



SEEK THE TRUTH AND SERVE HUMANITY the Beacon

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EDITORIAL

The recent federal election confounded the experts, dismayed the Labor Party and confused a large section of the electorate, raising the following question: How could a party without policies, struggling with internal dissension, beset by corruption and with little real electoral support, become a government?

The answer is not a simple one. The mass media played a significant role, big money an even more significant role, but most of all it was because the Opposition has lost its direction as well as its commitment to social justice.

The Labor Party leadership, as distinct from its rank and file, has forgotten its purpose, betrayed its members and the wider community, and has clearly evolved as simply the second party of capitalism.

The Labour Party was formed in the 1890s by trade unions seeking a political voice and an increasing influence in government after the failure of the shearers and maritime strikes. It was meant to be the means for ordinary people to obtain a degree of social justice through parliament.

The Liberal Party clearly represents the ruling class: its policies and programs support this. It is the party of big business, of capital, of the class that rules for the elite.

Today's Labor Party is a party that no longer accepts the class nature of our society. It was the Rudd Labor government that sacrificed the word 'class' by using the term 'working Australians' rather than 'working class Australians'.

On most major issues the Labor Party has failed to represent the people. On the environment it

has refused to condemn and oppose Adani. It has embraced privatisation, facilitating the sale of all our major infrastructure, with a severe social cost for the people. It has contributed to the destruction of our vitally important public housing program at a time when homelessness is rapidly rising, favouring developers over those in desperate need.

It has failed to protect asylum seekers and supported appalling conditions in established off-shore camps. It is subservient to US imperialism and supported wars of aggression initiated by them. Add to this the decision to vote with the Morrison government against wider investigation into the criminal activities of Crown Casino based on the fact that there was 'no obvious evidence of corruption among politicians' beggars belief.

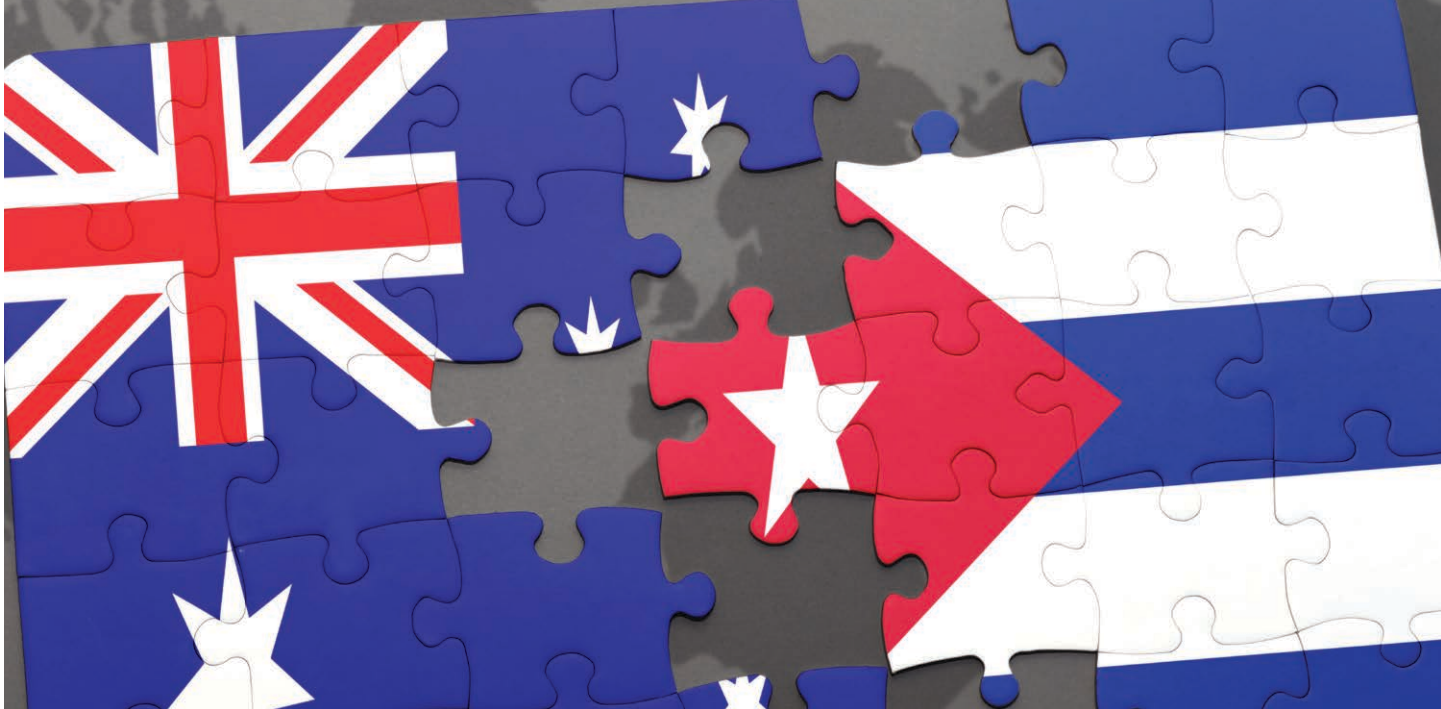
But the very worst display of class bias was displayed when Labor refused to support an increase to the Newstart allowance of \$40 per day despite overwhelming and irrefutable evidence that people were unable to feed their families or keep them warm or pay their rent on this meagre amount or indeed prepare themselves for a job should there be one available.

This is a party that long ago forfeited its right to be called a party of the working class, of the mass of the people, and is indeed clearly now a party that 'misrepresents' us in parliament.

While we understand that we will never get justice through parliament, we need to ensure our Labor representatives take a class stand on the issues that are critical to the future of the working class and the globe.



Cuba and Australia in the Pacific



The Pacific Region has long been considered Australia's backyard – we are, after all, one of the most economically and politically powerful nations in this part of the world, which is largely composed of tiny, disparate island groups. The Pacific Islands are blessed by beautiful natural phenomena, important ecological reserves and, if one knows where to look, bountiful resources, both on and offshore. However, these islands remain poor, economically dependent and developmentally backwards, with staggeringly high rates of health issues and domestic violence, low life expectancy and, in some countries, open and brutal conflict. Australia has had a dirty hand in perpetuating this situation, as we will soon find out, and all so that some of us can benefit – and by 'some of us', I mean Australian corporations. However, the Pacific Islands and their people are quickly taking to a fellow small island nation, this one in the Caribbean, which is instead dedicated to improving conditions in this region. These activities are not designed to seek some ulterior motive as some may claim but rather to ensure that Pacific people can enjoy better healthcare, education, and other essential human services. This island is Cuba. Today, I will compare Australia's actions in the Pacific with those of Cuba, detailing Havana's extraordinary contribution to humanity in the Pacific, and exposing Australia's cruel attempts to retain the Pacific Islands as 'our turf'.


One of Cuba's most significant, and indeed its largest presence in the Asia-Pacific Region, has been on the small island of East Timor, amongst the world's poorest countries, that is still recovering from its brutal occupation by Indonesia. In fact, following

East Timor's independence in 1999, rural medical facilities were virtually nonexistent. This was not helped by the World Bank's relentless attempts to force the Timorese government to privatise its healthcare and educational assets, and the tiny nation effectively lost one billion dollars as a result. East Timor, abandoned during its occupation, was once again left isolated and severely lacking much-needed social aid. This is where Cuba came in. Upon hearing of East Timor's plight at a regional conference in the early 2000s, Fidel Castro offered East Timor's government as many doctors as they needed to alleviate the issue at hand. So, the largest medical aid mission outside Latin America began. Around 300 doctors on two-year medical missions now serve both rural and urban populations across East Timor, whilst over 1000 East Timorese students have been sent to Cuba free of charge to study medicine, and then return to their home country to bolster efforts there. A medical school has since been established in Dili with Cuban funding. Currently, Cuban-trained doctors are the backbone and lifeline of East Timor's fledgling public healthcare system. This program has been significant in that it is a public sector-to-public sector endeavour, with no input from private sector organisations. Cuban medical personnel are paid the same wages as the East Timorese, avoiding the often-detrimental development of a dual economy and resentment of the higher-paid aid workers that accompany private NGOs and aid organisations. The ethos applied by Cuban doctors and teachers has also meant that East Timorese medical staff are interested first and foremost in helping their home

country, and the nation now has one of the highest doctor retention rates in the Asia-Pacific. In fact, a survey conducted in 2014 indicated that 99 per cent of East Timorese doctors wanted to remain in their country and in the public sector, in large part due to the ideals espoused by Cuban personnel. This can be compared with nations such as Fiji, where an average of between 40 and 50 per cent of graduate doctors leave their country annually to seek better opportunities elsewhere. Since the beginning of the Cuban medical mission in East Timor, child mortality rates have dropped from 172 per 1000 in 1999 to 55 per 1000 in 2013. Additionally, access to clean drinking water had increased to 70% by 2014, as a direct result of Cuban efforts in rural areas. So, I do not exaggerate when I say that Cuba is one of the most significant factors contributing to human development in East Timor. One, Doctor Monteiro, head of East Timor's disease control program, a Cuban scholarship graduate and head of the Timor-Cuba Friendship Society, has said that Cuba's medical missions are 'about human values, not "if you have money to pay me I'll serve you better".' Moreover, she remarked that illiteracy in some provinces has been eradicated due to Cuba's 'Yo si Puedo' literacy campaign, which is used with Indigenous Australian communities here as well. Clearly, East Timor is thankful for the selfless aid of the Cuban medical missions, and these achievements are something that the Cubans should be rightfully proud of.

Now, Australia's contribution to development in East Timor is another matter entirely. Where does one begin? We actively supported and concealed Indonesia's genocidal invasion of East Timor, in which a third of the island's population is estimated to have been massacred. Canberra was also instrumental in providing intelligence and arms to the Indonesian military during this period. We even covered up the murder of five of our own journalists by Indonesian soldiers in the 1970s. Whilst this was shameful enough, Australia continued to betray East Timor well after its independence. Following a 1999 referendum in which almost the entire East Timorese populace voted for independence, mass violence against East Timorese protestors was perpetrated by Indonesian soldiers, and Australia intervened militarily. We didn't stop the Indonesian soldiers. Rather, our military was sent straight to strategic areas that our government sought for itself after the fighting inevitably subsided – including the oil-rich Arafura Sea. Additionally, we lobbied the UN to keep the Indonesian Army in control of the 'transition to democracy' in East Timor. This essentially allowed the master to keep ruling the slave. And when East Timor finally did achieve total independence in 2001, Australia then bullied the new government into perhaps one of the most exploitative trade deals in existence – the Bayu-Undan gas field – which could have been an economic lifeline for East Timor, and far closer to East Timor than Australia, was piped directly to Darwin. Australian corporations continue to have exclusive rights over revenue from this resource. Half of the Greater Sunrise Oilfield has also been illegally claimed by our country, though East Timor has contested this for years. During negotiations over this particular oilfield in 2006, it was revealed that ASIO had been illegally bugging

the East Timorese government building to spy on their discussions. Australia has completely and utterly ruined East Timor. Today, when walking the streets of Dili, the island's capital, it is not uncommon to see graffiti depicting Australian soldiers as crocodiles and kangaroos sucking East Timor's oil and blood out of a barrel. Moreover, Australians visiting have been warned to hide their identity because there is almost unanimous consensus that Australia is full of thieves and criminals. And judging by what has transpired, it is difficult to challenge the East Timorese on this



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claim. Currently, Australia sends about 70 million dollars in aid to East Timor – already a small amount – though this number is likely to fall further as the Liberal government continues to slash aid spending. This is sickening and hypocritical, considering we extract an estimated five billion dollars in stolen wealth from East Timor, condemning them to poverty and underdevelopment. So, in a twisted way, East Timor is forced to give us much more than we have ever given them. This is capitalism at its finest, and Australia has merely done what other Western nations do in their respective 'backyards'. Canberra is so desperate to maintain its economic and political power that it has condemned an entire nation to massacres, rape, wanton destruction and theft of resources. Cuba, on the other hand, has once again proven that there is another way, a manner in which nations can work together based upon respect and socialist principles.

Another Pacific Island nation that has been helped immeasurably by Cuba is the Solomon Islands, once again a very poor nation, and once again very close to Australia. Following several years of violent unrest, the Solomon Islands were left with just one doctor per 10,000 and poverty was endemic. In 2008, two Cuban doctors arrived as a part of Cuba's medical mission to the Solomon Islands. Cedric Alependava, then Undersecretary for Health, has since praised these individuals as 'a blessing to the people of the Solomons'. The number of Cuban personnel operating in the islands expanded to forty over the next few years and has since increased further. Twenty-five young Solomon Islanders also began their subsidised medical studies in Cuba in 2008, and as of 2012, ninety Solomon Islanders had been fully trained and returned to the islands, contributing to a commendable reduction in disease contraction and increasing life expectancy, as in East Timor. What was particularly impressive regarding Cuban aid to the Solomon Islands was the specificity and appropriateness of the medical aid. The first two doctors sent in 2008 were an anaesthetic specialist and a physician, both of which were severely lacking in the Solomon Islands. Clearly, Cuba has played not only a positive role in the Solomon Islands, but a vital one, as many rural communities would still be devoid of even the most basic medical assistance without Cuban internationalist efforts.

Australia, once again, has embarrassed itself with its behaviour in the Solomon Islands. You will perhaps be most familiar with our involvement in the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands, or RAMSI, which we spearheaded, alongside New Zealand. This began in 2003, following horrific inter-island fighting known as 'the tensions'. After a deeply flawed peace agreement that Australia championed in 2000, the situation morphed into an islands-wide extortion racket where pardoned local militias were making millions of dollars from selling decommissioned weapons and, unsurprisingly, this reignited the conflict. In 2009, at the end of a costly and bloody operation, Australia left the Solomon Islands with a severely underfunded and understaffed police force as well as an inexperienced legal and political system. The true nature of Australia's involvement in the Solomon Islands was exposed when the Howard administration demanded that the government in Honiara embrace neoliberalism and privatisation – whilst giving preferential treatment to Australian companies, of course. In fact, the Australian foreign minister at the time was reported to have slammed his fists down in the Solomon Islands parliament building, threatening that no further aid would be given unless the Solomon Islands did as Australia said. Mind you, Australia had no legal right to demand this of the Solomon Islands, but it went ahead regardless. Now, almost ten years and three billion dollars later, Honiara's main hospital is in squalid condition, the nation's GDP is one of the lowest on the planet and the islands have suffered no less than three major insurrections since RAMSI left Solomon shores. But Australian companies and their unscrupulous local business allies in Honiara have reaped the rewards, forcing through several lucrative contracts with the desperate government. The most recent, and

much-publicised instance of Australian aid to the Solomon Islands, which saw Scott Morrison pledge improvements to infrastructure, will actually take funding away from vital education and healthcare programs in the country.



AUSTRALIA, ONCE AGAIN, HAS EMBARRASSED ITSELF WITH ITS BEHAVIOUR IN THE SOLOMON ISLANDS.

Cuba's role in the Pacific is not limited to these two countries. A Cuba-Pacific Islands summit in 2008 saw representatives from Tonga, Kiribati, the Solomon Islands, Tuvalu and many other countries meet together with Cuban officials in Havana to discuss issues of healthcare, education and development. From this meeting, further agreements and international missions have grown. Kiribati sent over thirty students to Cuba in 2009 for medical training, and one of its only four embassies is in fact Cuban. Tuvalu has also received much-needed Cuban aid in the medical sector, for free, of course. These two small, low-lying island groups also collaborate with Cuba on climate change research, an issue that affects them all. Vanuatu shares a particularly strong connection with Cuba, as Fidel Castro was an ardent supporter of the Ni-Vanuatu calls for independence from France in the 1980s. Several dozen students from that island have also completed studies in Cuba. In every instance, it is clear that the Cubans are not doing this for political purposes – this is the socialist internationalism that drives their operations in Latin America, Africa and Asia, a desire to create a better world for those less fortunate.

However, Cuban doctors and Cuban-trained Pacific students have come under fire from certain groups in the region. There are claims that the Cubans do not train these students adequately, or that not enough is being done to address local issues in the islands. But, let's take a look at who specifically is making these claims. Because, believe me, you will be hard-pressed to find a hostile or negative testimony from a Pacific Islander who has actually

been treated or trained by the Cubans. Rather, the vast majority of disgruntled Pacific Islanders hail from the region's wealthy medical elite, the majority of whom work in the private medical sector and have studied in Fiji, a strong US ally, or in Hawaii, within the United States itself. These individuals make these accusations because they are threatened by the Cuban medical missions, which have grown very popular in the Pacific Islands. And they feel that their 'business' is jeopardised by the free Cuban medical assistance. A similar phenomenon has occurred in Brazil, where Cuban doctors were not only harassed but also racially abused by wealthy Brazilian medical practitioners. Cuban medical education courses are some of the most widely recognised qualifications in the world, and not even the United States has denied the impressive medical capacities of the Cuban state. There can be no doubting that the quality and standard of Cuban medical missions in the Pacific are excellent – the research and PhD theses I read to inform this speech also attest to the excellence of Cuban personnel and their training.

Australia's track record with the rest of the Pacific is less than stellar, to say the least. In 2009 the Director of Economic Governance of the Pacific Islands Forum denounced Australia's constant attempts to bully smaller Pacific nations into accepting free trade deals that benefit Australian corporate interests. This official, Roman Grynberg, was ousted from his position by Australia and New Zealand after he published an article detailing how Canberra and Wellington use the tactics of coercion and bribery, as well as the cover of the IMF, to force their agenda upon other Pacific Islands. This is typical imperialist behaviour and isn't helped by the fact that Australia and New Zealand control almost the entire budget and funding of the Pacific Islands Forum. This allowed Canberra to maintain its military intervention in the Solomon Islands, Tonga and Papua New Guinea in the early 2000s, simultaneously approving neoliberal restructuring programs for these three nations. Local

industries in these islands have since collapsed in the face of competition from Australian companies. The resultant poverty and unemployment has forced many Pacific Islanders to come to Australia and New Zealand to work as cheap, underpaid labour on farms and in factories. Unsurprisingly, the governments of the Pacific Islands do not want to engage in these trade deals and restructuring programs, but they are unable to do anything in the face of Australia and New Zealand's domination of the region. Clearly, Australia believes that it can do what it wants.

Times are changing, however. Australia's thuggish behaviour in the Pacific has thrust many islands into the arms of China, which has initiated many development projects in the region. Whilst it remains to be seen how effective this aid will be, at the very least it provides an alternative to Canberra. Cuba has also expanded its contribution to development in the Pacific, and the health and education programs there are constantly evolving to suit local needs.

Cuban aid to the Pacific Islands has been generous, cooperative, effective and internationalist. This proves perhaps one of the greatest achievements of the island's socialist revolution, and that is a commitment to brotherhood and solidarity amongst nations. This is all the more extraordinary considering that Cuba, with a low GDP itself and suffering at the hands of the illegal US blockade, has done so much for the Pacific Islands. It is also significant in that it has at least partially reduced and exposed these islands' dependence upon Australia. Cuban aid to the Pacific is everything Australia should be doing. And yet this is the fundamental difference between capitalism and socialism. Whereas Cuban internationalism has contributed to human development, with great respect for local customs and an emphasis on education and community, Australia has plundered the Pacific, with little regard for the human and environmental impact it has had, and will continue to have, in this beautiful but troubled part of the world. 🕊

WE ACKNOWLEDGE

Traditional owners of the Kulin Nation, past Warriors, Elders past and present.

Our church is a public and usable asset with portable seating and excellent conference, meeting and function facilities. We welcome its use by those who support our motto 'Seek the Truth and Serve Humanity'. Interested individuals or groups can contact the church office – we would be delighted to speak to you. A donation is payable.



Friday, 26 July 2019

ATTN: POLITICAL PARTIES / LEFT AND PROGRESSIVE ORGANISATIONS

Dear Comrades, Friends and Supporters

The Maritime Union of Australia is in dispute with global multi-national container terminal operator DP World. This Dubai based tax-dodging monolith is currently attacking the rights and conditions of the 1800 waterside workers employed by DP World throughout its four ports in Australia, being Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Fremantle. This is a massive dispute which is escalating over fundamental and critical issues not just for wharfies, but the entire working class.

The main issues in dispute centre around:

200 WHARFIES THROWN ON SCRAP HEAP

There is no basis for DP World to move to 200 compulsory redundancies. The MUA and its membership accept that in periods of lower volume there is a capacity to mitigate both the impacts and the redundancies, via roster change, reduced hours and other measures. We have company rejected proposals on the table in both Sydney and Melbourne that would address the current shortfall of work.

It is an attempt to deregulate the workplace further, so that rostered permanents are minimised and irregular workers are maximised, an attack on our right to work, our basic rights, our job security, our conditions and our quality of life.

OUTSOURCING

The company wants to outsource Cargo Care operations nationally. This important function ensures that the goods in refrigerated containers are kept at appropriate temperatures and do not spoil. This work came under the jurisdiction of wharfies as part of the outcomes associated with the process of containerisation. Maintenance, refuelling and other roles are also up for grabs throughout the country.

We reject our traditional work being outsourced. The outsourced work regularly goes to non union companies, with reduced rates of pay, and reductions in safety, evidenced recently by the outsourcing of a wire rope change.

It is a union busting exercise and we are determined to fight it with your support.

AUTOMATION

Automation is being weaponised by businesses to cut costs, cut workers, and cut conditions. It is not the productivity driver that is reported, it is purely an anti-union attack and union-busting strategy.

The CEO of DP World Australia threatened wharfies with automation in the AFR. We are opposed to automation and will fight against it when it is not in the interests of our members, families and communities.

If DP World aren't going to automate, why not put that clearly in the agreement. If DP World declare they want to automate then we are seeking job security provisions and protections from union busting abuses and prevention of the transference of wharfies work to management which is a stated aim of DP World.

INCOME PROTECTION

DPW have already sought to remove this social condition from workers. We don't accept workers and their families being left worse off because DP World wants to use Income Protection and the welfare of our families as a bargaining chip. It actually costs DP World more to get rid of Income Protection highlighting the true nature and behaviour of DP World.

Our members receive more outcomes, more services, and more benefits when they have a policy that the Union has negotiated, the same cost delivering more benefits, yet DP World are ideologically opposed and acting belligerently.

DISHONEST BARGAINING

DP World are using dishonest back door methods to achieve claims they cannot bargain or negotiate into the agreement.

Using the Commission, courts and back door change methods is not a process of good faith bargaining. DP World should drop all of their dishonest notifications of change and bargain around the issues with workers and their union.

If Companies can undermine the whole premise of the system of Enterprise Bargaining, by introducing change whenever they want, the entire system is reduced to oblivion.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

We want Domestic Violence protections and 10 days Domestic Violence paid leave in our agreements. The company want DV in a discretionary company policy.

There is no place for the haves and the have nots when it comes to domestic violence or somehow ranking the effects of this social plague prior to offering assistance.

DP WORLD PROFITS

This global giant has operated over the last 20 years with an enormous profit margin of close to 50%. The average profit margin for Australian stevedores over the last 10 years sits at an amazingly profitable 17.98%, which would put them in the top 20 global corporations for profit raking.

The incredible profits over such a long period of time demonstrate productivity improvements by workers that have gone unrewarded.

The Company have rejected the MUA's claim for a three per cent wage increase.

SOLIDARITY REQUEST

This dispute is likely to continue for some time. The issues are critical for the future of wharfies. Australian wharfies have played a major role in solidarity movements, the peace movement and within left and progressive politics for over 100 years. Wharfies have consistently supported community and charitable causes and opposed the corporate greed of Australian bosses and their reactionary political mates. We have always stood alongside workers in struggle and we always will.

On this occasion, once again, it is the MUA and wharfies at DP World who are under attack from their bosses and the Morrison government. Accordingly, we request that your organisation consider undertaking one or all of the following actions in support of the campaign of wharfies for justice, job security and the right to work.

1. Write a solidarity letter to the MUA and a letter to DP World condemning their attacks on Australian wharfies.
2. Have your organisation photographed with the sign of solidarity in meetings or with individual members and send to us (sign to be sent and will be available on MUA social media).
3. Publish articles of support for the MUA and DP World Wharfies in your journal or newspaper.
4. Support and share our social media postings on the dispute.
5. Send a solidarity video clip message via YouTube or send videos to us to distribute.

Your support and solidarity in this campaign is vital. Wharfies are the target for extreme union busting in an environment of broad social anti-unionism driven by reactionary forces and related to the Ensuring Integrity Bill. The attack on wharfies is an attack on all workers and we look forward to your ongoing support and solidarity.



Warren Smith

*Divisional Assistant National Secretary Maritime Union of Australia Division
Construction, Forestry, Maritime, Mining and Energy Union*



WE MUST STOP OUR NATION'S PUSH FOR RELENTLESS WAR

Former president Jimmy Carter recently made a profound and damning statement – the United States is the ‘most warlike nation in the history of the world’. Carter contrasted the United States with China, saying that China is building high speed trains for its people while the United States is putting all of its resources into mass destruction. Where are high speed trains in the United States, Carter appropriately wondered.

As if to prove Carter’s assertion, Vice President Mike Pence told the most recent graduating class at West Point that it ‘is a virtual certainty that you will fight on a battlefield for America at some point in your life ... You will lead soldiers in combat. It will happen’. Clearly referring to Venezuela, Pence continued, ‘Some of you may even be called upon to serve in this hemisphere’. In other words, Pence declared, war is inevitable, a certainty for this country.

Moreover, it was recently reported that the Pentagon is preparing for war against both Russia and China, even as Trump and his henchmen are openly threatening war against Iran and Venezuela, doubling down on the nearly 20-year war in Afghanistan, and aiding and abetting Saudi Arabia in its genocidal war in Yemen. One might think, and certainly hope, that there would be a massive outcry against what appears to be the imminent threat of another world war.

And, yet, this threat has been met with near total silence. Indeed, to the extent that the mainstream media have reacted at all to Trump’s war plans, the reaction has been disappointment that Trump is not moving quickly enough towards military aggression. One example was a May 11 *New York Times* piece, ‘Trump Said He Would Tame Rogue Nations. Now They Are Challenging Him’ – a piece which essentially goaded Trump into using military force against North Korea, Iran, and Venezuela.

In the meantime, the promised and desperately needed infrastructure overhaul in this country is barely mentioned anymore; tent cities sheltering the homeless are rising up in nearly every major US city; nearly half of Americans cannot afford basic necessities; and basic healthcare is still out of reach of millions of Americans.

The mammoth elephant in the room is the insatiable military-industrial complex, which is diverting precious resources away from these causes and towards the cause of destroying other nations. Meanwhile, the US war machine is arguably the greatest contributor in the world to the global warming crisis. And, as a symbol of its environmental threat, the US military just opened an airstrip in the Galapagos Islands.

As the 2020 presidential campaigns begin, it is baffling to witness that none of this is a matter of debate. The one candidate who is willing to broach this subject – military veteran Tulsi Gabbard – is vilified and ridiculed as a result. And yet, don’t people realise that there will be no ‘Green New Deal’, or ‘Medicare for All’, or other such laudable social programs as long as we continue down our unending path of war? Indeed, the United States just made history this year by experiencing a historically high increase in the deficit during good economic times, and this is because we are now engaged in deficit spending on war instead of meeting human want.

In the end, the greatest single thing we can do, both for ourselves and for the world, is to stop the United States from starting its next war, while demanding that it end the wars it has already started. We must demand that our government stop putting resources into war and destruction and instead put those resources towards building, meeting human needs, and saving our environment. This will require the rebuilding of the US peace movement, which once helped stop the war in Vietnam and the US war on Central America, and which mobilised record numbers of people in opposing the invasion of Iraq in 2003. Such a peace movement is needed now more than ever, and it is literally a matter of life and death.

*Oliver Stone is an Academy Award-winning filmmaker and author. Dan Kovalik teaches international human rights at the University of Pittsburgh School of Law. They both contributed to the new book *The Plot to Overthrow Venezuela: How the US is Orchestrating a Coup for Oil*.*



Assange's treatment torture says UN

Professor Nils Melzer is a Swiss academic, author and practitioner in the field of international law. Since 1 November 2016, Melzer has been serving as the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

The following is the response published by Professor Melzer after his investigations into Julian Assange's case.

I know, you may think I am deluded. How could life in an embassy with a cat and a skateboard ever amount to torture? That's exactly what I thought too when Assange first appealed to my office for protection. Like most of the public, I had been subconsciously poisoned by the relentless smear campaign that had been disseminated over the years. So, it took a second knock on my door to get my reluctant attention. But once I looked into the facts of this case, what I found filled me with repulsion and disbelief.

Surely, I thought, Assange must be a rapist! But what I found is that he has never been charged with a sexual offence. True, soon after the US had encouraged allies to find reasons to prosecute Assange, two women made the headlines in Sweden. One of them claimed he had ripped a condom, and the other that he had failed to wear one, in both cases during consensual intercourse – not exactly scenarios that have the ring of 'rape' in any language other than Swedish.

The women even texted that they never intended to report a crime but were 'railroaded' into doing so by zealous Swedish police. Ever since, both Sweden and Britain have done everything to prevent Assange from confronting these allegations without simultaneously having to expose himself to US extradition and thus to a show trial followed by life in jail. His last refuge had been the Ecuadorian Embassy.

Alright, I thought, but surely Assange must be a hacker! But what I found is that all his disclosures had been freely leaked to him, and that no one accuses him of having hacked a single computer. In fact, the only arguable hacking charge against him relates to his *alleged unsuccessful attempt to help breaking a password which, had it been successful, might have helped his source to cover her tracks*. In short: a rather isolated, speculative, and inconsequential chain of events; a bit like trying to prosecute a driver who unsuccessfully attempted to exceed the speed limit but failed because their car was too weak.

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Well, then, I thought, at least we know for sure that Assange is a Russian spy, has interfered with US elections, and negligently caused people's deaths! But all I found is that he consistently published true information of inherent public interest without any breach of trust, duty or allegiance. Yes, he exposed war crimes, corruption and abuse, but let's not confuse national security with governmental impunity. Yes, the facts he disclosed empowered US voters to take more informed decisions, but isn't that simply democracy? Yes, there are ethical discussions to be had regarding the legitimacy of unredacted disclosures. But if actual harm had really been caused, how come neither Assange nor Wikileaks ever faced related criminal charges or civil lawsuits for just compensation?

But surely, I found myself pleading, Assange must be a selfish narcissist, skateboarding through the Ecuadorian Embassy and smearing faeces on the walls. Well, all I heard from Embassy staff is that the inevitable inconveniences of his accommodation at their offices were handled with mutual respect and consideration. This changed only after the election of President Moreno, when they were suddenly instructed to find smears against Assange and, when they didn't, they were soon replaced. The President even took it upon himself to bless the world with his gossip, and to personally strip Assange of his asylum and citizenship without any due process of law.

In the end, it finally dawned on me that I had been blinded by propaganda, and that Assange had been systematically slandered to divert attention from the crimes he exposed. Once he had been dehumanised through isolation, ridicule and shame, just like the witches we used to burn at the stake, it was easy to deprive him of his most fundamental rights without provoking public outrage worldwide. And, thus, a legal precedent is being set, through the backdoor of our own complacency, which in the future can and will be applied just as well to disclosures by *The Guardian*, the *New York Times* and ABC News.

Very well, you may say, but what does slander have to do with torture? Well, this is a slippery slope. What may look like mere 'mudslinging' in public debate, quickly becomes 'mobbing' when used against the defenceless, and even 'persecution' once the state is involved. Now, just add purposefulness and severe suffering, and what you get is full-fledged psychological torture.

Yes, living in an embassy with a cat and a skateboard may seem like a sweet deal when you believe the rest of the lies. But when no one remembers the reason for the hate you endure, when no one even wants to hear the truth, when neither the courts nor the media hold the powerful to account, then your refuge really is but a rubber boat in a shark-pool, and neither your cat nor your skateboard will save your life.

Even so, you may say, why spend so much breath on Assange, when countless others are tortured worldwide? Because this is not only about protecting Assange, but about preventing a precedent likely to seal the fate of Western democracy. For once telling the truth has become a crime, while the powerful enjoy impunity, it will be too late to correct the course. We will have surrendered our voice to censorship and our fate to unrestrained tyranny.

This article has been offered for publication to The Guardian, the Times, the Financial Times, the Sydney Morning Herald, the Australian, the Canberra Times, the Telegraph, the New York Times, the Washington Post, Thomson Reuters Foundation, and Newsweek. None responded positively.



from our readers



Kia Ora (Ed Note: 'Kia Ora' is Māori for 'Hello') Team

We really value your great work.

Jill & Alan Bagnall, NZ

TO THE EDITOR

Please accept my cheque for 12 months subs.

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Please save me!

PS Thank you for sending me the July edition.

Regards

P O'Connor, Vic

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J Michie, NSW

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