

EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

A World in Crisis

BRONWYN STEVENS AND DEBRA LIVINGSTON

As 2024 begins the world is beset with a series of crises. A refugee crisis continues to engulf advanced nations from Europe to the USA and to Australia as millions risk death and disaster to flee war and poverty. US competition with China edges closer to confrontation and through the AUKUS agreement Australia has been pulled even closer to a USA whose own stability is looking increasingly fragile. Wars in Gaza and Ukraine pose a particular threat to world peace and stability. Climate change continues to loom over the globe with higher temperatures, more unstable weather patterns and catastrophic rain events.

This issue of *Social Alternatives* addresses some aspects of these crises. Australia has faced a refugee crisis for some years, smaller than Europe and the United States but substantial enough to become a major political issue. Solutions have included draconian policies such as boat turn-backs, offshore detention, temporary visas and indefinite detention. Most recently, political drama was sparked when the High Court ruled indefinite detention illegal and ordered the release of affected refugees – those who were stateless or had been released from prison but could not be returned to their country of origin. As moral panic was whipped up by the opposition the government introduced harsh restrictions initially to be applied to all irrespective of the reason they were in indefinite detention. Despite the ongoing harshness of government responses many in the Australian community have rallied to support refugees by providing basic necessities, educational assistance and supporting creative endeavours. One such initiative is 'the Ballina Region for Refugees Annual Seeking Asylum Poetry Prize.' This issue contains a brief history of the prize, the report of the judge Renee Pettitt-Schipp and the winning entries.

In response to China's expanded military capacity and greater naval reach into the Pacific Australia has drawn even closer to the United States through its participation in the AUKUS alliance. The terms and commitments of this agreement have received scant critical appraisal by both major political parties, the mainstream media and pro US think tanks. In his article 'An Unworkable Pact? The Problems with AUKUS' Binoy Kampmark examines the AUKUS agreement, the implications of its terms and potential impediments to its implementation. These include the difficulties Australia will face in acquiring, constructing and managing a fleet of nuclear submarines with its limited experience in nuclear technology. He then considers the implications of the alliance and some of the commitments Australia has made to the USA as part of the agreement. These include most worryingly

the potential threat to Australian sovereignty. Kampmark concludes with an examination of the problems that will be caused by the handling and storing of the nuclear waste associated with the submarines which will be especially challenging given Australia's failure so far to find a storage site for even the low-level nuclear waste currently produced in Australia.

The war in Gaza is becoming a major flashpoint for international confrontation. The conflagration that erupted on October 7 has sparked reverberations around the world. The Netanyahu Government was already under pressure in Israel over judicial reforms seen by some as an attack on Israeli democracy. Its failure to intercept intelligence and prevent the attack put it under further domestic pressure. The Netanyahu Government responded with a full-scale assault on Gaza. Initial sympathy for Israel began to evaporate as its assault appeared to make little effort to protect civilians who are the majority of the now 27,000 plus Gazans killed. These casualties have been disproportionately women and children. Nor has the mass assault on Gaza attained the release of the hostages. They remain in deadly peril, not only from their HAMAS captors but from Israeli bombs, missiles and bullets.

The death and destruction wrought in Gaza has seen attempts at the international level to restrain what many see as Israel's disproportionate response. Two General Assembly Resolutions and orders from the International Court of Justice have so far failed to stop the assault on Gaza's civilians. The conflict has spread to the West Bank where settler attacks on Palestinians – killings and dispossessions – have increased so dramatically that President Biden has announced sanctions on Israeli settlers attacking Palestinians and peace protesters. Conflict has expanded beyond Israel and Gaza, initially from Houthi attacks on vessels transiting the Red Sea and blocking a major trade route. The US and UK responded with targeted attacks on Houthi bases. The danger of a direct Iran-US clash was increased by an attack on a US base in Jordan that killed and injured several US military personnel. The US responded with eighty-five hits on the bases of Iran's Revolutionary guards and their allies in Syria and Iraq with more attacks threatened.

This issue contains three pieces relating to the current war in Gaza, 'An Overview of the War in Gaza' is followed by a blank verse response to initial reporting of the

Hamas attack that implied that war in Gaza only began on 7 October. Entitled 'To Forget' it reminds us of the tragic history of the Palestinians since 1947. This issue also presents an article about, and a gallery of images from a Palestinian Photojournalist, Mohammed Zaanoun's Snapshot of Life in Gaza.

Even though Gaza-based photo-journalist Mohammed Zaanoun was seriously wounded early in his career he continues to document everyday life in Gaza. His images dramatically illustrate the scope of destruction impacting every aspect of people's lives under the Israeli offensive.

Another war, the war in Ukraine, is causing apprehension around the world with its potential for confrontation between nuclear armed powers. From 2014 when a western oriented government came to power in Ukraine, Putin's Russia has been involved in conflict in Ukraine, first supporting the pro-Russian separatists in border regions and then invading the Crimea. Alarm increased significantly after Russia began a full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The war drags on into its second year with stalemated WW1 style trench warfare on the eastern border. A major assault on Kyiv was repelled but Ukrainian cities and towns continue to suffer attacks from Russian bombs and missiles. Civilians and civilian infrastructure are regularly targeted, millions are displaced. The Ukrainian resistance so discounted by Putin foiled a full-scale invasion and is now launching Ukrainian-made drones that are demolishing Russian military platforms and hitting infrastructure deep into Russia. But Ukraine faces enormous obstacles in repelling an enemy so much larger in population and resources and the suffering and destruction continue. Casualties on both sides are enormous.

For this issue Debra Livingston arranged an interview and a picture gallery by Brendan Hoffman and Oksana Parafeniuk, 'Images of War: Ukraine' which gives some context to the war and the lives of the photojournalists featured. It also contains an impressive photo-gallery of images of the war in Ukraine and the impact it is having on the Ukrainian people. Brendan and Oksana have been photographing the war, and civilian life surrounding it, since its early days in April 2014. Their gallery of photographs 'emphasise the inherent absurdity of armed conflict: the shock of the unimaginable juxtaposed with the utterly mundane' (Hoffman 2022).

The final article in this themed edition on the World in Crisis turns to the impact of climate change and its interaction with policy shortcomings. As 2023 progressed, the validity of the dire prediction made by climate scientists decades ago were on display as floods began to engulf large areas of eastern Australia. Morag Cook examines the devastating 2022 floods in Lismore and critiques policy responses to previous

floods in her article 'Lismore Floods, Policy Failure, and Climate Change: The Need for Political Ecology in Policy Learning'. She argues that the scale of the disaster was exacerbated by both the impact of climate change and policy failures in previous responses to floods in the region. Human factors had been omitted in previous evaluations and policy formulation. She argues that applying the theoretical lens of political ecology thus incorporating human factors would expose policy failures and provide better policy learning to guide future policies.

Reference

Hoffman B. 2022 'The Sky Is Blue but the Sun Isn't Shining' <https://www.brendanhoffman.com/war-in-ukraine-1> (accessed 15/01/2023).

Authors

Bronwyn Stevens has published on Australian politics and public policy and the intersection between Australian and international relations. She is currently Coordinating Editor of *Social Alternatives*.

Dr Debra Livingston is a photo-media artist, and lectured in photography at the Queensland College of Art and the University of the Sunshine Coast. Her work is presented in solo and collaborative exhibitions locally and internationally in private and public collections.

POETRY AUTHORS

Michael Farrell is originally from Bombala, NSW, and has lived in Melbourne since 1990. Michael's books include *Googlecholia* (Giramondo), *Writing Australian Unsettlement: Modes of Poetic Invention 1796-1945* (Palgrave Macmillan), and the edited volume, *Ashbery Mode* (TinFish).

Mitchell Welch is a writer, editor and freelance communications consultant with an interest in music and visual/photographic art. His work has appeared in a range of journals and anthologies including *Antipodes*, *Arena Magazine*, *Arena Quarterly*, *The Australian Poetry Journal*, *The Best of Australian Poems 2022*, *Cordite*, *Meanjin*, *The Medical Journal of Australia*, *Overland*, *Rabbit*, *Southerly* and *TEXT*.

B. R. Dionysius was founding Director of the Queensland Poetry Festival. He has published nine collections of poetry, teaches English, lives in Brisbane and in his spare time watches birds.

Ken Bolton's most recent book, *A Pirate Life*, was published by Cordite this April, just weeks after *A Double Act*, the selected collaborations of his and John Jenkins', appeared from Puncher and Wattmann.

Dennis Haskell is the author of 9 collections of poetry, the most recent *And Yet...* (WA Poets Publishing, 2020).

Cath Kenneally is a writer and enthusiastic swimmer. She lives in Adelaide.

Andrew Leggett is an author and editor of poetry, fiction, interdisciplinary academic papers and songs. His third collection of poetry, *Losing Touch*, was published in 2022 by Ginninderra Press, where his fiction collection *In Dreams and Other Stories* has also recently been accepted for publication.