

Things they say

I don't want to be told by woke CEOs and a weak Prime Minister that I can't celebrate Australia Day.
Peter Dutton tries to channel Donald Trump

I support Israel destroying and killing every last member of Hamas.
Trump's Defense Secretary nominee Pete Hegseth

It's like a massive demolition site. It's gotta be rebuilt in a different way. Gaza's interesting, it's a phenomenal location. On the sea, best weather. Everything's good. Some beautiful things can be done with it.
Donald Trump on Gaza

I see Australia as the beachhead to counter China. Australia is the key country, continent, to counter the malign influence of China, and that's why AUKUS is so important
Republican Congressman Michael McCaul, until recently chair of the House Foreign Affairs Committee.

More than ever, we and our European partners need to be conscious, to get away from a form of naivety, to protect ourselves, to rearm.

French government spokesperson Sophie Primas responding to the Trump's threat to annex Greenland

I'm here with a fantastic woman.
Donald Trump introducing Italy's fascist prime minister Giorgia Meloni.

Factcheckers have just been too politically biased.
Mark Zuckerberg, not letting facts get in the way of sucking up to Trump

It does seem he has some ill-will toward corporate America.
Joseph Kenny, New York Police Department Chief of Detectives on Luigi Mangione, the alleged killer of United Healthcare CEO Brian Thompson

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Gaza deaths 40 per cent higher than counted

DEATHS IN Gaza have been under-reported by 40 per cent, a new study in the medical journal *The Lancet* estimates.

It implies a figure of around 77,800 people have been murdered by Israel so far.

The study looked at deaths up to 30 June 2024, after nine months of the war.

Their best estimate was that 64,260 people had died to that date, with 59 per cent of them women, children and people over age 65.

It compared different sources including the official Gaza Health Ministry statistics, an online survey launched by the Ministry to report relatives' death, and social media obituaries. The method has been used in a number of previous wars with

The estimates exclude people missing under the rubble as well as those who have died from hunger and disease as a result of the war.

Arrests at Australian climate protests highest in world

AUSTRALIA HAS one of the highest rates of arrest of climate and environmental protesters, a survey of 14 countries has found.

Just over 20 per cent of all climate action protests in Australia lead to arrests, compared to a global average of around 6 per cent.

This is also higher than other countries that have seen a surge in civil disobedience actions, with rates of 10 per cent in the US and 17.2 per cent in the UK, the birthplace of Extinction Rebellion.

This is partly the result of a trend towards more anti-protest laws and efforts to criminalise protest action.

However some countries with lower rates of arrest instead saw hundreds of environmental activists killed between 2012 and 2023, such as the Philippines and Brazil.

But it shows how governments worldwide are cracking down on dissent as they promote fossil fuel and fail to act on the climate.

Israeli soldiers flee war crimes arrests



Above: Gal Ferenbook (left) on the APC with the monitor behind him Photo: Hind Rajab Foundation

ISRAELI SOLDIERS are facing possible prosecution for war crimes if they travel abroad—with their own social media posts used as evidence. Countless Israeli soldiers have gloated about their genocidal actions in Gaza on publicly accessible social media accounts.

In early January a soldier on holidays fled Brazil with the help of Israel's Foreign Ministry, after a court ordered police to investigate him for the destruction of civilians homes in Gaza.

This was the result of a case filed by the Hind Rajab Foundation, a group based in Belgium that compiled evidence including video footage and photos allegedly showing the soldier planting explosives and helping demolish houses.

The group has tried to bring cases in a number of other countries including Thailand, Sri Lanka, the Netherlands, the UK and France. It has also sent the names of 1000 soldiers it accuses of war crimes to the International Criminal Court.

In December it sent a demand to the Sri Lankan government urging the arrest of Gal Ferenbook, who posted a video boasting that he was the "terminator" of a Palestinian civilian, whose body could be seen on a screen in his Armoured Personnel Carrier.

It also filed a complaint under French criminal law against Roi Hakimi for acts of torture and enforced disappearances, after he posted photos from Gaza of Palestinian detainees bound and stripped to their underwear in freezing temperatures.

Courts in many countries are authorised to prosecute anyone involved in crimes under international law.

The Israeli Defence Force now performs a "risk assessment" for all troops who have served in Gaza who apply to travel overseas.

Police car chase targets innocent 12-year-old Indigenous child

AN UNMARKED police car has chased a 12-year-old Gomeri boy in Moree, forcing him to jump a fence before the car mounted the kerb, knocking down a letter-box.

The child, who ran from the car on foot, was chased as a suspect in a break-and-enter, despite the fact police were looking for a 30-year-old man.

Three police officers then surrounded him, refusing to let the boy's mother get to him, and threatening her with pepper spray. The boy was arrested and taken to the police station but later told it was a case of mistaken identity.

Billionaire wealth explodes again

THE COMBINED wealth of the world's richest 500 people passed \$15 trillion in 2024. This is roughly the same as the combined annual GDP of Germany, Japan and Australia put together.

Eight tech billionaires alone, including Elon Musk, Mark Zuckerberg and Jeff Bezos, raked in \$600 billion between them.

Australia's 47 US dollar billionaires made around \$67,000 an hour, or 1300 times that of the ordinary Australian wage, according to an Oxfam analysis, increasing their wealth by \$28 billion. Based on Australian dollars there are 150 billionaires in the country controlling \$584 billion, according to last year's *Financial Review* Rich List.

Gaza a key reason for Democrats' loss

GAZA WAS the top reason given by Biden voters in 2020 who didn't vote for Kamala Harris in last year's US Presidential election, new polling has found.

In total 29 per cent of people who voted for another candidate in 2024 after backing the Democrats last time said "Ending Israel's violence in Gaza" was the main reason, followed by 24 per cent who listed the economy.

In the six battleground states that swung to Trump 20 per cent of these voters nominated Gaza as the main issue, compared to 33 per cent who said the economy. The polling, by IMEU Policy Project and YouGov, shows that the Democrats were happy to put their commitment to US imperialism and Israel above their own chances of winning the election.

Swedish wharfies block Israeli weapons

THE SWEDISH Dockworkers Union voted in December to block the transport of all military shipments to and from Israel.

While its arms exports were worth only \$6.9 million in 2023, the government has contracts with Elbit and Rafael worth over \$300 million. In 2010 the union refused to handle all Israeli goods for a week after its military attack on the *Mavi Marmara* freedom flotilla to Gaza.

EDITORIAL

Trump's new era of racism and corporate greed fuels the far right

DONALD TRUMP'S inauguration speech was a rallying call for the far right across the globe. His speech railed against climate change, ramping up anti-immigrant racism and fuelling transphobia as he declared that US government policy would recognise only two genders, male and female.

He backed that up with pardoning 1500 far right and fascist activists. Trump has vowed to launch, "the largest deportation operation in American history."

The notorious Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) has begun rounding up illegal migrants. "We'll be arresting people across the country, uninhibited by any prior administration guidelines," Tom Homan, Trump's incoming border tsar said.

Australian billionaires Anthony Pratt and Gina Rinehart are backing Trump and placed advertisements in US newspapers praising him.

Labor's foreign minister, Penny Wong, was in Washington for Trump's inauguration, having already declared that, "Australia looked forward to prioritising AUKUS as a key agenda item with the Trump administration."

Dutton hopes to repeat Trump's formula in the coming federal election, embracing fossil fuels and championing nuclear power while ramping up border protection rhetoric and attacks on refugees.

Last year, Dutton told a conference of mining bosses that a Coalition government, "will be the best friend that the mining and resources sector in Australia will ever have."

A conga line of Coalition politicians are already imitating Trump's election mantra, repeatedly asking, "Are you better off under Labor?"

Just as the failures of Genocide Joe Biden and the Democrats paved the way for Trump, Labor's failures on climate, cost of living and Palestine are paving the way for a Dutton comeback.

To effectively oppose Trump and his Australian disciples, the fightback against the racism, sexism and the cost of living crisis has to go hand in hand.

Gaza

Despite the savagery of 15 months of genocide, Israel has not defeated the Palestinian resistance. The ceasefire in Gaza is a relief from indescribable horror that has left Gaza in ruins.

But Netanyahu is describing the ceasefire as "temporary" and openly talking about restarting the war.

He has thanked both President



Above: Trump on the day of his inauguration

Photo: White House

Trump and Biden for giving full backing to Israel's right to return to fighting if Israel decides that the second stage of negotiations are ineffectual. "If they [the Israeli army] need to go back in, we're with them," incoming US National Security Advisor Mike Waltz told Fox news.

Trump is promising even more arms for Israel, and is giving the green light for expanding settlements in the West Bank. Netanyahu and Trump insist that Hamas will never govern in Gaza.

But the last 15 months of genocide has reshaped world opinion. Israel has never been more isolated. Millions have witnessed Israel's devastation of Gaza and joined demonstrations to free Palestine.

Workers in Italy, South Africa, Sweden and the US have refused to handle arms intended for Israel.

Labor

Through 15 months of war and genocide, however, Labor's commitment to US imperialism has never wavered.

In January, Labor sent Attorney-General Mark Dreyfus to Israel to pledge the Australian government's continuing support while Israel was still massacring Palestinians in Gaza.

Dreyfus, Australia's chief law officer, declared his visit was to show that "Australia's friendship with Israel is deep and enduring", but made no mention of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's arrest warrant for war crimes in Gaza.

Albanese has also sought to use the antisemitic attacks on synagogues and residential areas to attack the

movement for Palestine, claiming that protests here are inflaming the situation and somehow causing racism.

But opposition to Israel is not antisemitism.

Antisemitism is never acceptable—and has never been accepted at the protests, where there have been regular Jewish speakers and contingents of anti-Zionist Jews.

It's not clear who's responsible for attacks like the firebombing of Adass Israel synagogue in Melbourne. Painting swastikas and firebombings are the hallmarks of Nazi groups and the far right.

While Albanese and the media have made antisemitic attacks a headline issue, there has been barely a word about the Islamophobic attacks—from deaths threats to racist graffiti and an attempt to hit Palestine activist and Muslim Vote organiser Wesam Charkawi with a car—produced by support for the genocide and the media's backing for Israel. Albanese's anti-Hamas rhetoric fuels Islamophobia.

Albanese wants to distract from his own complicity in the genocide, as the government continues to allow weapons exports, the use of intelligence from Pine Gap and refuses to sanction Israel.

The fight to sanction Israel must be stepped up. To free Palestine from the river to the sea, the Zionist state must be smashed.

Sydney rail workers have shown how to deal with the cost of living, taking industrial action against NSW Labor government for a real pay increase.

We need more strikes and protests to take on the warmongers, corporations and billionaires.

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Dutton hopes to repeat Trump's formula in the coming federal election

Los Angeles fires are an unnatural disaster

By Clare Fester in Los Angeles

THE CATASTROPHIC wildfires that have engulfed Los Angeles are the city’s worst ever fires—and potentially its worst ever disaster of any kind.

Spurred by drought and the fierce seasonal Santa Ana winds, uncontrollable wildfires broke out across the city. Over 200,000 people were evacuated. More than 12,000 homes, businesses, cars and other buildings have been destroyed.

The worst hit include the coastal Pacific Palisades neighborhood to the west and the inland area around Altadena to the east. Evacuation orders due to a fire in the Hollywood Hills reached the busy arterial road Sunset Boulevard.

This unfolding catastrophe is anything but a “natural” disaster. Not only have climate scientists warned for decades about exactly this kind of destruction (while governments marched in lockstep with the fossil fuel industry), the people in power have systematically undermined the social services necessary to get the fires like these under control.

We face not only the climate crisis itself, but a man-made emergency response crisis as well.

Democratic LA mayor Karen Bass recently oversaw a \$17.6 million budget cut for the LA Fire Department. It took the second highest departmental cut in the city.

Just last month department Chief Kristin Crowley warned that cuts would take money out of pilot training and helicopter coordination specifically designed for wildfire suppression. There are now fewer bulldozer teams that can construct firebreaks around wildfires.

The “Critical Incident Planning and Training Section”—which develops public emergency response plans—also lost resources.

Meanwhile, the LAPD, which gets the most money of any department already, received a \$126 million funding boost.

One of the reasons LA has a budget deficit is liability payouts for the police—which don’t even come out of the bloated police budget itself, but a separate pool of funds. This fiscal year it only took them six months to spend double their liability claim budget.

Among the \$100 million spent on these LAPD legal settlements, \$17.7 million went to the family of a



Above: The Palisades fire in Los Angeles Photo: California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection

disabled man who was murdered by an off-duty officer in a Costco. \$11.8 million was paid out to a man with a traumatic brain injury sustained during a crash caused by an LAPD detective running a red light.

Working people’s tax dollars are being diverted away from essential services to pay for the police and the violent things they do.

One way California tries to compensate for its underfunded fire services is the use of prison labor. Incarcerated people make up nearly a third of firefighting crews across the state. Prisoners’ work is especially dangerous because unlike their “professional” counterparts, they are typically sent to the frontlines, using their hands to create vegetation-free perimeters that stem the spread of fires.

They get minimal training for this

work and they earn as little as \$2.90 a day.

We need a world that takes the climate crisis seriously. We need governments that invest in the renewable energy transition that’s necessary to mitigate further climate catastrophe. We need fully funded services that can handle the disasters we can now no longer prevent thanks to decades of inaction.

This should be well-trained, well-paid work—not left to the most vulnerable people in our society for little or no pay. Mutual aid networks are doing stellar jobs taking care of evacuated people and providing essential services.

But we need more than distribution systems for aid, we need a society run for the planet and the people who live on it, not the wealthy few who are hellbent on destroying it.

Labor gives go ahead for four new coal projects

THE ALBANESE government chose the week before Christmas to announce four new coal mine approvals, hoping to sneak the news out when fewer people would notice.

In all Labor has now approved 14 new coal mines or coal mine extensions since its election.

Environment Minister Tanya Plibersek tried to claim there were no new coal mines approved in 2024, saying all the approvals were extensions.

But mine extensions can produce huge increases in emissions.

One of the four approved, the Lake Vermont Meadowbrook mine in Queensland, will massively

increase its emissions by more than more times by 2028 for a total of 1.5 million tonnes of CO2 a year. That would make it the third most polluting coal mine in the country.

This would use up almost all that’s left of the “buffer zone” set aside in Labor’s Safeguard Mechanism to accommodate new projects by 2030, leaving just 6 per cent of it.

The other three are the Bogabri mine in NSW, the Vulcan South mine, and BHP’s Caval Ridge mine, which can now continue mining until 2056, producing 11.5 million tonnes of CO2 over its life.

This fossil fuel expansion has to stop.

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Prisoners make up nearly a third of firefighting crews across the state

Gaza ceasefire at last, but Israel's still not done killing

By James Supple

ISRAEL HAS finally agreed to a ceasefire after 15 months of genocide in Gaza.

There were celebrations in Gaza following the news, with hopes for an end to the daily slaughter, hunger and appalling conditions. The global movement of solidarity with Palestine and Israel's increasing diplomatic isolation have built consistent pressure for a ceasefire.

But in the hours following the announcement, Israel stalled signing the agreement and continued to butcher scores of Palestinians.

The ceasefire is for an initial phase lasting six weeks. During this time there will be a gradual exchange of 33 Israeli hostages for around 1900 Palestinians held by Israel, and an increase in aid deliveries. Palestinians will be allowed to return to their homes across Gaza and Israeli troops will occupy a buffer zone of 700 metres (and up to 1100 metres in five places) inside the Gaza border.

Despite its genocidal assault, Israel has been unable to totally defeat Hamas. Its efforts to depopulate and ethnically cleanse the north of Gaza, as its Generals' Plan suggested, have also failed.

Yet the ceasefire may not deliver a permanent end to the war. The current outline would require a full Israeli withdrawal but the agreement may never get that far.

Discussion about phase two of the agreement is meant to begin on day 16 of the ceasefire, but there is no guarantee that Israel will move to phase two.

Indeed Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said in a speech after the ceasefire came into force that it was "temporary" and that Israel retains the right to restart the war after the first phase of the deal. Trump had approved this, he claimed.

Netanyahu has declared he wants Hamas completely destroyed and has insisted that Israel will continue to strike at will against anything it deems a "security threat".

Israel has a history of breaking previous ceasefire agreements. It has violated the ceasefire in Lebanon more than 470 times since it was agreed in November, according to Lebanese authorities, launching regular missile strikes that have killed 32 people.



Above: Damage from bombing in Khan Younis in Gaza's south Photo: : UN Women/Suleiman Hajji

Millions of Palestinians are without proper shelter, the health system is shattered, schools have been razed. Any actual rebuilding of Gaza is not scheduled to take place until phase three.

Israel has no intention of loosening its stranglehold on Gaza or ending its occupation of Palestine. It continues to expand settlements and attack Palestinians in the West Bank.

Far-right parties are also threatening to bring down Netanyahu's coalition government if fighting does not resume.

Far-right National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir has already resigned from the government over the ceasefire, with far-right Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich's party saying it could follow.

Outgoing US President Joe Biden tried to claim credit for securing the ceasefire, saying it was similar to a proposal he put forward in May, but the US has ensured Israel had all the arms it needed for the genocide.

Just weeks before he left office Biden sent plans for another \$12 billion in arms transfers to the US Congress.

Anthony Albanese too claimed his government had "consistently been part of the international call for a ceasefire". But it continues to back Israel and is insisting a permanent end to the war requires a complete Hamas surrender.

And Albanese has refused to apply any pressure on Israel through sanctions on Israel or ending the sup-

ply of parts for its F-35 jets that have relentlessly bombed Gaza.

Trump

Pressure from incoming US President Donald Trump appears to have helped secure the deal.

Trump told Netanyahu he wanted a ceasefire and threatened Hamas with "hell" if they didn't agree.

But Trump's support for Zionism and US imperialism means any agreement he imposes will be designed to benefit Israel and the West.

Trump's pick for National Security adviser Mike Waltz said, "We've been clear that Gaza has to be fully demilitarised, Hamas has to be destroyed to the point that it cannot reconstitute, and that Israel has every right to fully protect itself."

Gaza has been decimated, with most of its hospitals destroyed and barely a building left standing. Israel continues to control Gaza's borders and has not agreed to end the crippling blockade it began in 2007.

Israel's military occupation of Gaza and the West Bank, and its policies of apartheid and ethnic cleansing, continue. Netanyahu is still a war criminal.

Trump will take Biden's place to provide arms, to maintain Israel as Palestine's jailer and watchdog for the West. Albanese will keep supply chains open and ensure Pine Gap keeps providing intelligence for Israel.

The movement for Palestine has to keep fighting until Palestine is free from the river to the sea.

Netanyahu said in a speech that the ceasefire was 'temporary' and that Israel retains the right to restart the war

Sydney rail workers should step up industrial action to win pay

SYDNEY RAIL workers were facing a ban on further industrial action as *Solidarity* went to press, with the NSW Labor government pushing for the Fair Work Commission to suspend or terminate action.

Industrial action has caused major disruption as rail unions fight to win cost of living pay rises.

Rail unions rejected a previous offer of a 14 per cent over four years and 1 per cent extra in super, an average of 3.5 per cent a year. This will not make up for what workers have lost to inflation after previous below inflation wage rises. Rail workers deserve better.

But union officials are now proposing to accept 11 per cent over three years—4 per cent in the first year but then just 3.5 per cent a year. The government also wants to remove the requirement to consult unions on new train fleets—putting guards the union won to staff the new Intercity Fleet at risk.

Nurses are still fighting for a one year pay increase of 15 per cent. A win for the rail workers will be a win for every worker suffering as their living standards drop with the cost of living crisis.

NSW Labor can afford to pay. They told the *Daily Telegraph* it would cost \$2 billion to pay the rail union’s full claim. They had no trouble affording the Metro which blew out to \$20 billion, and another \$17 billion on Westconnex.

A year ago in December 2023, NSW paramedics rejected a 19 per cent offer and went on to win 25 per cent over four years. Last year, the Labor government happily granted wage increases to police of up to 39 per cent over four years.

Even the limited industrial bans so far have shown the power the unions have to shut down the train system and force the government to boost pay.

But for 18 months the union leadership has ducked and weaved, imposing and then lifting bans.

This strategy has meant the campaign has lost momentum. The reliance on industrial bans instead of strike action has meant some workers take action, while others fear repression. When the government has threatened to dock pay or ban industrial action, the union has lifted the bans.

If the NSW government succeeds in terminating industrial action rail workers face having a settlement



Above: Rail Tram and Bus Union members in Sydney
Photo: RTBU NSW

imposed by Fair Work—with a worse pay deal and conditions.

The unions need to defy the law and escalate industrial action to win.

Union democracy summit discusses Labor’s attack on CFMEU

OFFICIALS FROM nine unions met in Canberra in early December for the “Trade Unions for Democracy” summit, held in response to the Labor government’s union busting attack on the CFMEU.

Labor’s attack, and the support for it from the peak union body the ACTU, has triggered outrage among blue collar unions. Officials representing 350,000 members from the ETU, MUA, the plumbers and meat workers unions as well as some state branches of the AMWU, RTBU and UFU all joined the summit, alongside sacked former CFMEU officials.

The summit was not just about opposing the administration of the CFMEU but, “about building a strong, powerful voice for working people and real union principles”, according to ETU Queensland Secretary Peter Ong, while the ETU’s National Secretary Michael Wright said it “represents a turning point for Australia’s unions”.

While the new grouping is clearly seen as an alternative to the ACTU, most of the unions involved also remain part of the existing national body.

The summit adopted a charter and agreed to hold a further summit early this year.

But there was no decision on running unions candidates in the fed-

eral election, despite earlier talk of standing Senate candidates against Labor.

Nor was there any plan agreed to fight the administration imposed on the CFMEU, or future national stopwork rallies.

The summit was held the day before the High Court hearing on the unions’ legal challenge to administration. A decision is expected in February or March.

But we can’t rely on the courts to end administration. Labor’s Workplace Relations Minister Murray Watt says the government already has plans in place to respond even if it the unions do win, with Labor likely to just change the law again.

According to the *Financial Review*, “the administrators’ directors are promising there will be much stronger action after the High Court hands down its decision”.

We need a strategy if the court case fails. This will require further stopwork rallies to create a crisis big enough to force the government to restore union democracy in the CFMEU.

Site delegates and activists in the construction industry need to take responsibility for regular meetings on their sites to respond to breaches of safety and EBA conditions—as well as organising for the action needed to end administration.

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The limited industrial bans so far have shown the power the unions have to shut down the train system

Australia spends big to keep China out of the region

By David Glanz

THE ALBANESE government is spending almost a billion dollars to bolster Australia's dominant position in the region and lock out Chinese influence.

In the run-up to the end of the year, deals were signed with PNG (\$600 million), Nauru (\$140 million) and the Solomon Islands (\$190 million), adding to an agreement with Tuvalu signed in November 2023.

Each agreement has different terms—PNG's is linked to funding for a team to compete in the NRL—but there is a common theme, China.

In exchange for Australian funds, PNG and Nauru have agreed not to engage in security agreements with countries that Canberra frowns upon.

It's a measure squarely aimed at China and one that gives Australia a veto over elements of local sovereignty.

According to the BBC, PNG has signed a pact reaffirming its commitment to Australia as its major security partner.

If PNG enters a security agreement with a country that Australia does not favour, Canberra will withdraw its money and the PNG league team will be forced to drop out of the NRL.

Nauru has committed that the country's critical infrastructure "shall not be used by any third party for security purposes".

It has also agreed that Australia can veto any engagements by third countries in Nauru's "security and key critical infrastructure sectors".

The deal follows Nauru's decision in January 2024 to switch its diplomatic recognition from Taiwan to China, followed by an agreement to expand trade, investment and infrastructure deals with China a few months later.

The situation with the Solomon Islands is not as clear cut. The government in Honiara signed a security agreement with China in 2022 in the dying days of the Morrison Coalition government, sending a wave of panic through the corridors of power in Canberra.

The Solomon Islands still host about 14 Chinese police officers, an arrangement that will continue.

But Albanese boasted that, "As a result of this agreement, what we



Above: Anthony Albanese with PNG Prime Minister James Marape following the NRL deal Photo: Anthony Albanese/ Facebook

have done is make sure that Australia remains a security partner of choice."

State of contest

The Australian ruling class has long been concerned about control of the territories and shipping lanes to the north of the continent.

In 1883, Queensland tried to annex eastern New Guinea to pre-empt Germany from seizing it, hoping that Britain would step in and take control, which it did the following year.

The colonial premiers argued, "Further acquisition of dominions in the Pacific south of the equator by any foreign power would be highly detrimental to the safety and well-being of the British possessions in Australasia and injurious to the interests of the Empire."

Australia put pressure on Britain to seize colonies on other occasions—in Fiji, the New Hebrides (Vanuatu), Samoa and the Cook Islands.

After the Second World War, the Australian ruling class shifted its focus on to the US, with the strategic aim of involving America in the region as a guarantor of Australian regional supremacy.

There was a flurry of concern in the 1980s about Russian influence in the region but with the end of the Cold War, Canberra felt its domination was secure.

The rise of China as a rival to the US has changed that. While the main focus has been on tensions around

Taiwan, the South West Pacific is once again an arena of imperialist competition.

As Foreign Minister Penny Wong said in December, "We are in a permanent state of contest in our region, that is the reality."

In July last year, *The Guardian* reported that there were more than 60 agreements and initiatives between industrialised countries and Pacific island nations focused on defence and policing.

Australia remains the dominant partner in the region accounting for more than half the deals identified, followed by New Zealand, the US and China.

But China has been expanding its reach, with policing deals with Fiji, the Solomons, Vanuatu and Kiribati.

Excluding China or at least minimising its influence is now core Australian foreign policy business.

Albanese will try to wrap the latest agreement with PNG in a rugby league jersey but this is no game—Australia is part of an inter-imperialist rivalry that is driving a dangerous arms race across the region.

It has already begun expanding the US's use of bases in the north of Australia with the increased rotation of US troops and warplanes as well as pre-positioning of military equipment as a launchpad for a future war on China.

Workers in the region have no interest in this contest. We reject Australia's imperialist machinations.

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Excluding China or at least minimising its influence is now core Australian foreign policy business

Joyce Clague: a life of service and solidarity

By Paddy Gibson

JOYCE CAROLINE Clague (nee Mercy), an incredible warrior for Aboriginal rights and justice for all oppressed peoples, died peacefully on 25 September, aged 86.

Joyce was instrumental in establishing many community organisations, winning rights and access to services that still improve lives every day.

Joyce was a Yaegl woman from the Clarence River in northern NSW, born on the Ulgundahi Island Aboriginal Reserve at Maclean in 1938.

She was born into world where Aboriginal lives were tightly controlled under the NSW Aborigines Protection Act.

When Joyce was just 10, her mother Hilda Mercy died of pneumonia on the verandah of the segregated hospital at Maclean.

Joyce's family proudly asserted their Aboriginal identity in defiance of this regime and Joyce grew up fluently speaking her Yaegl language.

At just 16, in 1954, she travelled to Sydney to make representations on behalf of her uncles to a union conference, discussing the impact that mechanisation of the sugarcane industry was having on Aboriginal workers.

This helped to inspire recognition of the power of working-class solidarity and a life-long commitment to the labour movement.

From 1960, Joyce was active in the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders (FCAATSI), the lead organisation in the campaign for the 1967 referendum, where 90 per cent of Australians voted to remove discriminatory clauses from the constitution.

Major trade unions were affiliated to FCAATSI and Joyce helped to push the ACTU to back important initiatives like the referendum and fights for equal pay and land rights.

In her role as the first welfare officer at the Foundation for Aboriginal Affairs in 1965, Joyce also drew on union resources and networks to provide practical support for the day-to-day needs of Aboriginal people.

Joyce kept an incredible archive that includes some of the only surviving copies of the *Aboriginal Worker*, a newsletter produced by Black trade unionists and their supporters in the



Above: Joyce Clague speaks at an Aboriginal rights conference in the Building Workers' Industrial Union Hall, Sydney 1965.
Photo: Tribune.

mid-60s to deepen union connections with the struggle.

In the early 1990s, Joyce worked for the NSW Labour Council and played a key role in organising training programs for Aboriginal construction workers and advocating for Aboriginal housing projects.

Building unity in struggle

Joyce worked hard to build bridges between Aboriginal and non-Indigenous activists and believed strongly in the importance of joint action against racism.

During the 1960s in Sydney, she was a member of both the Australian Aboriginal Fellowship, a predominantly non-Indigenous campaign organisation, and the Aboriginal-controlled Aborigines Progressive Association.

The joint struggle led by these groups, with the strong support of trade unions, eventually abolished the

NSW Aborigines Welfare Board in 1969.

In the early 1970s, Joyce was a leading member of both FCAATSI and a new all-Aboriginal group, the National Tribal Council.

In all her struggles, Joyce worked alongside her husband Colin Clague, who she met attending an Asian Christian Youth Assembly in the Philippines in 1964.

Joyce's lengthy ASIO file shows that spies were worried about the relationship with Colin, said to be a "committed socialist" now influencing Joyce.

But Colin says it was Joyce doing most of the influencing. Meeting Joyce and connecting with Aboriginal people and culture profoundly reshaped his Christian socialist world view, deepening a commitment to egalitarianism and justice.

Both Joyce and Colin were members of the Labor Party and fought all their life for a left-wing, activist vision within the party.

The couple moved to the NT in the late 1960s. When the ALP would not preselect Joyce for the electorate of Stuart in Central Australia in the 1968 election, she stood as an independent candidate to promote the battles against racism raging across the Territory.

She fought hard in support of striking Gurindji stock workers at this time, who had walked off Wave Hill station and were demanding the return of their land.

Joyce helped Aboriginal people reclaim lands in Central Australia and then, when she returned to NSW, played a key role in the campaign that won the NSW Aboriginal Land Rights Act in 1983.

Joyce was instrumental in the successful Yaegl Native Title Claim No. 1, a ground-breaking case that won recognition of rights to both lands and waterways.

Solidarity extends our condolences to Joyce's family and all those who loved her. We pay tribute to her extraordinary life and contribution to the struggle for justice.

Much of the information for this obituary comes from the website established by Joyce's family to honour her life, joyceclague.com. We encourage people to visit the site and read more about her extraordinary life.

Resistance helps stop coup attempt in South Korea

By Midhat Jafri

MASS RESISTANCE and the threat of workers' strikes stopped a half-baked coup attempt in South Korea in early December.

On 3 December President Yoon Seok Yeol, leader of the conservative People's Power Party, declared martial law. Yoon cited the need to root out "anti-state forces" and overcome political deadlock, attempting to use Cold War rhetoric through blaming "shameless pro-North Korea elements".

The martial law declaration called a halt to "all political activities, including those of the National Assembly, local councils, political parties" and declared "all media and publications will be subject to the control of the Martial Law Command", alongside prohibiting strikes, work stoppages and protests that "incite social unrest".

The military was deployed to parliament to stop it assembling. In response, thousands took to the streets, gathering around parliament to express their anger, blocking army vehicles and arguing with soldiers.

Within hours, parliament had voted to rescind martial law, exercising its powers under South Korea's constitution. But with Yoon remaining in power, the wave of protest across the county continued, demanding his resignation.

Up to 100,000 protesters maintained a permanent occupation in front of Parliament House. This included thousands of students in the biggest inter-university student rally Korea has seen in over two decades, which was backed by 30 student unions.

The working class also began mobilising against the threatened coup. The Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KTCU) called for an indefinite general strike half an hour before martial law was lifted. But several unions still took limited strike action.

Members of the Korean Metal Workers Union (KMWU) carried out two-hour warning strikes at GM Korea, Hyundai Motor and throughout the metalworking sector. The Korean Railway Workers Union also struck.

The following Saturday up to one million people joined a protest demanding Yoon's resignation.

He was finally impeached by the National Assembly on 14 December, after 12 PPP parliamentarians broke



Above: Protesters celebrate after the announcement of parliament's vote to impeach president Yoon Photo: Workers' Solidarity

ranks to back the vote in order to reach the required two-thirds majority.

Yoon's supporters blocked police attempts to arrest him but he was finally taken into custody on 15 January.

Why was martial law called?

South Korea is suffering from problems of low economic growth due to being squeezed by rival imperialist powers, China and the US.

At the end of the Second World War, the US created South Korea when it divided the Korean peninsula between itself and Russia. From 1950 US troops fought to prop the state up during the Korean War and never left.

South Korea's economy has become more integrated with the nearby Chinese economy, with many South Korean manufacturers exporting machinery and semiconductors to China.

During the 2000s, the government declared they were partnering with the US for security and with China economically. But since the imperialist rivalry between the US and China has become more intense, the US has demanded that South Korea decouple from China.

Chinese companies also present a formidable challenge to South Korea in areas such as semiconductors, consumer electronics and cars, which have been a major part of South Korea's industrial miracle. The largest semiconductor company has seen its share price fall by half in the past six months.

As a result Yoon was under pressure from South Korea's capitalists

to reform the economy. But since the opposition Democratic Party won control of parliament in April 2024, he had been unable to get his measures passed, with a deadlock over the budget.

Through his time in power he has set out to viciously attack trade unions, denouncing them as a "deep rooted evil". He has brought trumped up criminal charges against thousands of unionists, used the National Security Act to raid the offices of the KCTU and stepped up police repression of union protests.

But workers throughout his presidency have fought back. Although they didn't win they inflicted political damage.

South Korea has a history of military rule and union repression. Military dictator Park Chung-hee seized power in 1961, systematically breaking up the KCTU's predecessor the FCTU.

In 1980, General Chun Doo Hwan declared martial law, allowing him to launch a bloody campaign of political repression, including at Gwangju. Military police smashed student protests, with 165 killed and more than 3000 wounded.

Military rule ended in 1987 following student protests and massive strikes.

Despite Yoon's arrest, he has refused to back down, calling on right-wing activists to take to the streets in his support. Continuing the strikes and protests will be necessary to defend democracy and ensure he can't return.

Elon Musk promotes fascism and the far right

By Adam Adelpour

ELON MUSK, the world's richest man, has embraced the far right and fascist forces in the US and abroad. He even gave a fascist salute in a speech following Donald Trump's inauguration.

This is a sign of the dangers that will accompany Trump in the White House.

Musk threw himself behind Trump's election campaign. He used his control of social media platform X (formerly Twitter) to boost Trump and his own posts about the election.

Trump has now put Musk in charge of an advisory body called the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) set up to launch savage public sector cuts.

But Musk has gone beyond supporting Trump to supporting open fascists.

At the start of this year he backed the German AfD (Alternative for Germany) in the lead-up to German elections, using X to promote them and hosting an extended live interview with their leader Alice Weidel.

The AfD is increasingly dominated by fascists and has risen in the polls on a viciously anti-migrant platform to become Germany's second most popular party.

At the heart of the AfD are Nazis who want to recreate Hitler's Third Reich. Bjorn Hocke, the leader of the party in Thuringia, is a fascist who has been fined by German courts for using Nazi slogans.

Musk has also backed British fascist Tommy Robinson and the racist, anti-immigrant Reform UK party.

Nigel Farage, the bigoted leader of Reform UK, spews hate against migrants. But Robinson is even worse. He is an outright Nazi trying to build a violent street movement and a former member of the fascist British National Party. In 2017 he said "militias will be set up" and warned of mass violence aimed at "cleaning out this Islamic problem".

Serving the rich

Across the globe the political mainstream—whether conservative or Labour-type parties—have overseen attacks on living standards. They have then used racism and bigotry to deflect anger away from themselves towards migrants and minorities, feeding an



Above: Elon Musk interviewed in 2017 Photo: Steve Jurvetson

alarming rise of the far right.

These politics serve his interests of the rich. Such extreme reactionary and pro-capitalist ideas fit well with Musk.

His treatment of his workers has been atrocious. He cut 80 per cent of jobs at Twitter after taking it over and slashed 10 per cent of staff at SpaceX.

At Tesla he sacked 14,000. Many didn't know until they turned up at their jobs and their access cards didn't work.

There has also been a flood of workplace sexual harassment complaints against Musk. SpaceX paid a flight attendant over \$400,000 to settle one sexual misconduct claim against him in 2018. The company and Musk also faced a lawsuit by eight former employees who say they were fired for raising concerns about sexual harassment and discrimination.

Musk is also viciously anti-union, once saying, "I disagree with the idea of unions."

With a track record like this it is no wonder he has turned to the far right who scapegoat migrants, re-direct working class anger and normalise gross inequality, sexism and bigotry.

At the trough

There is also a cynical self-interest at play in Musk's support for Trump and the far right. By hitching himself to them he gains more political power and influence over government.

Despite his claim to support "small government" Musk and his companies have benefited enormously from government regulations and subsidies.

Tesla received a \$751 million low-interest loan from the Department of Energy in 2010. A \$12,100 tax credit for EV buyers allowed it to jack up prices and saw Tesla buyers receive billions in subsidies.

Tesla's biggest boon from government actually comes from its trading of regulatory credits.

Tesla sells these to other car manufacturers who can't otherwise comply with state and federal regulations aimed at reducing greenhouse gases. Between 2008 and 2019 this raked in around \$3.2 billion for the company. SpaceX also depends on government contracts worth billions.

Since Trump won the election Musk's wealth has jumped by a staggering \$103 billion, nearly 25 per cent, according to an estimate by Bloomberg. This is at least partly due to the expectation of favours for his companies from Trump.

Musk isn't the first major US capitalist to flirt with the far right. Car manufacturer Henry Ford used his national newspaper to promote antisemitism, supported pro-fascist organisations and employed far-right anti-union thugs, even receiving an award from Hitler in 1938.

But despite this, the 1930s in the US saw a massive wave of unionisation, including in the car industry, that helped push back the far right.

Musk is a living, breathing advertisement for why we must resist the far right, racism and capitalism today and build socialist organisation to fight for a better world.

.....
Musk has gone beyond supporting Trump to supporting open fascists

Trump lets rip with horror show of reaction

By David Glanz

DONALD TRUMP used his inauguration as US President to unleash a barrage of attacks—on migrants, trans rights, climate action, public services and more.

He repeated his threats to seize the Panama Canal and Greenland and declared an emergency on the country's border with Mexico, despatching soldiers there.

A government app that allowed 1450 asylum-seekers to enter the US each day was shut down, the first step in Trump's plan to deport 11 million undocumented migrants. He also declared he would remove automatic citizenship for children born in the US to undocumented migrants.

He signed an order withdrawing the US from the Paris Agreement on climate change, an order taking the US out of the World Health Organization and another freezing the recruitment of public servants. He declared that there were two genders—men and women.

The US government website providing information about abortion and birth control was taken offline.

Trump was cheered on by his tech billionaire supporters, Elon Musk (X), Mark Zuckerberg (Meta) and Jeff Bezos (Amazon). After Musk spoke, he gave a fascist salute.

Among Trump's guests were leading members of the global far right. They included the fascist prime minister of Italy, Giorgia Meloni; Eric Zemmour, a French exponent of the antisemitic "great replacement" theory; Tino Chrupalla, a co-leader of Germany's AfD; Nigel Farage, the leader of the UK Reform party; and Argentina's President Javier Milei.

Trump's win will give confidence to the far right everywhere. Another early act was to pardon about 1500 of his supporters who stormed the US Capitol in January 2021.

Trump will have 13 billionaires in his cabinet and 19 of Rupert Murdoch's Fox News presenters in the administration.

Musk is being given the task of slashing public spending. Robert F. Kennedy Junior, who is a militant anti-vaxxer, will run the health department and Pete Hegseth, a Fox News personality who boasts far right tattoos, will run the military.

Trump's supporters are celebrating his war on "woke". Trump has ordered



Above: Donald Trump and JD Vance at the inauguration
Photo: White House

the cancellation of federal diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) policies.

As one top banker put it, "I feel liberated. We can say 'retard' and 'pussy' without the fear of getting cancelled ... it's a new dawn."

Horror show

It is a horror show of reaction. Yet while Trump claims he is ushering in a "new golden age", he faces substantial challenges.

Many of his orders will face challenges in the courts. But his bigger problem will be satisfying his support base.

Many people voted for Trump because of his promise to reduce inflation and deal with the cost-of-living crisis. But his plans to introduce tariffs will lead to higher prices and likely higher inflation—and working class discontent.

Trump's deportation agenda also poses problems, with some economists suggesting that if fully implemented it could shrink the US economy by as much as 7 per cent and put upward pressure on wages and prices.

There are already divisions in the MAGA camp. In the days before the inauguration there was a public blow-up between two of his main supporters, Musk and far right headkicker Steve Bannon.

Musk wants to recruit migrants with high levels of skills to drive his cyber operations. Bannon denounced this as an attempt to deny jobs to US workers.

Trump publicly flip-flopped, not wanting to annoy either man. Eventually he needs to take a position and in doing so alienate supporters.

Fighting back

The US left is on the back foot. A protest rally in Washington DC before the inauguration attracted tens of thousands rather than the hundreds of thousands when Trump took office in 2017.

But there is the potential for resistance. There are millions who have taken to the streets over the past decade over women's rights, Black Lives Matter and Palestine.

Workers are fighting back in bigger numbers than for decades. In the run up to the inauguration there were strikes among Amazon, Starbucks and health workers. More than 45,000 wharfies on the East and Gulf coasts are threatening renewed strike action to save jobs.

To turn that resistance into victories over Trump, the US left must break with the Democrats.

Biden's administration laid the basis for Trump's win, with billionaires in the cabinet, the deportation of 1.5 million people, staunch support for Israel, inaction on abortion rights and a failure to raise working class living standards.

Trump's MAGA offensive can be beaten but it won't be done by waiting for Democrat wins in two and four years' time. Workers and students have to fight back where they are strongest—on the picket line and on the streets.

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While Trump claims he is ushering in a 'new golden age', he faces substantial challenges

REVOLUTION, CIVIL WAR AND ASSAD'S FALL IN SYRIA

After the toppling of the Assad regime in Syria, **Maeve Larkins** looks at key questions on the legacy of the 2011 revolution and what his fall means for Syria and the region

What was the al-Assad regime?

Dictator Bashar al-Assad ruled Syria from 2000, inheriting his position from his father, Hafez al-Assad. Together, the al-Assad family dominated Syria for more than 50 years.

Their regime was brutally anti-democratic and enriched a small, privileged elite at the expense of ordinary Syrians.

When Bashar al-Assad came to power, he implemented sweeping austerity, cutting welfare and subsidies for necessities like electricity and water and further privatised state assets.

On the eve of the 2011 revolution, a third of Syrians were living below the poverty line. In some cities in the south, poverty rates had doubled in five years.

What was the 2011 revolution?

In 2011, popular revolutions involving millions of people overthrew the dictatorships of Ben Ali in Tunisia and Hosni Mubarak in Egypt.

Demonstrations began to sprout across Syria. After the arrest and torture of young teenagers on 6 March for writing “the people want to overthrow the regime” on the wall of their school the movement exploded across the country.

Mass protests were met with live ammunition. By the end of March, hundreds of protesters had been killed.

Assad resorted to savage repression to save his regime. He began besieging entire cities, cutting off basic necessities and raining artillery and air strikes on them. But many Syrian soldiers refused to carry out their orders, defecting to join local protesters and forming armed militias loosely organised as the Free Syrian Army.

Assad drowned the revolution in blood. Millions were displaced and entire neighbourhoods reduced to rubble.

Increasingly, the Syrian revolution became dominated by armed groups fighting the regime. These forces largely relied on foreign funding and arms and, as a result, they became tied to the various imperialist interests

backing them.

Russia, Hezbollah and Iran backed the regime while Turkey and the Gulf States back the armed opposition.

Syria is ethnically and religiously diverse, including Sunni Muslims, Alawite Muslims, Christians, Kurds and other groups. The regime worked to turn the struggle into a sectarian civil war, releasing jihadists they had imprisoned and using sectarian militias to carry out atrocities.

Islamic State and other foreign fighters also moved into Syria, so the armed rebellion took on an increasingly sectarian character.

Is Assad's fall a continuation of the 2011 revolution?

The offensive in December 2023 that toppled Assad was not based in a mass movement like 2011. An essentially unimpeded march of rebels led by Islamist group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham showed that the regime had rotted from the inside.

One regime conscript stationed near Idlib described how there were meant to be three times as many Syrian army guards there but the officers had fabricated rosters to pocket extra wages.

When the conscript heard that HTS the tanks were rolling towards him he simply stripped off his uniform and went home. Across Syria, there were similar scenes, with abandoned regime uniforms littering the streets.

The horror of Assad's counter-revolution had completely hollowed out any support for the regime. The regime ruled purely by fear; it was infamous for industrial-scale torture, indefinite incarceration and routine disappearances.

The regime was also weak and impoverished after more than a decade of sanctions and civil war. It relied on support from Russia, Iran and Hezbollah to keep control. But with Russia pre-occupied with Ukraine, and Iran and Hezbollah facing ruthless Israeli aggression, Assad's allies

Assad's fall brought Syrians into the streets in massive rallies

were in no position to save him.

Assad's fall brought Syrians into the streets in massive rallies. People began to tear down statues, Assad's pictures and whatever remnants of the regime they could find.

The fall of the regime opens new possibilities for struggle for the democratic hopes that inspired the 2011 revolution.

But the situation is significantly different from 2011. Grassroots demonstrations have sprouted across Syria, including firefighters, Christians, women's rights activists and others.

But the vast majority of the population are living in dire circumstances. When a local chef announced on social media that free food would be handed out in central Damascus, a crowd gathered, so large that some people were trampled to death.

The task of the left is to fan the flames of revolt; to mobilise the struggle for basic services, better wages and non-sectarian democracy against the transitional government as they try to consolidate their own power.

Who are HTS?

Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, or HTS, are an armed Islamist group which formed in the region of Idlib. Their leader Mohammed al-Jolani, who now goes by his real name, Ahmed al-Sharaa, was previously the leader of an al-Qaeda affiliate, the Al-Nusra Front.

When the Idlib region had been wrested from the regime in 2015, rival militias jostled for control until HTS, formed by the merger of several jihadist militias, militarily crushed its rivals to establish itself as the dominant force.

In practice, it was a one-party state with a form of crony capitalism, where monopolies over oil and other industries were granted to supporters of the party.

Yet, despite HTS's efforts to suppress opposition movements, including with tactics like ramming protesters with armoured cars, popular demonstrations forced them to make

concessions. Christians were allowed to hold church services, women were allowed to attend universities and drive cars. Protests won the release of political prisoners, the lifting of roadblocks and even succeeded in excluding HTS from some towns.

HTS are seeking to scale up their government from Idlib to the whole of Syria.

Pragmatically, they are assuring the stream of foreign diplomats who are visiting them that they will protect the rights of religious and ethnic minorities and will not seek to further “destabilise” the region by waging war on Israel or provoking another popular uprising.

There will be a huge gap between the promises of HTS for a secular and democratic state and the reality of the regime they want to consolidate. HTS have already back-tracked on their promise of elections within a year, saying now that it will have to wait four years.

They have courted supporters of Assad’s regime, such as the Damascus Chamber of Commerce, as well as former state functionaries.

The newly appointed HTS economic minister has promised “a free competitive economy” with huge cuts to the public sector. While they’ve announced a 400 per cent increase in public sector wages, it will apply only to those who remain after a review of 1.3 million employees. Only those with “sufficient expertise, academic qualifications, and the necessary skills for reconstruction” will be kept on.

The promises of a non-sectarian state already seem hollow as government positions are being handed out almost exclusively to HTS leaders, many with track records of religious authoritarianism.

The new justice minister was recorded in 2015 proclaiming death sentences and overseeing the execution of two women in Idlib accused of sex work. Although HTS says that they have now moved beyond such behaviour, there are now calls for the justice minister to be removed.

Who are the Kurds?

The Kurds are an ethnic group that has suffered decades of oppression. More than 30 million Kurds are divided between Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran.

In Syria, Hafez Al-Assad stripped them of citizenship and sent Arab settlers to drive Kurdish farmers from their land.

But the Kurds failed to support the 2011 revolution. The Democratic



Above: Protest in Damascus’s Umayyad Square after the fall of Assad, the first gathering of its kind in more than 50 years, calling for a secular state

Photo: Abaca Press/
Alamy Live News

Union Party (PYD) took the opportunity to seize control of Kurdish areas in Syria’s northeast, operating militarily as the People’s Protection Units (YPG). It is linked to Turkey’s Kurdish armed struggle movement, the PKK.

The PYD allied itself with the US, receiving funds and training to help fight Islamic State.

Turkey, a major backer of HTS, wants the complete destruction of Kurdish autonomy in Syria as a major priority, as it seeks to suppress its own Kurdish minority. During the December 2024 offensive, the Turkish-backed Syrian National Army began attacking Kurdish areas. Hundreds of thousands have been displaced.

The Kurds are now under serious threat and need the support of the kind of non-sectarian popular movement across Syria that was seen in 2011. Democracy fighters need to demand that all foreign troops, Russian, Turkish, US and Israeli, be withdrawn from Syria.

What does the fall of Assad mean for Palestine?

Israel responded to Assad’s overthrow with air strikes on military bases to destroy Syrian fighter jets, missiles and military capabilities. It has seized a “buffer zone” beyond its existing occupation of Syria’s Golan Heights, including the strategic Mount Hermon.

For some, this confirmed their view that Assad’s collapse is a blow to Palestinian liberation, since Syria was seen to be part of the “Axis of Resistance” between Hamas, Iran,

Hezbollah and the Houthis.

But the Assads were no reliable supporters of Palestine. Syrian troops invaded Lebanon in 1976 to crush Palestinian forces and the left. In the 2011 revolution, Palestinian refugees in the Damascus neighbourhood of Yarmouk faced brutal repression for supporting protests.

The Axis of Resistance was never going to free Palestine. Their military capabilities are simply no match for the military power of Israel and the US. But crucially both Assad and Iran’s ruling class were far more concerned with maintaining their own power than consistently fighting Israel or Western imperialism.

The Arab rulers of Jordan, Egypt and the Gulf States have also betrayed the Palestinians. Palestinian liberation will only be achieved from below, by mass movements that topple these regimes and uproot the imperialist order in the region.

In the aftermath of Assad’s downfall, Egypt’s dictator al-Sisi has been petrified. He banned all Syrians from entering the country and released a doctored video where he pretended, “My hand has not been tainted with anyone’s blood.”

The overthrow of Assad has the potential to rekindle the spirit of the 2011 Arab Spring and inspire the kind of popular working class movements in the region that can break the stranglehold of imperialism and its brutal watchdog, Israel.

For this reason, supporters of Palestine should celebrate the downfall of the regime.

HONOUR THE TREATY— MASS PROTESTS AND THE FIGHT FOR MAORI RIGHTS

The government is waging a major attack on Treaty principles in Aotearoa-New Zealand, writes **Jayden Rivers**, but gains for Maori did not come from the Treaty itself

IN NOVEMBER, more than 40,000 people, predominantly Māori, marched on the New Zealand parliament in Wellington as part of a hīkoi (march) from a place called Te Rerenga Wairua at the tip of the north island.

The Toitū Te Tiriti (Honour the Treaty) campaign, led by Te Pāti Māori (the Māori Party) demands that the right-wing Coalition government’s Treaty Principles Bill be scrapped. Māori Party MP Hana-Rāwhiti Maipi-Clarke led a haka in parliament to protest as the bill was being introduced, tearing up a copy of the legislation.

The Coalition government came to power in late 2023 with the main conservative party National supported by the smaller right-wing libertarian party Act and New Zealand First. The Coalition parties agreed to allow Act’s Treaty Principles Bill to be debated in parliament.

The bill attempts to reverse Māori rights by reinterpreting Treaty principles that were legally enshrined after the 1970s Māori rights movements.

Many people look to the Treaty of Waitangi as a source of progress for Māori. But the truth is that the Treaty has always been a tool of colonisation and accommodation to capitalism. Māori have only made progress through the power of mass working class movements.

The bill is a vehicle for the Coalition’s wider political attack on Māori and the working class.

The Coalition have already dismantled the Māori Health Ministry, cut funding for Māori housing and other programs and are removing Te Reo Māori (Māori language and place names) from public institutions.

For now, the Treaty Principles Bill is unlikely to pass. National has indicated they will vote against it when it returns to parliament. However, there is currently a six month “consultation process” which presents the most im-

mediate danger.

Act have used the consultation process to push for a citizens-initiated referendum, launching a campaign to turn up the level of racism in New Zealand society. The lobby group Hobson’s Pledge, led by former Act politician Don Brash, has said, “We need to deliver the kind of message that the Voice referendum in Australia delivered.”

The Coalition also wants more racial division so they can pursue broader attacks on workers and the poor. For example, at the beginning of 2024 the Coalition repealed the Fair Pay Agreements Act which allowed forms of sector-wide union bargaining.

The right are looking to exploit racism and confusion about Māori rights.

A 2023 Post/Freshwater Strategy poll asked voters if there should be more co-governance with Māori in government decision-making—and 45 per cent disagreed, with only 28 per cent in favour. There was a similar split among voters about whether road signage should be written in Te Reo Māori as well as English: 45 per cent were against compared with only 32 per cent in favour.

The Treaty Principles Bill is part of an ideological attack on Māori self-determination.

Treaty

Many Indigenous people and allies across the world look to the Treaty of Waitangi as a model for how Indigenous people can secure real rights.

The Victorian Labor government is working towards a Treaty with Aboriginal people, and state governments in NSW, SA, Tasmania and the ACT are considering it. But to see the Treaty of Waitangi as a source of progress for Māori is to mistake the map for the land.

The Treaty of Waitangi was an

The bill attempts to reverse Maori rights by reinterpreting Treaty principles

agreement between Māori and the British Crown, signed in 1840 by more than 500 Māori chiefs.

There were two versions of the Treaty, in Māori and in English, that said different things. In the Māori version, the Treaty allowed the Crown to station a governor in Aotearoa while guaranteeing Māori control of land and culture. In English, the Treaty gave the Crown authority over New Zealand and the right to buy land.

Māori did not share the same concepts of land ownership as British settlers. Many Crown purchases were conducted covertly by appealing to individuals, despite land being communally owned.

Māori often agreed to allow settlers the use of their land without knowing that the settlers viewed this as a permanent sale.

Anger at increasing dispossession saw Māori in the North Island organise a series of Kotahitanga (solidarity) movements, aiming to unite Māori, establish an alternative government, and stop further loss of land.

The colonial Land Wars intensified as the Crown sought to break down all barriers to the alienation of land. Disregarding any pretence of Treaty obligation, the Crown confiscated tracts of land and killed thousands of Māori.

New Zealand Chief Justice Prendergast ruled in 1877 that the Treaty was a “simple nullity” with no effect on New Zealand law.

By the 1890s, only 17 per cent of land was left in Māori control. Children were beaten in schools for speaking Te Reo Māori.

Rather than protecting Māori control of Aotearoa, the Treaty facilitated the theft of Māori land and the growth of British settlements.

Resurgence

After the Second World War, the state encouraged Māori into urban indus-

tries where thousands of Māori and pākehā (Europeans) worked together. While their ancestors had been defeated militarily, working class Māori now had a far greater patu (weapon): the porotū (strike).

Through to the 1970s, many Māori had become well respected trade unionists, fighting for higher pay and conditions alongside pākehā workers. Māori were able to use their industrial mana (authority) to politicise the unions.

For example, unions raised funds for activist group Ngā Tamatoa and supported the 1975 land march. Then in the 1980s unions placed a Green Ban on Māori land at Bastion Point that property developers wanted to use for high-end real estate.

Syd Jackson, Māori student activist and trade unionist, argues, “Trade Union support was vital to the Ngāti Whātua people during their 500 day occupation of Bastion Point... They decided that a green ban should be placed on the whole of Bastion Point, and individual Unions informed contractors of this decision. This had the desired effect of halting development work.”

Trade unionists raised money for the occupation and would mobilise to stop police invasions. It took both police and the military to break the occupation and even then, the green ban remained in place.

A strong base in the working class gave the Māori rights movement the power to win reforms such as the introduction of Māori language into schools, returned land, Treaty settlements and social services.

But rather than admit that working class power is what forced concessions and reform, governments and bosses instead refer to their Treaty obligations.

Counter-offensive

Governments in New Zealand responded to the 1970s Māori rights movement by attempting to absorb it into state institutions and legal claims.

Where there were land occupations, now there was the Waitangi Tribunal, set up to hear claims under the Treaty and making recommendations to government. Where Māori had united to defend their whenua (land) and win it back into communal ownership, now there were individualised shares in land and tribal corporations overseeing assets.

Ngāi Tahu Holdings, for example, is worth nearly \$2 billion. Ngāi Tahu members are offered perks like schol-



Above: A protest against the Treaty Principles Bill Photo: Mark McGuire

arships and housing schemes while the executives of Ngāi Tahu are on six-figure salaries. Indeed, the current CEO of Ngāi Tahu Holdings, Todd Moyle, is not even Māori.

Since the courts had ruled that the Treaty had no force under the country’s law, governments also moved to make some individual pieces of legislation subject to the “Treaty principles”.

While a thin layer of upper class Māori were left like foam on the shores as the movement faded, the vast majority of Māori remain at the bottom of society and continue to face structural racism and disadvantage.

Māori control only 6 per cent of the land. In 2020, Māori made up 52 per cent of the prison population but only 16 per cent of the total population. Māori earn up to 23 per cent less than pākehā and make up 60 per cent of homeless people. In 2019-2020, about 60 per cent of the children entering state care were Māori.

The dominant view of the Treaty expresses a real contradiction. The Māori rights movement rose up in the 1970s in spite of the Treaty. Then the movement receded. But it was never possible for governments to completely wind back the reforms made in response to it.

So people see that Māori have made some progress to reclaim land and culture, and many attribute this to greater respect for the Treaty as the source of Māori rights. But this benefits the establishment through

writing out of history the only social force capable of defending Māori rights from the Coalition’s attacks: the organised working class.

In the last election Te Pāti Māori (the Māori Party) vote went up after they campaigned around opposition to spending cuts as well as for raising taxes on the rich.

But there is also a basis for winning wider working class support for Māori through a common struggle against a Coalition government that is attacking the entire working class.

The Coalition’s racist attacks represent the continuation of an agenda which has so far transferred billions of dollars to big business, away from workers.

The New Zealand Council of Trade Unions and union officials have shown symbolic support for the hīkoi, releasing statements and showing flags at rallies. They have not yet committed to a substantial mobilisation in support of future hīkoi. But there is potential for a united front between Māori organisations and the unions.

While we need to defeat the attacks here and now, Tino Rangatiratanga (sovereignty) can only be secured by ending the rule of the big bosses and politicians who constantly try to divide the working class and take back the wins of our movements.

The fight today must go beyond defending te Tiriti to taking on a system which exploits all working class people, the same system which oppresses Māori.

WHAT'S SO SPECIAL ABOUT THE WORKING CLASS?

Erima Dall explains why the working class is still the only force with the power to bring fundamental change—and a world run in the interests of people and planet

WHY DO socialists talk so much about the working class?

Socialists can often be found on picket lines or convincing their work-mates to join the union and stand up to the bosses.

Even over issues such as climate change or the genocide in Gaza, we point to the importance of winning working class support and union backing for our campaigns.

This is because the working class remains the key force in society capable of challenging the exploitation and horrors of capitalism.

Mass strikes cannot be ignored in the way that protests sometimes are, because the economic impact can be dramatic.

A mass strike can bring society grinding to a halt and cut off the flow of profits on which companies and the capitalist system depend.

Ordinary people do all the work needed to keep society running. At the end of the day, if the boss stays home, nobody notices much. But if nurses, bus drivers, Google employees or Amazon warehouse workers don't show up to work, whole industries come to a standstill.

The working class is the only social group that can take control of the economic levers of society and fundamentally restructure it to put human need before profit.

The working class today

It is fashionable to say that the working class has disappeared—replaced by “the middle class”, a “knowledge economy” or a “precariat” of gig workers.

But this misunderstands what it means to be working class.

Workers aren't just those in blue-collar jobs. What makes you working class is your role in the economy and the level of control over your labour. Class is determined by your relationship to the means of production.

The vast majority sell their ability to labour for wages to the bosses and so are part of the working class.

Most of us are not part of the tiny minority that own and control production.

Many white-collar jobs have become mundane and alienating, increasingly resembling factory-line production. Big strikes of public sector workers, teachers and university staff show that white-collar workers are just as capable of unionising and fighting.

Manufacturing jobs have declined but blue-collar work remains vital.

Construction employs over a million people in Australia and has produced powerful unions like the CFMEU. Workers like these can take strike action that has a huge economic impact even if undertaken by a small workforce of dozens, shutting down mines, the rail network or the power grid.

Globally, the working class has grown to represent more than 50 per cent of the population, with hundreds of millions of workers in countries like China, India, Brazil and Indonesia.

There has been a massive rise in inequality over the past 40 years. Workers everywhere are exhausted and overworked, often juggling multiple jobs to survive. Full-time workers struggle to afford homes.

Workers are systematically exploited to make corporate profits for the rich.

Bosses will always want to cut wages and conditions to increase their profit margins, forcing workers to fight back. Workers' interests remain fundamentally opposed to those of the wealthy minority of capitalists and therefore to the system itself.

Fighting back

Workers have used industrial action to win many of the rights we have today.

Unions campaigned for annual leave over many decades, going right back to the stonemasons in Melbourne and Sydney who fought for the eight-hour day and a right to a life outside the workplace.

Workers have used industrial action to win many of the rights we have today

Enormous strikes in the 1890s led to maritime workers winning ten days of paid annual leave. In 1935 the Printers Union won one week's leave. It was not until 1970 that a full four weeks was finally won.

The 1970s was a general period of upheaval and workers' struggles. A national general strike involving 1.6 million workers took place in 1976 to stop the Fraser government abolishing Medibank.

Workers also have a history of standing up to war and racism.

The movement against the Vietnam War started out small—but by 1970, tens of thousands of organised workers were taking to the streets on weekdays, marching under the slogan “Stop work to stop the war”.

Apartheid in South Africa was ultimately defeated by a militant Black workers' movement, supported by a global boycott movement that saw unions famously disrupt the tour of the all-white South African Rugby team, the Springboks.

In Australia, hotel workers refused to book the team's accommodation and transport workers refused to move the team around, forcing them to take private jets.

This movement also reinvigorated a determined Aboriginal rights movement. First Nations workers had already taken strike action themselves, as in the Wavehill walk-off of Gurindji stockmen in 1966.

The demands began to be supported more broadly by the working class, who took to the streets to march for land rights most famously with the Black Moratorium in 1972.

Faced with genocide in Gaza, we need unions and the organised working class to enforce sanctions on Israel like those in the past. The National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) has resolved at the national level to implement Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions against Israel—an achievement won over a year of rank-and-file organising in the union.

Unions in Spain, Italy, Greece

and Belgium have prevented shipments of weapons going to Israel. We need workers here to do the same.

Challenges

One of the obstacles to this is that unions today are weaker and there has been an overall decline in class struggle. Strike days have plummeted since the 1970s, from an average of 2368 disputes annually to just 198 in the 2010s.

Conservative union leaders are often the first to highlight the decline of organised labour, in order to dampen expectations and accept compromises.

During the peak of class struggle in the 1970s, wages accounted for a record share of GDP. However, the ruling class retaliated.

The 1980s saw a decisive attack on class struggle and a shift toward neoliberalism—casualisation, privatisation and wage restraint—first introduced in Australia by the Hawke and Keating Labor governments. Unions became complicit in policies that restricted strike activity.

In the early 1990s, new legal restraints were introduced, limiting the scope for strikes and imposing harsh penalties for illegal “unprotected” industrial action.

The union movement increasingly fell into line, relying on legal disputes in courts, limited enterprise bargaining and lobbying inside the Labor Party as the path to change.

Rebuild

But strong unions have been built, and rebuilt, out of equally tough conditions.

During the Second World War there was immense pressure to support the war effort and many unions had no-strike policies yet, as the war dragged on, illegal strikes began to surge. Women who were entering the industrial workforce for the first time were particularly enthusiastic.

Throughout the 1950s, in the midst of the Cold War red scare, unionists faced increased repression.

But by 1969, frustration with anti-union laws reached boiling point, and a general strike led by Tramways Union Secretary Clarrie O’Shea broke the back of the “penal powers” that imposed punitive fines on striking unions.

Unions that fight consistently grow. In 2023 the NTEU at Sydney University recruited hundreds of members through a determined campaign of strike action to win better pay and conditions.



Above: Workers outside blue collar industries have also unionised and taken strike action, like these nurses in NSW last year Photo: Solidarity

The potential for decisive class struggles today is immense. In 2020 the biggest strike of human history occurred in India, involving 250 million people.

In the US, 2023 was declared the “year of the strike”, as auto workers, teachers, Hollywood writers and actors as well as Starbucks workers and nurses all took strike action.

A world to win

The working class also holds the power to create a completely different society, run on the basis of real democracy and human need.

Workers’ role in production means we already do all the work to run society—but the decisions about what to produce and where to invest are in the hands of the capitalist ruling class.

Any strike on a wide enough scale forces workers to take decisions about running society into their own hands—from how to feed people to when to run transport, power systems and hospitals.

A small example of what workers’ control can look like occurred in Greece in 2013, after the global financial crisis.

The entire government TV broadcaster ERT was shut down, sacking 2700 workers.

Rather than accept their fate, the workforce decided to occupy, and run the network themselves—reporting on the strikes and struggles. Workers reported teaching each other new skills, and many women reporters

stopped wearing makeup in an act of liberation.

Throughout history, revolutions and uprisings have seen the emergence of workers’ committees and councils on a much wider scale.

This was true of the 1918-19 German revolution, the upheaval in Chile in 1973 and the 1979 Iranian revolution, to name a few.

Despite its later degeneration into dictatorship, the most complete form of workers’ democracy arose out of the Russian Revolution of 1917, with factory committees based in each workplace nominating delegates to higher district-wide committees called soviets.

Every day workers debated the tasks of the revolution at work and were closely engaged in the decisions of the local soviets. If they didn’t like the way things were going, they sent new delegates instead.

Working class control of the economy means we could redirect money away from militarisation and towards building affordable, quality housing.

Instead of opening up yet more gas fields and oil wells, we could construct major renewable projects instead.

Technological improvements and automation can be used to create shorter working days, not just to put people out of a job.

We need more revolutionary socialists who understand the potential of the working class so that we can build and channel these struggles into a fight for a better world and to end the insanity of capitalism for good.

MORE BLACK KIDS LOCKED UP AS RACIST IMPRISONMENT SURGES



Above: Protesting youth prisons in Alice Springs in 2017 following the exposure of conditions of torture in Don Dale youth prison Photo: Shut Youth Prisons Mparntwe

By Luke Ottavi

THE FAILURE of the Voice referendum left racists and the right emboldened.

The Albanese government has opened the door for the racist onslaught. It refused to fight for Indigenous rights through the referendum campaign, saying the body would be have no real power.

The referendum provided a useful distraction from Albanese's own racist policy agenda. His government continues to enforce apartheid-style laws against NT Aboriginal communities, continuing measures started in 2007 with John Howard's Intervention.

Nationally, the number of Indigenous prisoners increased 15 per cent in the year to June 2024. Indigenous people in Australia are already the most incarcerated on the planet—32 per cent of the prison population but only 3.8 per cent of the total population.

Labor and Liberal state governments around the country have been driving up these numbers, running a harsh "law and order" agenda.

And Albanese has done nothing to address the cost of living crisis hitting Indigenous people hardest, pushing people into homelessness and prison.

Racist panic

There has been a particularly racist panic about "youth crime".

In October one of the first acts of the new Country Liberal Party (CLP) government in the NT was to lower the age of criminal responsibility to 10. This means 10 and 11-year-olds can now be locked up in youth prisons. In the NT, typically 100 per cent of the

children in detention are Indigenous.

These children grow up facing extreme social deprivation.

"Most of these kids are experiencing poverty, disability, removal, poor health, low education, and trauma," Tiwi woman and Justice Not Jails spokesperson Yvonne Dunn explained.

In prison they are "treated like animals", the group says, with youth prisons, "notoriously overcrowded, presenting serious physical and mental health risks to prisoners".

The CLP has also made it harder to get bail, including for children. Prison numbers have skyrocketed, with police watch houses and prisons overflowing.

Similarly, in Queensland, "youth crime" legislation was the new Liberal National Party government's first act in November, following its election.

Never mind that rates of youth crime have been falling for two decades and offences were down 6.7 per cent last year, according to Queensland police data.

Its new laws target Indigenous children, who make up 70 per cent of children in detention. They make it easier to lock up kids by removing the principle of detaining children as a last resort, along with draconian "adult crime, adult time" measures increasing sentences for youth offences.

This meant again over-riding the Human Rights Act, continuing the legacy of the outgoing Queensland Labor government that also twice suspended it to lock up more kids.

These laws will do nothing to make Queenslanders safer or reduce crime. According to National Voice for our Children chief executive Catherine Liddle, "Over 90 per cent of children who leave detention in Queensland will

return to the system within the year."

Peter Dutton is demanding further attacks on Indigenous rights.

Many local councils have moved citizenship ceremonies from 26 January, recognising that it marks the beginning of colonisation and genocide. Dutton announced he would force them back to Invasion Day.

Albanese refused to stand up to Dutton's racism and responded by declaring he'd "look forward to celebrating Australia Day".

Dutton has also vowed to remove the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags from government press conferences.

Albanese has backed away from his promise to set up a truth-telling commission, or Makarrata.

Promises to replace the exploitative CDP scheme, where more than 40,000 Indigenous people are forced to work for quarantined Centrelink payments with "real jobs" have come to almost nothing, with less than 1000 jobs created out of a promised maximum of 3000.

A renewed Aboriginal rights movement is desperately needed.

The Gomeri campaign against Santos' Pilliga gas project is an example of how to fight and win broad support. A final decision on their appeal at the Native Title Tribunal is expected in March.

Unions have backed the campaign and organised several protest tours to the Pilliga. The most recent, in October, involved members of the Maritime Union of Australia, the Independent Education Union and the nurses' union alongside climate activists.

This is the kind of fight needed to stand up for Indigenous rights.

Prison numbers in the NT have skyrocketed, with police watch houses and prisons overflowing

Solidarity