Borroloola and Robinson River as well as Tennant Creek in the South."

First Nations peoples, represented by NNTAC, have said that there has been no genuine free, prior and informed consent process, LtG said.

"While some Traditional Owners have supported gas exploration on their land, many other affected groups oppose fracking but have had no opportunity to exercise their free, prior and informed consent rights.

"When Traditional Owners take their objections before parliamentary inquiries and company AGMs, gas companies and politicians simply rely on

the Traditional Owner's lack of legally enforceable free, prior and informed consent rights to ignore them."

Tamboran, Empire Energy and Santos want to start operations soon. Tamboran, which has major United States financial backing, said it is ready to begin drilling in July, with "the most powerful drill rig in Australia" having just arrived in Darwin.

Tamboran chief executive Joel Riddle told the *Australian Financial Review* on May 5 it is able to drill more than 3000 metre horizontal sections in the main shell plate. "This is a big deal because the longer horizontal wells that we can drill with this rig, the more reserves that we can recover per well and it will be a real driver to bring down well costs and also improve the economics of the Beetaloo development."

One hundred scientists and other experts sent an open letter to Fyles last November warning her that large-scale gas production in the Beetaloo Basin could add 89 million tonnes of emissions to the atmosphere annually — the equivalent to four times the NT's current emissions and 18% of the country's emissions.

First Nations opposition to shale gas drilling in the NT is being sidelined just as the nation is being urged to listen to First Nations voices and vote "Yes" to enshrining a First Nations Voice to parliament in the Constitution.

Traditional Owners from the region have called for a halt to fracking exploration and production until proper consultation is done and the combined risks from what will be a major industrialisation of their country are better understood. ■

Qld gov't plan for CSG salt dump is not safe

ELENA GARCIA

DECIDING TO SUPPORT the coal and gas industry is not just about climate change. It is also about whether or not to support sustainable agriculture and tourism — because you cannot have both.

Water is life: but that is only true if the water is clean.

Fugitive methane emissions from the coal seam gas (CSG) industry have now gone from streams of bubbles to churning spa-baths coming up like volcanoes through the Condamine River, in the headwaters of the Murray-Darling Basin.

If methane is visibly coming up through rivers (as it is also coming up, invisibly, from soils) so is the waste salt and carcinogenic benzene, toluene, ethylbenzene and xylene (BTEX) chemicals released from coal seams by the industrial

process of pumping water through fracked coal to extract the gas.

A dump for 5 million tonnes of waste salt and BTEX poisons, by-products of CSG mining, has been approved at Chinchilla, 50 metres uphill from a Condamine tributary at the top of the Murray-Darling Basin.

Five million tonnes of salt is the estimated amount of waste from Queensland CSG wells. However, the dump has been approved for 15 million tonnes of salt waste.

The Queensland government's recently-released CSG brine management action plan, for the next decade, confirms that the science does not offer a safe storage method.

Instead, it proposes to use the cheap method of drying the salt in evaporation dams, then storing it in plastic-lined holes in the ground. Salt does not

break down, but plastic liners do, and the plan admits this is only a short-term solution until a better method can be found.

We have seen the enormous fish kill at Menindee, from toxins washed down by floods. This will pale in comparison with the death of fish, wildlife and vegetation if 5 million tonnes of salt washes down the Condamine into the Murray-Darling Basin.

Salt is extraordinarily difficult to remove from environments — much more difficult than oil spills in low permeability heavy soils.

Coal holds numerous carcinogens and other poisons, and mining coal allows those toxins into the water. In floods, coal mines fill with water.

This contaminated water is then allowed, by governments, to be pumped out into our catchments, where it ends up in the waterways that supply

communities. This was allowed after the 2011 floods.

Wastewater for coal and CSG mining gets pumped into storage ponds that then overflow in floods. If the ponds are lined, the plastic lining breaks down after 20 years and leaches into groundwater.

Reverse osmosis filters, used to remove toxins from CSG water, are then stored, filled with poisons, in landfill. All landfill leaches into groundwater.

During drought agriculture is increasingly dependent on artesian water. Our catchments feed our artesian basins. We are poisoning the Great Artesian Basin and we don't even know how the basin works. We certainly don't know how to clean it of poisons that get into it.

Because water moves so slowly underground, by the time monitoring bores pick up

contamination, it has already become a massive problem.

Economically, we can stop mining coal and gas. Engineer Saul Griffith's book *The Big Switch* explains how we can 100% electrify Australia and create far more export dollars by using renewable energy to smelt the mineral ores already being produced and make 10 times the income for a far smaller volume of exports.

We could lead the world in the supply of clean green steel and aluminium.

Labor now governs every state, except Tasmania. It could take the big step to reject mining industry donors and ban these filthy fossil fuel industries that are killing our rivers and artesian basins and poisoning all of us who depend on clean drinking water.

[Elena Garcia is a regenerative grazer based in the Western Downs in Queensland.] ■

Young people left out by Labor's budget

ISAAC NELLIST

LABOR'S BUDGET IS a huge disappointment for many, but especially young people struggling with the cost-of-living crisis, surging rents and expensive education.

Despite significant pressure from welfare recipients and advocates to raise the JobSeeker rate and other payments above the poverty line, they only rose by \$40 a fortnight.

Even Labor's Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee found, in April, that a rise of about \$256 was needed, which would raise payments to 90% of the Age Pension. It found that the previous payment rate of about \$49 a day was a barrier to people trying to find work.

Forty dollars a fortnight is a drop in the ocean against the rising cost of food, petrol, housing and education: it works out to less than \$3 a day, barely enough for a loaf of cheap bread.

"We do not welcome this insult," the Antipoverty Centre said. "A deficit or a surplus, it doesn't matter to the communities who need housing and a rate above the poverty line to pay their bills and buy their food."

The raise also applies to Youth Allowance and Austudy — payments available for students — but they are still less than JobSeeker and well below the poverty line.

Accessing Youth Allowance is still difficult for students under 22 years old, who are deemed to be tied to their parents' finances even if they are not.

Lowering the age of independence was a key part of a National Union of Students (NUS) report that, last year, found the rule was entrenching disadvantage for students who could not, or did not want to, live at home.

In addition, international students cannot access Youth



Students campaign for affordable housing, in Ngunnawal/Canberra on May 9.

Photo: Paul Oboohov

Allowance or Austudy.

NUS organised a protest outside Parliament House on budget day, alongside the Australian Unemployed Workers' Union and Get A Room!, calling for JobSeeker to be raised to \$88 a day and for AUKUS and the Stage 3 tax cuts to be scrapped.

"What good is \$2.85 a day when rents are going up by hundreds of dollars a week?," NUS Education Officer Xavier Dupé said.

The government claims not to have the money to address poverty, but is still spending \$243 billion on tax cuts for the rich and \$368 billion on nuclear submarines, he said. "If the [government] wanted to make sure no one is left behind they would cancel these and direct funds to lifting people out of poverty."

Disadvantaged students are skipping meals to pay bills, and inadequate pay and insecure work eats into their study time, leading to many discontinuing

their formal education.

The single parent payment has been expanded, raising the cut-off age from 8 to 14. This will be an extra \$176.90 a fortnight for single parents who are on the base rate, but does not fully undo Julia Gillard's cuts, which lowered the cut-off age from 16 years old.

While these will make a difference to some, Ben Phillips argued in *The Conversation* that they will "not make a significant difference to poverty in Australia".

Young people are overwhelmingly renters, but the budget offered only piecemeal solutions to the rent and housing crisis. They include a 15% rise to the rent assistance payment for welfare recipients, amounting to a raise of up to \$31 a fortnight. This is nothing when compared to the record rent rises over the past few months: some renters have been hit with rises of hundreds of dollars a week.

Anti-poverty campaigners

said rent assistance does nothing to address housing affordability, and the payment is not available to the homeless.

The budget includes a few other measures to address the housing crisis, with most confined to the housing future fund, which is being debated in the Senate.

Other changes include an expansion of the First Home Guarantee scheme, tax breaks for "build-to-rent" properties and additional funding for community housing providers.

Surprisingly, little change to education was made, but 300,000 fee-free TAFE and vocational training positions will be funded and 5000 scholarships, plus other funding, have been allocated for more teachers.

The budget does not scrap the automatic indexation of HECS/HELP debts, meaning students will be hit with an average of \$1700 in extra debt this June.

It did include 4000 additional

university places over the next four years, focused on science, technology, engineering and mathematics — subjects that support AUKUS and further tie universities to the military-industrial complex.

University of Sydney Student Representative Council president Lia Perkins told *Honi Soit*: "It is disappointing to see the government prioritise creating a surplus, cutting taxes on the wealthy and minor relief measures", while doing little to improve the lives of students.

"The cost of living crisis is hitting students hard ... This budget will worsen the divide between the wealthy few who are making profits while everyone else struggles to get by."

The ABC's "Federal budget 2023: Winners and Losers" counts young people as "winners", despite conceding there is "not much targeted support for young people listed in this budget". ■

'MUA: Here to stay!' remembered at May Day dinner



Dave Ball, Assistant Secretary of the Victorian Branch of the MUA, speaks about the Patrick dispute.

Photo: Sarah Hathway

SUE BULL

DJILANG/GEELONG

ONE OF THE most significant battles in recent working-class history was remembered at the annual May Day dinner to support *Green Left* at Geelong Trades Hall on May 6.

Twenty-five years ago, on May 7, 1998, Maritime Union of Australia members around the country marched back to work, chanting "MUA! Here to Stay!" They had just won one of the most significant battles against Patrick Stevedores, which was supported by the union-busting John Howard Coalition government.

Seventy people heard stories from the dispute from six Socialist Alliance members, who were either MUA members, or picket line participants and *Green Left* journalists, at the Melbourne and Sydney pickets.

The Patrick dispute began

at Webb dock in Melbourne in January 1998 when the National Farmers Federation leased the port and trained strike-breaking scabs to replace the port workers who had gone on strike.

In a rapid escalation, Patrick Stevedores locked out 2000 waterside workers on April 7: they were "escorted" from their workplace by balaclava-wearing thugs and dogs.

The MUA, with the support of other unions and community members in Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne and Fremantle, set up picket lines. Some were savagely attacked by police.

Thousands of people, horrified by Howard and Patrick's tactics, joined the pickets. Sue Bolton, now a Merri-bek Councillor, and Tim Gooden, formerly Geelong Trades Hall secretary, recalled their time on the Sydney picket lines.

Perhaps the most famous

picket was at the East Swanston Dock. MUA member Ross Smith recalled how, on April 17, 4000 picketers linked arms all night facing down 1000 police.

Mick Bull, a member of the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union at the time, recalled how 2000 building workers, led by the legendary John Cummins, surrounded police, forcing them to make a hasty retreat.

This broke the back of the bosses' campaign.

Justice North of the Federal Court finally ruled on April 21 that Patrick had deliberately restructured with the sole intention of dismissing its unionised workforce. This was illegal, and the ruling was upheld by the High Court after Patrick challenged it.

The MUA had won, but in the ensuing months there was much disquiet about the industrial outcomes as about 1000 jobs were lost and casualisation

led to reductions in working conditions and pay.

Dave Ball, Assistant Secretary of the Victorian Branch of the MUA, told the dinner that despite everything, the struggle was a magnificent display of solidarity by thousands of brave supporters — across Australia and internationally — and that this is why the MUA is, victoriously, here to stay.

The dinner marked the wonderful role *Green Left* played throughout the dispute, when dozens of comrades wrote from every picket line and solidarity event.

Bronwyn Jennings, who was a university student at the time, recalled how the 750-strong Asia Pacific Solidarity Conference, which was meeting in Gadi/Sydney at the time, marched down to the Darling Harbour picket on April 13. The sacked workers welcomed the international solidarity with their struggle. ■

Nurses and midwives discuss making workplaces sustainable

JACKIE KRIZ

NAARM/MELBOURNE

ABOUT 500 MEMBERS of the Australian Nursing & Midwifery Federation (ANMF) attended its 10th Health & Environmental Sustainability Conference on April 27.

The ANMF continues to lead in environmental sustainability: it is one of only a handful of unions to employ a dedicated environmental health officer, since 2015, and is the only one to organise an annual environment conference. The union also delivers health and sustainability courses, providing practical support and education for nurses and midwives to improve their knowledge and skills to reduce their workplace carbon footprint.

Given that healthcare makes up 7% of national annual carbon emissions, the sector does need to rapidly reduce its footprint.

An ANMF delegate's resolution in 2012 first proposed a health and environmental conference to help do more to combat climate change. Since then, the annual gathering has grown from 50 to approximately 500–600 attendees annually. It is the largest conference of its kind in the Southern Hemisphere.

Nurse presenters showcased innovative ways to reduce waste, energy and products made from plastic. Others demonstrated novel ways to repurpose items used in hospitals and educating staff on behaviour change.

Examples of such initiatives were: moving from plastic to cloth bags for patient belongings; pens made from



ANMF (Vic Branch) Health and Sustainability Officer Ros Morgan.

Photo: Chris Hopkins/anmfvic.asn.au

syringes; using drug vials caps for art; reducing and replacing plastic liners with sustainable alternatives; donating expired stock; rescuing and sending surplus medical supplies to communities overseas; ending the use of polystyrene cups; implementing aluminium recycling programs and using environmentally sustainable alternatives to current personal protective equipment products.

Oliver Hunt, founder of the New Zealand organisation Medsalv, said it strives to reuse single-use items, diverting unnecessary products from landfill and ultimately saving money. Hunt reported that Medsalv had already prevented 1500 kilograms of waste from going to landfill by reusing

cardboard boxes.

Keynote speaker Norman Swan, a medically qualified journalist, introduced concepts rarely talked about in health care: he referred to unsustainable, wasteful practices with high carbon intensity being widespread in the health system.

The waste in healthcare has been calculated at 20–40% due to consumption, energy and plastics. Inappropriate care and unnecessary procedures that do not benefit the patient also have a high carbon footprint. “We need to reduce medical interventions that impact on environmental sustainability,” Swan said.

Swan spoke about Victoria's inadequate response to the

pandemic, saying it was due to inferior public health infrastructure. He said he remained sceptical about the state's ability to respond to future pandemics, saying: “We have a system not changing.”

His main criticism of this was the fact that more resources have gone to maintaining existing hospitals and building new hospitals, after the election, rather than funding primary health care which is where preventative medicine occurs. “More hospital beds will only increase demand,” Swan said.

Sharon Desmond, a nurse and PhD candidate in sustainable healthcare systems, echoed Swan's view saying: “The budget cuts to community

health were very disappointing. We need to revise models of care if we are going to decarbonise health care.”

By reviewing and researching models of care, conference presenters exposed some unnecessary practices and medical interventions with high carbon intensity which contribute to the large amount of waste produced from the health system. Presenters stressed the need to decentralise healthcare and put more resources into community health to optimise disease prevention and lower carbon outputs.

Ros Morgan, ANMF Health and Sustainability Officer, said in her opening address: “People are looking to deliver high-quality care without a big, dirty, footprint”. Swan said: “Caring for patients and caring for the environment doesn't need to be mutually exclusive.”

Every year the gathering inspires a new layer of nurses, midwives and carers to develop innovative ways to reduce their workplace carbon footprint.

This requires commitment as these projects are usually undertaken in the worker's own time and against a tide of structural barriers.

Without strong, ongoing organisational support, these initiatives will be difficult to sustain. It is clear that nurses and midwives need more support if they are going to continue to perform these vital additional roles for their workplaces and communities beyond.

[Jackie Kriz is a long-term member of the Australian Nursing & Midwifery Federation (Victoria branch).] ■

The impact of medical misogyny

JACKIE KRIZ

DJILANG/GEELONG

A PANEL ON “Patriarchy Power & Privilege: Medical Misogyny” discussed the gender bias in the health system. The forum on May 4 was the third of a series, hosted by the Geelong Women Unionist Network (GWUN) and the Geelong Regional Library.

After Wadawurrung Traditional Owner Nikki McKenzie gave a welcome to country, GWUN co-convenor Adele Welsh spoke about First Nations women and girls' experiences in a health system that frequently ignores culturally safe practices.

The panellists and more than 70 people shared stories about the inequitable health system which is likely contributing to unquantifiable, co-morbidities among women. There was a strong appetite to improve it.

Researcher Elizabeth McLindon spoke about her

2018 University of Melbourne study on gender-based violence, funded by the Australian and Nursing Midwifery Federation, (ANMF) Victorian Branch.

From surveying more than 10,600 women, 38% of the ANMF membership, on their experiences with family violence and sexual assault, she found that 45% had experienced one or more violent relationships since the age of 16.

The study also found that nurses and midwives experienced a higher rate of physical and sexual violence — up to 4.5 times higher.

McLindon reported on the trauma load healthcare workers carry, which leads to long-term health implications. They are more likely to have poor physical and mental health, caused by chronic sleep disturbance, financial stress and hazardous alcohol consumption, along with symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder.

Rochelle Hamilton, a reproductive and sexual health

nurse, who is undertaking a doctorate in public health, outlined the lack of contraceptive information services and information for women through their lives. “There's a gamut of contraceptive methods out there, but women just don't know about them and are not given the choice,” Hamilton said.

“Further, not all contraceptive pills are available on the [Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme] and costly hormone replacement therapy treatments also disadvantage many women during their peri- and post-menopausal years.

“Some GPs refuse to refer women for pregnancy terminations on the basis of conscientious objection ... Women, under stressful and difficult circumstances, are forced to find a compassionate GP, without blame or moral judgment.” She said access can also be limited due to reduced bulk billing opportunities.

Ged Kearney, Assistant Minister for Health and Aged Care and chair of the newly-formed National Women's Health Advisory Council (NWHAC), questioned these systemic failures. She said the history of medicine was deeply rooted in systemic misogyny. Even last century, women were diagnosed with “hysteria”, a derivative of hysterica, Latin for “of the womb”.

Kearney listed the multiple barriers for women that lead to poor health outcomes: women are twice as likely to die from a heart attack while being misdiagnosed with anxiety and, at emergency departments, they are half as likely to receive pain relief because our symptoms are not believed. Endometriosis, for example, takes an average of seven years to diagnose.

Another study has found that women were twice as likely to reject hip prostheses, as earlier prototypes were modeled on men's hip physiology.

There is a lack of research on

auto-immune disease in women even though 78% of women are more likely to develop the conditions. Women are also more likely to accidentally overdose on medication, as most drug trials are undertaken on men.

The panellists expressed their concerns about how research is carried out. People expressed hope that a new advisory council will deliver greater funding for research into women's health.

Younger women and those with disabilities confirmed the male-dominated medical profession's practice of dismissing pain symptoms — often with devastating consequences.

The ANMF was requested to run an educational campaign on medical misogyny. There was a strong appetite to expose the inequities and improve the flawed health system, which is likely contributing to unquantifiable, co-morbidities among women. ■

Budget fails on serious measures for climate transition

ALEX BAINBRIDGE

GOVERNMENTS HAVE TO be judged by their actions, not their words.

Treasurer Jim Chalmers didn't even mouth the words "climate action" while spruiking the May 9 budget. In fact, the word "climate" did not appear once in his speech.

Serious action to cut carbon emissions was not one of Labor's top five budget priorities. Chalmers' pitch and the budget measures announced are either tepid, or disguised assistance to industry. Canberra is continuing to provide huge subsidies for fossil fuels.

Just days after the budget, Environment Minister Tanya Plibersek approved her first coal mine. Meanwhile, the World Meteorological Organisation announced the world is on track to breach the 1.5°C Paris target within the next five years, possibly sooner.

Humanity faces an urgent imperative to completely transform economies and societies to rapidly phase out the use of fossil fuels.

This budget completely fails that challenge.

Amanda McKenzie of the Climate Council said: "We can't settle for a slow jog when the climate crisis calls for a sprint ... Climate change is already reshaping our world, the government needs to fundamentally re-shape budgets to tackle it."

Measured in dollar terms, the biggest new budget measure that could broadly be considered "climate action" is the \$2 billion for a new hydrogen power program.

This item came under the heading "making Australia a renewable energy superpower". The framing is about building Australia's economic competitiveness, not mobilising



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to meet the climate challenge.

Promoting hydrogen power is a support, not a challenge, to the fossil fuel industry. As *Green Left* reported in 2021, the fossil fuel industry is a key proponent of using hydrogen for energy. Although it is possible to make "green hydrogen", the majority of hydrogen is actually produced from fossil fuels (gas and coal).

Further, hydrogen is more expensive and less efficient than directly using renewable energy.

Other budget measures, including spending on energy efficiency, subsidising household

energy bills, establishing a Net Zero Authority and Environment Protection Australia and monitoring fuel efficiency standards, are not bad things to do, but they do not tackle the key structural changes we need.

These are the transition to 100% renewable energy, the massive expansion of public transport and the establishment of huge (and ecologically sensitive) reforestation projects.

They are small change compared to the \$313 billion on Stage 3 tax cuts and the \$368 billion (at least) being spent on AUKUS nuclear-powered submarines.

Chalmers claimed his budget "allocates \$4 billion to realising our future as a renewable energy superpower".

Compare this to the \$10–11 billion a year in fossil fuel tax subsidies, calculated by Climate Action Merri-bek.

Kelly O'Shanassy of the Australian Conservation Foundation said: "The really ugly part of this budget is the continuation of subsidies to big, multinational companies, encouraging them to use more coal, oil and gas". She said the fuel tax credit scheme will cost \$9.6 billion in the next year and \$41 billion over the forward estimates.

Chalmers announced the Petroleum Resource Rent Tax would be tightened "so that Australians receive a fairer return on the sale of our natural resources, sooner". It sounds good, but tax specialist Steven Hamilton said these

changes are "mostly cosmetic".

"They don't raise a huge amount of money — we're talking something like \$600 million a year — and most of that is about shifting the money forward," Hamilton said.

Tellingly, the Australian Petroleum Production and Exploration Association (APPEA) welcomed the change, saying it provides "greater certainty" to the industry.

The budget also allocated \$80 million in corporate subsidies to the "critical minerals sector", which produces resources used in electric cars and batteries. However, this is also a site of intense international capitalist competition.

Once again Labor is gearing the budget more to helping corporate Australia rather than setting up a real climate transition.

Climate Action Merri-bek highlighted that "the budget papers also revealed the government has an 'unquantifiable' future liability due to its indemnification of Chevron for future legal action against its failed carbon capture and storage (CCS) project at Gorgon".

Beyond Zero Emissions produced a detailed and costed transition plan in 2009 for 100% renewable energy within 10 years. It would have cost \$370 billion — the equivalent to eight nuclear submarines.

If Labor were serious about climate action, as it says it is, the budget would have set out and funded such a plan.

Prioritising AUKUS nuclear submarines, tax cuts for the rich and giving a blank cheque to Chevron to fund their lies about "clean" fossil fuels gives the game away about Labor's priorities.

[Alex Bainbridge is a member of the Socialist Alliance National Executive.] ■



David Brophy: ‘The justifications for AUKUS are simply not convincing’

David Brophy delivered this speech to the Sydney Palm Sunday rally on April 2. Brophy is a senior lecturer in history at the University of Sydney and is the vice-president of the National Tertiary Education Union at the university. He is also the author of *China Panic: Australia's Alternative to Paranoia and Pandering*.

As we call for justice for refugees, we also call for an end to the wars that produce refugees; Russia's attack on Ukraine, Israel's never-ending war on the Palestinians, Yemen, the violent repression in Myanmar, all wars.

But here in Australia we have a particular obligation to resist the forces that are pushing this country towards war, towards a disastrous confrontation with China.

For years now, politicians, media, hawkish think tanks and spy agencies have been straining themselves to scare the public and whip up animosity towards China.

The proposition would be absurd were it not so terrifying: they paint a picture of a war that could easily trigger climate catastrophe, and they tell us to simply prepare for it, not to prevent it.

Federal Labor, to its shame, has gone along with this campaign and has now signed off on its end result — the AUKUS pact.

A pact negotiated in secret, carrying a \$368 billion price tag but, in reality of unknown cost; a pact that binds Australia to United States' military strategy for decades to come.

All of this for what?

The justifications for AUKUS



Image: Green Left

are simply not convincing.

A few days ago the defence minister went on TV to claim that the South China Sea was a vital national interest for Australia, because all of Australia's trade with Japan and South Korea went through it.

This is simply untrue. The defence minister lied.

He lied because he didn't want to state the absurdity that has already been so well satirised, that Australia is supposedly spending billions of dollars to defend its trade with China — from China.

China, of course, is where the vast bulk of Australian shipping in the South China Sea is going.

The truth is that there is no defensive rationale for this program.

The purpose of AUKUS is to: anchor a United States military presence in Asia; bring the British Empire back in; and signal Australia's willingness to make itself a platform for,

and contributor to, a future American war on China.

These submarines only make sense as part of an aggressive strategy to hem China in and create insecurity on China's doorstep.

The peoples of the Pacific do not want AUKUS.

They call this deterrence; they say it's all in the name of peace. But what they're saying to China is: "We intend to maintain the capacity to fight and win a war right on your doorstep."

Imagine if China said the same thing to Australia? Is there any way that would not be considered a highly aggressive posture?

That is the reality: deterrence is aggression.

To those in Washington and Canberra the threat from China

— such as it is — is China's ability to defend itself — to deter the deterrers, to stymie the US' ambition to dominate Asia.

That American ambition — to dominate Asia and the world — is what Australia is supporting by promoting the AUKUS pact.

But that ambition is not worth a single Australian fighting and dying for. It's not worth a single Australian life. That is why we must say no to AUKUS.

People in Asia do not want a new arms race; they do not need a revived Anglosphere alliance policing their region; they do not support an aggressive containment policy towards China.

The peoples of the Pacific have seen the tragic consequences of Western nuclear ambitions in the past — many still live with those consequences. They do not want AUKUS.

People in Port Kembla, in Wollongong, do not want a

nuclear base there. More and more Australians are saying that they do not want AUKUS. We do not want to be complicit in America's next war. We will not risk the future of humanity to prop up a declining and dangerous US empire.

We have to tell our politicians: stop listening to the hawks; stop the war-mongering. We want policies that deescalate conflict, that demilitarise; our tax dollars spent on welfare, education, public services, not poured into the gaping maw of the international arms industry.

And if you won't deliver those policies, we in the anti-war movement will fight to put those policies on the agenda.

Let's all take this opportunity today to recommit to that task, to build the movement we need to stop the war drive and stop AUKUS and say no nuclear submarines, no war with China. ■

Union members locked out, strike at JCU

JONATHAN STRAUSS

GIMUY/CAIRNS

UNIVERSITY MANagements WILL make the institutions' workers bear the brunt of their surplus-scravenging wherever they can. James Cook University (JCU) in northern Queensland is no exception.

In recent years job cuts have been followed by pay offers well below inflation. The latest round of "enterprise bargaining" for pay and conditions over the last 18 months has now extended to all the publicly-funded universities.

Eighty four people lost their jobs in the restructuring at JCU at the end of last year. Meanwhile, management's pay offer on April 27, after a year and a half of negotiations, amounted to an

annual rise of less than 2.5% to the end of 2026.

National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) members rejected management's proposal. Since JCU's agreement expired in the middle of 2021, inflation has been running at about 7%.

The NTEU does not want its agreement to confirm going backwards nearly 10% in real terms and, most likely, put in place further reductions in living standards for three more years.

NTEU members struck on May 4 and rallied at JCU's two larger campuses in Townsville and Cairns. They joined a nationwide campaign by the NTEU, with actions on nine universities in Victoria, NSW, Queensland and the ACT.

JCU is not a large university,

but a few dozen people were actively involved on each campus, supported by students who used it as an opportunity to discuss activism together for the first time.

Local councillor and Socialist Alliance member Rob Pyne attended the Cairns rally.

In the face of management threats to lock them out, some JCU NTEU members imposed work bans at the start of the same week. Management then refused to accept any work from these staff.

The bans would have had minimal impact — taking a couple of minutes out of classes to talk with students about the campaign — but management proceeded to lock these staff out anyway.

That generated some local media interest, and gave unionists an

opportunity to talk about why they were taking part in an NTEU national week of action.

Across the country, many events were organised involving dozens or hundreds of members. There has been more coordinated action between the NTEU branches at different universities this bargaining "round".

However, to make a significant dent on university managements' neoliberal plans, and the capitalist logic behind that, higher education workers need more industrial power. Building workplace organisation and the union's membership is the basis to create that. Then the union needs to be willing to use that power.

[Jonathan Strauss is the National Tertiary Education Union James Cook University Branch President. He writes in a personal capacity.]

Palestine activists challenge Zionist redefinition of antisemitism

RENFREY CLARKE

ATTEMPTS TO SHACKLE criticism of Israeli violations of Palestinian rights have rebuffed in recent months, as Palestinian activists and their supporters win endorsements for a Sydney Statement on anti-Palestinianism.

The Sydney Statement was drawn up in September 2021 by the Arab Australian Federation. It received backing last November from both houses of the South Australian parliament, which passed a resolution moved by Labor Party members and supported by the Greens. The Statement has also been adopted by two of Australia's largest municipal councils — Canterbury-Bankstown and Liverpool in Western Sydney.

Arab Australians decided to draft the Statement in the context of a worldwide attempt by supporters of the Israeli state to impose a Working Definition of Antisemitism, drawn up by a conference, in Romania in 2016, of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA).

IHRA's Working Definition has since been endorsed by governments of at least 30 countries, including Australia, as well as by the European Union and the United States.

Along with winning support from governments and other state bodies, advocates of IHRA's Working Definition have also campaigned to have its terms inserted into the policies and regulations of universities.

What, one might ask, could be objectionable about an initiative to keep fresh the memory of the World War II massacre of most of Europe's Jewish population — one of the most horrifying episodes in human history?

Doesn't the world need a clear, shared definition of antisemitism, an ugly throwback that refuses to vanish from humanity's collective psyche?

Unfortunately, the picture is not so straightforward.

IHRA DEFINITION A BOOBY-TRAP

The IHRA's Working Definition can fairly be viewed as a conceptual booby-trap, aimed at aligning the unwary with the policies — often very objectionable — of successive Israeli governments. It also represents a tool for bullying into silence anyone who takes issue with those policies.

The IHRA Working Definition begins: "Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities."

That seems unexceptionable. But, if someone shows



Protesters marks 75 years since *al Nakba* (the Catastrophe), in Gadi/Sydney, on May 13.

Photo: Zebedee Parkes

hostility to a particular Jewish individual, or institution, this may be for reasons quite distinct from their Jewishness.

Are we then seeing a case of antisemitism? Here, the IHRA's Working Definition is not clear. In a formula meant to be incorporated into laws and regulations, this can pose real dangers.

'Accusations of Anti-Semitism should not be used to shield Israel from criticisms of its oppression of Palestinian people.'

The sharpest objections to the Working Definition, however, relate to a list of 11 "contemporary examples of antisemitism" appended to it, and offered as guidelines for its application. Seven of these examples refer to the state of Israel. Some condemn genuinely reprehensible behaviour.

But what are we to make of this? "Denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination, eg, by claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavor?" Here, the task of formulating and illustrating a definition has been left far behind and we are into tendentious political argument.

So, is it antisemitic to call Israel racist?

Let's note a 2018 set of changes to the Israeli Constitution, which now includes the sentence: "Israel is the historic homeland of the Jewish people and they have an exclusive right to national self-determination in it."

What if you are a Palestinian, born in Palestine, or the child or grandchild of people who were? Sorry, you don't get self-determination in Israel. Jews, by

contrast, even if their ancestors have lived outside the present-day Israel for millennia, possess the automatic right to "return".

In a further insult to Palestinians, the 2018 constitutional changes stripped Arabic of its status as an official language. If that isn't racism, it can only be for the technical reason that "race" is not a valid

put upon, the reason may simply be that their behaviour has been uncommonly vicious. In any case, criticising their actions and policies is not the same thing as antisemitism.

Slipped into the IHRA's Working Definition's justified condemnation of anti-Jewish hatred and discrimination is something altogether different: a dishonest conflation of protest against the crimes of the Israeli state with antipathy to Jews as such.

The methods used by the IHRA's Working Definition to mislead opinion and stifle debate are a pitiable con trick. Still, there is no question that if used relentlessly enough, the devices rolled out in the Definition can score results.

JEREMY CORBYN SCAPEGOATED

Jeremy Corbyn, British Labour Member of Parliament, had a long record of defending Palestinian rights, before being chosen as leader in 2015. Almost from the day Corbyn was voted in, big-business media and the political right began a campaign slandering him as a collaborator with antisemites. It helped distract attention from the Conservative government's poor performance and the smear campaign helped secure a heavy election defeat for Labour in 2019.

The IHRA's Working Definition was adopted by the Scott Morrison Coalition government in October 2021. By then, the Definition had long been attracting praise from Labor's then-shadow foreign minister Penny Wong.

A cross-party Parliamentary Friends of the IHRA has been set up and is promoting the Working Definition. Last November, this association sent

an open letter to university vice-chancellors, urging the IHRA's Working Definition be adopted.

Will the CEOs of Australian universities, facing a squeeze on government funding, now defy organised pressure from pro-Israel politicians?

And will the vice-chancellors resist demands to censor teaching and discussion on Palestinian issues? Among those unconvinced is Sydney University branch president of the National Tertiary Education Union Nick Riemer. *The Guardian* on February 6 quoted Riemer as saying the Parliamentary Friends of the IHRA had launched an "outright attack on academic freedom".

"[The IHRA] will prevent universities doing what they're meant to do ... critically analyse the contemporary world without concern for lobbies."

OPEN LETTER TO VCS

Well over 100 academics and other educators, many of them Jewish, have now signed an open letter to vice-chancellors "opposing the adoption of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) Working Definition of Antisemitism in Australian Universities".

Unlike the IHRA's weasel-worded Definition, the Sydney Statement on Anti-Palestinianism being circulated by the Arab Australian Federation is a model of humanity and scruple.

"Anti-Palestinianism", the Sydney Statement explained, "refers to language and practices that direct discrimination, racism, hatred or violence against the Palestinian people".

"Accusations of Anti-Semitism," the Sydney Statement continued, "should not be used to shield Israel from criticisms of its oppression of Palestinian people and its defiance of international law". Then follows a list of principles, including one that spells out the right of Palestinians to their own state.

"Anti-Palestinianism is flagrant," the Sydney Statement noted, "when this right is undermined by settlements and acts of annexation, both illegal under international law".

Palestinians are also entitled to "all legitimate means of protest and advocacy", and to "engage in resistance against unlawful policies and practices of the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land".

They have the right, the Sydney Statement continued, to present their case to the world; to advocate their right of return; to freely commemorate Nakba Day, the anniversary of their expulsion; and to be free from collective punishment.

These are the most pressing human rights issues in the region of Palestine today. They need to be acknowledged by Australian governments at all levels. ■

Ten strategies to prevent another war in the

REIHANA MOHIDEEN

THE ASIA PACIFIC region is important for the US and the Global North imperialist bloc. They have: waged imperialist wars against liberation struggles in Korea, Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia; established military bases and military treaties; and organised political interventions to set up, or prop up, dictatorships, such as in Vietnam and the Philippines.

They relied on the newly industrialised countries' economic "development" model of integration, as in South Korea, especially after World War II when the primary motive was to stop the "spread of communism" in the region. Attacking and containing China and Russia was the centre-piece of this strategy.

Today, Washington's "pivot to Asia" and foreign policy strategy is similar, but contains important differences.

Aimed at curbing China's rising economic weight and its rapidly increasing influence in the Asia-Pacific, Washington wants to regain strategic balance through direct competition with China. It is also concerned about the alliances China is forming, such as with Russia.

The US' *National Security Strategy* paper, issued last October, which many saw as a declaration of enmity, branded China as its main rival.

In launching it, National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan asserted that the post-Cold War *détente* with Beijing "is over". At last October's Chinese Communist Party Congress, President Xi Jin Ping warned that "stormy weather" was ahead.

CAPITALISM'S MULTIPLE CRISES

The US' aggressive regional plan comes amid capitalism's multiple crises.

The working class today continues to suffer from the combined systemic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, the generalised crisis of capital, the climate emergency and rising inter-imperialist contestations.

These conjunctural crises are pushing the US towards a more aggressive path on the world stage.

US imperialism is embarking on a revitalised offensive of economic and defence-based initiatives to guarantee its pre-eminent standing in the



The US has leveraged the dispute over the South China Sea to militarise the region.

Image: Green Left.

capitalist world order into the latter half of the 21st Century.

A cornerstone of this strategy is the "triad of aggression": the AUKUS-IPEF-Quad initiatives.

AUKUS — the Australia-United Kingdom-United States "trilateral security partnership", under US command, strengthens collective security and represents a willingness to build a strong international counterforce to China.

The Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF) is a new neoliberal project targeting Asian markets for super-profit. It is expected to undermine and outflank China's own expanding economic influence in the region.

The Quad — Quadrilateral Security Dialogue — involving India, Japan, Australia and the US, issued a strong statement aimed at China to "strongly oppose any coercive, provocative or unilateral actions that seek to change the status quo" in the region at its summit last May in Japan.

This offensive is leading to a rapid escalation in the militarisation of the region.

THE SOUTH CHINA SEA DISPUTE

China claims sovereignty over the South China Sea and its estimated 11 billion barrels of untapped oil and 190 trillion cubic feet of natural gas. The area is also a major trade route.

Competing claimants are Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan and Vietnam.

The claimant countries' position is that under the United Nations' Convention of the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), they should have freedom of navigation through exclusive economic zones (EEZs) in the sea, and are not required to notify claimants of military activities.

The Permanent Court of Arbitration at The Hague issued its ruling in July 2016 on a claim brought by the Philippines against China, under UNCLOS, in favour of the Philippines on almost every count. The Philippines has renamed the areas it claims as the "West Philippine Sea".

Party of the Laboring Masses (PLM) candidate for Vice President, Walden Bello, described the ruling as a "flawed victory". "The Hague verdict is not an undiluted victory for the Philippines and, at least in the short term, it will not unlock the door to peace in the region," he said.

The PLM argues for a two-pronged approach involving both military de-escalation and multilateral agreements.

Unfortunately China has taken unilateral moves to secure what it sees as a defensive perimeter, instead of cooperating with other countries to reach multilateral agreements.

The PLM sees this as "bullying tactics driven by an aggressive nationalist stance".

China has unilaterally claimed more than 90% of the South China Sea, with its infamous nine-dash line

map, which has no historical or legal basis. It has moved to grab maritime formations such as Scarborough Shoal and Mischief Reef that are in the Philippines' EEZ. There is no excuse for this. China must engage in negotiations with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries that have legal claims in the South China Sea to bring about a peaceful territorial settlement.

However, Beijing's actions stem from an effort to expand its defence perimeter to protect its industrial heartland in south and south-eastern China from a potential attack from US bases and US ships that are within striking distance of the Chinese coast.

The US has leveraged the dispute over the South China Sea to its advantage, using it to militarise the region, signing various military agreements, including base agreements with the claimant countries.

The Philippines signed the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) with the US in 2014 ostensibly to secure territorial claims when, in fact, it increases US military access to East Asia and undermines efforts to peacefully acquire territory through the Hague Tribunal.

VIETNAM'S 'FOUR NOS'

By contrast, Vietnamese Communist Party Secretary General Nguyen Phu Trong reiterated to Beijing, during his visit to China last year, that his government would continue

its "Four Nos" foreign policy approach.

These are that Vietnam would not: join military alliances; side with one country against another; give other countries permission to set up military bases or use its territory to carry out military activities against other countries; and use force — or threaten to use force — in international relations.

Contrast this to Jose Manuel Romualdez, the Philippine Ambassador to Washington (and a relative of President Ferdinand Marcos jnr), who said the new administration might give the US permission to use its bases in the Philippines to support Taiwan in the event of hostilities. This only encourages US military adventurism.

The Marcos regime has also increased the number of US bases in the Philippines from five to nine.

The Philippines also hosted the largest ever military exercise with the US, in April, with 12,000 troops from the US, 5000 from the Philippines and 111 from Australia.

This has been described as the "recolonisation" of the Philippines.

China could stop building military bases in the South China Sea, while the Philippines should scrap the EDCA.

The process would build on previous ASEAN initiatives, such as the treaty that makes ASEAN a Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality and the agreement setting up the Southeast Asian Nuclear-Weapons-Free Zone.

Bilateral talks should focus on military de-escalation, not resolving the territorial conflicts.

ASEAN and China should schedule multilateral talks on a code of conduct to govern the maritime behaviour of all parties with claims in the South China Sea.

Should these confidence-building measures prove successful, then ASEAN and China could begin multilateral negotiations on exclusive economic zones, continental shelves and other sovereignty issues.

WASHINGTON'S DECLINE, TAIWAN

Although Russia's war in Ukraine is the leading trouble spot today, the Taiwan Straits and the South China Sea is a close second.

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Asia-Pacific

Taiwan is increasingly becoming a key piece in the US' militarisation plans for the region.

Washington's bellicose mood was underlined by US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan last year, followed by President Joe Biden's explicit commitment to assist Taiwan "militarily".

While Beijing considers its sovereignty over Taiwan non-negotiable, its strategy has been to promote cross-straits economic integration as the main mechanism that would eventually lead to reunification.

China's overall defensive position in the region has, some argue, changed to a "tactical offensive" position over the last two decades.

The trigger for this was Taiwan.

China launched missile drills in 1995 as payback following then-President Lee Teng-hui's US visit. It did so again in 1996 after Taiwan held its first democratic presidential election.

The Clinton administration responded by sending the USS *Independence* and the USS *Nimitz* to the Taiwan Strait in March 1996. This was the biggest display of US power in the region since the Vietnam War and it was intended to underline Washington's determination to defend Taiwan by force.

Washington's intervention revealed just how vulnerable the coastal region of east and south east China — the industrial heart of the country — was to US naval firepower. It was this realisation that prompted the change in China's strategy, which has been unfolding since.

The PLM recognises Taiwan's national sovereignty. At the same time we oppose the US plan to use the unresolved status of Taiwan to pursue war plans against China.

MASS ANTI-WAR MOVEMENT NEEDED

The US' war plans will have a disastrous impact on the peoples in the region. It will also have a disastrous impact on the climate crisis.

We know that the Global North imperialist bloc is prepared to fight China to the last Filipino standing, with no concern for the destruction of the region's ecology.

Some governments are no better: the Marcos regime is willing to be used as a US proxy in this war.

Building mass anti-war movements, based on regional and international solidarity, is key. We must use every platform, every arena of struggle to do this.

In the Philippines it took a peoples-power revolution to get rid of the two major US bases in the country — the Clark and Subic bases. On September 13, 1991, the Filipino Senate voted to reject a lease extension on the bases, ending almost a century of US military presence.

This only came about because of the large mass movement

pressuring the senate and individual Senators (despite Cory Aquino reversing her position and campaigning to keep the US bases).

The left played a crucial role in this movement. Today, as a recolonisation takes place, this is our challenge: we call it the "continuing revolution".

The PLM is campaigning for: **1** All US and British imperialist troops, together with other foreign military forces, be immediately withdrawn from Asia. All US military bases and facilities across the Asia-Pacific region must be shut down.

2 Close down Five Power Defence Arrangements bases as well as all other foreign military bases in the region.

3 Dismantle Asia-Pacific-based physical forces and intelligence interception infrastructure of the imperialist-controlled Five Eyes intelligence alliance and the Echelon intelligence network.

4 Firmly uphold the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone Treaty to urgently demilitarise the area and advocate and campaign for a broader Asia-Pacific-wide nuclear weapon-free zone treaty and regime.

5 Advance a common security policy by promoting progressive regional peace initiatives to foster a more peaceful and cooperative global order, especially for the Asia-Pacific region.

6 Support worldwide moves to boost the Non-Aligned Movement, especially its historically progressive principles to decrease and deescalate great power contentions.

7 Popularise the idea of a Shared Regional Area of Essential Commons, with a progressive code of conduct for the South East Asian Sea.

8 Intensify the struggles to dismantle authoritarian, ultra-rightist and fascist regimes in the Asia-Pacific region that serve to support US imperialism. Replace them with working-class states that will advance and build socialism.

9 Reject the US' AUKUS, IPEF and Quad (the "Triad of Aggression"). Push ASEAN, its member-states and other non-ASEAN countries in the Asia-Pacific region, to adopt an actively neutral and non-aligned stance concerning inter-imperialist rivalries, while rejecting any efforts to join the Triad of Aggression.

10 Expand and consolidate working-class solidarity and internationalism to resist and defeat US imperialism's global manoeuvres. Renew all efforts to bolster anti-imperialist/anti-fascist united fronts for militant mass struggles at national-regional-international levels.

[Dr Reihana Mohideen is National Council member of the Party of the Laboring Masses and the head of the party's international work. The above was abridged from a presentation to a Socialist Alliance-Green Left forum on resisting AUKUS in Naarm/Melbourne on April 18.] ■

'No to expansion of US military forces on Philippines soil'

AS PART OF its renewed military cooperation under the Enhanced Defence Cooperation Agreement (EDCA), the United States and the Philippines conduct annual joint military exercises. This year, more than 17,600 members of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the US military took part in Balikatan 2023 from April 11-28 – the largest such joint exercise to date.

The EDCA also allows for the US military to preposition military assets and construct facilities in select Philippine bases. Signed in 2014, the EDCA is due to be fully implemented this year.

Rasti Delizo, an international affairs analyst, longtime socialist activist in the Philippines and former vice president of the Bukluran ng Manggagawang Pilipino (BMP, Solidarity of Filipino Workers) spoke to *Green Left's Alex Bainbridge* about the EDCA and rising militarism in the region.

★ ★ ★

What is your response to the Enhanced Defence Cooperation Agreement?

The BMP joins the broad Philippine left movement in fully condemning this latest show of "iron-clad" loyalty by the Philippines reactionary state to back up United States imperialist designs in this part of the world.

We continue to struggle against any expansion of US military forces on Philippines soil, just as we also call for all US military troops to be kicked out of the Philippines and the broader Asia-Indo-Pacific region.

All US imperialist troops should be out of Japan and South Korea and its advisors out of Taiwan, the Philippines, Australia and wherever they are stationed. This includes the British imperialist military presence as a result of the Five Powers Defence Arrangements (FPDA) and Five Eyes Intelligence Security Arrangements. All of these imperialist forces have to be kicked out and expelled from all across the eastern hemisphere.

This is exactly the reason why China and Russia are combining forces in a strategic alliance to defend whatever interests they may have themselves against an offensive onslaught that US imperialism has been launching in this part of the world since 1991 – since the end of last century's Cold War.

But the US military says it is committed to the defence of the Philippines. What do you say to that?

Clearly that is part of the US foreign policy narrative that is trying to win over a lot of potential allies and puppet states such as the Philippines. Clearly the US is trying to show that they need to uphold a rules-based international order, to ensure that the international community remains stable and to allow for freedom of movement of international forces all across the Indo-Pacific.

These are just catch phrases that effectively aim to uphold, protect and preserve the imperialist world system under US control and dominance.

A recent ABC Australia report basically said that this US deal with the Philippines was a direct response the build up of Chinese forces in the South China Sea. What do you say to that?

Of course the Australian bourgeois media will, in a default mode, defer to the US imperialist narrative, which is already being cast wide across the world as a result of the AUKUS [Australia-United Kingdom-United States security] agreement and even the Quad [Quadrilateral dialogue] project.

The AUKUS/Quad and you could even say



US Army soldiers conduct a ship-to-shore air assault during Balikatan 2023. Inset: Rasti Delizo
Photo: US Indo-Pacific Command/Flickr

the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework – which I would call an imperialist triad in this part of the world – is essentially trying to run a counter narrative against – not necessarily Moscow or Beijing – but the independent working class movement's position, which says no to all imperialist designs, offensives and manoeuvres across the world.

So effectively this kind of statement is trying to hide the real motive, by saying "We're here to protect you", which is exactly what the Philippine state leadership accepts.

Under Philippines President [Ferdinand] "Bong Bong" Marcos's leadership they deliberately and consciously accept this, because they aim to remain puppets of US imperialism in this part of the world.

The term "interoperability" [under the EDCA] ... essentially means that the Philippines military forces will now come under the direct command and control of the US imperialist military structure.

The entire Philippines military establishment and state security forces will now act as a single unified military unit – a unit inside the US imperialist war machine together with those of Taiwan, Australia, South Korea, Japan and India.

Because this is how the interoperability concept actually operates as a mechanism. And this is exactly what they want to do to ensure that the AUKUS, Quad and any globalised NATO in the Asia-Pacific region will operate in the future.

[The full interview will appear soon at greenleft.org.au.]

South Korea pivots to conflict

DAE-HAN SONG &
ALICE S KIM

SOUTH KOREA'S far-right President Yoon Suk-Yeol is rushing the country headlong into the middle of the new Cold War that the United States is waging against China.

Yoon's aspiration to position South Korea as a "global pivotal state" is turning South Korea into a bigger cog in the US war machine and stakes South Korea's security and economic future on a declining US-led global order. Yoon's support of the US global order has taken him on a flurry of visits and meetings around the world, from the virtual Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) summit to the NATO summit in Madrid, to high-level meetings in Japan and the US.

Most recently on his April 26 US visit, Yoon and US President Joe Biden announced the "Washington Declaration" to deploy US nuclear-armed submarines to South Korea — reintroducing US nuclear weapons to South Korea for the first time in more than 40 years.

When viewed against North Korea's development of nuclear weapons as a strategic deterrent, these weapons in South Korea will more likely fuel a nuclear arms race rather than check North Korea's nuclear program. As former South Korean unification minister Jeong Se-hyun observed, four out of North Korea's six nuclear tests occurred in response to the hardline stance of conservative South Korean administrations that refused to dialogue with North Korea.

Ultimately, Yoon's actions are putting South Korea on a dangerous path that further destabilises inter-Korean relations and antagonises China, its biggest trading partner. All the while, the move also forsakes the Korean government's duty to advocate for reparations from Japan



The alarming return of US nuclear weapons to South Korea follows far-right president Yoon Suk Yeol's posturing over the development of nuclear weapons at home.

Graphic: Green Left

for Koreans exploited under Japanese colonialism and to prevent the discharge of radioactive waste from the Fukushima nuclear reactor, which lies upstream from South Korea.

'GLOBAL PIVOTAL STATE'

The alarming return of US nuclear weapons to South Korea follows Yoon's posturing in January to develop nuclear weapons in South Korea as part of his evolving extremist hardline North Korea policy. More broadly, it forms part of

Yoon's greater foreign policy agenda of inserting South Korea in the security architecture of the US's anti-China Asia-Pacific grand strategy.

The Yoon administration's "Strategy for a Free, Peaceful and Prosperous Indo-Pacific Region", like Yoon's recent activities, follows closely from the US Indo-Pacific Strategy, with the goal of building and enforcing a US-led "rules-based order" in the region with "like-minded allies" to contain China.

For all its declarations of fairness and playing by the

rules, this US-dominated "rules-based order" is at odds with the actual multipolar world taking shape around the world, as well as the multilateral nature of the internationally agreed-upon United Nations-based order.

The US has been leading the creation of regional minilateral bodies such as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) or the IPEF as part of its "hybrid war against China" and engaging in unilateral aggression toward China in the form of "military, economic, information and military warfare".

For example, the US is setting

the stage to dispute China's actions in the South China Sea not through the UN Law of the Sea Convention, which the US has not signed onto, but rather through the Indo-Pacific security framework. This allows the US to target China's actions while exempting its own naval operations from the oversight of "global bureaucrats" — i.e. the UN.

Furthermore, despite calling for an "open" and "free" Indo-Pacific, the US is waging a "chip war" by pressuring its Indo-Pacific allies to impede China's access to semiconductor chips,

SOUTH KOREA

Documents reveal sexual exploitation and abuse in the

BARRY SHEPPARD

THIS YEAR MARKS the 70th anniversary of the end of the Korean War.

Much is known about the Korean "comfort women" — a euphemism for women forced into sexual slavery by the Japanese colonial government during World War II. However, newly released South Korean government documents reveal that the sexual exploitation of Korean women continued long after Japan's colonial rule ended in 1945 — facilitated by the Korean government and in full knowledge of the United States military, the *New York Times* reported on May 3.

The article's headline, "South Korea Created a Brutal Sex Trade for American Soldiers" is

shocking and to the point.

"Special comfort women units" were created for South Korean soldiers, and "comfort stations" for US-led United Nations troops during the Korean War. In the post-war years, many of these women worked in *gijichon*, or "camp towns" built around US military bases, reported the *NYT*.

In September, 100 former comfort women won a landmark compensation case against the South Korean government for the sexual trauma they endured. The Korean Supreme Court found the government guilty of "justifying and encouraging" prostitution camp towns "to help South Korea maintain its military alliance" with the US and earn US dollars, reported the *NYT*.

"It also blamed the government for the 'systematic and violent' way it detained the women and forced them to receive treatment for sexually transmitted diseases [STDs]."

"South Korea's history of sexual exploitation is not always openly discussed," said the *NYT*. "When a sociologist, Kim Gwi-ok, began reporting on wartime comfort women for the South Korean military in the early 2000s, citing documents from the South Korean Army, the government had the documents sealed."

Gyeonggi province, the heavily populated region surrounding the capital, Seoul, "considered it 'urgent to prepare mass facilities for comfort women to provide comfort for UN troops or boost their morale', according to

documents submitted to [the Supreme Court] as evidence.

"The local government gave permits to private clubs to recruit such women to 'save budget and earn foreign currency'. It estimated the number of comfort women in its jurisdiction at 10,000 and growing, catering to 50,000 American troops.

"When President Richard M Nixon announced plans in 1969 to reduce the number of US troops stationed in South Korea, the government's effort took on more urgency. The following year, the government reported to Parliament that South Korea was earning \$160 million annually through business resulting from the US military presence, including the sex trade...

"Society mostly dismissed such women as *yanggalbo*, or 'whores for the West', part of the price of maintaining the US military presence in the country after the war.

"The officials who called us patriots sneered behind our back, calling us 'dollar-earning machines'," said one of the women who brought the suit to the Supreme Court.

Why were US troops in South Korea in the first place? The US first invaded Korea in 1945, a consequence of the victory over Japan in WWII. During the war, there was a left-wing resistance movement against the Japanese occupation. This movement had connections with the Chinese Communist Party, which was also fighting the Japanese who occupied part of China.

one of the world's most critical high-tech resources today.

The Yoon administration has been contributing to the buildup and reinforcement of this “rules-based order” through its participation in the Indo-Pacific framework, global NATO and by consolidating the US-Japan-South Korea trilateral military alliance.

In May last year, a few weeks into his term, Yoon participated virtually in the IPEF meeting. In December, the administration adopted its own Indo-Pacific Strategy which committed to “stabilise supply chains of strategic resources” and “seek cooperation with partners with whom we share values” — i.e. IPEF states. South Korea is now being recruited into the US chip war against China.

In June last year, the participation of South Korea (including Yoon's establishment of a NATO diplomatic mission) and three other Asia-Pacific states in the NATO meeting expanded NATO's reach from the North Atlantic into the Pacific. This year, Yoon paved the way toward consolidating the US-Japan-South Korea trilateral alliance by forgoing demands that Japan take responsibility for its colonial exploitation of Korean workers. Then, during his March visit with Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, he resumed the controversial 2016 General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) intelligence-sharing pact, laying the groundwork for direct military coordination between South Korea and Japan.

In April, US, Japanese and South Korean officials met and agreed to hold missile defense and anti-submarine exercises to counter North Korea and “promote peace and security in the Indo-Pacific region”, with special emphasis on “peace and security in the Taiwan Strait”. As a further

show of commitment to the US global war strategy, in an April 19 Reuters interview, Yoon reversed his position on Ukraine and raised the possibility of sending weapons, and exacerbated the US's provocations in Taiwan vis-a-vis the One China principle, to the ire of Chinese officials.

A PIVOT TOWARD PEACE

Activists in South Korea and abroad have been ceaselessly working toward peace on the peninsula, with key struggles waged along the very sites of US military installations in the Asia-Pacific region encircling China, such as the construction of the military naval base in Gangjeong village. They have also been part of long-standing transnational activism to procure a peace treaty for the Korean War.

As these activists and US scholar Noam Chomsky have recently reiterated in the face of the April 26 US-South Korea nuclear weapons deal, only a peace treaty ending the Korean War would lay the basis for denuclearising the Korean peninsula, bring an end to the US military occupation of South Korea, and move toward peace and stability in Northeast Asia.

[Abridged. This article was produced by Globetrotter. Dae-Han Song is in charge of the networking team at the International Strategy Center and is a part of the No Cold War collective. Alice S Kim is a writer, researcher, and translator living in Seoul. Her publications include “The ‘Vietnamese’ Skirt and Other Wartime Myths” in *The Vietnam War in the Pacific World* (UNC Press, 2022) and “Left Out: People's Solidarity for Social Progress and the Evolution of Minjung After Authoritarianism,” in *South Korean Social Movements* (Routledge, 2011).] ■

SOUTH KOREA



Photo: KCTU/Facebook

Government's war on unions

CLIVE TILLMAN

ONE HUNDRED AND thirty thousand South Korean workers rallied across 14 cities on May 1. Organisers estimate 80,000 took part in the country's capital, Seoul. It was the largest turnout for a political rally in the country since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The rally was endorsed by the two major union confederations, the radical Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU) and the traditionally more conservative Federation of Korean Trade Unions (FKTU).

In Seoul, the rally focused on the repressive anti-union stance of right-wing president Yoon Suk-yeol. The record-breaking attendance rates reflect the popular discontent towards the government. Participants carried signs with slogans such as “Out with Yoon Suk-yeol” and “General Strike Now”.

Workers' frustration was well summed up by Kim Byul-sam, head of the Seoul Regional Organisation for the Medical Workers Transport Union, who said: “Because the Yoon Suk-yeol government continues to suppress workers and trade unions, we have come out to show them that workers are here to fight against the government.”

Anti-union witch hunt

The May Day rallies were tainted by tragedy, however, involving the death by self-immolation of 50-year-old construction unionist Yang Hoe-Dong. His death was the result of false criminal charges imposed on him as part of the government's war on militant unionism.

Yang was one of a number of unionists from the Korean Construction Workers' Union (KCWU) targeted by the Yoon administration in a crackdown on union militancy on construction sites.

Yang had been under police investigation since February for his involvement in striking a collective agreement with construction companies in his area that delivered substantial benefits to union members in the hiring and firing process. He was falsely charged with “racketeering” and scheduled for questioning before the Gangneung branch of the Chuncheon District Court on May 1.

Before his death, Yang issued the following post on a popular construction union social media page: “I carried out union activities lawfully and without committing crimes, but [the charges applied to me] are obstruction of business and intimidation, not a violation of assembly law. My pride cannot abide this.”

Kim Jeong-bae, head of the Gangneung branch of the KCWU, said that “Yang would often say that the arrest warrant had been requested based only on the management's side of the story, and that the investigation [into him] was far-fetched”.

The Yoon administration assumed office on May 10 last year and immediately proclaimed that it would take a hard-line stance against union “militancy” in order to enforce the “rule of law in labour-management relations”. Tough

criminal sanctions for non-compliance have been advocated as part of a “war on unions”.

Yoon directly intervened in a nationwide truck drivers strike in December, by issuing a return-to-work order that imposed criminal penalties of up to three years jail or a fine of ₩30 million (A\$33,500) for non-compliance.

The administration's hard-line measures and its direct intervention in an industrial dispute have attracted criticism from a range of international commentators, such as the International Labour Organisation (ILO), which said return-to-work orders violate workers' freedom of association under international law.

The Yoon administration attempted to raise maximum weekly working hours in March from 52 to 69. This was met with a fierce backlash from unions and community organisations. Consequently, the government had to backpedal on the proposal — at least temporarily.

The attempt to lengthen the working week coincides with wider attacks on the union movement. As at the time of writing, more than 950 union officials have been summoned for questioning by police, under government-directed “special investigations”, and 16 unionists are detained on criminal charges.

The government also used the authoritarian Cold War-era *National Security Act* to raid the KCTU's offices on January 18. The following day, police raided eight construction union offices affiliated with the KCTU and FKTU. Dozens of police raided the KCTU office again on January 20.

The raids have been condemned by international human rights organisations, the United Nations and the global union movement. Owen Tudor, deputy general secretary of the International Trade Union Confederation said: “This is a shameful attack on trade unions and, as such, an assault on democracy itself in South Korea. As an ILO member state, the Korean government has a duty to uphold ILO standards on freedom of association.”

The global civil society alliance, CIVICUS, has downgraded South Korea's civic space rating from “open” to “narrowed”.

Union fightback

The Korean union movement has vowed to stand up to the government's attacks. The KCTU has publicly declared plans for a general strike in July. This will involve strikes across various industries and daily street protests over two weeks. Individual unions have also announced sector-wide strikes.

Healthcare workers staged a nationwide strike on May 11, in protest at the government's *Nursing Act*, which specifies roles and responsibilities for nurses. Further protests by medical workers are planned for July.

The Korean Metal Workers Union has announced a nationwide strike for May 31 and the KCWU is planning a nationwide strike in July in the construction sector.

Public service and transport workers unions are planning strikes in September and October.

Korean War

This movement was suppressed in southern Korea by the US. In Korea's north, Soviet troops moved in, blocking the US from occupying the whole peninsula.

US troops have remained since 1945 in what became South Korea, while the Soviet troops withdrew from what became North Korea.

While the US military was fully aware of South Korean comfort women being provided for US troops during the Korean War, it was not concerned about the abuse these women endured at the hands of pimps and US soldiers, but was more concerned about controlling STDs among its own troops.

Six former camp town women told the NYT they were used for political and economic gain

by their government before it abandoned them.

The plaintiffs now want to take their case to the US.

“The Americans need to know what some of their soldiers did to us,” said one of the women, who endured severe beatings and other abuse from US soldiers, also known as GIs.

“[U]nlike the victims of the Japanese military — honored as symbols of South Korea's suffering under colonial rule — these women say they have to live in shame and silence,” the NYT noted.

“Between 1960 and 2004, American soldiers were found guilty of killing 11 sex workers in South Korea,” said the NYT. But what about those GIs who were never charged for their violence and abuse? ■

TURKEY

Erdoğan to face second round in presidential election

PETER BOYLE

THE TURKISH GENERAL election on May 14 had mixed results. On the one hand, the right-wing incumbent presidential candidate, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, failed to get 50% and so there will be a second round of voting on May 28. In addition, while his Justice and Development Party (AKP) won the most seats in the national assembly, with 267 out of 600 seats (28 fewer than it won in the 2018 election) it will have to rely even more on its right-wing ally, the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), to pass legislation.

On the other hand, the left and pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) was forced at the last minute to contest as the Green Left Party (YSP) and as a result had its assembly seats reduced from 67 to 61. It remains the third largest party in the national assembly. The YSP has lodged appeals to the electoral board, and stands to win up to six more seats if its evidence of electoral irregularities is accepted.

The May 28 presidential runoff will be between Erdoğan and Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu from the Republican People's Party (CHP), the traditional Turkish



The banner reads: 'Our line is the 3rd way', symbolising the way beyond Islamic and Turkish nationalism towards a free, democratic Turkey.

Photo: HDP Europe

nationalist (Kemalist) party, which has more recently promised to peacefully resolve the Kurdish question and to release former HDP chairman Selahattin Demirtaş, imprisoned since 2016 on trumped up terrorism charges.

The HDP and YSP supported Kılıçdaroğlu presidential candidacy and did not field their own presidential candidate.

On May 14 Kılıçdaroğlu won 44.9% while Erdoğan won

49.5% (with a lot of cheating and manipulation).

HDP co-chairs Pervin Buldan and Mithat Sancar and the co-spokespersons of the YSP Çiğdem Kılıçgün Uçar and İbrahim Akın said in a May 15 joint statement "that the election results cannot be seen as a success for us".

"Our party was subjected to detention and arrest operations for political reasons from the beginning of the election

campaign. We faced government crackdowns throughout the entire campaign with the Kobani and HDP closure cases. These lawsuits led to an atmosphere of pressure during the election campaign. The closure case hung over our heads like a sword of Damocles, preventing a free and fair election in Turkey. Conspiracies and closure cases were used in an attempt to bar the will of millions of our voters.

"During the election campaign, the government detained and imprisoned hundreds of our friends through a new political operation every day, creating conditions that undermined our most fundamental right, the right to democratic politics."

The statement added that the Erdoğan government encouraged racist attacks on their activists and "used all kinds of public resources and power to their advantage during the election period".

"The government crackdown and election fraud tipped the balance in the results of the election.

"The biggest conspiracy against us was the prevention of the HDP from entering the elections. We had to work with the Green Left Party in a short time to not leave our people

without a choice against this trick and conspiracy. We faced difficulties in preparing and publicising the Green Left Party for the elections in a short time.

"These difficulties were increased with the censorship and isolation imposed by the mainstream media. The disadvantages of organising a new alliance (Labour and Freedom Alliance) reflected in the field and the problems caused by the fact that our proposal was not implemented, despite our insistence as the Green Left Party to enter the elections with one list and one party."

The HDP and YSP promised to make a self-critical evaluation of their campaign and to "fulfill the historical role, mission, and responsibility given to us by our people concerning the presidential elections, which are heading towards a second round".

"We have a tradition that does not limit the struggle for democracy to ballot boxes but organises life and society," the joint statement continued.

"We will never give up our struggle for the Democratic Republic. We will continue our struggle in the strongest way possible to realise our political goals and end the one-man regime." ■

WESTERN SAHARA

Polisario Front marks 50 years of struggle

RON GUY

THIS YEAR, THE people of Western Sahara are marking the 50th anniversary of the founding of their liberation organisation, the Polisario Front, on May 10, 1973.

The armed struggle for independence began on May 20 that year, with the attack and occupation of a Spanish military garrison at El Khanga.

Two years later, following a request of the United Nations General Assembly, the Special Decolonization Committee sent a fact finding mission to Western Sahara and its neighbouring countries, to assess the situation and make proposals for a process to decolonise the territory.

The mission, issued its report on October 14, 1975, which confirmed that the people of Western Sahara want independence and "rejected the territorial claims of both Morocco and Mauritania". The Polisario was also recognised in the report as the major political force in the territory.

The International Court of Justice (ICJ) considered the legal status of Western Sahara before its colonisation by Spain in 1884 and issued an advisory opinion



Saharawi protest Australian company Incitec Pivot's trade in Western Sahara's phosphate resources.

Photo: Western Sahara Resource Watch

on October 16, 1975, in favour of the self-determination of the Saharawi people.

Morocco invaded Western Sahara in 1975, against the various interventions of the UN. An agreement between Spain, Morocco and Mauritania for the partition of this non-autonomous territory took place in Madrid, on November 14 that year. The military invasion by Morocco and Mauritania of the territory was met with strong resistance from the Polisario Front.

The Saharawi question and the success of the Polisario Front made possible the creation of the Saharawi Arab

Democratic Republic (SADR) in 1976, now a full member and founder of the African Union. This followed the withdrawal of Spanish occupation forces, while the UN General Assembly adopted resolution 34/37 of November 21, 1979, recognising, the Polisario Front as the legitimate representative of the Saharawi people.

A UN-brokered ceasefire, for the vote of self-determination commenced in 1991.

Unfortunately, human rights were not part of the mandate. Australia sent peace keepers to monitor the ceasefire and the referendum process.

Unfortunately, Morocco — which was in charge of registration for the referendum — obfuscated the process, throwing up obstacles with violence and intimidation.

The ceasefire was broken by Morocco on November 13, 2020, after the attack on Saharawi civilians. They were peacefully demonstrating against Morocco's opening of an illegal breach in the UN monitored buffer zone of El-Guerguerat, in the south-west of Western Sahara.

The Polisario had hopes that the UN would live up to its promise of decolonisation.

A recent report by the Collective of Human Rights Defenders in Western Sahara details war crimes and crimes against humanity and Morocco's use of drones and smart bombs targeting civilians and transport vehicles.

As Moroccan King Mohammed VI counts his fortunes made from the exploitation of Western Sahara's natural resources, the Saharawis and Moroccans count the deaths of sons and daughters in a war that could be ended by allowing the last colony of Africa to have its long-awaited vote of self-determination.

The war would end soon, if countries and companies lived up to their ethical, sustainable governance commitments and procurement policies.

Unfortunately, Australian company Incitec Pivot and New Zealand's Ravensdown and Ballance Agri-Nutrients have been plundering Western Sahara's phosphate. The revenue is likely to end up in the coffers of the Moroccan regime and be used to finance its brutal occupation and war in Western Sahara.

[Ron Guy is a unionist and member of the Australian Western Sahara Association.] ■

Michael Lebowitz, presente! (1937–2023)

FEDERICO FUENTES

MARXIST ECONOMIST
Michael A Lebowitz passed away at home on April 19. With his death, the international left has lost one of its most insightful and original thinkers, whose contributions to reviving Karl Marx's vision of socialism are essential reading for activists.

Lebowitz built on his groundbreaking work, *Beyond Capital: Marx's Political Economy of the Working Class*, to compile an indispensable collection of texts for 21st century socialists, many of which have been translated into numerous languages. These ranged from theoretical books dedicated to critically rethinking the errors of 20th century socialism, such as *The Contradictions of Real Socialism: The Conductor and the Conducted*, through to shorter education pamphlets aimed at new activists, such as *Know your enemy: How to defeat capitalism*.

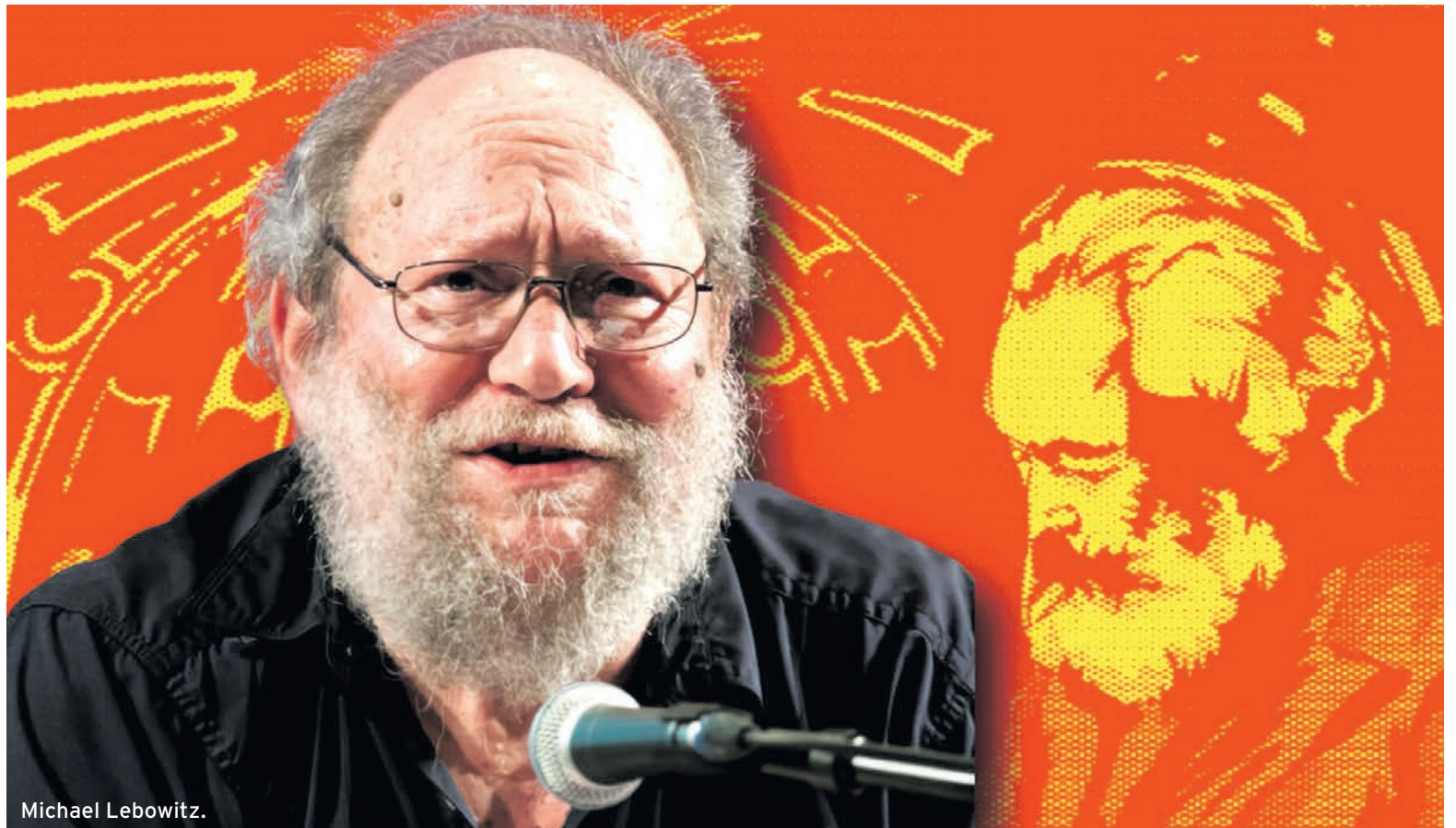
Green Left readers would know Lebowitz from his articles and interviews that appeared in the paper and its sister publication, *LINKS International Journal of Socialist Renewal*. They might also know Mike from his visits to Australia to speak at the 2009 World at a Crossroads conference and the 2016 Socialism in the 21st Century conference, both co-hosted by *GL*.

Mike came from a working-class background. In an interview with Mark Fischer, recently republished on *LINKS*, he outlined how early life experiences stoked his interest in Marxism: "Like many working-class people, I was determined to make money when I was young. I went off to business school [in the late 1950s] — although lack of money meant I had to work during the day and attend school at night.

"I was studying economics with a focus on marketing research, so I ended up in an electrical manufacturing corporation doing market research full-time. As I did this, I saw lots of contradictions ... There I was, taking economics classes at night, learning the neo-classical orthodoxy about how prices are set through perfect competition and all that. Yet during the day I was working in a corporation that was involved in price-fixing...

"That whole experience led me to conclude that I was being lied to ... I began to read Marx. I was not yet an activist, however: it was a purely intellectual rejection of the fact that I was being told lies about the way the world worked."

Having enrolled at the University of Wisconsin in 1960, Mike got his first taste of activism with the Wisconsin Socialist Club, Cuba solidarity campaigns and participating in the founding of Students for a Democratic Society. He also collaborated with the New Left journal *Studies on the Left*. Like most activists in the United



Michael Lebowitz.

States, Mike spent the early '60s campaigning against the Vietnam War and in support of the civil rights movement.

"From my experience of working with student movements and other campaigns," he told Fischer, "I saw the basic truth that people transform themselves through their struggles. That idea became the central concern of my political world view — how do you put people into motion; how do you develop their capacity to self-transform?"

Mike moved to British Columbia, Canada, in 1965 where he took up a job teaching economics and economic history at Simon Fraser University, remaining there until retirement in 2000. There, he got active in local community organising as well as the left faction of the social democratic New Democratic Party (NDP).

Talking about this time as NDP Party Policy Chair, Mike said: "I was the policy chairman during its period of government in British Columbia, constantly pushing for policies that would lead people to understand the role of their struggles.

"Thus, I didn't just say, 'Let's nationalize the forest industry'. I fought for the books of the forest industry to be opened to the government and to working-class scrutiny, for forms of workers' control within industry. In other words, modes of struggle that I saw would allow people to develop a greater understanding of how the society worked and to make further demands, rather than simply shouting the slogan, 'Nationalize everything under workers' control', at them."

Mike later left the NDP, concluding it was "just another electoral machine rather than a means of self-liberation of the working class". He developed some of the lessons he learnt from his time in the NDP in a chapter dedicated to social democracy in his 2006 book,

Build It Now: Socialism for the Twenty-First Century.

Mike chose to dedicate himself to reviving Marx's ideas of working-class self-liberation, human development and revolutionary practice. In a 2009 interview with Christopher Kerr for *GL*, Lebowitz outlined his belief in the need for "a rejuvenation of Marxism", one based on going "back to Marx's premise and goal, which was the concept of human development".

"It is no accident that the *Communist Manifesto*, written in 1848 with Frederick Engels, talked about how the free development of each depends

wrote in "Hats and men: Marx's faulty symmetry", "Marx understood quite well that not only is capital produced within [capital-labour] relations but that there is as well a second product, a crippled human product."

What is therefore required, he told Fischer, is a "focus on the many-sidedness of the working class. We have to attempt to understand all its aspects under capitalism. When you do that, you don't focus simply on the struggles of trade unionism. You look at all the needs and struggles of the workers, all the ways in which they attempt to satisfy their needs as humans in this inhuman society".

Mike chose to dedicate himself to reviving Marx's ideas of working-class self-liberation, human development and revolutionary practice.

upon the free development of all. By free development, they meant the development of human potential and capacities. In Marx's writings from 1844 through 1858, and in *Capital*, he kept talking about developing a rich individuality and rich human beings. He argued that capitalism distorted human development, while socialism was necessary for it."

In 1973, Lebowitz began the work of writing down his ideas and tackling head-on what he called "one-sided Marxism". The result was *Beyond Capital*, first published in 1992 and which won the 2004 Deutscher Memorial Prize for its second edition.

In this seminal work, Lebowitz took aim at a Marxism that focused solely on capital's tendencies and viewed workers as mere wage labourers — a commodity within the cycle of capital reproduction — rather than human beings with their own needs. In contrast to this one-sided Marxism, Lebowitz

It was workers' desire to satisfy their human needs, together with their ability to transform through struggle — and not their place in capitalist production — that gave workers their revolutionary potential for Lebowitz. In "What makes the working class a revolutionary subject?" he wrote: "Struggles are a process of production: they produce a different kind of worker, a worker who produces herself or himself as someone whose capacity has grown, whose confidence develops, whose ability to organise and unite expands. But why should we think this is limited to wage struggles?"

It was a shared belief in the revolutionary potential and creativity of ordinary people engaged in struggle that brought Mike and Marta Harnecker together in the '90s. Excited by the revolutionary developments unfolding in Venezuela, along with an invitation from then-president Hugo Chavez, they moved to Caracas in 2004.

I first met Mike in Caracas in 2005, where he and Marta warmly welcomed me as if we had been comrades for many years. This warmth, I quickly found out, was extended to all they met, always keen to strike up discussions and listen.

By the following year, I was working with them at the Miranda International Centre (CIM), a space they helped set up for Venezuelan and international intellectuals to contribute their ideas to the revolution.

For the next three years, we shared many experiences travelling around Venezuela meeting with organised communities and workers to learn from their struggles, and then often inviting them back to CIM to debate with intellectuals from Venezuela and overseas. All the while, Mike continued to plug away at writing, including numerous papers for Chavez and his ministers that occasionally got converted into pamphlets for free, mass distribution and discussed on Chavez's weekly TV program.

The two moved back to Canada in 2011. From there, they continued writing and helped establish a program on Socialism for the 21st Century in Cuba. But with Marta's passing in 2019, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and Mike's own health issues, his work rate slowed down.

His last few years were dedicated to following the activities of Vancouver Ecosocialists and going through old papers to find texts that might be useful to new activists. With the help of long-time friend and comrade Bill Burgess, Mike set up a website where he collected these writings, michaelalebowitz.com.

Along with this invaluable collection of text, Mike leaves behind his sister, Gloria, two daughters, Jessica and Rachel, and Camila Piñero Harnecker, Marta's daughter. ■

10 new albums to get you on the streets

Mat Ward rounds up the best music that related to April's political news.

1 **Manif Hits** (*La Bo Des Luttes*) Various Artists

Norwegian pop star Girl In Red was playing a gig in Paris on April 2, as strikes against President Emmanuel Macron's pension reforms intensified across France. When she asked her audience to teach her some French, they erupted in chants of "Macron, démission!" ("Macron, resign!").

Two days later, French dance music record label DÔME released a compilation album featuring songs based on the strikers' chants. It includes the feminist slogan and dance "À cause de Macron" ("Because of Macron"), which highlights the ways in which his pension reforms target women. "As we were afraid the movement would run out of steam, we thought of a compilation whose profits would be donated to the strike funds," said the label. "Beyond the financial help, the objective is above all to keep the flame alive." It was released on respected music platform Bandcamp. Yet Bandcamp workers were also planning to strike.

2 **Common Nation of Sorrow** Rachel Baiman

The DÔME artists' fellow French musicians Maladroït released their new punk album on April 7, which blasts anti-union billionaires. On the song "Rich Assholes Won't Save the World", they sing: "Jeff Bezos won't make a change. Modern slaves cry in the warehouse ... Elon Musk won't make a change, sending cars in outer space." It came as Musk, who is facing lawsuits for sacking employees without adequate notice, lost \$US13 billion (\$20 billion) as drama unfolded across his empire.

Days earlier, Musk's fellow US citizen Rachel Baiman released her new folk album, which takes aim at his ilk. On the catchy "Self Made Man", the daughter of a political activist sings: "How many men do you think it takes to make a self made man? How many fingers must he step on to do the best he can? Do you think you want to sit around and play your part in a corner of his self made plan?"

3 **Body of Work** Carsia Blanton

Baiman's fellow US folk artist Carsia Blanton released her new album on April 21, which is cut from the same activist cloth. The Philadelphia-based veteran protester describes her music as "anthems for a world worth saving". On the album's song "Out In The Streets", she sings: "Now they call it a riot 'cause we ain't keepin' quiet. But if you're out there listenin' we know you don't buy it. And they

say we been stealin', but who's the real villain? When we can't even make a livin' and they're out there makin' a killin'. So all my friends in the streets tonight we go singin'. All my friends who're down and out, we're gonna fight."

Blanton's fellow Philadelphians Poison Ruin released their new album on April 12, which adds a twist to their chosen genre of medieval-inflected punk. "Instead of knights in shining armor and dragons, it's a peasant revolt," said vocalist Mac Kennedy.

4 **Poor Little England** The Undercover Hippy

Over in the medieval motherland that inspires Poison Ruin, British PM Rishi Sunak's wife lost £49 million (\$91 million) on April 17. The fact the couple can afford such losses sparked renewed debate about the wealth gap in Britain. Britain's biggest-selling singles artist of the 1980s, Shakin' Stevens, released a new album on April 28, that slams such inequality. On its single "All You Need Is Greed", he seethes: "Welcome to the firm, welcome to the house of lies. Greed is all you need, to take the suckers for a ride." His new direction is perhaps not as surprising as some have made out, since he started his career playing Young Communist League events.

Still less surprising is Poor Little England, the new album from former drum and bass emcee The Undercover Hippy, which skewers generations of British leaders, from former PMs Margaret Thatcher and Boris Johnson to the current rule of "Rishi Rich".

5 **Killing the Messenger** David Rovics

Showing the continuing dire state of British politics, April 11 marked four years since WikiLeaks co-founder Julian Assange was imprisoned in London's high security Belmarsh prison. Four days earlier, veteran protest singer David Rovics released his new Assange-themed album, *Killing The Messenger*, on streaming services. "Wikileaks was too effective, it had to be beaten out, let there be no doubt," he sings on the title track. "Now they want to kill the messenger, while most of us stand by, just waiting for this prisoner to die."

Award-winning media analysts *Media Lens* — who have long pointed out the media's role in smearing Assange — showed on April 18 how journalists were killing another messenger. Rather than publishing the highly classified military documents leaked by US airman Jack Teixeira a week earlier, *The Washington Post* and *New York Times* helped get him arrested instead.



6 **With A Hammer** Yaeji

Teixeira's leak showed how the US was spying even on allies such as South Korea, all while sabre-rattling against China and accusing it of spying. Australia upped the Beijing-bashing on April 24, by announcing an extra \$19 billion for missiles to point at its biggest trading partner, China, on top of the \$368 billion it is spending on nuclear-powered submarines to aim at it. The Sydney "Warmongering" *Herald*, which has been red-baiting China for months, reported the news as "admirable".

The hypocrisy would not be lost on New York-based South Korean artist Yaeji, who released her new album on April 7. Its title and artwork reference the large hammers she has fashioned to deal with her anger at anti-Asian racism. Expressing such views is unlikely to limit her audience for one big reason: Her cutting-edge, innovative electronica is probably the coolest-sounding music you'll hear all year.

7 **Stolen From God** Reg Meuross

Apparently trying to make amends for such racism, British aristocrats who benefited from slavery were pushing their country to pay reparations, news website *Quartz* reported on April 24. "Britain traded more slaves than nearly any other country, transporting 3.1 million Africans to its

colonies in the Caribbean, as well as to North and South America." Documenting it all is the new album from white British folk singer Reg Meuross, released on April 7. The album, subtitled "a song cycle unfolding the history of England's involvement in the Transatlantic slave trade", generated rave reviews.

But for an insight from those directly affected, check out Dave Okumu's album, released one week later. "I Came From Love is a tapestry of the Black experience that explores ancestry, the legacy of slavery, what it means to exist in an unjust society, and Okumu's own family history," say its liner notes.

8 **Bastard Jargon** Nakhane

In the most notorious outpost of colonial racism, South Africa, queer house music musician Nakhane discussed their new album on April 5, which "probes deep cultural and political questions". Discussing the song "Tell Me Your Politik", which suggests finding out someone's politics before having sex with them, they said: "Especially as a South African, my entire existence has been politicised. So 'Tell Me Your Politik' was just a song that I felt was supposed to sound ferocious but fun at the same time."

They were speaking to National Public Radio, which said on April 12 it was no longer posting content on Twitter after the social media platform's owner, Elon Musk, mislabelled it "state-affiliated media" and

then "government-funded media". *Quartz* pointed out Musk's companies receive more government funding than NPR. That came after Musk made Twitter a more hostile place for trans people.

9 **Call Me Terry** Terry

Musk often complains about establishment media. So he surprised many when he was pictured sitting next to media baron Rupert Murdoch at this year's Super Bowl, despite Murdoch's papers calling Musk a "\$61 billion joke". Murdoch was back in the headlines on April 18, when he paid \$US787 million (\$1.2 billion) to voting machine firm Dominion for falsely reporting that it rigged the 2021 US presidential election.

Melbourne indie band Terry released their new album on April 14, which takes aim at Murdoch. "Call Me Terry is the most political album yet from a band that was already nearly monomaniacal in its study of Australia's rotted colonial legacy," said US music publication *Pitchfork*. "It's spread across the album's sleeve, each song paired with a photo of a politically toxic site — like the headquarters of mining giant BHP or a building belonging to Rupert Murdoch's News Corp."

10 **Requiem for the Earth** Scarlett Cook

Also dissecting Australia's rotted colonial legacy is Terry's fellow Melbourne

The bloody truth about the British Empire

ALEX SALMON

TIPU'S TIGER IS a mechanical toy that depicts a tiger mauling a British soldier, created in the 1790s for the Tipu Sultan, who became ruler of the Indian Kingdom of Mysore in 1782. Tipu fought against the forces of the British East India Company from the 1760s until his death in the aftermath of the Siege of Seringapatam in 1799.

It is appropriate, therefore, that Tipu's Tiger, a symbol of resistance to British rule, graces the front cover of *Guardian* journalist and author Richard Gott's *Britain's Empire: Resistance, Repression and Revolt*.

Gott also wrote *Cuba: A New History* (2004) and *Hugo Chavez: The Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela* (2005). *Britain's Empire* covers more than a century of resistance to British colonial expansion, from the French and Indian wars of 1755-63 through to the Great Indian Mutiny of 1857-58.

Colonial powers including Britain have always claimed that they are a driving force for civilisation and progress. However, in reality, violence and repression have always reinforced colonial rule – a fact often overlooked by mainstream historians from the Victorian era to today.

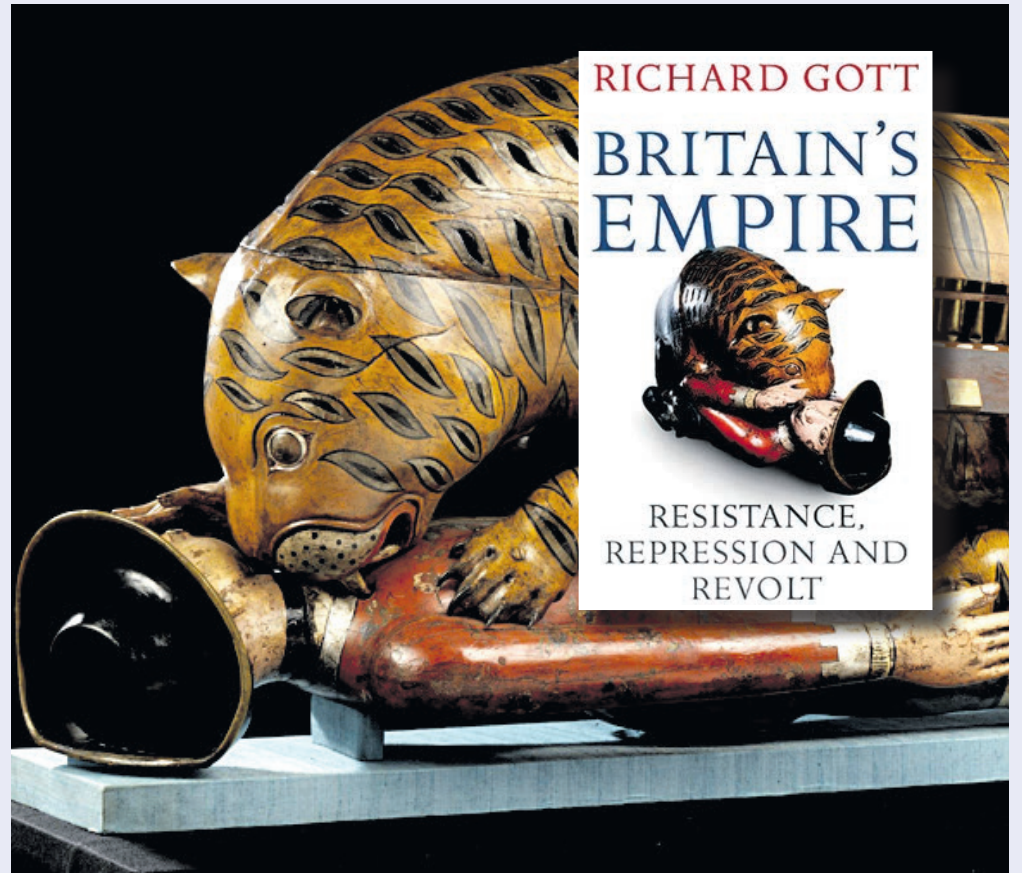
Britain's Empire places the revolutionaries and rebels who stood up to the British empire and the bloody repression that the British authorities used to crush resistance at its centre. It spans the globe, from Ireland, North America, South Africa, India, Australia to New Zealand.

Resistance to British colonialism in Ireland had existed since the Anglo-Norman invasion and Gott examines the creation of Catholic peasant secret societies such as the Whiteboys as acts of resistance against the Anglo-Protestant landlord class that dominated. It was in response to these societies that the Loyalist protestant Orange Order was created in 1795.

Inspired by the French Revolution, the Irish Republican United Society of Irishmen was formed in 1791 and in 1798 staged a rebellion against British rule. Further unsuccessful revolts were staged in 1803 and 1848. Irish resistance often continued in Britain's colonies, such as at the Vinegar Hill rebellion in Sydney in 1804.

Tragically, the Irish, along with Scottish peasant farmers driven off their land due to the highland clearances, convicts and political prisoners sent to Britain's far-off gulags, as well as soldiers, sailors and settlers press-ganged from the ranks of the unemployed, became the oppressors in Britain's colonies.

In the Americas, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Canada, Rhodesia and Kenya, white settlers simply took over land that was not theirs, often slaughtering, and even purposefully



Britain's Empire: Resistance, Repression and Revolt
By Richard Gott
London, Verso Books, 2011
478pp

exterminating, the local Indigenous populations when they resisted British colonial expansion.

Ironically these groups were often as much as a thorn in the side of British rulers as Indigenous resistance. For example, in the American War of Independence (1775-83), revolts such as the 1808 New South Wales Rum Rebellion and the 1854 Eureka stockade in colonial Australia, the Boer resistance in South Africa from the 1830s onwards and the French Canadian revolt of 1837-38.

Between 1755 and 1858, British imperial expansion continued to be resisted. Gott puts the men and woman of the Pontiac in North America, Tacky and Nanny in Jamaica, Papineau in Quebec, Wickrama Sinha in Ceylon, Myat Toon in Burma and Lakshmi Bai in India at the centre, their communities in resistance.

While this resistance was often bloodily crushed, British imperialism suffered a number of defeats such as in the American War of Independence. The Haitian slave rebellion forced British soldiers to withdraw in 1798 and the Javanese resistance in the 1810s thwarted Stamford Raffles' dreams of the East India Company's expansion in South-East Asia.

Moreover, as with the many white settler revolts, failed Indigenous and slave revolts forced concessions from the British. In the aftermath of the great slave revolt in Jamaica (1831-32), despite

the revolt being crushed, it accelerated Britain's abolition of slavery in 1833.

Gott's century-long narrative culminates with the Great Indian Mutiny of 1857-58 in which a mutiny in May 1857 of Indian sepoys employed by the British East India Company spread to a nationwide revolt, uniting Hindu and Muslim soldiers. It was only defeated by the East India Company, with much brutality and bloodshed, in September 1858.

After the defeat of the revolt, the control of India was taken from the East India Company by the British Crown. While *Britain's Empire* ends at this point, the cycle of resistance, repression and revolt continued well into the 20th Century with the partition of many of its former colonies in Ireland, India and Palestine and the bloody suppression of revolts such as the Mau Mau in Kenya in the 1950s.

Even after India gained its Independence in 1947, with the rest of its colonies gaining independence in the 1950s and '60s, British imperialism continued to play a key role as junior partner to the United States. Most British historians and commentators continue to sanitise it.

Tipu's Tiger is one of the many treasures that Britain plundered from its colonies. Many of these former colonies have demanded their treasures be returned.

Originally written in 2011, *Britain's Empire* is still relevant. It shows the Empire's brutal reality and put at the centre those resisting its expansion, providing an inspiration in the continued fight for a better world.

Rachel Berman



Common Nation of Sorrow

ME TERRY

TRIZON CHURCH, SUTHERLAND, NSW. ITS ST FAMOUS FAITH IS FORMER PRIME ST MORRISON. WHEN ELECTED, MORRISON D "BURN" FOR ALL AUSTRALIANS AND LIVED IN MIRACLES. DEDICATED MIRACLES HE FURNACE, ITS NOT FUNNY IN THE FURNACE FOR YOU, JENNY, JENNY, JENNY SAYS.

TURIES THE MELBOURNE CLUB, COLLINS STREET, MELBOURNE. MEMBERS INCLUDE EX PRIME MINISTERS, GENERALS, CHIEF JUDGES AND BUSINESSMEN. (LET ME) PEEK INSIDE THE PALACE THE PALATINE. I NEED AN "IN" FOR BEING IN THE TOC. TING ALL THE WALLS DOWN. WAITING ON A WAR CLWYN. NA, THE NEWFUND. CENTRALES CRASHED. (LET ME) TAKE THE D. TAKE THE TRIP. TAKE THE LAND. ALL THE DOGS AND ALL THE H. LEAVE THEM HERE. HERE TO REST. WHEN THE DOGS ARE D. HE SEE YHA. SEAT IF RIPPED AND SKAYED. HE SEE ME THINKS HE HEARD BHP BUILDING, COLLINS STREET, MELBOURNE.

BHP IS THE LARGEST MINING COMPANY IN THE WORLD. IN OCEAN IN AUSTRALIA AND INDONESIA. TODAY THEY FROM EVERYWHERE. THIS STOLEN WEALTH CONTINUES. FOLKERS OF THE PRIVILEGED AND THE SPOOKY. WE LET THEM GLASS. WITH IT WAS YOU. WAS THE THIRD TIME. NOT THE BUCKY NANT. WITH WHAT? ADD DUCK EVERY TIME. THE WHAT? A. EIGHTHUS. ITS A ROLLING PIN. IN NOT FACE. ADD IT UP WITH THE YHA. WAS THE FOURTH TIME. NO, THE LAST TIME. E. YHAKE A SHREDDER. TIP UP THE GAME. WHAT A WINNER.

BALCONIES NEWS CORP BUILDING, SOUTHBANK, MELBOURNE. FAMILY VIOLENCE IS PREVENTABLE. THOSE WITH A MOUTHPIECE REFUSE TO DO ANYTHING. WHAT DOES POWER LOOK LIKE? GAMBLER IS BURNING IN FIRE. THERRS A BUL HMMI CENTER IN KENTUCKY. FILTHY WARD, FILTHY TEAMS. FALSHARD FILM. SPLINTERED SCARCE AND SHINY BOMPL. ARE THE YEHAS? ARE THEY JUNK? DO THEY MOUNT? ARE THEIR HANDS UP? ARE THE WHAT? DO THEY MOUNT? THE BALCONIES ARE BURNING. THE LUZI ARE LOW. THINKING OF COSTBAIL, THINKING OF LANE. OF THE WORK THEY'VE DONE. THINKING OF NANO. DINNER / I UN VARY. CLOUD TRAVELLING THROUGH THE VADRY. ITS COOL. BUT IT WILL BE. HOT LAYER. GETTING USED TO NEW KILN. FROM THE KITCHEN TABLE. WALKING ON DREAMS. YOUR DAY. DIFFERENT TO MINE? STAY IN AT NIGHT. AND ON TOP OF ME. WORK IN JILLY. THE LAW LIES. IT ENDS EVENTUALLY. ITS THE SAME. BUT THEY CAN'T JER FOUR, THE FOUR. TODAY THE HEAT COMES UP SHUKKI. ITS IN YOUR EYES. STAYED. CHIL WAREL WITH YOU AND OUR. MAY THE WAVE ROLL UP FOR FACE. THE FOUR, THE FOUR.

musician Scarlett Cook, on her new gothic classical album. "We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land on which this album was written and recorded," she writes in the liner notes for the record, released on April 19. "Sovereignty never ceded." On the opening track, the multi-instrumentalist soars from a whisper to a wail as she froths: "We can't escape what we have done. We must face what we have become. Desensitised emotionally numb. Slave to the machines and the guns ... We can no longer take from her. We can no longer deface her. We can not replace her. Earth Mother."

A fortnight before its release, activists were fined for taking non-violent direct action for the climate. Meanwhile, the Green Party said dealing with Australia's Labor government was "like negotiating with the fossil fuel industry".

[Mat Ward has been writing for *Green Left* since 2009. He wrote the book *Real Talk: Aboriginal Rappers Talk About Their Music And Country* and makes political music] ■

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GRAHAM MATTHEWS

THE FEDERAL BUDGET delivered by Treasurer Jim Chalmers on May 9 has been billed as a “cost of living” budget. Yet the paltry relief handed out to those living on welfare is overshadowed by cuts to vital services — notably the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and a failure to raise Medicare rebates across the board.

Chalmers said the budget “provides cost-of-living relief that is responsible and affordable and prioritises those most in need”. There are some modest additional payments for those on welfare (amounting to less than \$3 a day in most cases) and the Parenting Payment to single parents has been extended until their youngest child turns 14.

But its \$14.6 billion cost-of-living plan is dwarfed by the \$74.3 billion it will rip from NDIS over the next 10 years.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said on April 27 that the government would restrict the annual growth of NDIS to 8% by 2026, down from the current 14% per year.

At the time, Albanese estimated that the “reboot” would save the federal budget \$50 billion over 10 years. He failed to explain how the cuts to NDIS funding growth would be achieved.

The announcement also seems to cut across guarantees offered by minister in charge Bill Shorten. Shorten told the National Press Club on April 18: “The NDIS has literally changed the lives of hundreds of thousands of Australians ... and it saved a disability system from collapse. The truth is that NDIS is the difference between a life and a living death for many vulnerable Australians.”

Labor’s attitude to NDIS has rapidly hardened and its cutting blades have been sharpened. Between Albanese’s “reboot” announcement and the budget, the amount Labor intends to “save” in NDIS funding has grown from \$50 billion in 10 years to more than \$74 billion — an additional cut of almost 50% in just 12 days!

Labor’s threat to slash-and-burn NDIS funding gives the lie to Chalmers’ claim that the budget would offer “more help for some of the most vulnerable in our community”.

Exactly how Labor intends to “save” \$74 billion over 10 years in NDIS funding was not spelt out in the budget papers. But there is speculation that eligibility for NDIS funding will be significantly restricted.

Exactly what people — or which disabilities — will no longer be eligible is unclear.

However *The Australian*, together with former Coalition NDIS Minister Linda Reynolds, are running a concerted attack on neurodiverse people, arguing that too many children with autism are being allowed to enter (and remain) on the scheme.

They want the abandoned “independent assessments” gimmick to be revived to restrict NDIS access and reduce the size of NDIS plans.

The decision to cut more than \$74 billion from NDIS over the next 10 years also makes a mockery of Labor’s much-vaunted *NDIS Review*, headed by Professor Bruce Bonyhady (inaugural Chair of the National Disability Insurance Agency) and Lisa Paul. The *Review* is not expected to report its findings in September.

“The community have been blindsided by this decision,” Australian Greens disability spokesperson Jordon Steele-John said on May 10. He said people expected more from Labor “which promised to co-design decisions with the disability community”. He said Labor had broken a commitment “to co-design” the NDIS and “has pre-empted the findings of the *NDIS Review*”.

Chalmers said on budget night that “one of the things that makes this the best country in the world is our shared belief that every Australian should be able to access affordable, reliable healthcare”.

But bulk billing rates for GPs (where the patient pays no gap for a consultation) are plummeting. Estimates are that less than half (42.7%) of GP visits are now bulk billed, with the average out-of-pocket cost of a standard consultation being \$40.25.

Labor’s response is to commit \$3.5 billion to increase financial incentives for GPs to bulk bill: but only for children or those with a concession card.

For the majority of patients, rebates will not increase in real terms. Already, a significant number of GPs are saying that the incentives on offer are too little to encourage them to return to bulk billing, even for children.

Ten years ago, 82.4% of GP visits were bulk billed. Nine years of the Coalition reduced bulk billing rates by almost half. Labor’s tinkering will not restore universal access: at best it may simply slow the decline.

Labor will raise military spending from 2.04% to 2.3% of gross domestic product over the next 10 years as part of its commitment to the US strategy to militarily encircle China.

While it offered only \$14.6 billion for cost-of-living relief, the government will spend \$19 billion on AUKUS submarines, long-range missiles and other weapons over the next 10 years. An additional \$30.5 billion has been confirmed for the five years between 2027–28 and 2032–33.

At the same time as it spends big on the military, Labor is refusing to force resource companies to pay their fair share of tax.

Canberra has sought to only marginally increase the tax charged on oil and gas companies’ super profits (the Petroleum Resource Rent Tax – PRRT) with gas exports, which is ballooning in response to the war in Ukraine. However, the increased tax take is only expected to be \$2.4 billion over five years.

At the same time, profits for Woodside Petroleum (responsible for the Scarborough gas field off the coast of Western Australia), just one of the major gas exporters helping cook the planet, increased by a massive 228% in just one year between 2021 and 2022 to \$9.6 billion!

While it promises relief and opportunity, Labor’s budget primarily delivers for the very big end of town at the expense of those living with disability, in particular.

The big pay-off for the wealthy will come next year, when the Stage 3 tax cuts drop. However, in the meantime, they may enjoy the fruits of their inflated dividends: largely untaxed.

[Graham Matthews is a member of the Socialist Alliance.] ■



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ECOSOCIALISM 2023 SPECIAL FEATURE

A WORLD BEYOND CAPITALISM

This issue of the Links supplement
features three Marxists who will speak
at the upcoming Ecosocialism 2023
conference, Kohei Saito (left), Huei Ting
(centre) and Farooq Tariq (right).



Kohei Saito's Marxism for the age of climate emergency

GARETH DALE

KOHEI SAITO'S 2020 book *Capital in the Anthropocene* became a surprise bestseller in Japan, demonstrating a wider thirst for anti-capitalist analyses of environmental catastrophe and a popular openness to degrowth-oriented solutions. In *Marx in the Anthropocene*, released in English, he grounds his argument more deeply in Karl Marx's own writings.

In both these books, building on his earlier *Karl Marx's Ecosocialism*, Saito advances a compelling case that the growth imperative is innate to capitalism and not, as liberal degrowthers would have it, an option. Its progressive negation would be communism, a form of society that, with its democratically-planned resource allocation, common ownership and solidarity ethic, appears uniquely able to manage the downscaling of rich-world material and energy use that human survival now urgently requires.

Along the way, he develops critiques of "productivist" interpretations of Marx, of the fetishism of productive forces, of "techno-utopianism" and the idea that

technology is "neutral" between social formations, and of the "flat monism" and eco-modernism of Bruno Latour. And, finally, he asks Marxists to set aside a century of productivist growth-mania and to recognise that in this age of ecological cataclysm, any clear-eyed communist strategy, at least in the rich world, must involve degrowth. This, moreover, was the conclusion that Marx was reaching in his final, post-*Capital*, years. Saito has uncovered a Marx for the age of environmental emergency.

Saito's case for degrowth, though the most urgent of his arguments, is the least original so need not detain us for long. He portrays the extreme gravity of the multi-stranded environmental crisis, summarises the usual laundry list of pseudo-solutions (green growth, efficiency and technology, climate Keynesianism, circular economy, etc) and then, with a sharp knife, dissects and dispatches each one.

Instead of accumulation and growth, the primary goal of production should be meeting people's — all people's — basic needs. Given that the mother of all human needs is a habitable planet, we

must re-evaluate what sufficiency means within a limited materials and energy envelope. The case, in essence, is for private sufficiency but public luxury and abundant leisure.

Saito's next step goes beyond the orthodox degrowth account. For him, growth is not its own cause. The line of causation flows from the form of value in capitalist society to gross domestic product, not the reverse. At the root of the growth imperative, and the growth paradigm, is capital accumulation. I find this a refreshingly direct approach, in contrast to some degrowth manifestos that fudge the question of capitalism. Possibly some do so for reasons of "capitalist realism" (the gerbil cannot or dare not imagine the grasslands and mountains beyond its cage), but more often it follows from seeing the Soviet economies as non-capitalist. This obliges them to seek the roots of the growth compulsion in something other than the mode of production, whether that be a vague descriptor for the era of high growth ("industrialism," "modernity"), a cultural attribute or a psychological drive. Saito, rightly in my view, sees

China and the USSR and other so-called Communist economies as state capitalist, and accordingly theorises the core of "industrial modernity" as the compulsive, systemic drive to accumulate capital.

Saito's books represent the next step in a transformation of our understanding of "Marx's ecology". For his Marx, human society arises from nature: it is simultaneously of it and against it, in that humans are conscious of their relationship to nature and consciously shape it, in a relationship that develops historically. The term that captures this is metabolism, referring to humanity's interaction with nature through social labour — a relationship that becomes increasingly riven the more it is subsumed under capital.

Marx's concept of metabolism has been explored and developed by a number of Marxist thinkers over the last hundred years: by Georg Lukács in the 1920s, Alfred Schmidt in the 1970s, István Mészáros in the 1980s, and Paul Burkett and John Bellamy Foster at century's end. It featured in Saito's 2017 book *Karl Marx's Ecosocialism*, and in

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Marx in the Anthropocene he elaborates the concept, with attention to its three dimensions: disruptions of natural processes, spatial rifts, and the rupture between nature's temporality and that of capital. These correspond to three forms of "metabolic shift" by which capitalists "fix" or displace the ecological crises that their system occasions: technological shifts (e.g. developing chemical fertiliser to maintain soil fertility), spatial shifts (e.g. displacing ecological burdens onto the Global South) and temporal shifts (e.g. displacing the full consequences of carbon dioxide emissions this century onto our descendants in the next).

Saito shows that towards the end of Marx's life, his thought shifted quite radically in respect to all three of these dimensions. When poring over Marx's notebooks from the 1870s and 1880s, Saito noticed that the German communist, who we would suppose would be busy completing the second and third volumes of his masterpiece, *Das Kapital*, was in fact reading biology, chemistry and geology. This was not a leisurely pastime, an old man's crossword puzzles. He had not forgotten the unfinished volumes. Rather, he was deepening his understanding of what he was coming to see as the fundamental contradiction of capitalism: its tendency to ravage and despoil nature, to saw off the branch on which it sits. He recognised that the productive forces, as Saito puts it, "do not automatically prepare the material foundation for a new post-capitalist society but rather exacerbate the robbery of nature". And with exploitative practices come instrumental ideologies: the reification of the natural environment, positing it as dumb resources for use rather than as a realm of vital life within which we coexist. Humanity's alienation from nature, which Marx had discussed abstractly in his early works, was now redescribed, with the benefit of new findings from the natural sciences, as the metabolic rift.

The development of Marx's ecological critique, Saito reveals in an astute and indispensable passage of *Marx in the Anthropocene*, was tightly connected to his re-evaluation of the progressive character of capitalist modernity, including his earlier optimism on technology and economic growth and on the potential of capitalism to bring emancipation to colonised peoples.

When Marx "jettisoned productivism as the essential component of his view of human history," Saito argues, he had to also reconsider the other side of the same coin: Eurocentrism. If industrial capitalism demolishes the natural world, devastates communities and plunders and brutally subjugates the Global South, the sense in which the high-tech West can in any way represent history's vanguard was called into question.

Against this backdrop, Marx began to reconsider the process of communist transition, notably in his 1881 "Letter to Vera Zasulich". It is only one letter, but one of significance that Marx redrafted again and again. In it, he advocates a return of modern society to the "archaic" type of property found in Russia's communes, and rails against the suppression by British colonialists of indigenous communal land ownership in India. The letter should be read, Saito concludes, as the crystallisation of Marx's "non-productivist and non-Eurocentric view of the future society", a view that is best characterised as "degrowth communism".

That Saito reads Marx as a degrowth communist is eye-catching, but it should not come as a bolt from the blue. It builds on decades of extensive research that has steadily undermined the perception that Marx was simply a booster for economic growth and material progress. Before Saito's book, some were familiar with the "ecological Marx": a critic of the growth paradigm and of the trampling of nature under capitalist "progress", an



For a social order that tackles the climate crisis democratically, with major input from social movements and mutual aid, Saito looks to the recent climate protests.

Photo: Zebedee Parkes

advocate of careful stewardship of the environment — including a concern of environmental limits and a commitment to emancipation not only of the working class but of "the fish in the water, the birds in the air, the plants on the earth". However, given that for well over a century, Marxists have gravitated toward projects for overseeing capitalist states (social democracy, Stalinism), with the growthphilia and biophobia that these invariably entail, Marx was generally read through a productivist lens, with his "degrowth communist" side prised out. This has even influenced translations of his work into English.

In view of the weight of these readings — the leaden presence of which, we should not forget, drew from the massive power of capitalist states — Saito is sensible to formulate his case adamantly, even provocatively. In response, some have sought to rebut his thesis with productivist quotes from Marx. Yet these are invariably from his earlier work, which is to miss Saito's point. His case is not that Marx avoided all productivism and techno-utopianism but that he evolved. The more he learned of ecology and the ecocidal power of capital, the more he turned to "green" and anti-colonial positions — initially "eco-socialism" (the subject of Saito's first book) and, in his final years, "degrowth communism" (the subject of *Marx in the Anthropocene*). Those today who share Marx's philosophy, having seen more of capital's Earth-shattering power than he, would logically follow the same trajectory.

I've been immensely impressed and largely persuaded by Saito's trio of books on Marxism and degrowth, but on two points I would like to probe a little.

First, Saito raises the question of why, if Marx proposed degrowth communism, Marxists historically have tended instead to endorse "productivist socialism". His answer is entirely textual and Engels-centric. Friedrich Engels "largely determined" — no less — "the course of Marxism in the 20th century". This is a staggering claim, and one that sits uncomfortably with the facts — which is why the chapter on Engels in *Marx in the Anthropocene* has a pernickety feel. By Saito's own admission, Engels co-wrote (or at the very least signed his name to) texts that he flags as "degrowth communist", notably the 1882 preface to a Russian edition of the *Communist*

Manifesto. Moreover, Saito is critical of the earlier (pre-*Capital*) Marx himself for his "productivist socialism".

All this has left this reader puzzled as to why culpability for Marxist productivism is piled exclusively on the quill of Engels. Would not a materialist response to the question make more sense? It could begin with the absorption of Marxist theory, from the 1870s onward, into projects that rest either on an accommodation between classes within capitalism (such as trade unions) or on the management of capitalist states (by social democracy and the various official "Communisms").

Saito posits that the more Marx learned of ecology and the ecocidal power of capital, the more he turned to 'green' and anticolonial positions — initially 'eco-socialism' and, in his final years, 'degrowth communism'.

Secondly, we should turn to Saito's treatment of political strategy and the capitalist state. Saito's books are formidably sharp and thorough in their delineation of capitalism in its economic and ecological and imperial aspects. He persuasively mobilises Ulrich Brand and Markus Wissen's concept of the "imperial mode of living" to portray the world's division between a dominant North with its unsustainable consumption levels based on resource transfers from, and the environmental ruin of, the Global South. But when turning to politics, and in particular the capitalist state, the grip falters. Nor does Saito explore how Marx's conception of agency — workers in struggle, with allies from other oppressed classes and populations — could be updated and reimagined today. How can the goal of degrowth communism be squared with the strategy of proletarian revolution? What obstacles confront it and how can they be addressed?

Adapting the quadrant of ideal-typical scenarios from Geoff Mann and Joel Wainwright's *Climate Leviathan* (2018), Saito sketches alternative futures of "climate fascism" (regimes that do little to mitigate climate change, instead protecting the wealthy and punishing refugees and the socially and

environmentally vulnerable), "climate barbarism" (much as fascism but with mass rebellions that fracture social institutions without replacing them, yielding systemic chaos), "climate Maoism" (dictatorships that impose climate mitigation measures despotically but in a relatively egalitarian manner), and "climate X" (a social order that tackles the climate crisis democratically, with major input from social movements and mutual aid). For agency that can begin to steer towards X, he looks to Gen Z and recent climate protests, and finds hope in Erica Chenoweth's suggestion, made famous by Extinction

Rebellion, that if a social movement can mobilise 3.5% of the population the prospects of success are excellent (although Saito recognizes the 3.5% goal is still some way away).

In the here and now, he highlights efforts to extend democracy beyond parliament and into production through workers' co-ops; the recent "citizens' assembly" experiment in France; and the revolutionary potential of civic municipalism, exemplified by Barcelona en Comú: local governments in revolt against state-imposed neoliberal policies that sponsor workers' cooperatives and the "solidarity economy" (which comprises fully 8% of Barcelona's workforce). He finds inspiration, too, in the public fruit tree initiative in Copenhagen, and in Alberto Garzón, a Communist and currently Spain's Minister of Consumer Affairs, who has drawn attention to the limits of growth and called on the public to reduce their meat consumption. (By per capita meat consumption, Spain is in the world's top five.) Taken together, these movements prefigure what could and should become "a new *Front Populaire* (Popular Front) in defence of the planet."

In striking contrast to his chapters on Engels or Lukács, here the critical scalpel is blunted. The 8% figure is accepted

at face value, without assessing which of the cooperatives resemble regular capitalist businesses. The role of Garzón likewise: we can (and should!) applaud his stand and his rhetoric, but in truth he has been able to do little to alter Spain's meat consumption, let alone promote degrowth in other sectors. For its part, Barcelona en Comú has indeed promoted the social economy, from major cooperatives to smaller service-sector ventures, but its intentions (say, to abolish short-haul aviation, or to ramp up local production) greatly outweigh its achievements. This is bound up with the fact that on most issues, with AirBnB the standout exception, it avoids conflict with big capital or the central state, and, relatedly, it has been losing support from the radical social movements (such as the Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca) which had provided the energy behind its original tilt for office. A similar scepticism is warranted apropos the French experiment in participatory democracy.

When discussing trade unions, Saito's critical edge returns. Although he gives them a significant role in his progressive scenario (X) in leading the battle for reduced working hours and democratised workplaces, he sees unions as a compromised force, co-opted by capital. Yet this only prompts the question: should we not apply the same critical approach to the "social economy" and The Global Municipalist Movement? Can co-ops not also be co-opted?

In these areas, Saito skirts around the problem of the capitalist state, and refrains from supplying his otherwise trenchant Marxological analysis. He could, for example, have drawn attention to how *The Civil War in France* fleshed out Marx's commitment to revolutionary democracy and workers' power — on this issue too, alongside ecology and Eurocentrism, Marx grew more radical as time wore on — and considered how the strategy advanced in that pamphlet, of dismantling the capitalist state, could be updated for the twenty-first century.

How, for example, might the accelerating tendencies to environmental breakdown and agricultural disruptions influence the prospect of winning working-class support to a program of communist degrowth? Saito's reflections in these areas are terse: state power is required to address the climate crisis; an over-reliance on the state however raises the prospect of "climate Maoism"; the solution therefore must be that popular influence on and within the state be intensified (as with municipalist movements) and production be democratised (as with the cooperative movement). There is an unmistakable flavour of utopian mutualism: the project of establishing islands of socialism within capitalist society through cooperatives, left-led local councils, and the like. It's a tradition whose roots, in Europe at least, extend back to Owenism, the mutualist Fabianism of Eduard Bernstein, and Proudhonism, although Saito is no orthodox adherent of either mutualism or utopianism, from which he maintains a critical distance.

These wrinkles notwithstanding, Saito's project has been transformative. It has given a much-needed spur to conversations between degrowth and Marxist traditions; it has shaken up our understanding of the Marxist tradition in an original and meticulously evidenced way; it is helping to reconstruct Marxism for the "Capitalocene", the epoch of accelerating catastrophe. And it will, I hope, catalyse reconsideration by Marxists of our engagement with movements oriented to "the environment", the realm that is, after all — it should always have been obvious — the ground on which we stand or fall.

[Gareth Dale teaches politics at Brunel University is the author of, most recently, *Reconstructing Karl Polanyi*, and writes for *Spectre*, where this was first published.] ■

PAKISTAN



Imran Khan arrested, what next?

■ FAROOQ TARIQ

THE SITUATION IN Pakistan is highly unstable and volatile, with political and economic crises intensifying and exacerbating each other. The May 9 arrest of Imran Khan — former prime minister and leader of the Pakistan Tehreek Insaaf Party (PTI) — has triggered violent reactions from his supporters, leading to attacks on military installations and civilian buildings. The military, which had previously supported Khan, showed restraint towards the violence, but has also vowed to take legal action against those involved in the attacks.

The Supreme Court ordered Khan's release on May 12 but he remains "under protection" of security forces in Islamabad.

Khan came to power in the 2018 general elections that were alleged to be rigged in his favour by the military establishment. Their relationship broke down after 2020 due to several factors. Khan's personality was more self-centred and egotistic, leading to clashes with military generals over the appointment of high officials. Moreover, the economy was not growing, leading to mounting economic pressures on both sides.

While Khan refused to normalise relations with India, the military commander-in-chief saw it as a key strategy. Khan also held a sympathetic view of the Taliban government in Afghanistan and tried to cosy up to the head of the intelligence service, ISI, to split the army's loyalty. Khan repatriated more than 5000 Pakistani Taliban from Afghanistan under the guise of rehabilitation, a move opposed by military generals. He was in favour of negotiating with the Taliban government, leading some to speculate that he wanted to become a better version of the Taliban than the original.

Khan's differences with the military on key issues, such as the economy, India-Pakistan relations and the Taliban government in Afghanistan, seem to have contributed to his downfall. His adventurist strategy to counter his arrest has backfired, leading to widespread arrests of his party's activists and the party being on the run. In his bid to become prime minister again, Khan dissolved his own provincial governments in Punjab and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa — two important provinces in the Pakistani federation, but his moves were thwarted by the present government and military establishment by delaying the elections.

Ten people were killed when Khan was arrested and most of the country, including the motorways, remained closed. This well-planned violent response, the present government alleges, was the result of Khan's instructions to his leaders and cadre. The government further alleges that Khan hoped to trigger a violent response from the military establishment by asking his supporters to directly confront them. His plan, the government suggests, was to destabilise the regime to

the point where the military would take over the government and declare martial law.

The military issued a press statement on May 10 declaring May 9 as a black day in Pakistan's history, announcing a restrained response to the burning of their buildings and warning that they would not tolerate any future attacks. Legal action has also been taken against those involved in the violent actions.

Wholesale arrests of PTI activists have been carried out throughout the country, with most of the party's main leaders arrested. Murder and attempted murder cases have been registered under anti-terrorist laws. The PTI party is now paying dearly for its adventurist strategy to counter its leader's arrest, and the party is on the run. However, small groups of PTI supporters continue to burn vehicles, but the mass response to the arrest has disappeared.

The increasing deployment of violence and the military's intervention in civilian affairs does not bode well for the future for democratic forces in Pakistan. With the excuse to maintain law and order, the military's control over civilian affairs will increase. The stifling of dissent will continue and free speech will be criminalised and working classes of the country will be further pushed to poverty.

It must be noted that there is no fundamental contradiction between Khan and Pakistan's powerful military establishment. Khan is simply trying to cajole or coerce the military establishment to get him back to the seat of power. In order to do that, Khan, in his previous government, tried to strengthen the military. His government passed a notorious law criminalising any criticism of the armed forces, which is now being used against him. During his tenure as prime minister, he used the anti-corruption watchdog, the National Accountability Bureau (NAB), to witch-hunt his opponents. Today, the same NAB is being used against him.

The collapse of the economy, coupled with the COVID-19 pandemic and climate disasters, has led to severe poverty and inequality in Pakistan. The implementation of neoliberal policies and the dominance of the military in civilian life are likely to further shrink democratic space and exacerbate poverty and inequality in the country. Ordinary people are likely to bear the brunt of the power struggles and political crises in the country.

The palace-intrigues between Pakistan's political elite and military establishment have worsened the economic conditions. Strengthening democratic forces would require a complete overhaul of the system including policies that favour the people. Pakistan's elite consume Rs 27 billion in subsidies to sustain their lifestyle. Any political force that does not challenge such gross inequality will continue to be in cahoots with the military establishment, furthering the economic poverty of its people.

[Farooq Tariq is Haqooq Khalq Party president and a leading activist in the climate justice movement in Pakistan.]

MALAYSIA

Class struggle in the face of environmental disasters

HUEI TING &
AUDREY CHAN

MAJOR FLOODS ARE a call for greater class consciousness and better national policies to mitigate the devastating effects of extreme weather due to climate change. As capitalism continues to leave a trail of destruction, we need to switch on emergency mode through advocating for a change in our economy by bringing in an unconventional ideology: ecosocialism.

On December 16, 2021, a tropical depression made landfall on the eastern coast of Malaysia, which brought heavy rains throughout the peninsula for several days. As a result of this, Malaysia experienced one of the worst floods in history, leaving an estimated 70,000 displaced and 50 dead.

The government was slow to deliver flood response, and a lack of clear central communication made things worse. Flood victims and volunteers took to social media to call for aid and coordination of flood relief efforts, showing solidarity among the people in the face of disasters. According to the Climate Emergency Coalition of Malaysia, lacklustre flood mitigation policies, loss of biodiversity and rainfall catchment areas, poor urban planning and unchecked development are all factors that culminated in this disaster.

The low-lying Taman Sri Muda township in Shah Alam is one of the worst flooded areas, with flood water reaching up to 4 metres. For 20 years, flood mitigation measures were sufficient to avoid major flooding — until the development of new projects in the surrounding areas compounded on the existing drainage system. Taman Sri Muda's system is now burdened with water from surrounding areas that triples its original water retention capacity, and tidal gates have broken pumps that are not fixed, despite having a RM 10 million allocation for upgrading works.

Why are new development projects being approved without proper urban and flood mitigation planning? And why are state governments and relevant authorities not doing enough to fix urban infrastructure? Malaysia's urban landscape must not be dictated



The village of Kijal, Malaysia.

Photo: Pok Rie/Pexels

by a handful of developers that prioritise short-term profit over residents' safety and wellbeing, as overdevelopment comes at a heavy price paid by ordinary citizens in the long run.

The flood not only laid bare the devastating effects of capitalism that thrives on the relentless pursuit of profits over sustainable development, it also managed to flush out the dirty laundry of our ruling elites. After the flood, our people were shocked at the horrific images on social media of mass timber debris floating on the rivers of Jalan Bentong-Karak and the Sri Temomong bridge. Civil society organisations and opposition parties often raised concerns over uncontrolled logging activities to the state government, yet it seems that this issue is not taken seriously. State governments who have sole authority over forests are often embroiled in a situation where they will award forest logging licences or convert forest lands into crop plantations to generate state revenue or use it to gain political leverage — often with the involvement of Malaysia's royal families.

In early June 2021, the Pahang state government approved an iron ore excavation project by a royalty-linked

mining company near Tasik Chini, a UNESCO biosphere reserve. The forest reserve has a history of pollution due to mining and logging activities since 2005. Orang Asli [Indigenous] communities in the area have been concerned about their wells being contaminated due to their reliance on rain and swamp water for consumption and daily activities. Fortunately, the project was cancelled later in the month due to public outrage.

Capitalism is a system that pursues infinite economic growth and profit in a world with finite resources.

Yet, later in the same month, there were still iron ore mining proposals at a degazetted forest reserve in Kuala Mukim Tembeling, Pahang which is listed as an Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA).

Under capitalism, corporates and ruling elites share the same class interest of capital accumulation, even if it

means risking severe loss of biodiversity and destroying the livelihoods of indigenous communities for the sake of profit. The climate crisis is no longer a looming threat, it is happening in Malaysia as observed through extreme weather patterns and hotter temperatures. It is time we ask the people, do the state governments have it in their interests to protect the environment that secures the well-being of the people? Are the royal families who are being hailed as “protectors of the people” walking their talk?

Echoing the solidarity spirit of #KitaJagaKita [“We Take Care of Us”], we the people only have ourselves to rely on to mobilise for concrete changes in the country's political landscape. Just like how the people mobilised and helped each other during the floods, we must continue showing solidarity across different races, religions and nationalities for a better world. For the wealthy ruling elites, heavy rain meant lazy weather and lie-ins; but for the everyday citizens, environmental destruction brought along devastating floods and a hazy future as they lost everything.

The rift between the elites and the people is a class struggle on display, reflecting the

central tenet of Marxism: “the history of all hitherto existing human society is the history of class struggles”. Capitalism is a system that pursues infinite economic growth and profit in a world with finite resources. The system has been efficient in production, but it has exacerbated global wealth inequality. Land, natural resources and wealth concentrated in the hands of the ruling class at the expense of the people.

Instead of focusing on economic growth through resource extraction and mega-development projects, we should overcome the crisis of capitalism and fight for social ownership of the means of production among the people. Our political system must also incorporate the ideology of ecosocialism — that life can only be preserved with the preservation of nature. The world needs to move towards an egalitarian post-capitalist economic, political and social structure which can fulfil human needs through harmony of human and non-human ecology.

[Huei Ting and Audrey Chan head up the Socialist Party of Malaysia's Bureau of Environment and Climate Crisis. First published at *ThinkLeft*.] ■



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