

# Solidarity



Issue No. 23/ April 2010

\$3/\$5

**STOP THE REFUGEE BASHING**  
**OPEN THE BORDERS**  
**CLOSE XMAS ISLAND**

**INSIDE**

**APARTHEID IN SOUTH AFRICA ● RUDD'S HEALTH PLAN ● WOMEN'S LIBERATION**

# SOLIDARITY: WHO ARE WE?

Solidarity is a socialist group with branches across Australia. We are opposed to the madness of capitalism, which is plunging us into global recession and misery at the same time as wrecking the planet's future. We are taking the first steps towards building an organisation that can help lead the fight for an alternative system based on mass democratic planning.

As a crucial part of this, we are committed to building social movements and the wider left, through throwing ourselves into struggles for social justice, to overturn the legacy of the Howard government and to strengthen the confidence of rank and file unionists. Solidarity is a member of the International Socialist Tendency.

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full content from the magazine / online-only updates  
/ up to date details of demonstrations and meetings

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# SOLIDARITY MEETINGS

## Sydney

7pm Thursday April 15  
Film screening: *With Babies and Banners*  
about women and the Flint strike

7pm Thursday April 22  
The origins of the Labor party

Sydney Solidarity meets 7pm every  
Thursday at the Brown st Hall, above  
Newtown library on King Street, Newtown.  
For more information contact:  
Jean on 0449 646 593  
sydney@solidarity.net.au

## Melbourne

6.30pm Tuesday April 13  
How did Israel become an apartheid state?

6.30pm Tuesday April 20  
Public debate  
Should the climate movement support The  
Greens' carbon tax proposal?  
Speakers: Greg Barber MLC, Victorian  
Greens' climate change spokesperson  
Chris Breen, Solidarity

Melbourne Solidarity meets 6.30pm every  
Tuesday at the New International Bookshop,  
Trades Hall, corner of Victoria Parade and  
Lygon Street, Carlton.  
For more information contact:  
David on 0418 316 310  
melbourne@solidarity.net.au

## Brisbane

2pm, Saturday 17th April  
Nuclear: no solution to climate change  
Justice Products, 192 Boundary St, West  
End

Brisbane Solidarity meets weekly.  
For more information contact:  
Rob on 0424 265 730  
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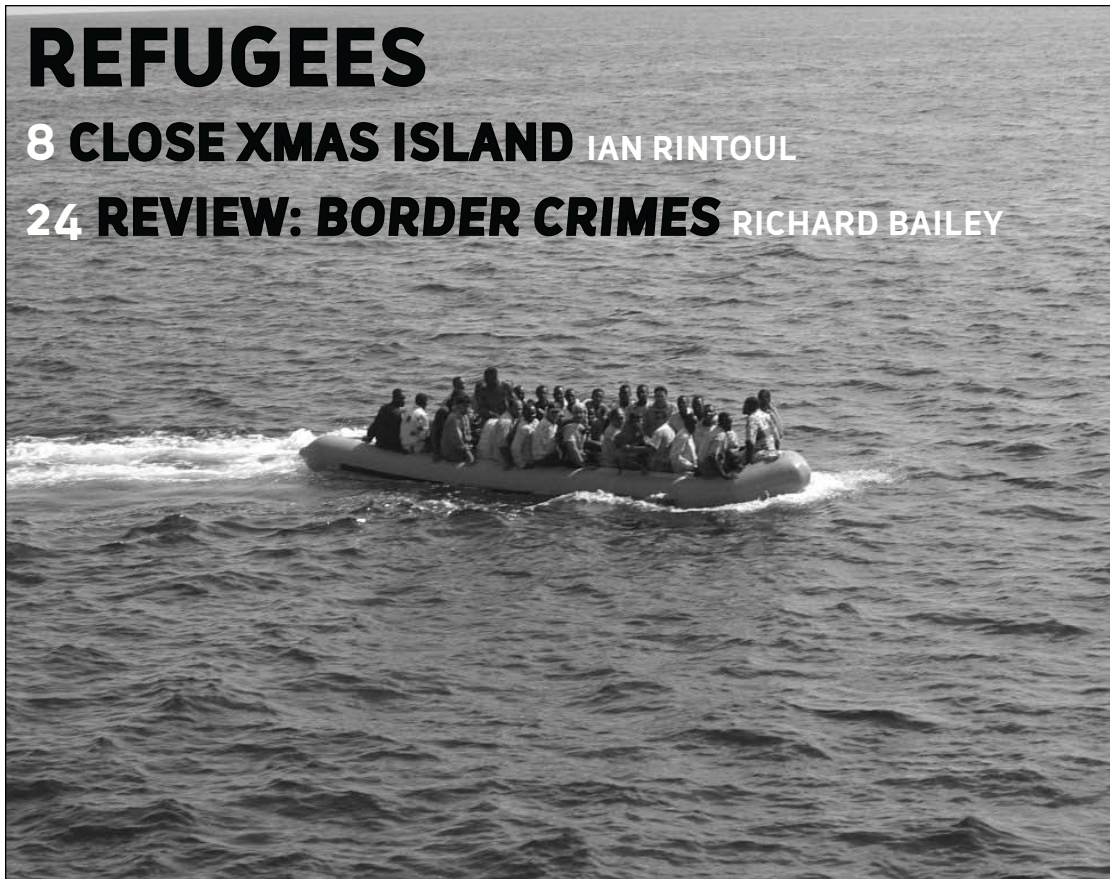
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## Things they say

**“He turned up in the last couple of years when I was Prime Minister. I used to regard him as a sort of resident nutter on their side.”**

Paul Keating on Tony Abbott

**“Conservative, tea leaf-reading, focus group-driven polling types [who] won’t get out of bed in the morning unless they’ve had a focus group report to tell them which side to get out.”**

Paul Keating on Kevin Rudd’s advisors

**“Prime Minister Blah blah”**

Tony Abbott on Kevin Rudd

**“I just wonder whether his obvious talents and his special communication skills could be put to a better use.”**

Liberal Senator Ian MacDonald explains Barnaby Joyce’s demotion

**“Joyce had a golden opportunity to showcase his talents as a serious senior opposition spokesman, but he chose instead to waste his chance by continuing to mix his metaphors and overuse bumptious and rhetorical speech devices.”**

A letter to *The Australian* mourns the loss of a dynamic politician

**“Channel Nine host Tracy Grimshaw ought to apply an IQ test to her audience of ‘undecided’ voters before she gives them a licence to press buttons.”**

Miranda Devine was not happy when the worm didn’t go Abbott’s way in the health debate

**“They spoke of money pouring into [Liberal Party] coffers like it never had during the reign of the investment banker Turnbull.”**

Business is keen to show their love for Abbott’s policies, says Miranda Devine

**“A devastating argument against religion in two words: ‘Senator Fielding’.”**

ABC Science Show’s Robyn Williams makes the case for atheism

**“Even if we tell them not to do it, some of them might not listen”**

Union official Gerard Declair on the workers who occupied the Sodimatex plant in France and threatened to blow it up

# Tasmanian Green vote up, but it looks like business as usual

By Amy Thomas

TASMANIANS SAVAGED the Labor government in the recent state elections. In the South Australian elections, the Rann Labor government just held onto power after an 8 per cent swing against it. The Liberals were the main beneficiaries of Labor’s disarray in South Australia, and their vote was up 7 per cent in Tasmania.

More hopeful is that The Greens recorded their largest ever vote in Tasmania—13.5 per cent altogether with a 5 per cent swing their way. Tasmania’s proportional system means that there are now ten Liberals, ten Labor and five Greens in parliament. As *Solidarity* goes to press, it seems that Liberal Will Hodgman will preside over a minority Liberal government.

Labor’s cosy relationship with the big end of town is to blame for their loss. Former Liberal Premier Robin Gray—now a board member of the timber company Gunns Ltd—suggested in the lead up to the election that if neither Liberal or Labor won enough seats to govern in their own right, they ought to form a coalition government. He argued there were no major policy differences between the two parties, and that it would keep The Greens out.

Both Labor and Liberal have offered their full support to the planned Gunns pulp mill, which will pump 64,000 tonnes of effluent into Bass Strait and consume 4.6 billion tonnes of wood annually, most from old-growth forests.

Teachers took strike action during the election period over attacks on state education. And Labor’s campaign promises to fund public health failed to impress voters. It seemed like too little, too late from a government that has privatised three major hospitals in the last decade.

Statistics show The Greens picked up a large section of the working class vote in Lyons, which combines rural forestry areas with some of the poorest public housing estates in the country.

The “hung parliament” result has meant a big debate about how Tasmania’s government will function. Sadly, The Greens’ performance has been less than impressive. They have consistently put up their hand



Tasmanian Greens leader Nick McKim has promised to be a stable coalition partner

to share power with the Liberals. Moderate leader Nick McKim said that The Greens would “be making no demands” in any negotiations. The Greens opposed the teachers’ strike and according to the ABC, pressured forest protesters to lie low during the campaign period.

Although The Greens have given no commitment to pass Liberal legislation they have said they will not block the budget. But it is highly likely the Liberals will want deep cuts to public spending. It would not be the first time—The Greens’ informal alliance with the Tasmanian Liberals in 1996–1998 allowed them to pass a budget with public sector cuts.

The Liberals will be hoping to rely on Labor votes to maintain business as usual for corporate interests in Tasmania. A clear majority of Tasmanian voters don’t want a Liberal government but Labor has also ruled out any coalition with The Greens—preferring to let the Liberals govern.

People voted Green because they were sick of a Labor government acting like the Liberals. Greens policies for improved public transport and reversal of some of Labor’s attacks on education were popular with voters.

Looking for an agreement with the Liberals is no way of delivering on their promises. But that is where The Greens strategy—of gaining a bigger piece of the parliamentary pie—leads. Hopefully any minority Liberal government will be short lived. In the meantime it will be up to the teachers and the forestry activists to keep up the heat on The Greens and to win a better deal for Tasmania.

**The Greens’ informal alliance with the Liberals in 1996-1998 in Tasmania saw them help pass through a budget with public sector cuts**

# EDITORIAL

## It's Rudd we need to worry about

TONY ABBOTT'S election strategy has been reduced to Iron man photo spreads. Union leader Paul Howse summed it up in the *Herald Sun*: "If anything, it highlights that Abbott is, frankly, a little bit weird, a little bit out of touch, and a little bit of a show pony... every time he pulls a fitness stunt he gets a bit of positive press, but when he opens his mouth about important things like health reform, the polls plummet."

It has been a tough few weeks for the Opposition Leader. He's fallen into all of Rudd's traps around health reform, and has now been cornered into supporting it. This is not much of a stretch of his principles—the idea of a federal takeover was floated when Abbott was Health Minister under Howard—but signifies a retreat from his "oppose everything" mantra.

Abbott's popularity has peaked. Analysis of recent polling reported in the *Sydney Morning Herald* shows Rudd is in position to win the next election with an increased majority. The truth is as Howse says—there is little support for what the archconservative Tony Abbott stands for.

His comment that he is "a little bit threatened" by gays was a dog-whistle for the right—but nobody responded. He is still widely caricatured for his appalling backward ideas about women. And wanting to bring back WorkChoices is not winning him many friends in the working class suburbs. He seems desperate to avoid discussion of his Howard-era politics.

The left can take confidence from this. There is a tendency to overstate the threat posed by Abbott—or to see the solution to Abbott as going quiet on Rudd's policies. But it is Rudd who is opening up what space does exist for Abbott.

Rudd is constantly concerned to prove his conservative credentials. He has picked up on the public concern over our health system. But he tells us the problems there are about "efficiency"—and his reform package commits no new money to hospitals for another four years.

Jenny Macklin recently courted Abbott's support for her new Intervention laws (see page 9), which will mean the spread of the welfare quarantine to more Aboriginal communities, and cement the Intervention policies indefinitely. The government's own reports show that the interven-



A rally at Tennant Creek against a proposed waste dump at Muckatny station. The ETU has put a ban on their members participating in its construction.

### It is Rudd who is opening up what space does exist for Abbott

tion has only worked to worsen living conditions in Aboriginal communities.

#### Refugee hysteria

It is only around refugees that Abbott's right-wing views are starting to get some traction. The finger of blame needs to be pointed at Rudd. Instead of defending the changes to refugee policy, the Labor government is constantly looking for ways to prove how tough they can be on asylum seekers (see page 8). Abbott used the arrival of the 100th boat under Rudd to claim the government had "lost control" of the borders. It was a trap Rudd laid for himself when he claimed in parliament last November that more boats had come under Howard.

Tellingly, Abbott cited Julia Gillard's press releases when she was Shadow Minister for Immigration—that criticised Howard's policies for being too soft and encouraging a flood of boats!

Gillard lashed out at the operators of Villawood detention centre where three Chinese detainees escaped, saying the private contractors are paid money "to make sure people who are in detention stay in detention". Why three detainees would risk their lives to escape from the facility didn't rate a mention.

Labor may have abolished the Pacific Solution, but the basic cruelty of Howard's refugee policy remains.

The Immigration Department has also stepped up deportations. Three

Tamils were recently sent home and another 38 may be returned soon. Some will surely face persecution upon return.

Despite the rhetoric about a flood of asylum seekers, there is no huge increase. 6170 applications were made last year—compared to 50,000 in the US and 42,000 in France. But Labor's concern to meet Abbott's right flank is risking the lives of asylum seekers.

Instead of delivering on people's desire for change, Rudd has deferred to every whim of big business. This has meant the continuation of the bulk of Howard's policies. If we are really going to defeat the ideas of Tony Abbott then we need to fight their manifestations in Rudd's policies.

The unions in Western Australia have shown the way with their increasing willingness to use their industrial muscle to fight for pay and conditions (see page 23). The Electrical Trades Union has put a ban on its Northern Territory members participating in any work in the uranium industry—especially the proposed waste dump at Muckatny station. That should be a signal to the climate movement about what can be done to stop the construction of new coal-fired power stations.

Greek workers, too, continue to take to the streets in a collective roar of defiance, as their Labor-type party, PASOK, tries to force down living standards (see page 13). There are lessons for us to learn here if we want to force the Rudd government to deliver.

# Students say climate jobs, not coal



Students deliver a message to Peter Batchelor, Victoria's Minister for Energy and Resources

By Pete Sowter

CLIMATE ACTIVISTS gathered outside the office of Peter Batchelor in late March. Batchelor is Victoria's Minister for Energy and Resources and was due to attend the Victorian Coal and Energy conference to spruik plans for new coal projects in Victoria.

The picket was organised by Melbourne Uni's Climate Action Working Group (CAWG). Representatives from The Greens, the United Fire Fighter's Union (UFU), the Climate Action Centre, the Solar Systems campaign and Friends of the Earth spoke.

The government's CPRS was a key issue of the protest. Brian Walters stressed the low emissions targets set by the scheme, and explained how the policy will make it impossible for future governments to ratchet up the target. Concessions for heavy emitters was another point brought up by Walters. "We're actually encouraging the expansion of major carbon pollution by this scheme," he said.

Peter Marshal from the UFU explained the firefighters' support for the climate movement, saying, "the real extremists in this country are the politicians and corporate interests who would do nothing in the face of potential apocalypse, or at least one of the worst ecological and economic disasters our species has ever seen."

Australia's continued reliance on coal power, as demonstrated by the planned construction of 12 new power plants and the refusal to begin to phase out older stations, was another focal point. Damien Lawson from the Climate Action Centre told the crowd

that Hazelwood power station in the La Trobe Valley is "the dirtiest power station in Australia... it's an industrial dinosaur from decades and decades ago."

Mark Ogge from Beyond Zero Emissions explained how Australia could move to renewable energy and a zero emissions society without major difficulty, and that political will is the major problem. The point was further stressed by Chris Breen from the Solar Systems Campaign who pointed out that "the same week that Solar Systems was sold, the Brumby government gave \$363 million to build a new roof for the Tennis Centre."

Friends of the Earth speakers, Dr Jim Green and Madeline Hudson, spoke against nuclear power and the proposed nuclear waste dump at Muckaty in the Northern Territory. "This decision is a politically based decision... it is not based on science, environmental or ethical considerations," said Hudson.

The picket was celebrated as a success by the organisers and was a good first step for the newly-formed CAWG and the Melbourne climate movement in general. It was an important response to the recent approval of the HRL coal plant, and an important part of continuing opposition to the CPRS. The participation of the UFU in particular is important and can lay the basis for further collaboration with them and other unions. Bringing the climate movement together on the same platform as unions is crucial. The picket showed that student organisations like CAWG can play an important role in bringing these forces together.

## Electricity price rises: the cost of making ordinary people pay

HUGE ELECTRICITY price rises in NSW show that Rudd's CPRS will have more impact on power costs for working people than the government has admitted. From July 1 costs for households will rise by up to 64 per cent over three years.

The majority of the price rises, mandated by the NSW Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART), are due to the cost of building new electricity transmission lines in the state.

But about a third of the price increases are a direct result of the CPRS. The CPRS, if introduced, will cause a 24 per cent rise in power costs, or \$300 a year, over three years.

IPART's estimate for the impact on power prices of the CPRS is much greater than that of the federal Treasury.

The Treasury predicted bills would rise by just \$200 a year as a result of the scheme. This means the compensation the federal government is providing to households, designed to offset the impact of price rises caused by the CPRS, will be inadequate.

This news has led to calls for Rudd to increase compensation to households.

NSW Energy Minister John Robertson gently reminded his federal colleagues, "The Prime Minister is on the record saying low income families will be fully compensated for the costs associated with the CPRS, whatever they are".

What this all shows is the huge uncertainty in modelling the effect on power prices—and working class living standards—of putting a price on carbon, whether through an emissions trading scheme or a carbon tax.

It is further evidence of the danger in promoting them as a way to tackle climate change. The climate movement cannot afford to line up behind these kind of solutions—which are going to see ordinary working class people pay, not the polluters who got us into this mess.

.....  
**Australia's continued reliance on coal power was a focal point of the protest**

# Carbon tax: a distraction from real solutions



Damien Lawson, David Karoly and Christine Mile addressed the Climate Summit on strategies for 2010

By James Supple

THIS YEAR'S national Climate Summit voted to demand a carbon tax during the federal election campaign. Many viewed it as an alternative to Rudd's useless CPRS carbon trading scheme.

But there are fundamental similarities between carbon trading and a carbon tax. As with carbon trading, the cost imposed by a carbon tax will be passed straight onto consumers. It's essentially unfair—it would mean ordinary people, not polluters, pay.

## Won't work

It would also be ineffective. Like any carbon pricing scheme, it aims to encourage the private sector to invest in cleaner forms of power by making polluting technology more expensive.

A carbon tax beginning at \$23, the level suggested by The Greens, would not be enough to make renewable energy competitive. At best it would lead to new power stations being gas-fired. This is wasted investment that delays the structural change we need to cut emissions—transitioning power generation away from coal.

Introducing a carbon tax at the level needed to make a difference would be politically impossible. Solar power stations would not be competitive until a carbon tax reached \$100/tonne of CO<sub>2</sub> or higher.

.....

**The main reason governments are looking to market mechanisms is that they let business off the hook**

Denmark, Sweden, Norway, The Netherlands and Finland have all introduced low carbon taxes since 1990.

By 2008 Denmark had reduced its emissions by 15.5 per cent and Sweden by 11.7 per cent. But the other three countries all increased emissions—Norway 7.6 per cent, the Netherlands 9 per cent and Finland by 11 per cent. A study by sociologist Monica Prasad concluded it was actually government investment in wind power that was decisive in Denmark's emissions reductions.

## Progressive carbon taxes?

In theory, government could alleviate the unfairness of a carbon tax by returning revenue to consumers as compensation. But without a movement powerful enough to force this, it's a dangerous approach.

As the CPRS debate showed, business has enormous power to extract concessions from government, such as the masses of cash handouts and free permits they got. The main reason governments are looking to market mechanisms is that they let business off the hook and can be used to make ordinary people pay.

Another problem with a carbon tax is the extreme uncertainty about how corporations would respond. Carbon emissions are contained in virtually every product in a modern economy. There is no way of calculating exactly how much prices would rise.

Recent price rises announced in NSW are far above those the federal government predicted (see opposite page). This raises immense difficulties in working out how much compensation people would need.

Miscalculations would be a political disaster. We could see people suffering severe cuts to living standards or power disconnections.

Working class people have endured three decades of neo-liberal policies where workers were told "reforms" would be good for them—but it turned out a lie. They are rightly suspicious of government plans that might result in cuts to living standards.

A carbon tax—which does threaten this—will not win broad support or help build a mass movement.

## Progressive taxation

Instead of relying on private corporations to install renewable energy, the climate movement should call on government to build it. To pay for this, governments would need to raise taxes. There are fairer ways than a carbon tax.

The most regressive forms of tax are those that shift the burden of paying taxes onto workers and the poor. The GST is a classic example. Both rich and poor pay the same 10 per cent on products. But a wealthy person can much more easily afford to pay this than someone on a low income.

A carbon tax is even more inequitable. In particular it means higher costs for electricity, an essential service that every person needs. Low income earners such as pensioners spend a higher proportion of their income on power bills than others, so the proportion of their income swallowed by a carbon tax is higher.

Progressive taxation is much fairer, but has been wound back by neo-liberal governments. The level of corporate tax in Australia has been slashed from 49 per cent in 1987 to 30 per cent today. A tax on company profits cannot be passed on to consumers so easily as a carbon tax, since companies make different levels of profit relative to the prices of their products. Company shareholders will pay the higher tax in the first instance. Other progressive taxes such as more tax on high-income earners cannot be passed on at all.

Taxing the rich to fund renewable energy would be popular—and would improve living standards rather than attack them.

# Stop Abbott's fear mongering, close Christmas Island



By Ian Rintoul

ANTI-REFUGEE HYSTERIA reached new heights in early April as Christmas Island reached capacity. After the arrival of the 100th refugee boat since Rudd's election, newspaper headlines boosted comments from opposition leader Tony Abbott declaring, "I'll tow them back."

The hysteria only grew when the government shifted two groups of asylum seekers to the mainland—59 minors and refugees in the last stages of processing along with 89 asylum seekers rejected at their initial interview were sent to Sydney's Villawood detention centre.

It's a long-standing practice to shift unaccompanied minors and families to the mainland, but that didn't stop Brisbane's *Sunday Mail* running a front page that screamed "THEY'RE

**Above: Tamil detainees are being sent back to Sri Lanka, where many will face persecution**

**Labor's policies are adding fuel to the fire**

HERE" underneath a photo of a refugee family shopping.

Abbott and Shadow Immigration Minister Scott Morrison will say anything to fan anti-refugee sentiment. It is now Coalition policy to reintroduce temporary protection visas. Asked on the ABC program Q&A, "What would Jesus do on the issue of asylum-seekers?" Abbott replied tellingly, "Don't forget, Jesus drove the traders from the temple as well." Morrison wants to re-introduce the Pacific Solution.

Early last month, Labor Immigration Minister Chris Evans told a meeting of the conservative think tank the Sydney Institute that, "the Rudd Government doesn't intend to head down the path [Howard] took."

But it's Labor's own policies that are adding fuel to the fire.

They are determined to compete with the Opposition to show they're the toughest on refugees and border

protection. They have added to the hysteria about people smuggling, demonising asylum seekers by association. Labor has maintained the essential elements of Howard's anti-refugee policy, using Christmas Island in place of Nauru. The Rudd government, like the Liberals, wants to stop the boats.

In the same speech to the Sydney Institute, Evans boasted, "Despite claims that irregular maritime arrivals represent a failure of border security, the Rudd Labor Government has maintained and extended the Howard Government's border security measures."

"We retain excision of offshore places, we continued offshore processing of irregular maritime arrivals on Christmas Island, and we maintain mandatory detention of those arrivals for health, identity and security checks."

For the same reasons, the Rudd government has introduced a draconian "Anti-people smuggling" Bill. The new law will create the offence of providing material support for people smuggling—with a maximum penalty of ten years jail and/or a fine of \$110,000. Another new offence of people smuggling involving exploitation or danger of death or serious harm, applying to ventures entering Australia, has a maximum penalty of 20 years and/or a fine of \$220,000.

These are the harshest anti-people smuggling measures in the world. It is designed to show that the Rudd government is tough on border protection. The only people locked up for people smuggling offences in Australia are poor Indonesian fishermen who have crewed asylum boats. Already people can be convicted of people smuggling offences even if they do not receive any monetary benefit.

But "providing material support" will give the green light to ASIO and the Federal Police to potentially target and intimidate family members and refugee supporters assisting asylum seekers.

Christmas Island is overcrowded. Providing more demountable huts won't change that. Services are stretched to the limit. Detainees have to give three days notice if they want to see medical staff. There are too few recreational facilities. One compound at Phosphate Hill has two TVs for 150 people. Mental health problem due to long-term detention are increasing, but there are too few counsellors.

Christmas Island stands as a monument to Labor's commitment to Howard's anti-refugee policies. If Labor wants to stand up to Abbott, Christmas Island must be closed.

## Labor keeps detainees' rights excised

DESPITE A pre-election promise to return excised territory to the Migration Act, the Rudd government has kept Christmas Island and Ashmore Reef excised. Asylum seekers processed offshore have fewer rights than those reaching the mainland.

They are still considered offshore applicants and are unable to access Australian courts, even if they are later brought to the mainland. After an interview on arrival, they have a "refugee status assessment" hearing. If they are rejected at this stage, they may appeal to an "independent" reviewer. But both assessors and reviewers are appointed by the government. A second rejection makes them liable to be deported. Unlike the onshore Refugee Review Tribunal decisions, offshore decisions are not published.

The government's commitment to a 90-day limit for determinations on refugee status has never applied to Christmas Island. But if refugee processing can be done in 90 days on the mainland, why are the Tamils and the others left in limbo for months on the island?

Over 100 Tamils, Iranians and Iraqis are now in Villawood potentially facing deportation. This gives the refugee campaign an opportunity to raise awareness and focus attention on all the problems that have so far been hidden on Christmas Island.

# Where are the real jobs, Macklin?

By Jean Parker

IN 2008, MILLIONAIRE mining mogul Andrew Forrest launched a government-supported scheme to employ 50,000 Aboriginal people in mainstream jobs in two years. The Australian Employment Covenant (AEC) was built around the idea that ‘Twiggy’ Forrest’s connections in corporate Australia could be mobilised to solve Aboriginal unemployment.

With six months to go, only 622 people have been employed, and only 88 have stayed in their position for over 26 weeks. Rather than face up to failure, Forrest has re-branded the project as ‘GenerationOne’ and re-launched it at the Opera House. It is complete with a web site, television ads, a travelling road show, and funding from fellow corporate barons Kerry Strokes, James Packer and Lindsay Fox. The two-year target has been quietly dropped.

The project fits hand-in-glove with the Intervention’s assault on welfare rights. The AEC’s vision is: “To change the ‘welfare state’ that has destroyed so many indigenous Australians... To change government policy so that every dollar of government spending is directly linked to the only sustainable way out of poverty—a REAL JOB”.

Forrest’s initiatives fit with the line being run by Noel Pearson and The Australian that blames “welfare dependence” for the poverty and social problems that plague Aboriginal communities. Their solution is ‘tough love’: to force people into towns and into mainstream jobs.

The new Intervention laws will force more Aboriginal people onto permanent, mandatory income management—at a cost of more than \$350 million. This push is accompanied by a government takeover of Aboriginal organisations and services (see box).

Jenny Macklin told press at the launch of the GenerationOne bus:

“I’ve seen with my own eyes the difference it makes in the Alice Springs town camps where men and women are starting to work, starting to show their kids that they can be proud of mum and dad going off to work every day to a job.”

But hundreds of Aboriginal people in Alice Springs have lost their jobs because of the Intervention. Civic services, once delivered by the Aboriginal organisation Tangentyere,



Jenny Macklin launches the GenerationOne roadshow

have been taken over by NT Housing and the Alice Springs Town Council. Some former Tangentyere workers were employed in a high-profile “clean up” project over Christmas, but most are now out of work. No government agency has taken responsibility for mowing the grass that now stands chest high in many town camps.

The dismantling of CDEP (Community Development Employment Projects) in July last year is hitting hard. Macklin promised that the closure of CDEP in remote communities would mean real jobs with award wages—long a demand of the Aboriginal rights movement. This hasn’t happened. Many people in the NT doing up to 40 hours work a week in their communities, from rubbish collection to driving school buses are no longer paid through local councils. They now receive only Newstart Allowance, 50 per cent of which is quarantined onto a “BasicsCard”.

The Australian Education Union in the NT called for 500 full-time jobs to replace those lost after CDEP closures. Only 16 were created, all in communities the government has dubbed “hub towns”. This is part of the government’s effort to depopulate hundreds of towns, communities and outstations.

The AEC website advertises eight jobs in the NT, all located in Palmerston on the outskirts of Darwin. Forrest says he has 17,000 “covenants” with employers like Woolworths and Crown Casino. Aboriginal communities are starved of services and housing, and well-paid jobs for Aboriginal people could meet these needs. But these communities have been labelled “unviable” and the government refuses to fund them. Instead they continue to pour funds into “covenants” with big business that aren’t worth the paper they’re written on.

.....  
**Hundreds of Aboriginal people in Alice Springs have lost their jobs because of the Intervention**

## Abbott to support the new Intervention laws

THE MAN Jenny Macklin said had a “dark ages” view of women, the man who refuses to acknowledge Aboriginal custodianship at public events, has indicated his support for Labor’s changes to the NT Intervention. That Tony Abbott is willing to support the laws should indicate just how bad they are.

The laws have been designed to entrench the Intervention. Macklin’s claim that they mean the reinstatement of the Racial Discrimination Act (RDA) is a lie. The majority of the Intervention’s measures—Government Business Managers, alcohol and pornography bans, five year compulsory leases, and extreme police powers—won’t change. The measures won’t be open to challenge using the RDA.

Each piece of legislation needs to say the RDA is applicable for it to apply—this legislation deliberately excludes it. Macklin asserts that these control mechanisms are “special measures” that benefit the community—but this cannot be tested in a court.

The hated income management has been deemed “non-discriminatory” by removing mention of the 73 currently prescribed Aboriginal communities.

Instead, the Minister will now be able to deem any community, region or even state as “disadvantaged”, and people receiving Newstart or parenting payments will be subject to the welfare quarantine. The RDA will be reinstated for this part of the laws, but not for the bulk of legislation that covers the Intervention. Not only that, but it means potentially more Aboriginal people will be income managed.

These lies need to be exposed by campaign groups across the country, and used to fire up the growing resistance to the Intervention.

A public meeting on the new laws hosted by STICS in Sydney drew over 130 people, and protests are planned for May when the laws will go to the Senate.

Jean Parker

# Rudd's health reforms: what the doctor ordered?



The public wants action taken to fix up hospitals, but Rudd has avoided proper funding as a solution

By James Supple

KEVIN RUDD says he has a “positive” plan to fix health care. Many people have welcomed his plan for a takeover of public hospitals by the federal government, desperate for something to be done about the state of the health system.

But Rudd’s plans continue the economic rationalist model that has seen our health system deteriorate, and fail to address the basic need for more funding in the system. Hospitals will receive no new funding for four years under the plan—despite rising costs every year.

At the core of his plan is a new funding formula, designed to deliver “efficiencies” in the sector. This is code for cost cutting. The “case-mix” formula, under which hospitals would be allocated a set amount of funding for each operation, was first introduced by notorious Liberal Premier Jeff Kennett in Victoria.

It was claimed as a success for driving down hospital costs in the state. How? Through forcing hospitals to cancel surgery, leaving patients waiting months for operations.

When Latrobe regional hospital ran through its budget in 2008, it responded by cancelling 500 hours of elective surgery and closing 20

beds, according to an investigation by *Stateline*.

Peter Craighead, CEO of Latrobe regional hospital in Victoria told the program that the funding formula meant, “Our revenue’s increased by about 20 per cent over the last four years, but our costs have gone up by 32 per cent.” As he put it, “A number of our procedures actually cost more than what we get funded for.”

Dr Doug Travis, a Victorian urologist who has worked in the system for 30 years told *The Age*, “People have to accept that the hospital system is not meeting demand. We haven’t got enough facilities, doctors and nurses to deliver the healthcare the public expect and want. That’s the major crux of the problem and there’s only one solution for that and that is increasing services. That is going to cost money.”

But this is precisely the problem that Rudd has avoided in delaying any funding increases.

There are inefficiencies in the health system. Doctors have long complained that cost-cutting across the system ends up costing hospitals more in the long run. According to Con Costa of the Doctors Reform Society, “Policies that make short term and minor savings at one level prove to be enormously expensive to the system as a whole”.

As he explained “Australians

are too often treated by their GP by prescription, blood test or radiological investigation—at very high cost to the system... Thousands of men are now having a simple blood test for prostate disease—called Prostatic Specific Antigen. The test is not reliable... Nevertheless, it has taken off and now de rigeur for diagnosing prostate disease amongst Australian GPs. [It] seems it’s much quicker to order a simple blood test than to wait for a patient to undress and perform an uncomfortable rectal examination. And time is of the essence for Australia’s GPs—where the waiting room is often over-crowded”.

But Rudd’s plan has ignored the need for a plan to integrate the total health system and eliminate these problems. This is because it would mean increasing the bulk-billing rate the government pays to GPs and undoing the privatisation of nursing homes.

## Private health

Perhaps most alarmingly, Rudd has failed to target the private hospital system, which leaches money away from the public system and helps inflate hospital fees. As Ian McAuley noted in *New Matilda*, “private hospitals have their privileged stream of funding through heavily subsidised private insurance”.

The private health insurance rebate, paid by taxpayers, will remain at \$3 billion a year, even if it becomes means-tested. This is money sucked out of the public system that the 56 per cent of the population that cannot afford private health insurance relies on.

Private health insurance exists to enable those that can afford it to skip the queue in the public system for treatment. But the result of this is to force up hospital bills across the board, because doctors can charge more in the private system.

The government claimed that offering the rebate would reduce its health costs by encouraging more people to take up private health insurance.

But as the architect of Medicare John Deeble has said, “Less than half of the [money] spent each year on the private health insurance rebate actually goes on hospital care and the same sum would have transformed public hospitals.”

The private health rebate is nothing more than a subsidy for the rich—and one that undermines the idea of an equitable health system where everyone gets the same treatment.

At the core of his plan is a new funding formula, designed to deliver “efficiencies”—code for cost-cutting

## Queensland: not for sale!

DEEP OPPOSITION within the Queensland labour movement to the government's privatisation program continues to dog the Bligh government. As *Solidarity* goes to press unions are launching another round of TV and radio commercials opposing the privatisation of the rail freight networks, ports, roads and motorways and forestry reserves. On March 9 up to 5000 workers rallied and marched through central Brisbane to Parliament House chanting, "Queensland—Not for sale!"

In February a petition signed by union state secretaries representing 45 per cent of Labor party affiliates was lodged at ALP headquarters demanding a special state Labor conference to revisit the question. Also in February the ETU expelled two MPs for supporting the assets sale while another two MPs resigned.

Polls consistently show 80 per cent or more of the electorate are opposed to the privatisations. The issue too is influencing people's voting intentions. Union commissioned research found an average 7 per cent swing against the government in five selected seats, with 43 per cent of participants identifying privatisation as the issue most influencing their intentions.

Unions are counting on the fear of an electoral wipeout to persuade the government to change course. But Bligh remains unmoved. Experience from other states shows that Labor governments will stick with unpopular decisions and govern in the interests of the big business, even to the point of losing power.

As the next election approaches and the fear of the return of the conservatives rises, Bligh will be banking on the unions' campaign fading. Already some unions are toning down their criticisms. She will be hoping that the muffling of the unions' campaign, combined with some luck and lots of spin, will be enough to get the government over the line. Stopping this privatisation program will require much more than electoral pressure.

At the rally in March, Peter Simpson from the ETU talked about industrial action being the last resort. It is yet to be seen if unions will turn to this weapon, but as the privatisation program is implemented, there will be plenty of flash points.

**Mark Gillespie**

# Another black death in custody: no justice in the justice system



**A rally to end black deaths in custody after the tragic death of Mulrinji**

**By Lauren Mellor**

THE DEATH in custody of 18-year-old Aboriginal man Sheldon Currie has exposed the criminal neglect of Aboriginal prisoners in Australia. Currie's death was the fourth in six weeks in Queensland's prisons.

Currie was held at the Arthur Gorrie Correctional Centre in Brisbane for six weeks, facing minor charges. Despite a pre-existing medical condition that required ongoing treatment, Currie was repeatedly denied medical assistance by prison authorities. After five weeks he was unable to walk and was assisted by other Murri inmates, who also demanded treatment.

It was not until Currie was found unconscious in his cell that he was taken to hospital and put on life support. His family were denied visitation rights until his death four days later.

At a rally outside Queensland's parliament, one grieving protester said: "This death, like so many others, could not have happened had the police and government implemented the full recommendations of the 1991 Black Deaths in Custody report."

Since the 1991 Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody there have been over 200 recorded deaths. Murri leader, Sam Watson, told the Brisbane rally that Currie's death shows recommendations made by the Royal Commission have never been implemented. He called for a national audit. A key recommendation in the report—that prison be used as a last resort—continues to be ignored. Incarceration rates for Aboriginal adults are 13 times that of the non-

Aboriginal population.

The tragedy of Sheldon Currie is, sadly, one among many. A spate of recent suicides in remote NT Aboriginal communities have been linked to the heat exhaustion after being transported men are jailed at six times the rate of young black men in Apartheid South Africa.

The death of respected WA Aboriginal elder Mr Ward in January last year sparked outrage. Mr Ward died of heat exhaustion after being transported 700 kilometres in the back of a prison van in temperatures over 47 degrees. Large protests demanded justice and transparency in the investigation. Despite coronial findings of criminal negligence, the WA state government has extended the contract of the private prison transport company, GSR, that transported Mr Ward. Refugees transported interstate by GSR were forced to drink their own urine when GSR didn't provide them with water.

### Mulrinji inquest

In the week of Currie's death, Queensland police officer Chris Hurley was back in court. He was attempting to have findings that he was responsible for the death of Palm Island man Mulrinji Doomadgee struck from official records. Hurley was the second police officer in Australian history to be charged with manslaughter over an Aboriginal death in custody. But despite the coroner's finding that Hurley's brutal beating of Mulrinji in the watch house caused his death—and Hurley's own admission that he "must have been responsible"—he was acquitted in 2007. He still serves as a police officer.

The latest inquest revealed that the Queensland Police Union helped ensure Hurley was never brought to justice. Police witnesses admitted they colluded on statements given, and were instructed by the Police Union to withhold their statements until the Commissioner demanded them. Officers admitted they refused to cooperate with the prosecution team "because the accused was a fellow police officer". An internal report on this corrupt police investigation into Mulrinji's death is still unavailable to the public, six years on.

"Law and order" campaigns are no solution for Aboriginal communities. True justice will need to be fought for.

### April 10 will be a National Day of Action against black deaths in custody

Protest rallies will be held in major cities across Australia demanding a new Royal Commission into Aboriginal deaths in custody

**BRISBANE:** 10am, Queens Park (cnr Elizabeth and George Sts, City. Contact Sam on 0401 227 443.

**SYDNEY:** Meeting at Redfern Community Centre, The Block, 1-3pm. Contact Ray Jackson on 0415858264.

# How women and men united to fight for equal pay

By Carl Taylor

THIS YEAR unions have launched a new equal pay campaign, “Pay Up”, in recognition of the persistent inequality in wage levels. Women make up half of the Australian workforce yet on average earn 17 per cent less than men.

Over the years significant victories have been won by women and men who fought together in their workplaces to end wage discrimination. While the gender pay gap still remains, the history of militant industrial struggle around equal pay shows how the fight in the workplace is crucial for women’s liberation.

## Class unity: A militant strategy

Prior to the Second World War women on average received only 54 per cent of the male wage rate. As huge numbers of women moved into the workforce, to work in war-related industries, disputes over pay erupted.

Strikes by women workers at two munitions factories led to the establishment of the Women’s Employment Board (WEB), which set a wage rate of 90 per cent of the male wage for women working in war industries. Employers, however, often simply refused to pay the rates set by WEB.

Women workers were forced to strike to enforce the WEB rulings. At Simmonds Aerocessories in Melbourne a strike by 132 women sheet metal workers, supported by 150 male engineers, lasted four months. A strike of just a few days at Richard Hughes in Sydney proved enough to force bosses to hand over \$6000 in back pay.

The post-war years saw inequality again entrenched in the workplace.

In a landmark ruling in 1969 the Australian Conciliation and Arbitration Commission granted the union claim that women receive “equal pay for equal work”, although only in jobs mostly done by men. Just three years later, figures revealed that only 18 per cent of women had benefited from the decision. The majority of employers circumvented the decision by reclassifying women’s jobs onto lower scales compared with men who did the same work.

Equal wages were a key demand in the early Women’s Liberation Movement, symbolised by Zelda D’Aprano’s protest where she chained herself to the Commonwealth building in Melbourne.

**Women office workers crossed out the words “women only” on the union notices, believing equal pay was a matter of concern for all union members**



Striking for equal pay—community sector workers rally last year

Unions took up the campaign for equal wages. The Amalgamated Engineering Union (AEU) saw the need to take the fight to the factory floors.

Enthusiastic support among male rank and file AEU members (the union was 97 per cent male) to campaign for equal pay drew large numbers of women into the union. The AEU reported that, “we now also have an increased number of female shop stewards,” and described, “the readiness of the women concerned to take industrial action to support their demand.”

By the beginning of 1972 the industrial campaign had proved successful—90 per cent of the women in the metal industry had won equal pay.

## Insurance workers

Another example was the insurance industry. By the early 1970s, women clerical workers were voicing anger over unequal pay scales and lack of promotion opportunities.

In 1973 a rank and file group called Militant Insurance Clerks produced their own newsletter and quickly gathered signatures from 460 insurance workers on a petition demanding an industrial campaign to fight for equal pay.

When their union, the Australian Insurance Staffs’ Federation, eventually called workplace meetings they were advertised as “women only.” Women office workers crossed out the words “women only” on the union notices, believing equal pay was a matter of concern for all union members.

Phil Griffiths, a young clerk at Royal-Globe Life Insurance, explained why equal pay was an issue for the men in the office: “Because the union has not been seen to defend the wages of women...it has not been able to organise women into the union to fight for the interests of all insurance staff...[The union] must work to convince the male membership that their future lies in fighting with women for their mutual individual interests”.

The message appeared to be getting through. A stop work rally in November 1973 surprised many. Phil Griffiths described the scenes: “I think they [the union officials] expected 50 people, and there were...3000...and the sense of anger was tremendous.”

The insurance companies, who profited by paying lower wages to women, held out. An increasingly angry membership led the union to declare a national clerical strike. However the union officials canceled the strike at the last minute, preferring to negotiate behind closed doors. It took a further two years to win equal pay across the industry.

The ongoing fight for equal pay relies on industrial action in the workplace. Gender divisions among workers in the metal and insurance industries broke down when both men and women fought together against their employers for equal pay. Men were prepared to strike, sacrificing pay, to win equal wages for women. The broader fight for women’s liberation can learn much from these struggles.

# Greek workers escalate their resistance

By Stephen Martin

IN LATE March European Union leaders announced a joint rescue package with the IMF to stop Greece defaulting on its debts.

They have promised Greece €22 billion in case it fails to refinance its loans on the international money market.

But the rescue package would impose further savage budget cuts—to be paid for by ordinary people. The Greek government has already been rocked by massive resistance to existing austerity measures, undertaken by the supposedly left wing PASOK party to please global financial markets.

A third general strike within a month on March 11 was the biggest yet. It came in response to a further €4.8 in public spending cuts announced since the previous general strike in February.

Public sector workers are facing pay cuts of 7 per cent and cuts to holiday bonuses, pensions are to be frozen and the GST and fuel taxes increased.

According to Guy Smallman in Greece, “The protest was perhaps twice the size of the one during the general strike of 24 February”. Ninety per cent of workplaces across the country took part. Services across the country from flights to schools, hospitals and public transport were paralysed once again.

Train services ran only to take workers to and from the demonstration.

The union leadership has deferred decisions on further action until after the Easter break. But Panos Garganas, editor of Greek socialist newspaper *Workers Solidarity* says that “each day sees groups of workers holding protests against the cuts” with the latest being a doctor’s strike over cuts to wages and to force the government to keep its promise to hire 2000 new doctors.

## Debt problems

The rescue package came about for two linked reasons. On one hand the governments of the EU, especially Germany, are concerned about the destabilising effect if Greece defaulted on its debts.

The EU faces the risk of a wave of defaults. Total government debt



Greek workers have staged three general strikes against plans for budget cuts to pay Greece's debt

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**In effect what the EU and the IMF are demanding is that the profits of the global financial institutions are guaranteed**

in Italy is at 114 per cent of its GDP, a level that is actually higher than Greece, whose debt is currently 112.6 per cent of GDP.

If you look at annual budget deficits as a percentage of GDP, the UK at 13 per cent is actually greater than that of Greece which sits at 12.5 per cent, with Spain and Ireland not far behind with 11.25 and 10.75 per cent respectively.

As economist Costas Lapavistas points out, Germany, Europe's biggest economy, is not immune from the economic crisis that is engulfing the Eurozone:

“German investment has been weak, and productivity generally rose less than in peripheral countries. In the past the exchange rates of these countries would have fallen, allowing them to improve their exports. But the euro makes this impossible.”

The second reason for the so-called rescue package is to apply financial discipline on the Greek government.

The involvement of the IMF at the behest of Germany, despite initial French opposition, is part of the EU's attempts to ensure that the Greek government places the burden of the crisis onto Greece's workers.

Heavy conditions attached to the package mean the €22 billion will

be provided only if the government follows through on strict financial austerity measures. That means a cap on government spending, such as the current freeze in wage rises and government pensions and cuts to public services.

In effect, the EU and the IMF are demanding that the profits of the global financial institutions are guaranteed.

Costas Lapavistas points out a more successful alternative would be, “restoring some fiscal freedom to member states, expanding the European budget, instituting fiscal transfers from rich to poor, and introducing a minimum wage and unemployment insurance. The ECB [European Central Bank] might also be allowed to buy state debt.”

The inspiring resistance in Greece needs to continue, and to escalate if it is to force the Government to back down on its austerity drive.

As Greek socialist Garganas argues, a way to take things further would be for “individual unions to go for all-out strikes, which is a possibility for those in power, telecoms, schools and local government”.

The resistance in Greece is an example of the kind of action needed to stop workers being made to pay for the ongoing economic crisis.

# Thailand: hundreds of thousands demand democracy

By Giles Ji Ungpakorn

HUNDREDS OF thousands of Thai Redshirt pro-Democracy demonstrators have taken to the streets of Bangkok and other cities repeatedly since the middle of March. This is a show of force to prove the strength of the movement and to dispel any lies by the royalist Government and the media that the Redshirts are not representative of the majority.

The stated aims of the movement are to force the Military-installed Government of Abhisit Vejjajiva to dissolve parliament and hold fresh elections.

Abhisit was forced to hold two days of talks with protest leaders. But he would not agree to dissolve parliament within 15 days, as the Redshirt protests have demanded. Instead the reaction of the military-backed Prime Minister was to say that “elections solve nothing” and that he would not dissolve parliament until a long drawn out process of “constitutional reform was carried out”.

However, it is difficult to see how the Redshirt leadership is going to turn their massive show of popular anger into a force which can confront and overcome the army, which staged a coup back in 2006.

This is because the Redshirt leaders are not yet prepared to launch an all out ideological attack on the Military and the Monarchy. Calling fresh elections will not solve this problem.

## Class struggle

However, the massive turn out of Redshirts from Bangkok and the provinces is an important step forward. The vast majority of Redshirts are poor people, both urban and rural, and the Redshirt leaders are at last talking openly about a “class struggle” between the people and the elites. They need to go further and agitate among the urban working class and the lower ranks of the army in order to build up the momentum for revolutionary change. Any compromise will retain the power of the royalist elites who have constantly frustrated Democracy.

The political crisis and unrest which we have seen in Thailand since the September 19, 2006 military coup against the elected Taksin Government, represents a serious class war between the rich conservative and the urban and rural poor. It is not a pure class war and those taking part have



One of the huge Redshirt protests for democracy which have gripped Thailand for the last month

different aims and different concepts of Democracy.

Due to a vacuum on the Left since the collapse of the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT), millionaire and populist politician, Taksin Shinawat and his Thai Rak Thai Party, managed to inspire millions of ordinary Thais.

Despite the fact that many commentators try to explain the present conflict as only an elite dispute between Taksin and the conservatives and that it is a dispute between “the old feudal order” fighting back against “the modern capitalist class”, this is not what the conflict is really about.

The missing element in most analyses is the actions of millions of ordinary people. Taksin built an alliance with workers and peasants through his pro-poor policies such as the first ever Universal Health Care Scheme and local village funds to develop rural areas.

The Redshirts like Taksin, but they are not just being used by him or fighting only for his return. They want real Democracy and social justice. Both Taksin and his conservative opponents are royalists in modern terms, in that both sides seek to use the institution of the Monarchy in order to help support capitalist class rule.

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**Redshirt  
 leaders are at  
 last talking  
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 between the  
 people and the  
 elites**

Feudalism was abolished in Thailand in the 1870s.

What gradually turned the conservatives against Taksin was their fear that they would lose their privileges in the face of Taksin’s widespread modernisation programme which had mass popular support. In the past the elites had used a combination of military power, royalist ideology and money politics in order to ignore the wishes of the population.

Neither Taksin nor the conservative royalists intended their dispute to turn into a class war. But the mass pro-Democracy movement is starting to question the entire elite structure, including the Monarchy. This is because of the arrogant attitude of the conservative royalists and the prolonged nature of the crisis, plus the self-organisation and self-funding of millions of Redshirts at grass roots level.

This class war is bringing about changes in political attitudes and putting all sections of society to the test. But the real question facing the movement is how to seize state power. Giles Ji Ungpakorn is a Thai socialist, currently in exile in the UK. His latest book “Thailand’s Crisis and the Fight for Democracy” will be published in April 2010.

# Israel is still the US's watchdog

Israel's determination to build settlements on occupied Palestinian territory is worrying the US government. **John Rose** answers questions on the US-Israel relationship

## What is the historic relationship between the US and Israel?

*Ha'aretz*, Israel's main liberal newspaper, explained in 1951 that, "Israel is to become the watchdog".

Israel could only survive by demonstrating its usefulness to the West. It could not have been founded without Western imperial power.

At first, France was as important to Israel as the US. It was France that gave Israel its nuclear technology.

But the relationship with the US really became important after the 1967 war, when Israel demonstrated its military capacity by defeating the Egyptian, Syrian and Jordanian armies.

The flow of funds from the US to Israel afterwards went up ten times.

## Does that mean that the US effectively controls Israel?

I am Jewish, but became an anti-Zionist—opposed to the state of Israel—during the 1967 war. I learnt that you could see Israel as an attack dog with an American master.

So the US has Israel on a leash. But sometimes the dog can pull the owner—it can take them down alleys they don't want to go.

Israel has become more and more aggressive over the years. Now it has reached a point where it is almost completely out of control, which is why we've seen for the first time such an open intervention by the Pentagon.

The Pentagon effectively told Barack Obama, "You've got to cool these guys." General David Petraeus, who is in charge of US operations in Afghanistan, said, "Israel is risking American soldiers' lives."

## Does this represent a shift in relations between the US and Israel?

There's increased tension, but I don't think there's been a real shift. And this hasn't just happened under Obama.

Israel went into Gaza, quite cunningly, between the presidencies. They got out just before Obama was inaugurated. So it was George Bush's administration that was taking the hits

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**Israel could only survive by demonstrating its usefulness to the West**



Despite a tense meeting with Obama in Washington, Netanyahu negotiated a \$250 million arms deal for the US to give Israel these Hercules C-130J air-planes—indicating Israel's special relationship with the US is well intact

as Israel went berserk.

But the pressure from the Turkish government was interesting. Turkey signed a peace pact with Israel under US supervision in the 1950s.

Relations between Israel and Turkey had been really close. But at that point they were close to breaking down. That was deeply disturbing to the Americans.

Israel had been the key to stability in the region for the US. But now, to a degree, it was becoming a destabiliser. The problem for the US was managing that—which they're trying to do at the moment.

## Can the US draw in the leash without causing a huge fight?

Israel can be contained—but there are real tensions.

Its prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, clearly thought he could go to AIPAC—the Israel lobby in the US—and use it to bounce Obama into position. The opposite happened—it just infuriated the White House even more.

They're trying to manage these tensions. As we speak, it's not at all clear that they're going to succeed. The US has to get a freeze on Israeli settlements in Palestinian territories, one way or another.

## Why do you think the US is so keen to do that?

It has to curb Israel's aggression.

It has to find a way to keep Israel in its useful ally role instead of it going completely over the top.

US power in the region is not just about Israel—it's also about compliant Arab states, especially Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Jordan. They are all dictatorships, threatened by their populations.

The Arab in the street is sick to death of what's happening in Palestine.

With satellite TV, they're getting more accurate reporting about what's happening than we get in the West, and that's certainly a destabiliser for the Arab regimes. Obama has had to take that into account.

## What does the US want?

It now wants Israel to accept some kind of deal with the Palestinians that makes it possible for the Arab leaderships to say they've got something out of this.

Some halfway house solution would be a considerable advance for the Palestinians compared to what they have at the moment. But it falls far short of their legitimate national liberation aspirations.

In the end, the US can yank Israel's lead. But no one knows how it's going to play out.

Obama would prefer not to put that pressure on in public, but in the end it will be put on somehow.

**Socialist Worker UK**

# THE RISE AND FALL OF THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

British socialist **Judith Orr** looks at the radical women's liberation movement of the 1960s, and why it declined

IT IS HARD to imagine just how different the world was for women before the 1960s.

When my mum got married she had to leave her job in a bank. It was assumed that her husband would keep her and she would look after the home. This was not unusual—in many jobs married women were not employed. It was difficult for a woman to get a mortgage without a man's guarantee.

These were the days before the pill. Sex before marriage was seen as shameful and if a single woman got pregnant it was devastating. Abortion was illegal and many women risked their lives going to the backstreet, or were forced to give their baby up for adoption.

The radical political movements of the 1960s blew apart this repressive and stifled world.

The gains women made then—some abortion access, easier divorce, freedom to express our sexuality and the principle of equal pay—changed the lives of millions.

## The beginning

The Women's Liberation Movement (WLM) was born in the US among students radicalised by the mass black civil rights movement and opposition to the Vietnam War. In Britain, the WLM developed from the struggles of women workers for equal pay.

The two movements had different characteristics but both were rooted

in the effect of the long post-war economic boom. This had pulled increasing numbers of women into the workforce and into further education. For example between 1960 and 1965 there was a 57 per cent increase in women being awarded degrees in the US (the same figure for men rose by 25 per cent). Suddenly a whole generation of women had new expectations.

The universities of the US became centres of struggle and debate. By 1967 thousands of women had been on marches and protests. They had fought for black civil rights, opposed the war in Vietnam and challenged the state.

Yet they faced sexism in their own political organisations and felt sidelined and trivialised by the mainly male leadership.

It seems shocking that such brilliant radical movements did not take women's rights seriously. But when the movements exploded in the 1960s they did so in a vacuum.

The socialist tradition had been decimated by the witch-hunts of McCarthyism. In the US, there was no Labor-type party or revolutionary left to speak of. The shadow cast by the experience of Stalinism made many feel that socialism had nothing to do with liberation.

Women activists began to organise their own workshops, write papers and talk about their oppression.

The movement in the US was

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**The Women's Liberation Movement was born in the US among students radicalised by the mass black civil rights movement and opposition to the Vietnam War**

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dominated by the idea that women had to organise separately. Meetings often involved women talking about their personal lives—a process described as “consciousness raising”.

Groups, dominated by college educated middle class women, spread to cities all over the US. Although it was never a truly mass movement in terms of numbers and activity it did articulate the dashed hopes and frustration of millions of women.

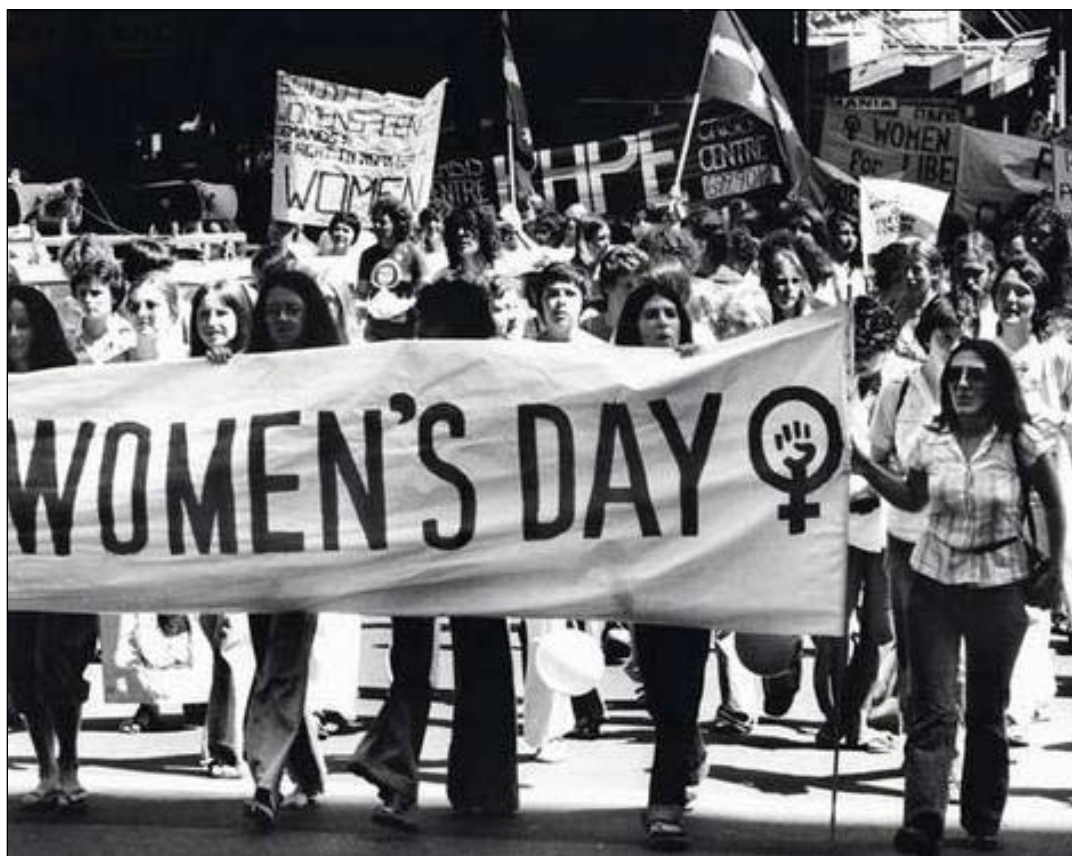
Elsewhere, such as in Britain and Australia, the experience of the women's movement was shaped by the greater influence of the left and class politics.

The presence of Labor Parties, the higher density of trade union membership, and an organised revolutionary left made a difference.

It meant that there was an understanding of the socialist tradition of fighting for women's rights. These influences ensured the demands of the British and Australian WLM reflected the needs of working class women—free abortion and contraception, equal educational and job opportunities, childcare and equal pay. Strikes of women workers like the London office cleaners were seen as very much part of the movement.

## Debates in the movement

But there were problems. Ideas about women needing to organise separately divided the movement. In fact bitter



Mass marches for women's liberation took up radical demands with gusto

experience showed there was nothing inevitably “sisterly” or democratic about women-only organisations.

By the late 1970s the Women's Liberation Movement (WLM) was in decline.

There was a growing rift between those who saw the struggle for women's rights as linked with that of the working class, and those who were more influenced by radical feminism, in particular the theory of patriarchy.

In essence this theory declared that the root cause of women's oppression was male power. Soon patriarchy became the dominant theoretical explanation of women's oppression.

It was widely accepted that all men benefited from women's oppression, and that therefore all men had an interest in maintaining it. This led to some organisations refusing to campaign alongside men—or even alongside women who worked with men in political campaigns.

But there is no male conspiracy to oppress women. The real cause of that oppression—class division—works against working class men as well.

To take low pay, for example. It is not the case that men benefit from women being paid less. It simply means that in the majority of working class families, where both men and

.....  
**There was a growing rift between those who saw the struggle for women's rights as linked with that of the working class, and those who were more influenced by radical feminism**

women work, the overall income will be less. Paying women less only benefits the bosses, who gain in profit.

When the left started to be characterised as “inherently macho” it signalled just how far the rightward drift had gone. *Beyond the Fragments*, an influential book by Sheila Rowbotham, Lynne Segal and Hilary Wainwright, was published in 1979. It was an outright attack on the left that claimed Leninist politics was oppressive to women.

Radical feminists argued that socialist politics were not part of the solution, but part of the problem.

Even working class struggle and trade unions were increasingly dismissed in this manner.

This disintegration of the WLM led some women—usually the most privileged—to look to individual solutions. These were women who could pursue careers in the big corporations while employing nannies and cleaners to carry the burden of housework.

The image of a businesswoman in shoulder pads and high heels became a 1980s cliché. But the success of the few women who broke through the “glass ceiling” did nothing to advance the position of the majority of women.

For others, the Greenham Com-

mon peace camp in the early 1980s provided a model. This was a women-only protest against US nuclear missiles in Britain.

Greenham Common came to embody the radical feminist view that men were biologically driven to be aggressors while women were naturally peacemakers. Yet Margaret Thatcher's warmongering was proof that women are not naturally non-violent.

In Australia, the movement retreated either into individual self-help projects like Women's Refuge Centres or turned inward, focusing on organising social and cultural activities without attempting to take up any of the political issues in the wider world.

In the end, many of those who had been at the forefront of the WLM ended up playing the system rather than trying to smash it.

These are the women who are the government ministers, lawyers and managers of today.

They have benefited from the struggles of the 1960s and 1970s that put equal opportunities on the agenda. But their lives have little in common with those of the mass of ordinary women.

### The fight continues

The battle to win real women's liberation is still to be won. We face pay inequality, attacks on abortion rights, welfare cuts and a massive rise in sexism in popular culture.

History has shown that the fate of women in society is tied to the fate of the working class. We have won the most gains when the working class has been on the offensive.

We have never been in a better position to challenge our oppression as part of a collective—women are now half the workforce. But the fight must be for more than just equality under capitalism.

Class remains the deepest divide in society, defining our health, education, housing, jobs and pay and even our life expectancy.

Winning equal pay with men would be progress, but not victory. Recent figures show the richest 20 per cent of Australian households own 63 per cent of wealth in the country, while the bottom 20 per cent own just 0.2 per cent. Equal pay can still mean gross inequality between the minority and the majority.

For socialists the fight for women's liberation is part of a struggle for the emancipation of the whole of humanity.

**Socialist Worker UK**

# UNITED WE STAND: SOCIALISTS AND THE UNITED FRONT

The strategy of the united front is indispensable in today's campaigns for social change, writes **Shannon Price**

AS THE Rudd government backs big business rather than taking action on climate change, entrenches the NT Intervention, and maintains much of the Howard agenda the need to build big, strong movements capable of forcing change only grows in importance.

The idea of the united front has much to contribute to the debates inside campaigns about how best to mobilise. It shows how a minority of radical, grassroots activists can relate to and draw into struggle people only just beginning to see the necessity of far-reaching change.

The theory of the united front, as developed out of the Bolsheviks' experience in the Russian revolution, was about alliances between mass workers' organisations, revolutionary and reformist. Today mass revolutionary organisations like the Communist Parties of the 1920s do not exist. But the need to balance maintaining a revolutionary organisation and outlook with the need for alliance building is just as crucial—whether in the workers' movement or inside campaigns around racism and climate change.

## Basic characteristics of the united front

The united front is a strategy, not just a tactic. It is a methodology that informs the general approach of revolutionaries to building alliances and joint work with other organisations and individuals. It is designed to allow revolutionary organisations to reach workers with reformist consciousness—those who do not yet see the need for radical, thoroughgoing change. Revolutionaries term this division, between those who have already reached revolutionary conclusions and others who have not, the problem of “uneven consciousness” within the working class.

A united front is a temporary

formation—an alliance between revolutionary and non-revolutionary organisations in a common struggle for a particular aim. This can be anything from the fight for workers' wages and conditions (such as the fight against WorkChoices) to the fight against fascism in Germany in the 1930s.

The type of demands around which to build common campaigns is a topic of controversy in many social movements. This united front specifies that common struggles must be around an aim that is acceptable to both revolutionary and non-revolutionary workers. This means that there must be an effort made to find common ground.

But it also means avoiding vague, general demands which are acceptable to everyone, but put no pressure on the government to deliver change. For example, demands like “Action on climate change now” are not acceptable to revolutionaries. They mean avoiding any confrontation with the government, and so contain no ability to radicalise those who are drawn into struggle.

But neither do revolutionaries propose demands that only other revolutionaries could accept, like forced nationalisation of polluting industries. In relation to climate change, there may be common demands around themes like “making the polluters pay” and “government support for renewables”.

United around a common aim, the revolutionary and reformist organisations necessarily retain political independence. The united front, given its combination of reformist and revolutionary workers, is a site of struggle. There will always be a debate about the tactics and strategy for a particular movement. In the struggle revolutionaries have, as Marx and Engels put it, “the advantage of clearly understanding the line of march, the conditions,

and the ultimate general results of the proletarian movement”, and are therefore well placed to win over reformist workers.

## The July Days

One of the best examples of the application of the united front is found in the Russian Revolution.

The July Days of the Revolution in 1917 raised the question for Lenin and the Bolsheviks of how to relate to reformist organisations as the movement came under attack from the right. The Bolsheviks were engaged in a bitter struggle with the Provisional Government headed by Aleksandr Kerensky, who had jailed many Bolshevik leaders. At the same time, Kerensky's government faced a coup attempt led by General Lavr Kornilov.

Trotsky, in *The History of the Russian Revolution*, explains the approach Lenin took, “Not for an instant did (the Bolshevik party) hesitate to conclude a practical alliance to fight against Kornilov with its jailers... The Bolsheviks were in the front ranks; they smashed down the barriers blocking them from the Menshevik workers and especially the Social Revolutionary soldiers, and carried them in their wake... In the midst of Kornilov's campaign, Kerensky appealed to the sailors of the cruiser Aurora, begging them to assume the defence of the Winter Palace. These sailors were, without exception, Bolsheviks. They hated Kerensky. Their hatred did not prevent them from vigilantly guarding the Winter Palace.”

Lenin and the Bolsheviks understood the importance of uniting with Kerensky and his supporters in order to beat off the challenge from Kornilov. Without defeating this challenge, there was no possibility of advancing the revolution and eventually defeating the Provisional Government.

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**The united front informs our general approach to building alliances and joint work with other organisations and individuals**



**Labor for Refugees was the result of a united front strategy in the refugee campaign**

Lenin stressed the importance of political independence within the united front in order to maintain their criticism of Kerensky and, crucially, in order to fight for the tactics necessary to defeat Kornilov.

As he explained, “We are fighting against Kornilov, but we do not support Kerensky; we are uncovering his weaknesses... we are varying the forms of struggle against Kerensky... by explaining the weaknesses and vacillations of Kerensky to the people (who are fighting against Kornilov).”

This willingness to defend Kerensky was crucial to the Bolsheviks winning an audience with the mass of workers who still had reformist consciousness. Their understanding that they were not defending Kerensky, but rather defending the revolution, is what allowed them to consolidate leadership of a larger base of workers.

### **The October Revolution**

The art of maintaining the balance between commonality and independence was further tested as the culmination of the revolution neared in October. The central question debated by Lenin and Trotsky was who should lead the insurrection: the Bolshevik party or the soviets?

Lenin argued that the Bolsheviks should call the insurrection rather than wait for the approval of the soviets. Trotsky argued that no one but the soviet should call it. This was an argument about the way to most effec-

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**The arguments made by the Bolsheviks within the Soviets were crucial, as was their orientation to winning over the mass of workers within them**

tively mobilise the mass of workers in support of the revolution.

Trotsky said of the October Revolution, “The party set the soviets in motion, the soviets set in motion the workers, soldiers, and to some extent the peasantry. What was gained in mass was lost in speed. If you represent this conducting apparatus as a system of cog-wheels—a comparison to which Lenin had recourse at another period on another theme—you may say that the impatient attempt to connect the party wheel directly with the gigantic wheel of the masses—omitting the medium sized wheel of the soviets—would have given rise to the danger of breaking the teeth of the party wheel, and nevertheless not setting sufficiently large masses in motion.”

Ultimately, it was the soviets that organised the insurrection that led to workers taking power in the October Revolution. The arguments made by the Bolsheviks within the Soviets were crucial—as was their orientation to winning over the mass of workers within them.

### **Germany, Trotsky and resisting the Nazis**

Most famously, Trotsky applied the theory of the united front in his pleas to the German left as it faced the rise of fascism.

In July 1929 the Comintern decreed that social democratic parties were the same as fascists, terming them “social fascists”. This led the

German Communist leaders to make light of the real fascist threat of the Nazis, treating them as no greater a danger than the German Social Democratic Party (SPD).

Trotsky argued against this saying, “Today the social democracy as a whole, with all its internal antagonisms, is forced into sharp conflict with the fascists. It is our task to take advantage of this conflict and not to unite the antagonists against us... It is necessary to show by deeds a complete readiness to make a bloc with the social democrats against the fascists in all cases in which they will accept a bloc... The overwhelming majority of social democratic workers will fight against the fascists, but—for the present at least—only together with their organisations.”

Trotsky understood that the revolutionaries in Germany could not themselves mobilise the mass of reformist workers. They needed an alliance with the SPD—the same organisation that the Stalinist Comintern termed “social fascists”.

The fact that Trotsky’s advice was ignored meant that not only did the SPD leaders refuse to fight—the leadership of the Communists failed to exercise the power that they had to force them to do so. As a result the Nazis took power in 1933 and began one of the most brutal reigns imaginable.

### **Reviving the united front**

The united front methodology is crucial for revolutionaries today. The smaller the revolutionary organisation, the more obvious the need to unite with broader reformist forces in order to fight the attacks of the ruling class. Whilst revolutionary organisations like *Solidarity* are too small to form a united front with a whole organisation like the Labor Party, a united front strategy informs our approach in campaigns of trying to involve reformist forces.

However, it remains crucial that revolutionaries assert their political analysis and strategy for the movements. It is not hubris to recognise that because of their understanding of capitalism, revolutionaries are best able to understand how to fight for reforms. Fighting for a revolutionary strategy in campaigns and through publications like *Solidarity* is a crucial contribution that revolutionaries can make to the struggle.

The united front strategy is as important today as it was in Russia in 1917—even if getting the balance between unity in action and political independence remains an art.

# LET FREEDOM REIGN: LESSONS FROM THE FIGHT AGAINST APARTHEID IN SOUTH AFRICA

Understanding the history of the fight against Apartheid can help explain why black poverty still persists today, argues **Paddy Gibson**

TWENTY YEARS on from Nelson Mandela's historic release from Apartheid's prisons, the overwhelming majority of black South Africans still languish in poverty.

South Africa is the most unequal country on earth. Poverty has increased in urban areas since 1993. At least two-fifths of the workforce is unemployed—a rate higher than in the Apartheid era.

The defeat of Apartheid was a massive blow against black oppression. It was driven by the mobilisation of millions of black workers and township residents. It was an inspiring movement, and contained so much promise for overthrowing the system that created these horrible conditions.

But the history of South Africa since the overthrow of Apartheid illustrates why capitalism itself has to go.

## The roots of Apartheid

South Africa was formed in 1910. The regime was white, but overwhelmingly the population was black. Cheap black labour was needed for economic prosperity. Apartheid emerged as a way to control this labour.

Hundreds of thousands of blacks entered a growing manufacturing labour force through the 1930s and 40s. The South African Board of Trade and Industries wrote in 1945:

“The detribalisation of large numbers of Natives congregated in amorphous masses in large industrial centres is a matter which no government can view with equanimity. Unless handled with great foresight and skill these masses of detribalised Natives can very easily develop into a menace rather than a constructive factor in industry.”

Apartheid was formally established

in 1948, with the election of the National Party to government. All South Africans were officially divided into three categories; white, black (African) or coloured (mixed race). All public and economic life was regulated by the segregation of these groups.

A new labour bureau was established to control black workers. Officially, all blacks were considered “citizens” of one of the Bantustans—small reserves within the rural areas of the country—rather than of South Africa. Tenancy in urban areas remained totally reliant on the discretion of the bureau. Blacks were banned from taking strike action or forming unions.

## Resistance to Apartheid

These conditions inspired resistance in many forms. Nelson Mandela was a founding member of the “Youth League” of the African National Congress (ANC) in 1943. They were influenced by the militant wave of nationalist, anti-colonial struggles sweeping the world. Similar to many of these struggles, leading youth league members tended to come from the educated, privileged sections of the black community.

Black oppression placed serious barriers in the way of improvements of the social conditions and economic development of their communities, and they were outraged by the extreme hardship faced by the black masses.

They could not ignore the power of black workers, who periodically exploded in resistance. In 1946 the African Mineworkers Union initiated powerful strikes against the system of migrant labour. They were brutally repressed.

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**South Africans were officially divided into three categories; white, black (African) and coloured (mixed race). All public and economic life was regulated by this segregation**

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For Marxists, the development of workers' power provides the basis for a fundamental transformation of society. But the ANC saw workers' struggle only as one of many tactics. They sought to unite all classes in South Africa in the struggle for national liberation.

The 1955 Freedom Charter, still formally adhered to by the ANC today, expressed these contradictions. It says, “the people shall govern... the people shall share in the country's wealth” and calls for “nationalisation of the mineral wealth beneath the soil, the banks and monopoly industry”. But Mandela immediately ruled out a socialist reading of this clause, saying, “the break-up of these monopolies will open fresh fields for the development of a prosperous, non-European bourgeois class”.

At Sharpeville on 21 March 1960, police opened fire on a mass demonstration of workers refusing to carry their passbooks—required identification for all blacks. They killed 69 people. Thousands were jailed in the aftermath of the massacre. The ANC was banned. Its leading cadres went into hiding and the movement went into retreat as the regime declared a state of emergency.

So the ANC looked to the strategy of guerilla war, which was striking major blows against colonial powers from Vietnam to Algeria.

But these were mainly peasant societies. In an increasingly urbanised and industrialised South Africa, this tactic was futile. Much of the organisation's energy was focused on the development of Umkhonto weSizwe (MK), the military wing of the ANC.

Following a spate of MK bomb-

ings, Mandela and other ANC leaders were arrested and jailed.

### The storm breaks

In 1973, a wave of spontaneous strikes, involving more than 60,000 black workers, shook the Durban-Pinetown area. They forced significant concessions from the Apartheid regime. Only 0.2 per cent of the strikers were prosecuted, wages were increased and new legislation was introduced removing the ban on black strikes. This political victory came as the global economy boomed, which improved the position of the black working class.

In the mid-70s black unions expanded rapidly, representing 70,000 members by 1977. From 1970-75, African wages rose by 6.6 per cent, compared to 1 per cent for white workers, a redistribution of wealth unprecedented in South African history.

This growing strength underpinned the re-emergence of mass political struggle against Apartheid itself. In June 1976, thousands of students joined demonstrations in the black township of Soweto in protest against learning in Afrikaans, the language of the Apartheid regime.

Students drew inspiration from their striking parents and the recent victories of black liberation struggles in Angola and Mozambique.

Police opened fire and murdered more than 500 students. A revolt spread immediately across South Africa, from the streets into the factories. 1976 saw three “stay-aways”—political general strikes. They were met with savage repression—mass detentions and a ban on “black consciousness” organisations. The public record shows 700 blacks were killed by October 1977.

The populist politics of the ANC had little to offer the uprising and the brave students leaders at its head lacked experience. Many thousands went into exile, often across the borders to join the ranks of MK guerrillas. No political force existed that could systematically co-ordinate the potential power of the workers movement with the fighting taking place on the streets.

### Between reform and revolution

The onset of global recession drove both the growing politicisation of the workers’ movement and the brief lull in struggle during the late 1970s. From 1975, the Apartheid regime, facing stunted economic growth, became less willing to grant wage demands and turned increasingly to repression.



Young black South Africans were inspired by the movements for national liberation in Africa

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### After Soweto, a revolt spread immediately across South Africa, from the streets into the factories

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In 1980, a new cycle of township rebellion began, centred on the Cape. The Apartheid regime was scrambling to tweak its regime of exploitation and relieve some pressure. A section of black workers in urban areas were granted permanent tenancy and reprieve from the “passbook” system. In a similar vein Indians and Coloured people were granted their own chamber of parliament and ministerial positions and new town councils were established, with greater “autonomy” over black areas.

Black trade union membership trebled from 220,000 in 1980 to 670,000 in 1983 as bitter fights raged over wages and increasing unemployment. In 1982, 100 miners were killed and thousands more deported in a major wave of riots and strikes.

The workers movement was constantly gripped by debates over strategy. The dominant faction in the union federation COSATU, which included the Stalinist South African Communist Party (SACP), were known as the “populists”. They argued for subordination of industrial struggle to the political leadership of the ANC. They proposed a mechanical “two stages” theory of revolution lifted from Stalinism. They believed that the authoritarian political system of Apartheid was stifling the economic development of South Africa as a whole. They argued that the material foundations for socialism would only

come after a period of parliamentary democracy and “black capitalism”.

The second major faction, known as the “workerists”, articulated a syndicalist perspective. They placed a primary emphasis on questions of class and the need for independent trade union organisation.

Despite these divisions over strategy, both the rising power of the workers movement and growing township revolt propelled South Africa’s leading trade unionists towards unity. Between 1984-86 the scale of struggle was so great that large sections of South Africa become literally ungovernable. Township streets were under the control of militant black youth.

There were four general strikes in 1984, 22 in 1985 and 26 in 1986. A general strike on May Day in 1986 involved 1.5 million workers.

In response to this upsurge, the regime declared a state of emergency. 26,000 people were arrested between 1985-87. The power of “Bantustan” leaders, who had developed a strong material interest in Apartheid, was also mobilised to crush grass-roots power.

Buthelezi, the Chief Minister of the KwaZulu Bantustan, fought anti-Apartheid militants for control of the streets, slaughtering more than 200 people to put down an uprising in Alexandria in February 1986. Another 662 people died in Pietemartzburg in 1987 as a result of the fighting.

The tensions over strategy reflected

the contradictory consciousness of workers across South Africa. On the one hand, people were increasingly feeling their own power in struggle and beginning to imagine the possibility of seizing control of their workplaces and fundamentally restructuring society. On the other, many workers had a political allegiance to the ANC who were focused on the transition to formal equality and parliamentary democracy within the confines of capitalism.

The defeat of a major National Union of Mineworkers strike in 1987 came with a broader victory for the “state of emergency”. More than 60,000 mine workers were sacked. Mass incarceration had forced township militants off the streets.

While they had done brilliant work on the trade union front, syndicalist leaders refused to build any political alternative that could provide revolutionary leadership to the movement. Millions of workers had moved into open confrontation with the Apartheid state but had neither the politics nor the organisation to harness the insurrectionary sentiment and seize power.

In this political void, much of the syndicalist leadership was pulled in behind the ANC strategy of alliances with “progressive” bourgeois forces and a negotiated transition. COSATU officially adopted the Freedom Charter in 1987 and increasingly began to put out joint statements with the ANC calling for negotiations with the regime.

Mandela actually initiated such negotiations at the height of the uprising in 1985. While undergoing treatment in hospital, Mandela very publicly refused an offer to be released from prison on the condition that he renounce violence—but began secret talks with Justice Minister Coetsee.

By 1987, the Apartheid regime had regained control of the streets and workplaces. But it had been sufficiently rattled to realise that Apartheid could not continue indefinitely. The decision to release Mandela happened alongside public commitments to political restructuring.

### **The transition from Apartheid**

Over the ensuing period, the leadership of the ANC, COSATU and the South African Communist Party (SACP) worked overtime to convince white capitalists they were capable of taking over the political reins and becoming responsible managers of South Africa.

This process was far from smooth. Conservative forces in South African politics attempted to stifle the transition. And the black masses consis-

tently renewed mobilisation, taking the transition into their own hands and demanding it deliver an end to crippling oppression.

1992-3 saw a return to the streets as negotiations broke down. In August of 1992, a four million strong general strike crippled the country. In April 1993, general strikes again broke out in response to the assassination of the left-wing General Secretary of the SACP Chris Hani. Mandela appeared on television calling for calm—the ANC leadership had no control over the street fighting and stop work actions.

Here was a power capable, not just of toppling Apartheid, but of seizing the wealth held by white capitalists and putting it to work for the black majority. But the ANC were terrified of losing the support for transition amongst the white ruling class. And the leaders of the SACP and COSATU kept insisting that socialism would have to wait until some distant future.

The ANC abandoned all former commitments to nationalisation. They began talking about “redistribution of wealth through growth” —not from rich to poor, or from white to black. Through 1993, COSATU began to be incorporated into state economic planning boards, sitting alongside corporate leaders and publicly supporting the need for wage restraint to support economic growth. In the lead up to the 1994 elections, 68 out of South Africa’s top 100 businessmen backed Mandela’s campaign for President.

In South Africa’s first democratic elections, held in May 1994, the ANC received 63 per cent of the vote. But despite the jubilation that greeted this historic victory, the commitment of the ANC to running South African capitalism brought it into conflict with the black masses almost immediately.

The ANC government savagely repressed nurses and municipal workers striking for higher wages in 1995—using the same police units and same weaponry as the Apartheid regime.

Some public spending programs gestured towards the ANC’s former promises of economic equality. Perhaps one of the most significant of these was the delivery of free health care to all infants. A reconstruction and development program promised 125,000 houses in the first year of the ANC government—but delivered less than 11,000.

Overwhelmingly it was the politics of neo-liberalism, the same policies being implemented by ruling classes around the world, which came to characterise the approach of the

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## **The commitment of the ANC to running South African capitalism brought it into conflict with the black masses almost immediately after it came into power**

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ANC. They implemented massive cuts to company tax, waves of privatisation and attacks on union rights.

A strategy of “black empowerment”, lifted from the Mugabe dictatorship in Zimbabwe, was employed in an attempt to change the face of economic power. A number of big companies recruited blacks into the boardrooms. A handful of powerful black enterprises, incubated by the state, have become major players within the ruling class.

But white settler and foreign capital still control more than 80 per cent of South Africa’s economy. A tiny minority of blacks may have joined the ruling class in their opulent suburbs. But these still sit alongside massive squalid slums inhabited by the black majority. This extreme class segregation is a product of capitalism and a characteristic of all former colonial societies, no matter the colour of the regime.

### **South Africa today**

Despite the betrayals of the ANC leadership, the spirit of the anti-Apartheid struggle has remained very much alive. Privatisation has been fought both with mass strikes and direct action at the township level. For example, a massive community-union campaign defeated attempts to patent AIDS medication over 1999-2003.

In the 21st century, South Africa has registered the highest level of protest actions per person in the world. And in recent years, splits have emerged in the ANC between leadership figures continuing to preach wage restraint and “redistribution through growth” and grassroots militants furious at worsening poverty.

In 2007, more than a million public sector workers undertook weeks of strike action against wage restraint and led the biggest general strike since the end of Apartheid. More mass strikes in mid-2009 provided the background to the ousting of president Mbeki for Jacob Zuma, who had promised to break with neo-liberalism. COSATU and the SACP have begun discussions about breaking their tri-partite alliance with the ANC—the bedrock of post-Apartheid rule.

These are promising signs. But the lesson of these last two decades is that black oppression and crippling poverty cannot be reformed away—they lie at the heart of South African capitalism. Strong political organisation is needed to take the explosive struggles of the exploited black majority beyond reformism and nationalism—towards revolution.

# Tahmoor workers fight Xstrata to maintain conditions

By **Matte Rochford**

THREE HUNDRED coalminers at the Xstrata-owned Tahmoor coal mine in NSW have been fighting for their rights and conditions since late 2008. After ten months of seemingly constructive negotiations in 2008, Xstrata suddenly pulled out of negotiations, citing the global economic crisis as an excuse. The company then sacked 100 full-time workers and 60 contractors. This was despite the fact that Xstrata had managed a profit of \$28 million during the worst of the economic crisis and \$200 million the year before.

Coalminer and CFMEU delegate Bob Timbs told *Solidarity* that the union had taken three-hour stoppages and imposed restricted duties through 2009. When Xstrata again decided to cease negotiations with the union and draw up its own agreement, workers decided to step up the fight. In a secret ballot, they voted to 235 to 1 to reject the offer from management. Unhappy with the vote Xstrata locked them out for a week. Workers then decided to go on strike for another three days in a counter punch that received widespread press coverage and solidarity messages from coalminers around the country.

Xstrata has offered a small pay increase and demanded that workers abide by a list of twenty-three clauses. These included promises not to take industrial action, unsafe crew-manning numbers, and a loss of conditions from the existing agreement. Xstrata claims its pay offer is an increase of 25 per cent over four years. But workers say Xstrata have included previously existing entitlements and bonuses based on unrealistic workloads. The CFMEU calculates the increase is only 5.5 per cent over four years.

Officials say that management is still refusing to budge. Despite the fact that Tahmoor workers are on the lowest rate of pay amongst any coal mine in Australia (\$25.96 per hour), Timbs says that safety and job security are their main concern:

“When you’re down in the mines it’s important to have your mates around you and that they are experienced and have the right training”, he said. Workers are being asked to accept fewer workers in a crew which means less assistance in case of accidents. They are also worried about losing their jobs to less experienced and lower-paid contract workers.

Despite the resistance and courage



shown so far, more action will be needed to convince Xstrata to come to the table with a reasonable offer. The workers want safety, protection against job losses and to maintain existing conditions. They should also receive a wage increase in-line with other workers in the industry.

With negotiations also in train at other Xstrata mines, there needs to be a company-wide campaign to force Xstrata to negotiate. CFMEU officials have been reluctant to broaden the campaign and instead prefer to bargain separately at individual workplaces. This can only weaken the union’s fight.

## Round two of industrial action begins at Woodside

IN THE aftermath of wild cat strikes in January and February over motelling, construction unions in the Pilbara have begun an industrial campaign targeting one contractor at a time over unresolved issues such as travel time.

CFMEU crane divers working for the giant crane company, Mammoet, on Woodside’s Pluto site in Western Australia are set to strike for 48 hours in mid-April over travel time and issues such as unpaid meal breaks.

A ballot for industrial action was carried overwhelmingly after it finally went to the vote after months of wrangling with Fair Work Australia and the courts. Stopping the cranes will effectively stop the construction sites.

Woodside has been refusing to pay travel time claiming that workers should be able to get from the accommodation camps to the work site in less than 20 minutes. In practice it is taking at least 40 minutes.

A win against Mammoet would be a big start to pushing the claims through other Woodside contractors. Stay tuned for more industrial action.

### Anger over ABCC

Workers are also angry over the ongoing surveillance of the Construc-

tion Task Force and the court action initiated by Woodside against 1668 workers for their part in the strike action in February.

The Australian Building and Construction Commission was set up by the Howard government to target union activity in the construction industry. The Rudd Government has refused union demands to dismantle it, repeating Howard’s arguments that there is still a need for a “strong cop on the beat.” Gillard even used the Woodside strikes to insist the task force was still needed. The Western Australian branch of CFMEU and assistant state secretary Joe McDonald are also being sued by Woodside for damages.

Meanwhile CFMEU workers in the ACT have voted to shut down construction sites if South Australian CFMEU member Ark Tribe is jailed for refusing to attend an ABCC hearing. Ark is due to face trial on June 17 in Adelaide and could be jailed for six months if convicted.

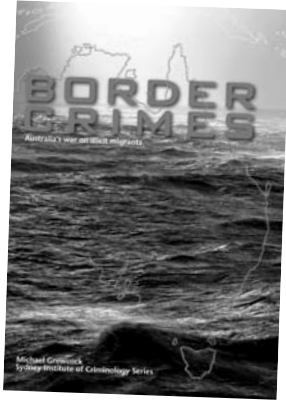
Among the construction sites affected by any strike in Canberra would be the new \$600 million Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) headquarters.

**Ian Rintoul**

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**They voted to 235 to 1 to reject the offer from management. Unhappy with the vote Xstrata locked them out for a week**

# Refugee policy is the real crime

**Border Crimes**  
By Michael Grewcock  
The Federation Press,  
\$49.95



WITH THE defeat of the Howard Government in 2007 many assumed the dark days of the mandatory detention of asylum seekers were over.

Many in the refugee movement were a little more sceptical. We knew how hard it had been to force Labor into the limited policy change it took to the election: the retention of mandatory detention, but only while health and identity checks are carried out rather than while the refugee claim is assessed.

So it was not a huge surprise when the issue flared again last year. Behind the scenes, Rudd's main approach to asylum seekers has been to provide funding to Indonesia to intercept refugee boats and detain asylum seekers.

For those that do reach Australian waters, Rudd has continued off-shore processing.

The Pacific Solution has been replaced with the Indonesian Solution with the same racist emphasis on queue jumping and border protection.

Rudd has added a new dimension, spewing out a stream of vitriol

against people smugglers. His claims that they are the scum of the earth are aimed solely at re-emphasising border protection at the expense of the right to seek asylum. The reality is that so-called people smugglers are the only option available to people fleeing persecution by a hostile state.

As a result of Rudd's policy, thousands of asylum seekers languish for years in appalling conditions in Indonesian detention centres. So asylum seekers are again taking matters into their own hands and trying to reach Australia whatever way the can. At the time of writing, more than 200 refugees were still refusing to leave their boat in the Indonesian port of Merak, demanding resettlement in Australia.

The situation for those who get to Australia is deteriorating as well. Mandatory detention on Christmas Island has gone from the suggested 90 days to longer than eight months in some cases. The centre is overcrowded and Howard-esque measures are being implemented to crack down on increasingly angry detainees. Recently mobile phones were banned. Detainees have again begun hunger striking and protesting in response to excessive delays in processing.

So the publication of Michael Grewcock's *Border Crimes: Australia's War on Illicit Migrants* is timely.

Grewcock is part of an outstanding tradition within criminology of campaigning academics. He states unequivocally that his book "is designed as an attempt to refocus mainstream debate about

border controls onto the actions of states".

## State Crime

His work focuses on the issue of state crime. Starting in the 1970s, radical criminologists have argued that "crime", as traditionally defined, focuses solely on the behaviours of individuals and primarily on the behaviours of poor and disadvantaged people, while violent and abusive state acts are ignored. *Border Crimes* argues that Australian Government policy relating to on-shore asylum seekers should be regarded as state crime.

Its case is based on three key claims: that the policy has intentionally and systematically alienated, criminalised and abused asylum seekers.

Alienation here refers to the deliberate attempt to physically and ideologically separate illicit migrants from the Australian community. Grewcock argues that:

[T]he construction of the unauthorised migrant as the outsider is perhaps the most powerful legitimising process underpinning the implementation of border controls. [A]lienation superimposes over the legal limits to movement, a generalised lack of authenticity that helps to popularise and legitimise their exclusion.

He traces this ideological separation back to the very founding of the Australian nation.

In 1888, in a portent of what was to come over a century later, the *SS Afghan* arrived in Australia carrying 550 Chinese migrants. Local media, such

## Border Crimes argues that Australian Government policy relating to on-shore asylum seekers should be regarded as state crime

as *The Bulletin*, "caricatured Chinese immigrants as immoral, sexually rapacious, opium-smoking, disease-carrying, devious and dishonest" and the Victorian government prevented the Chinese from disembarking.

The modern version of this approach is a government that seeks to demonise on-shore asylum seekers with concepts such as "queue jumping" and "economic migration". The introduction of Temporary Protection Visas that denied important benefits such as access to government services and family reunion created the impression that on-shore asylum seekers were less deserving than other migrants or refugees. The result is a portrayal of asylum seekers as devious, selfish, cheating, undeserving, illegal and most importantly, different to us.

The physical separation of asylum seekers needs little explanation. Even the middle of the South Australian desert wasn't far enough, detention centres have been moved off-shore to Nauru and now Christmas Island. Grewcock adds that this physical separation too, has roots as far back as the internment of "enemy subjects"—Australians of German or Japanese descent—during the two world wars.

## Criminalisation

This physical and ideological separation is taken to a new level by Grewcock's second major concern, the criminalisation of illicit migrants.

By transforming refugee policy into border policing, by emphasising people smuggling, by detaining asylum seekers in prison-like detention cen-



The regime of border policing serves to reinforce the idea that refugees are illegitimate outsiders

tres, using policing technologies such as handcuffing, constant surveillance and calling detainees by number instead of name the impression is created that asylum seekers should be viewed suspiciously, as criminals are viewed.

Of course government ministers and the media have gone further than this, explicitly suggesting that asylum seekers could be terrorists sneaking into Australia.

However Grewcock makes it clear it is not just the government and the media that contribute to the criminalising of asylum seekers. The courts too have played their part.

Key High Court decisions held that even when detention is effectively indefinite and in breach of human rights treaties, it must be considered administrative and not punitive. This is a crucial distinction since *The Australian Constitution* says only the courts can punish, not the government. Grewcock explains that these decisions confirm that immigration detention is a legitimate administrative

function, even in a liberal democratic state.

More importantly, the High Court, with the exception of Justice Michael Kirby, endorsed the government's approach to illicit migration as a matter of border protection rather than protection of human rights and the right to seek asylum. In other words, asylum seekers are regarded as illegal entrants first and foremost, rather than as fleeing persecution.

The last of Grewcock's three criteria, that refugee policies are abusive, requires the least introduction. The movement against mandatory detention thoroughly exposed the abusive nature of the detention camps.

Grewcock stresses that these abuses were not aberrations or the actions of rogue guards, but rather the intentional result of government policy.

He notes that even the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) found that the detention of *virtually all* unlawful citizens breached human rights treaties. Former Immigration Minister

Amanda Vanstone rejected HREOC appeals to release children from detention on the basis that deterring "people smuggling" was a higher priority, confirming that the uniformly abusive nature of detention was intended.

Grewcock makes a powerful case that the government's detention policies are in fact state crimes. However *Border Crimes* has two further merits worth noting.

### History of racism

The first is that the regime overseen by the Howard Liberal government was consistent with a long history of official government racism that has been the basis of Australian capitalism and nationalism since colonial invasion.

This is a critical point. It helps to explain why things have changed so little under Rudd. But it also reveals that the root of refugee policy goes much deeper than bad policy. Grewcock is a Marxist and elsewhere he has done brilliant work linking the explosion of border security measures

in recent decades with the long term crisis of capitalism.<sup>1</sup>

The final point worth mentioning is that *Border Crimes* is one of the very few works dealing with this subject that pays close attention to the determined resistance by detainees. Grewcock makes reference to hunger strikes, work strikes, the organisation of committees, coordination of protests between compounds and detention centres, escapes and connections made between detainees and activists outside detention.

As Grewcock points out: "The scale of the protests indicated that detainees were able to maintain a sense of collective identity, despite the efforts of the Australian state".

The protest actions of detainees drew the attention of the media and successfully contested the ideological and physical separation of detainees. They also drew attention to the reality of the persecution they were fleeing from, puncturing their criminalisation.

Lastly, they drew attention to the abusive nature of detention, solidifying a public outcry and mass protest movement that ultimately won concessions from Howard and contributed to his electoral defeat.

Perhaps most importantly, it developed a sense of solidarity amongst detainees that overcame ethnic barriers and at times helped them endure in appalling circumstances.

Grewcock has added a new dimension to the literature on Australia's policies of mandatory detention.

Despite the book being directed towards the discipline of criminology, *Border Crimes* is accessible and broadly focused and will be of interest to anyone that has followed these issues.

It makes a convincing case that conditions inside detention were not the result of policy breakdown. Nor were they simply the result of a particularly racist government. Rather they are the latest incarnation of a deeply racist Australian nation.

The book is a well-timed reminder of how deep the roots of racism run, a lesson equally important in explaining the on-going racism of the NT intervention as in explaining why Rudd's approach to asylum seekers is appearing more and more like Howard's.

**Richard Bailey**

### Notes

- 1 See: Green Penny and Grewcock Michael 'The War against Illegal Immigration: State Crime and the Construction of a European Identity' (2002) 14 1 *Current Issues in Criminal Justice* 87; Grewcock Michael 'Irregular Migration, Identity and the State - the Challenge for Criminology' (2003) 15 2 *Current Issues in Criminal Justice*.

# Glorifying life as a US soldier in occupied Iraq

**The Hurt Locker**  
 Directed by Kathryn Bigelow  
 In cinemas now

THE HURT Locker is a violent, politically shallow and confusing film. The film makers claim to be apolitical but in effect justify the American occupation of Iraq.

One reviewer has described the film as “one of the most effective recruiting vehicles for the U.S. Army that I have seen”. It’s not hard to see why. The American soldiers are depicted as heroic, and their combat missions exciting and action charged. At no stage do we see the war from an Iraqi point of view.

In this film the war in Iraq exists without a context, like a series of meaningless news reports on the channel Nine news.

The film is shot in an almost documentary “shaky cam” style that gives the audience a feeling of being embedded with the soldiers. We are fooled into thinking that this is a realistic depiction of the war.

This impression is false, the Hurt Locker is at heart a fantasy movie set in a fantasy world: a phantasmagorical place where the good guys of the US army fight an unending battle against chaos.

Insurgents are a shadowy evil that never shows its face.

The main character, Staff Sergeant William James (or Will for short), is a bomb disposal specialist. He is highly reckless and unprofessional.

When faced with a car, sagging to the ground with a load of explosives, Will doesn’t follow a methodical bomb disposal procedure.

Instead he simply

kicks open the car boot to reveal a precarious load of high explosive ordinance that he proceeds to defuse in a slapdash manner.

When asked how many bombs he has defused in this way Will replies, “873”.

Apparently Will is a wild man, high on the drug of war, for whom the usual laws of probability do not apply.

Applying rational thought and reason to the problem, Will’s two colleagues Sergeant JT Sanborn and Specialist Owen Eldridge discuss whether to knock him off before he gets them all killed.

The film shows the American soldiers as human, affected by the stress of the war and indulging in drinking and macho fighting. But this only serves to reinforce their heroism and status as manly, larger than life figures.

## Resistance

In contrast the Iraqi resistance are depicted as perpetrators of inhumane depravity. One example is the horrific bomb in a body sequence.

Inside an insurgent hideout, (that comes fully equipped with a camera for making YouTube videos), Will finds a body, surgically packed with explosives.

In response to the horror Will goes off on a personal quest to bring the perpetrators to justice. This begins a weakly veiled metaphor for the narrative that has been invented around the Iraq war.

Will misunderstands the situation and makes mistakes, but deep down he is still good and somewhat wholesome.

The audience is left with the impression that



Will’s reckless antics as a bomb disposal specialist in Iraq paint a glorified and action charged view of what it is to be a US soldier in Iraq

## The Iraqi resistance are depicted as perpetrators of inhumane depravity

although the war is psychologically damaging it is necessary. If Will isn’t there in Iraq, who is going to defuse the bombs?

When Will finally returns to civilian life, the boredom of a suburban supermarket and domestic life is a strong contrast to the adrenaline-charged excitement of combat.

Like any good soldier, he wants to go back to the war.

The reality is that the Iraq war has been a horror—for the American soldiers and the Iraqi people alike. In helping rehabilitate the US military, this film does them all a disservice.

**Josh Wood**

# A good idea, but marred by defence of Stalin

**The Idea of Communism**  
**Tariq Ali**  
 University of Chicago Press, \$22.95

MORE LIKE a long pamphlet than a book, *The Idea of Communism*, the first of a series edited by Tariq Ali, is a welcome defence of the idea that there are alternatives to capitalism.

It was published last year to coincide with the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall. As Ali states, “Capitalism appears more like a nervous disease these days than a triumphal, over-confident system generating unchallengeable ideologies to buttress and further its victories.”

Ali stresses that some form of socialism is crucial if we want to save the planet from recurring economic crises and impending climate catastrophe. He defends the idea of history as a grand narrative, and takes us from the Haitian slave revolt to critiques of 21st century capitalism by the likes of Mike Davis and Naomi Klein.

His rather whimsical opening ponders whether humanity can learn from certain Pakistani and South American species of “social spiders”, which construct web “communes” to hunt, eat, and even look after each other’s young. These spiders, he writes, “have existed for at least half a million years and there have been no assaults on them by more individual-oriented spiders”.

The book’s first section is the best, tracing the roots of the ideas and events that led Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels to write *The Communist Manifesto* in 1848. Ali stresses that whereas the idea of freedom came as



Workers brought down this statue of Stalin during the revolt in Hungary 1956

a response to slavery, the idea of “Communism” emerged in response to the “wage-slavery” of industrial capitalism.

Ali quotes liberally and approvingly from Marx’s account of the Paris Commune in 1871, the event that came closest in Marx’s lifetime to realising the *Manifesto*’s ideals of a socialist republic.

Ali also strongly defends the Russian Revolution. He describes its massive global impact—transforming the audience for socialism to millions of people, threatening empires, and bringing to life “the spectre of which Marx and Engels had written in the *Communist Manifesto*”.

Revolution in underdeveloped Tsarist Russia was the polar opposite of Marx’s prediction of it happening first in the most industrially advanced nations. But Ali highlights Lenin and Trotsky’s insistence that the revolution would only survive if it spread elsewhere; “socialism in one country” wasn’t possible.

By contrast, after 1927, Stalin and the state bureaucrats that provided his support base acted like “sterile, doomed creatures”. Ali points out that Stalin killed more communists than did the Tsar.

## Stalinist Russia

Ali’s discussion of the nature of the Soviet Union under Stalin and his successors reflects his orthodox Trotskyist outlook that Russia was a “deformed workers’ state”. He maintains that because there was no restoration of the free market, Stalin’s counter-revolution was at the level of the “political superstructure of the state”. He undercuts his own criticisms of Stalinism by claiming that the “social and economic conquests of the revolution were not simply preserved; they were, in reality, strengthened”.

He dismisses attempts to characterise the Stalinist bureaucracy as a new ruling class, arguing such theorists invariably ended

up as right-wing Cold War defenders of US imperialism. Similarly, Ali tries to shrug off Tony Cliff’s theory of state capitalism (and Cliff’s insistence that without workers’ power there can be no workers’ state) in a few lines, although he does recognise that Cliff “remained an intransigent revolutionary committed to the victory of socialism”.

Curiously, Ali seems unable to make the connection between the triumph of Stalinism and the outcomes of the Yugoslav, Chinese and Vietnamese revolutions. He wonders whether it is “a pure accident that every single revolution has resulted in a monolithic state, with the very partial exception of Castro’s Cuba.” One can only concur with his conclusion that any future revolution will need to ensure mass democratic participation.

He finishes the book with a brief discussion of what socialism might look like in the 21st century

and the need for a “socially just economic structure coupled with a radical political democracy.” He is optimistic about events in Latin America, but seems less convinced than he was in the 1970s that future socialist revolutions will come as a result of the “self-emancipation of the working class”.

Ali’s good intention of keeping the idea of communism alive is marred by how much of the book is devoted explaining away Stalinism’s role in the obvious triumph of capitalism in Russia and China. However, the book does include an illustrated pullout of Bertolt Brecht’s beautiful 1932 poem, “In praise of Communism”, which in part states: “*The exploiters call it a crime but we know: It is the end of crime It is not madness, but the end of madness. It is not the riddle but the solution The simplest thing so hard to achieve.*”

**Mark Goudkamp**

# Solidarity

## UNIONS FIGHT THE INTERVENTION

# 'ABORIGINAL PEOPLE ARE WORKING FOR RATIONS'

UNIONS ARE teaming up with anti-Intervention campaigners in the NT to demand proper jobs for Aboriginal people.

Activists from the Intervention Rollback Action Group, based in Alice Springs, will tour remote NT communities in April along with Richard Downs, a community leader from Ampilatwatja and Miguel Occiones, an LHMU organiser in the NT.

Unions are hoping to sign up Aboriginal workers on local services for the new mega Shires. Much of this work was previously done under Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP), and workers paid through local councils. But as Alice Springs LHMU organiser Miguel Occiones told *Solidarity*:

"Now jobs that need to be done within the community are being done by people working for the BasicsCard, [on] \$200 a week. What we are afraid of in the union movement is it's taking away jobs that are full-time within the community into being done by people working for the BasicsCard."

Any worker who has started on a CDEP job since July last year is paid only a Centrelink allowance, and receives no money from their employer.

In Tennant Creek the rationalisation of CDEP has seen the number of workers in the program go from over 400 in July last year to 130. The remaining CDEP workers are all employed by Julalikari council in services like aged care, childcare and other municipal work.

One of these programs in Tennant Creek is the Housing and Community Care program. Bobby, a supervisor in the program told *Solidarity* what this involves:

"We look after old people. We give them a feed, give them a bath, wash their clothes, take them shopping, to the bank, ask them what they want you know? There are lots of old people here in Tennant Creek who we look



**Yuendumu/Ntaria women lead a sit-in against Income Management at Woolworths in February**

after. Some stay with us, or we visit at their home."

CDEP does not provide proper award wages for workers: "Some of our workers are on CDEP", Bobby said. "They work from 8-12. They help with all the work."

"But they only get a little bit of money. It's no good. They can't buy their clothes, or their rent. They can't buy tucker for their family or a power card for their house. They should get paid proper wages you know?"

But the BasicsCard means even less money for doing the same work. As Bobby put it:

"It's like the old days. It was just work for rations in those days, for clothes and a bit of tucker. We're going back to that now, when we should be going forward."

The Intervention has betrayed people's hopes, according to Miguel, "they were promised jobs when the new Shires came in and that the Intervention would help them get into full-time work. But that's not happening."

In fact the shutdown of CDEP has

resulted in thousands of job losses in Aboriginal communities across the NT. Unions are planning a recruitment drive to organise workers either still on the old CDEP system who face losing their existing jobs or those already being forced to do the same work for Centrelink payments on the BasicsCard.

Miguel said, "At the moment we're just starting to open up a campaign. I presented these things to the [LHMU] delegates conference in Darwin recently. The idea is to get people that have full-time work in the community aware and get them [to] identify full-time work that could be changed into BasicsCard work and [start] a campaign."

"We want the broader union movement to see what's taking place and what the union movement can do as a whole. We are still in the initial stages. What we intend to do is support people who are doing things like rallies, on May 1 they are doing an anti-Intervention rally in Alice Springs and we are inviting unions to participate and listen to what people have to say."

**In Tennant Creek the rationalisation of CDEP has seen the number of workers in the program go from over 400 in July last year to 130**