



SEEK THE TRUTH AND SERVE HUMANITY the Beacon

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EDITORIAL

In order to understand the propaganda being disseminated by Patrick Corporation and the federal government around the waterside dispute in Sydney, it is important to recall the last time Patrick Corporation decided to take on the union. There were hard-to-forget tactics used by this company against its workers then. Cast your minds back to 1998, when that company decided to sack its entire waterside workforce. Remember the hooded thugs, the vicious dogs, the lockout, the scabs imported to take the place of unionised workers? Do you also recall the generous support offered by the then Minister for Industrial Relations in the Howard government, Peter Reith, in all of this illegal activity?

The Australian waterfront dispute of 1998 was an event in Australian industrial relations history, in which the Patrick Corporation undertook a restructuring of their operations for the purpose of dismissing their workforce. The restructuring by Patrick Corporation was later ruled illegal by Australian courts.

– ABC news report on the Waterfront Dispute, April 1998

Today, Patrick's emerges again in dispute with its workforce and while there are no dogs, scabs and hooded thugs, as yet, the same tired old lies begin to emerge again, lies supported by the Morrison government.

What is the union doing? It is representing its workers in negotiations around wages and conditions – surely a legitimate exercise for a union. Negotiations have been protracted and difficult and have been getting nowhere, hence the introduction of measures to bring the company back to negotiation. The union says: 'Our members worked throughout the COVID crisis to keep the economy ticking over. In fact, it was our efforts to implement separation, segregation and sanitisation protocols that ensured not one day was lost at any Patrick terminal throughout the crisis.'

The union claims Patrick Corporation wanted to 'rip up 50 pages of conditions. Patrick is attempting to impose wholesale cuts to terms and conditions of employment.' Patrick's original statement that there is a danger of a shortage of medical supplies due to the industrial actions of the union has now been retracted.

It should be noted that this highly profitable company have awarded themselves very generous bonuses, with one director who owns about half of Patrick Corporation being awarded \$1.2 million, and bonuses to management totalling over \$10 million.

The Morrison government as expected came out in favour of the company, with its Industrial Relations Minister Christian Porter saying the union actions were a threat to our economic recovery. 'For a union to be attempting to hold the national economy to ransom to leverage a push for a 6% annual pay rise is simply unforgiveable'. What is unforgiveable are the millions of dollars paid in bonuses to already overpaid directors of this company.

If unions do not continue to press for wage increases and protection of conditions, as is their legitimate role, then the gap between the obscene wealth of the few and the majority who are battling to survive will continue to widen and the economic crisis will worsen. We should be thanking waterside workers for their insistence on fighting for wage justice.

The Morrison government in its totally distorted Budget claimed that tax relief given to workers must be spent to improve and save the economy. Shouldn't they, by this logic, be supporting unions fighting for a bigger share of the economy that they have built by their labour?

The determination of the Morrison government to destroy the union movement becomes much clearer. It is simply the only way that they can increase the amount of value going to the wealthy.

photo: Shahbaz Khan

The role of Australia in the Filipino people's struggle against human rights violations

PART TWO

The passage of the Anti-Terrorism Law (ATL) validates the state's terrorism. This is a draconian law that will impinge on the basic human rights of every Filipino wherever they are, whether in the Philippines or abroad.

I will mention some provisions of this law that are very dangerous and disturbing and taken from the Statement of the National Union of People's Lawyers, NUPL).

First:

- Terrorism is vaguely defined in this law – it not only criminalises virtually all acts of freedom of speech, association, assembly, and the press, but also criminalises intent (justified by baseless, politically motivated accusations).
- The so-called safeguards are weakened and can actually serve to crush 'legitimate' forms of protest, such as striking workers' picket lines and peaceful mass demonstrations.
- It suppresses and criminalises free speech and dissent, labels and punishes political enemies as terrorists, and unjustly deprives them of basic internationally recognised human rights and due process.

Second:

- An Anti-Terrorism Council is formed – this consists of presidential cabinet officials and retired generals who serve under the pleasure of the President. This council has the power to declare and proscribe organisations and parties as terrorists or terrorist sympathisers without ample

and fair opportunity to be fully heard in a court of law. So, any group or person that the council does not like, they can proscribe as terrorist.

Third:

- The law also authorises the police or military to arrest people without a judicial warrant and detain and investigate a suspect without charge for 24 days.

This law largely contravenes the 1987 Constitution, which was a democratic victory following the Filipino people's ousting of the Marcos dictatorship and the end of martial law.'

This law is unnecessary and is a tyrannical upgrade of the already existing Human Security Act.

The ATL was passed at the same time as the Filipino people were suffering and battling against the COVID-19 pandemic.

Just recently, two staunch advocates of the poor, human rights workers and peace warriors were murdered: Randall Echanis, a National Democratic Front in the Philippines (NDFP) peace consultant, Deputy Secretary General of Anakpawis (Toiling Masses) had worked tirelessly with the peasants, including authoring a land reform program, was tortured and killed in his rented house on the 10 August. One week later on the 17 August, another human rights worker and advocate of poor peasants and workers, Zara Alvares, was also murdered.

In the time of COVID-19, the Duterte government declared the people the enemy, rather than the pandemic.

WHAT IS AUSTRALIA'S HAND IN THESE ALARMING CONDITIONS IN THE PHILIPPINES?

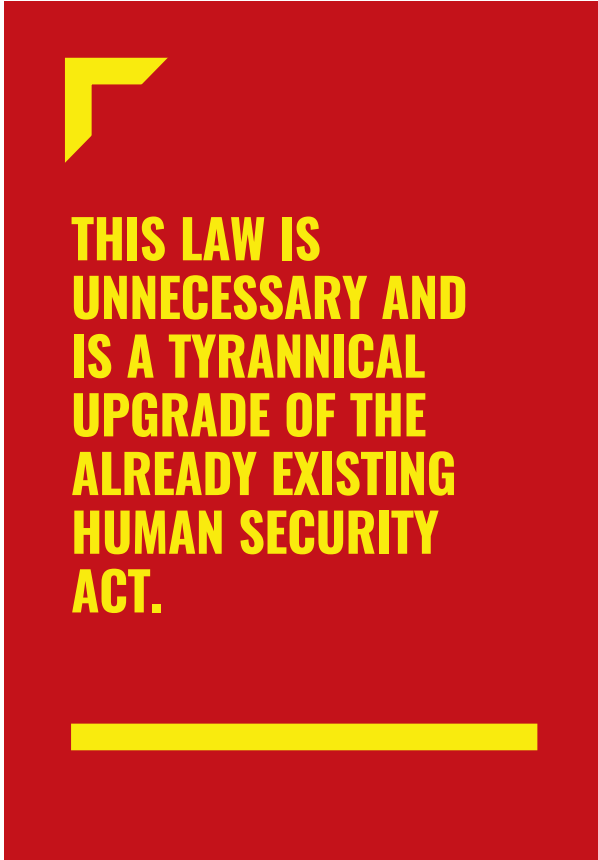
- 1. Australia designated the CPP & NPA as terrorist organisations:** In 2004, PASA wrote a letter to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Alexander Downer, requesting that Australia lift the labelling of the CPP and the NPA in Australia as terrorist organisations. PASA argued that these organisations are being represented by the NDFP and that the NDFP is a recognised group fighting for the Filipino people's socioeconomic rights, social liberation, and national democracy. All former governments of the Philippines after Marcos conducted peace negotiations with the NDFP. Although the peace negotiations were always stalled when it came to discussions on reforms that would benefit the majority of the people, it was still recognition that the NDFP represented a wide proportion of the Filipino community.

The response of the Australian government was that the United States designated these groups as terrorist so Australian would also follow this position. The United Nations did not endorse this designation.

- 2. The presence of Australian military personnel in the Philippines:** Again, we wrote to the Australian government regarding the presence of Australian military personnel in the Philippines. The response we received was that the Australian military is training the Philippine military in human rights. It is ironic that Australia trains the Philippine military in human rights, yet the Philippine military is one of the most notorious government departments widely known to be perpetrators of human rights violations.

One of the most brutal military officers in the Philippines, General Jovito Palparan, who is now serving a jail term for abducting and killing two university students under the Arroyo regime, was trained here in Australia.

- 3. The NTF-ELCAC visit to Australia:** When the NTF-ELCAC visited Australia last February and red-tagged and vilified civil society organisations and Australian citizens, our friends in solidarity raised that visit with the Australian government. DFAT acknowledges that they and the Office of the Minister for Defence had a meeting and a briefing with the Philippine military visitors before their meetings with Filipino community leaders. We believe that the Australian government then would have known the purpose of the visit and the briefing with the Filipino community and that the Australian government was complicit in this.
- 4. Australian military support for the Duterte government:** We are questioning the use of Australian taxpayers' money in supporting a government such as the Duterte government. Even the United Nations Human Rights Committee has recognised that the Duterte



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government is committing gross human rights violations. The UNHRC head, Michelle Bachelet, had a comprehensive report on the human rights situation in the Philippines that was tabled at the UNHRC meeting.

The number of deaths under Duterte's war on drugs has totalled more than twenty-five thousand in just four years and the killings and silencing of dissent are well-known around the world. To date, more than 300 human rights workers and advocates including lawyers, journalists, workers leaders and community leaders were extra judicially killed under Duterte's government. Joseph Camilleri, in his latest article entitled, 'The parlous state of our security policies – thinking through the hard questions', said that Australia's support for oppressive regimes is one of the security policies that Australians should be concerned with.

The UNHRC has mandated an investigation on the human rights situation in the Philippines following the resolution sponsored by Iceland, which the Australian government voted for affirmatively, but the Duterte government calls it interference with a sovereign country and would not allow UN investigators into the country.

Cases against the Duterte government have also been filed with the International Criminal Court (ICC). Although Duterte withdrew from the ICC to avoid prosecution, according to the ICC, the International Court can still hear and process the cases.

So, my dear co-church members and friends, my question is, should Australia be supporting Duterte and using taxpayers' money to support the Philippine military?



The Truth About the MUA Dispute with Patrick Corporation

Article provided by MUA Retired Veterans Association

At the start of October, the Maritime Union of Australia was making headlines: MUA members holding Patrick to ransom; *Urgent medical supplies being held up; 90,000 containers held up in an indefinite industrial dispute; Backlog of 40 ships waiting to berth.* The Prime Minister accused the union of extortion.

For a union that has never been a favourite of mainstream media it came as no surprise, but the scandalous headlines do little to represent the facts. Let us try to explain what is actually taking place.

Apart from bulk products, almost all international freight is shipped in containers – with most of Australia's container ports owned by Patrick and Dubai Ports World (DPW, formerly P&O).

Awards covered entire industries prior to the early 1990s, but since then, due to adoption of neoliberal policies by Australian governments, every company has its own enterprise agreement. These usually last for four years, and although conditions and wages vary somewhat, the MUA agreements have kept up the standard of working conditions in the stevedoring industry.

DPW

The DPW Agreement expired in June 2018, and after 12 months of fruitless negotiations, MUA members commenced limited industrial actions, such as one-hour stoppages and a ban on the upgrading

of positions. Today, Australia has some of the most constrictive industrial legislation in the world, giving workers limited ability to defend conditions. The only time industrial action (strike or work ban) can be taken is after an agreement has expired, negotiations have gone on and a secret ballot of all union members has been taken by the Australian Electoral Commission.

In late 2019 (18 months after the agreement expired), DPW applied to have the industrial actions terminated because some of the claims were on prohibited matters such as claiming back pay or asking for clauses such as banning subcontracting when taking industrial action. DPW was successful and Fair Work Commission (FWC) (we wished it was fair) awarded DPW the case. MUA subsequently appealed the case and were successful in March 2020.

By that time, COVID-19 was spreading so we didn't apply the bans, and rather we continued negotiations with the company. By June, members were incensed at the company's intransigence and recommenced limited work bans. Serious negotiations resumed and after about three weeks Part A (the part of the agreement that is common to all four terminals) was completed. This left just the local agreements or Part B to be negotiated by each local committee with the local manager and all bans were lifted.

However, after about another four weeks of fruitless negotiations, where the company could not agree to existing clauses, bans were again applied, this time

attracting the attention of the Industrial Relations Minister Christian Porter who intervened in the dispute on 18 September.

PATRICK

The Patrick Agreement expired in June 2020, but negotiations had begun in February. MUA Agreements are very democratic and they commence with the union taking claims from rank and file members that will form a log of claims to be negotiated with the company. The Patrick Part A negotiating committee comprised two delegates and an official from each of the ports and a national official that led the delegation.

The claims were served on the company at our first meeting in February and within a short period the company had rejected outright 95% of them. At the meeting, they explored the possibility of a rollover of the current agreement and we replied we could explore this possibility in tandem with the company fixing what was seen as problems for our members continuing employment. At the meeting, we asked the company for their log of claims, which is usual practice for an enterprise agreement, but they declined the offer.

In April, Patrick made an offer to rollover the current agreement, except for the rosters at 1.5% increase over 4 years. The Part A committee rejected the offer as it was not a genuine rollover, which by definition was the current agreement with a percentage increase. Also, the outstanding issues had been ignored. We made a counter-offer of a rollover for 12 months with a 2.5% increase to get over the pandemic. This was rejected.

What usually happens in negotiations for a new enterprise agreement is that the union and the company both submit a log of claims. After discussions, what has been agreed is documented. A subcommittee from both parties makes the required changes to the current agreement. That document is made available to members, and if supported by a majority vote, is registered with the FWC and is binding on both parties.

Traditional negotiations began in July (this time by audiovisual communications because of COVID) with Patrick not tabling a log of claims but submitting a completely new document. They were also not able to table a tracked change from the submitted document to the current agreement.

We were intrigued by the 'novel approach' (sounded like a virus) taken by Patrick. At the company's insistence, we conducted a page turn of their document. After about seven days of meetings, the union put together what would have been their log of claims. We documented 67 changes to the current agreement. These changes were framed by the company as 'simplifying the document'. What they did was completely change the agreement: removing commitment to full-time permanent employment, reintroduction of completely casual employment, removal of family friendly rosters, references to safety commitments and clauses deleted, selection criteria, removal of the right to contest changes the company



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could make to further change rosters and other work arrangements, extensions of maximum shift lengths, etc.

At the report back meeting to members on the job, the officials were instructed by the members to begin a protected action ballot. This is a secret ballot conducted by the Australian Electoral Commission. On 26 August the AEC released the results of the ballot. Over 99% of members who voted supported the 23 different industrial actions listed in the ballot.

On 2 September, Will Tracey, the national official looking after the Patrick negotiations wrote to Steve Cox, Patrick operations manager stating that any medical equipment would be exempt from any protected action. To date, the MUA has had no notifications of medical equipment being held up by the bans.

Protected industrial actions commenced at Patrick Terminals on 7 September. In Melbourne, an 8-hour stoppage of day shift was held on 7 September and a ban on upgrades and extension from that date.

On 17 September, Will Tracey made an offer to Patrick to stop all industrial actions for one month if Patrick withdrew their document and submitted a reasonable log of claims. This was rejected by the company.


Another 24-hour stoppage was held in Melbourne on 18 September and from 21 September shifts were cut from eight to seven hours for a period of two

weeks – all complying with the Fair Work Act. On 23 September, Patrick wrote to about 70 employees around the country notifying them that unless they stopped their ban on upgrades, they would no longer be picked up for work. The members refused to accede to the company's demand that they stop their protected action bans and were 'stood down'. Members held meetings on the job and a levee of \$100 a week was agreed to be contributed by working members to support our members who had been 'stood down'. It seemed bizarre that the company who had complained that the work bans stopped them picking up enough labour to work would stop employing 70 workers from performing their normal duties.

Ironically, earlier that week Patrick managers had given themselves generous bonuses. In the last few weeks it has been revealed that QUBE director Maurice James (QUBE owns about 50% of Patrick) was awarded almost \$1.2 million, with bonuses to management totalling over \$10 million – disgraceful when you consider that the company has claimed \$19 million from Jobkeeper payments.

On 28 September, Patrick CEO Michael Jovicic made the claims to mainstream media, as reflected in the opening paragraph of this statement. At the same time, Patrick applied to the FWC to have all industrial actions terminated and the hearings were listed for 30 September and 1 October. We are grateful that at least the ABC did some investigative journalism to find out there were two ships waiting to berth at Port Botany (which is not unusual) and Hamish McDonald from RN was told by Medicines Australia that there was no shortage of medical supplies in Australia.

The hearings were conducted over two days. Patrick submitted a 600-page report from HoustonKemp (an almost identical one prepared on behalf of DPW in their application to have DPW protected action terminated the week before.) The MUA made a further offer of a 2.5% rollover for two years and notified the FWC that all protected industrial actions would be suspended. The offer was rejected. The FWC hearing to have the protected industrial action terminated will be held on 15–16 October.



THE PANDEMIC IS BEING USED AS THE EXCUSE TO STRIP AWAY HARD-WON CONDITIONS FROM AUSTRALIAN WORKERS...

The Patrick document was made knowing that it would be met with an industrial response. The pandemic is being used as the excuse to strip away hard-won conditions from Australian workers – a fact supported by the Treasurer's statement that Australia's number one requirement is industrial relations reform. The Maritime Union is committed to fight for our members for decent working conditions and to live in a just and fair society. We look for support and will give our support to anyone that shares our belief that there is enough in this world for everyone to live a decent life.



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.

WE ACKNOWLEDGE

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



DEFENCE SPENDING SPIN BELIES DELUGE OF DOLLARS FOR MULTINATIONAL CONTRACTORS

Scott Morrison spins defence spending and says contractors are 'doing it tough'. The numbers show big dollars going to weapons makers from the US, France and Britain, while locally, lawyers, accountants and management consultants are in the frame. Marcus Reubenstein reports.

The Prime Minister Scott Morrison and his Defence Minister Linda Reynolds trumpeted the announcement: 'A \$1 billion investment package to boost Australia's defence industry and support thousands of jobs across the country.'

As is de rigueur under current government/media arrangements, all the political correspondents of the mainstream media had been handed the story on a platter the day before the announcement. Moreover, the ABC's report included the inexplicable statement that 'Australia's defence industry was struggling due to the coronavirus pandemic'.

DEFENCE STRUGGLING?

In July the government announced a defence spend of \$270 billion, the details of which were also handed out to the media prior to the official announcement.

Based on that figure, the recent \$1 billion announcement is a little under 14 days of spending – a drop in the ocean. Furthermore, it is money that was going to be spent anyway; it has just been brought forward.

Said the Prime Minister:

'Like much of the economy, our local defence industry is doing it tough because of COVID-19. This is especially so for small and medium-sized businesses that are critical to jobs.'

'Supporting our defence industry is all part of our JobMaker plan – especially high paying, high skilled jobs that ensure we are supporting a robust, resilient and internationally competitive defence industry.'

While smaller defence suppliers may be doing it tough, companies whose businesses are principally exposed to defence spending seem to be doing very nicely.

In the past eight weeks the Department of Defence has handed out 4,602 contracts, worth more than \$4 billion.

Of that \$4 billion, \$2.6 billion (or 65%) was awarded in deals of \$20 million or more. Furthermore, that \$2.6 billion involved just 24 contracts, with the vast majority going to foreign companies or wholly owned Australian subsidiaries. Five contracts were awarded to Australian companies, two went to government agencies and one to a university.

So \$2.2 billion of the \$2.6 billion spend has gone to foreign companies. That's 83 cents in the dollar headed offshore and now the government announces a lazy billion dollars is being brought forward as part of its 'JobMaker' initiative.

FRENCH MULTINATIONAL WINS BIG

The biggest beneficiary of the contracts handed out in this financial year is French military aerospace giant Thales. On July 16 it was awarded a \$1.26 billion contract to supply light weapons and ammunition.

On August 13 Boeing corporation of the United States picked up a \$332.2 million aircraft maintenance and repair contract. Another \$78.8 million went to the NGJ Cooperative Program, which is an electronic warfare systems project run by the United States Navy.

The Australian beneficiaries don't appear to be struggling small to medium-sized enterprises either, with construction giant Hindmarsh awarded a \$77.3 million construction and maintenance contract.

Melbourne-based Daronmont Technologies, which calls itself an SME, was awarded a \$72.3 million contract for security surveillance and detection services. It's a big win for the company, far and away its biggest ever contract, but it has still won \$290 million in government contracts over the past decade.

Other contracts include \$57.9 million for Pacific Marine Batteries, \$35 million for Watpac construction, \$22.4 million to DMV Consulting, while the Defence Department aligned University of Tasmania was awarded a \$30 million contract for 'building construction and support and maintenance and repair services'.

TOUGH EIGHT WEEKS FOR 'BATTLERS'

Among the Aussie battlers to benefit from the past eight weeks of Defence Department contracts, \$25 million was spent on accountants and another \$30.3 million on lawyers.

Market research firms pocketed \$1.7 million, while \$5.4 million was spent on hotel rooms and function centres, with another \$853,494 on restaurants and catering.

The big ticket item was a staggering \$201 million spent on management consultants.

The \$1 billion announcement is little more than spin delivered amidst sustained attacks on the federal government over its response to the COVID-19 crisis in aged care.



CHURCH BANKING DETAILS

BANK: ANZ

**ACCOUNT NAME: MELBOURNE
UNITARIAN CHURCH**

BSB: 013 275

ACCOUNT NO: 3011 30386



**IN THE PAST
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Marcus Reubenstein is an independent journalist with more than twenty years of media experience. He spent five years at Seven News in Sydney and seven years at SBS World News where he was a senior correspondent. As a print journalist he has contributed business stories to most of Australia's major news outlets. Internationally he has worked on assignments for CNN, Eurosport and the Olympic Games Broadcasting Service. He is the founder and editor of China-focused business website, APAC News. You can follow Marcus on Twitter @ReubensteinApac.

Source: Michael West Media Independent journalist

TUNE IN!

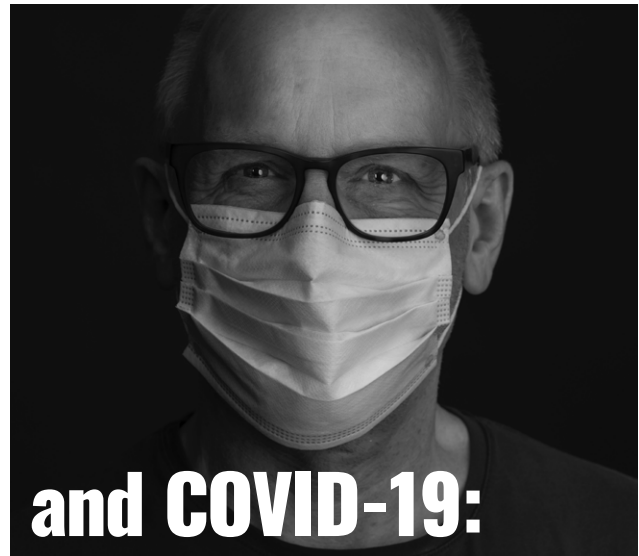
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Thoughts on the Contradictions of Global Capitalism

Since at least the devastating Spanish flu of 1918–1919, various factors emanating from capitalist globalisation, characterised by interlinked commodity chains largely controlled by multinational corporations, and more recently Chinese state corporations, have contributed to the spread of infectious diseases. One of these is increasing global interconnectivity driven by international travel and commerce. Wild food, such as that in the wet markets of Wuhan and other cities, has become an increasing formalised sector in the capitalist world system.

Bear in mind that Wuhan is both a domestic and international hub with at least, prior to COVID-19, over 100 flights to more than 70 countries. As Rob Wallace, Alex Liebman, Luis Fernando Chaves and Rodrick Wallace observe in their article titled 'COVID-19 and circuits of capital: New York to China and back', in the May 2020 issue of *Monthly Review*, COVID-19 emerged at a regional terminus in the supply line of exotic foods and spread vis-à-vis planes, trains and ships to other parts of China and across the globe, initially to large cities and later to smaller cities.

Other factors contributing to the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic are social inequality and urbanisation in which one finds large concentrations of poor people, particularly in developing countries in Asia, Africa and South America, living in cramped quarters. Social inequality as a by-product of global capitalism results in a lack of adequate nutrition, clean water and healthcare for hundreds of millions in particularly developing societies, but also developed societies, the United States as the most stratified advanced capitalist country being a case in point.

Aeroplanes, which were responsible for 5–6 per cent of greenhouse gas emissions prior to COVID-19, along with transporting cargo, were transporting all sorts of people including businesspeople, politicians, affluent and middle-class tourists, celebrities, sports teams, academics, students, tourists, military personnel, cheap labour and refugees, some of these categories more than others. Aeroplanes and cruise ships have become the underbelly of the global tourist industry in both developed and developing societies. The advent of large passenger jets in the 1960s prompted a shift away from ships to aeroplanes with the ocean liner trade, which carried passengers for business, immigration and pleasure, going into terminal decline.

However, cruise ships which need much closer scrutiny in terms of environmental and health problems, came to replace ocean liners for holiday travel. In December 2018, there were 314 cruise ships, often referred to as floating hotels, with a combined capacity of some 537,000 passengers along with hundreds of thousands of crew personnel, most of them from developing countries and poorly paid and working under onerous conditions. The largest cruise ships accommodate over 5000 passengers. Cruise ships are powered by bunker oil, which results in both carbon dioxide and sulphur dioxide emissions and discharge sewage, graywater, hazardous wastes and other pollutants to the marine environment. The *Diamond Princess*, which discharged passengers in Yokohama and the *Ruby Princess* in Sydney are two examples of cruise ships as human petri dishes carrying COVID-19 passengers and crew.

The COVID-19 pandemic thus far has had broad economic and social consequences, including impacting world stock markets, grounding much

international aviation and silencing global cities. Ironically, COVID-19 initially made its way around the globe with the travel of relatively affluent people, as we have certainly witnessed in Australia. It arrived in India through international travellers, hitting the upper classes before percolating to the poor.

Much of the recent debacle in Victoria has been traced to two hotels housing returning passengers from overseas. The Rydges Hotel in Melbourne housed passengers from a small cruise ship to Antarctic and was detained in Uruguay and entailed the employment of overworked and untrained security guards, some of whom became infected and passed their infection to their families and into the community. The outsourcing of security guards constitutes yet another example of the problems with the privatisation of support services, which calls for revisiting their socialisation. In an article titled 'A city divided on COVID-19 class lines' in the generally mainstream *The Age* on 9 August 2020, Ben Schneiders and Royce Millar state: 'The seeds of COVID-19 in Melbourne might have been sown first among skiers and international travellers, but since the hotel quarantine system infected poorly paid and sessional guards, it's Melbourne's working-class and northwest where the pandemic has taken root.'

Michael T Osterholm and Mark Olshaker, authors of *Deadliest Enemy: Our War Against Killer Germs*

(2020), predict the possibility of a pandemic much worse than COVID-19, which they term 'The Big One', although they admit that it is difficult to say when it might occur. For the moment, COVID-19 has deflected attention away from climate change given that it is a more immediate problem. Ironically, it has resulted in the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions from various sources, including production and consumption and air and motor vehicle travel. It has forced many people to adopt what Australian eco-anarchist Ted Trainer terms a 'Simpler Way', although the powers that be around the world are doing their utmost to ramp up the capitalist treadmill of production and consumption.

Climate change, however, looms in the background of COVID-19, as was the case with the massive bushfires in southeastern Australia in 2019–2020 and is presently the case with the massive wildfires in California and the hurricane and storm surges on the US Gulf Coast. Needless to say the COVID-19 pandemic and anthropogenic climate change illustrate the need to transcend the capitalist world system with an ecosocialist world system. 🕯

Hans Baer is an ecological and health anthropologist based at the University of Melbourne and author of Democratic Eco-Socialism as a Real Utopia: The Need for an Alternative World System (2018).

from our readers



EDITORIAL BOARD, THE BEACON

I urge members and friends of the Melbourne Unitarian Church to act in support of the Bill to end discrimination in the appointment of school chaplains. I think that the voice of Melbourne Unitarians in favour of the Bill should have some weight. I urge those who share my views to write a letter to their local MP to ask that they support the Bill.

In 2014, the High Court upheld a challenge to the National School Chaplaincy Program, ruling the law used to maintain Commonwealth funding for chaplains is unconstitutional.

The Commonwealth and the Victoria State Government then entered into an agreement to allow religious organisations to hire chaplains on behalf of public schools. To make matters worse, qualified psychologists and youth workers cannot be hired as chaplains in public schools unless they are funded by a Christian organisation.

As a former college principal, I would not want to have a chaplain employed by a church body imposed on the school or college, and nor would I want them sprouting fundamentalist views when I was seeking to foster pluralism and mutual respect.

Information about the Bill can be found on the web page of MLC Fiona Patten.

Yours sincerely
Revd Dr Ralph Catts, retired Unitarian Minister



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A MESSAGE TO PAX CHRISTI USA FROM PAX CHRISTI AUSTRALIA

As the United States of America edges closer to the Presidential election on 3 November 2020, Pax Christi Australia hopes and prays that the American people will exercise their precious right to vote responsibly, and with thoughtful consideration of the consequences of their choice, both for their own wellbeing as well as for the world beyond. Enjoying a significant power politically, economically, and culturally, decisions and actions of the US impact far from its shores, too.

As is well known, Australia has been a close friend of the United States for most of the 20th century and in the 21st, with our leaders proudly asserting we are 'joined at the hip with the USA'. Given our location, Australia is part of and also relates closely with the Asia-Pacific (Indo-Pacific), a region where the US has a long history of missionary work. Concerns expressed below are of relevance to the whole region, including Australia.

The Asia-Pacific, comprising several countries and nearly 2/3rds of the world's population, and sadly with a history of war and conflict, is now under growing pressure from the strategic rivalry between the US and China. Their combative relationship, thanks to a belligerent foreign policy, troubles us greatly, and it is incumbent on the both of them to address this by striking a more positive direction.

The strategic rivalry threatens the global ecosystem, harming the quality of life of billions through conflict in trade, access to resources, international relations, and the costly and unnecessary militarism and arms race. The Asia-Pacific remains perilously divided. Countries take sides between the superpowers, ensuring division at the UN and Agencies such as the WHO, WTO, and others, the Association of Southeast Nations (ASEAN) and G20, losing sight of the common good.

Sharing a common peace worldview with Pax Christi USA as we do, we lament such developments, and ask for a new way forward. We call on the US to live by the values it has espoused. The US must set an example – as it has before – by

- respecting international law
- upholding a rules-based world order
- adhering to global agreements
- eschewing confrontational trade relationships.

A better relationship between the two countries will translate to a better life, especially for the poor and marginalised in our countries.

*Pax Christi is a Christian worldwide movement for peace and disarmament.
It regards justice and human rights as central to peacebuilding
and fosters the spiritual dimension of peacemaking.*

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