

Solidarity

Issue No. 26 / August 2010

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Greens vote up, but **GILLARD'S SLIDE RIGHT GIVES ABBOTT A CHANCE**



INSIDE:

There's nothing radical
about the independents

Why real power doesn't
lie in parliament

Lessons of the
Accord

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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6.30pm Tuesday July 27
Venezuela: revolution stalled?

Melbourne Solidarity meets 6.30pm every Tuesday at Melbourne University Student Union, Joe Nap B room, 2nd floor. For more information contact: Chris on 0403 103 183 melbourne@solidarity.net.au

Brisbane

Brisbane Solidarity meets 7pm every Thursday. Meetings are held at the the Trades and Labour Council Building, Level 2, 16 Peel St, South Brisbane Brisbane Solidarity meets weekly. For more information contact: Carl on 0431 041 751 or brisbane@solidarity.net.au

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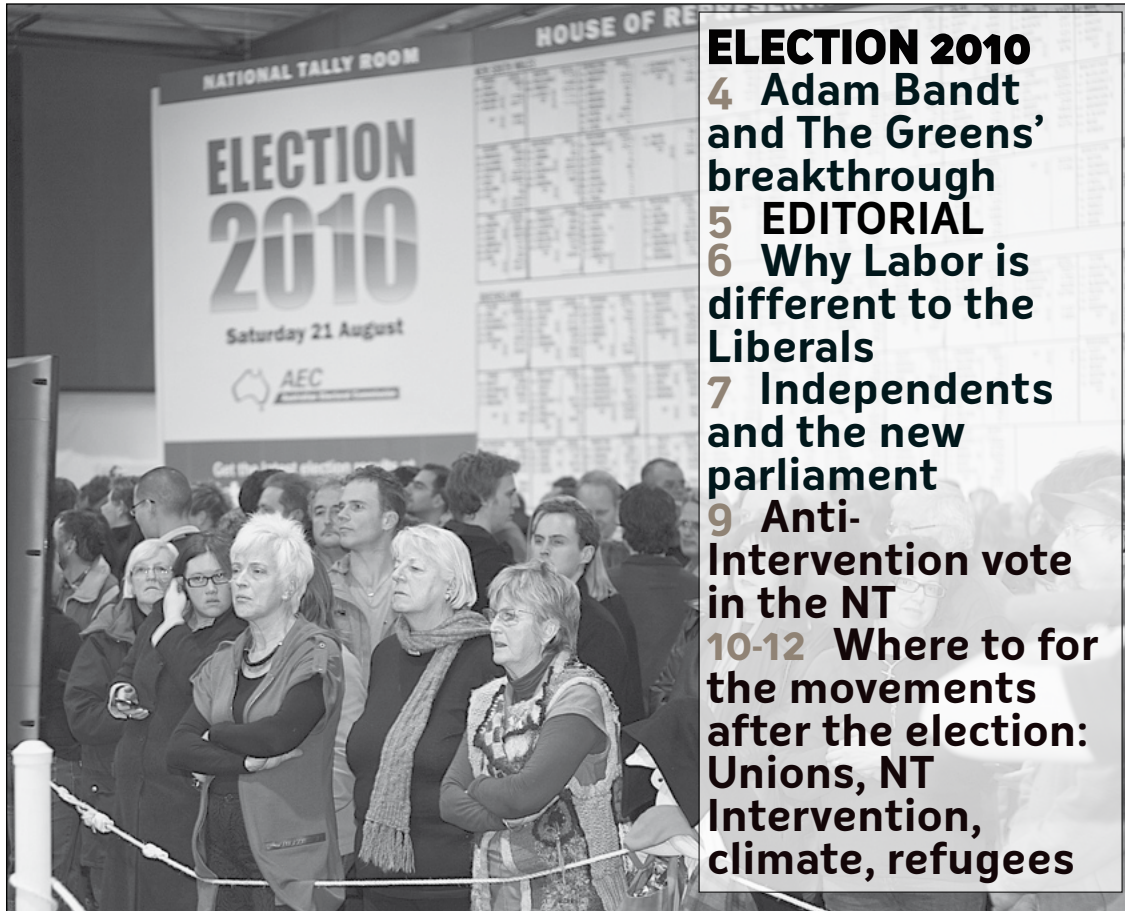
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Solidarity No.27
September 2010
ISSN 1835-6834
Responsibility for election
comment is taken by James
Supple, 410 Elizabeth St,
Surry Hills NSW 2010.
Printed by El Faro,
Newtown NSW.

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I don't deal with fools terribly lightly, and I think under any definition the man's a fool

One thing Tony Windsor is right about is Barnaby Joyce

[I will] walk backwards to Bourke if the poof population of North Queensland is any more than 0.001 per cent

And some people are saying Bob Katter represents a progressive voice in parliament

I'd hate to disillusion Bob but I am hearing different in the confessional
Father Michael Taylor, a local Catholic priest in Katter's electorate, provides a reality check

I mean, if you could imagine 20 or 30 crocodiles up there on the roof, and if all that roof was illumination, and saying that we wouldn't see anything in this room because of a few croco-roaches up there...are you telling me seriously that the world is going to warm because there's 400 parts per million of CO2 up there?

Bob Katter puts paid to climate science

We're all bloody boat people. That's how we found the place.

Perhaps Bob Hawke should send a memo to Julia Gillard about his brainwave

[It funds] groups such as International Socialists, South African terrorists—the anti-apartheid movement in south Africa—ultra militant feminism, homosexual proselytism and environmentalism gone to crazy lengths

Tony Abbott on why the Sydney Uni SRC should remove compulsory union fees, 1979

With your support money has been given by this SRC to the Kimberly Land Council, the Aboriginal Support Group, the active defense of homosexuals and the Labor Club
Tony Abbott laments SRC spending priorities in 1979

Grim faced, overall-clad, hard, strident, often lustfully embracing in a counterfeit of love

Tony Abbott on the Sydney Uni Women's Collective, 1979

Adam Bandt's campaign makes history, but at a price

"TOGETHER WE have made history today", Adam Bandt declared, as he became the first Green to win a lower house seat in a general election. The surge to The Greens shows that, despite Gillard's effort to race Abbott to the right, larger numbers than ever want a left-wing alternative. The swing to the Greens was 3.7 per cent, bigger than the 1.9 per cent swing to the Coalition. They will now have nine seats in the Senate, and the balance of power.

On the key issues of the campaign, where Labor capitulated to the Liberals, The Greens stood as a principled alternative. They called for an end to the demonisation of refugees, ending the war in Afghanistan, serious action on climate change, gay marriage, opposed the NT Intervention and stood up for union rights.

Adam Bandt was elected in the seat of Melbourne on the back of one of the most left-wing Greens campaigns in the country.

Damien Lawson, strategy and communications advisor to Adam Bandt told Solidarity: "This was a people powered campaign backed by some of the most progressive sections of the Victorian union movement. But fundamental to The Greens' success was the popular and progressive political platform that expressed the values and concerns of people in Melbourne."

Bandt made it clear that he was against the prospect of a Tony Abbott government and advocated a vote 1 for The Greens and 2 for Labor. This was in contrast to many other Greens local campaigns which treated Liberal and Labor as the same as each other.

Parliamentary pressure

But the hope that Bandt would be a left-wing voice within The Greens seems to be in doubt already.

The possibility that Bandt's vote in the lower house might be needed to prop up the government has seen pressure on him to fall in behind the Greens' electoralist strategy.

Key figures in the party want to position it as a moderate centre party that is open to forming a coalition government with either Labor or the Liberals. Bandt's principled stand of backing Labor was at odds with this. So since his election he has started



Adam Bandt talking to Melbourne campaign volunteers

qualifying his statements about siding with Labor, saying that he will also talk to Abbott. He has also echoed Bob Brown and the independents' promise of "stable and effective" government (see p7).

This shift is also noticeable in his position on climate change. He previously supported calls for direct government investment in renewable energy, and rightly warned that emissions trading meant, "giving the people responsible for the financial crisis another instrument to play with". But during his election campaign he fell behind not just the idea of a carbon price but emissions trading as well. Speaking at the National Press Club a few days after the election he advocated, "a two stage process as set out by Ross Garnaut, that is first let's put a price on carbon, a fixed price, and have that in place until we have a fully fledged robust emissions trading system up and running".

This slide to the right is the consequence of an electoral strategy based on The Greens using the balance of power to work with government (see editorial opposite). But instead of dragging the government to the left, so far it has only dragged The Greens to the right.

The drift will continue unless The Greens and others build movements outside parliament that can really shift politics.

Chris Breen

.....
Before the election, Bandt made it clear he was against an Abbott government

EDITORIAL

Danger signs: The Greens vote up, but Labor has opened the door to Abbott

AS SHE lost the seat of Bennelong, Maxine McKew summed up Labor's problem—compared to 2007, she said, Labor stood for nothing.

After removing Rudd, Gillard dragged Labor even further to the right – capitulating to the mining bosses, lowering company tax, delaying action on climate change, and most shamefully competing with Abbott about which party would more effectively stop asylum boats.

After they declared climate change the greatest moral challenge of our time—and then dropped it—a million people walked away from Labor in the space of two weeks.

There were two bright spots to an otherwise disastrous election result. One is the end of Wilson Tuckey, the racist Western Australian National Party bovver boy. The other is the increased vote for The Greens. Most of the swing against Labor went to the Greens. Adam Bandt is the first Greens member in the House of Representatives and there will be nine Greens with the balance of power in the Senate after June 2011.

The election was a vote *against* Labor, not a vote *for* Tony Abbott. The Coalition received only 2.1 per cent of the 5.7 per cent swing. As big a number voted informal. The election was a massive protest against the record of the Federal (and the Queensland and NSW) Labor governments.

Abbott has declared the Liberals to be the government in waiting. But Abbott has no mandate for his refugee bashing, climate change denial, or his anti-union policies. He has promised savage cuts to government spending and public sector jobs to put the Budget back in surplus.

As *Solidarity* goes to press, it remains unclear whether Liberal or Labor will form government. But the hope must be—despite the pathetic do-nothing (and worse) policies of Gillard—that Labor will form a minority government with the support of the one Green member and other independents.

But it is Labor's right-wing policies that have opened the door to Abbott. Instead of junking all of Howard's anti-refugee policies, Labor kept Christmas Island and offshore processing. Instead of countering Abbott's racist scare-mongering about



boat arrivals, Labor gave in.

In October 2009, Rudd pushed for an Indonesian Solution in which the Indonesian navy would “stop the boats”. Then Labor froze the visa applications of Sri Lankan and Afghan asylum seekers, and re-opened Curtin detention centre.

The success of The Greens is the silver lining to the cloud of the election result. But some of The Greens and others on the left seem to think that the hung parliament is something to cheer about (see p7). The Greens' balance of power in the Senate will only mean anything if Labor and Liberal are unable or unwilling to do a deal. It would be a mistake to think that one Greens MP is going to dictate policy to a Labor government that will likely be even more conservative than the last one.

But The Greens do need to make it clear they will do everything they can to bring down a Liberal government. Another election would be far preferable to three years of Tony Abbott.

Don't wait for Labor

The union movement played a major role in ousting Howard, but then waited for the Labor government to change his IR laws. But Labor left Howard's anti-union Building Task Force in place. The FairWork Australia laws maintain enterprise bargaining, deny the right to strike and restrict union right of entry.

The climate movement put its hopes in Labor introducing a market-driven Emissions Trading Scheme or some form of a price on carbon. When Labor reneged, the climate movement was left paralysed. Only a movement that sides with workers to oppose electricity price increases and which is willing to challenge the power of the carbon polluters can win real change.

The refugee movement faces a real fight against offshore processing, but the thousands who marched for refugees in the lead up to the election are a base on which to re-build the campaign (see p12). The racist Northern Territory Intervention remains in place with plans to extend welfare quarantining. But the “No Intervention” campaign saw substantial swings to The Greens in remote Aboriginal communities, while the Intervention Rollback Action Group won more supporters (see p9) out of the election campaign.

The Greens' vote shows there is a substantial left base to take the fight to whichever government ends up being installed in Canberra.

If Abbott does become Prime Minister, we will have to fight him even harder than we fought John Howard. But equally, we can't wait for, or rely on Labor. The future of climate action, refugee rights, union rights and refugees is going to be settled by the power of workers not the power of parliament.

.....
The election was a vote against Labor, not a vote for Tony Abbott. The Coalition received only 2.1 per cent of the 5.7 per cent swing

Mistake to treat Labor and Liberal the same



The gut hatred of many Labor voters for Abbott is something the left should relate to

By James Supple

JULIA GILLARD's disastrous election campaign showed that Labor's lurch to the right is continuing. But it is a mistake to condemn both Labor and Liberal as just as bad as each other, as many on the left did during the election campaign.

The Greens and the left need to come out clearly to say we support a Labor government over a Tony Abbott government.

This is not because we should expect Labor's policies to be any better—or because it is some kind of “lesser evil”. It is about relating to the mass of working class people who continue to support the party—and understanding the impact a Liberal victory will have on workers' confidence to struggle.

Those who have already broken with Labor to support The Greens or who are active in campaigns like those to stop the Intervention and for refugee rights rightly feel betrayed by Labor's performance in government. There is a temptation to brand both Labor and Liberal as just as bad as each other. The Greens often denounce both “the big parties” equally.

But the Labor and Liberal parties are not the same.

The Liberals are the open party of big business. Many Liberal MPs come direct from careers in the corporate world. Joe Hockey worked in banking and finance law; Malcolm Turnbull

is a millionaire investment banker. A study of 384 MPs at state and federal level in 1998-99 found that of 75 who identified their previous occupation as “businessperson”, 60 were members of the Liberal-National Coalition and only six of the Labor Party.

Liberal Party members are unashamedly right-wing—and often racists. Anti-Muslim comments led to the dumping of Liberal candidate David Barker in the seat of Chifley this election, and last election in the seat of Lindsay the Liberals were caught distributing fake anti-Muslim leaflets.

Labor membership

Labor's rank-and-file members and supporters are different. Most of them back the party because they see Labor as a vehicle for progressive change or because they fear the alternative of a Liberal government.

Tony Abbott represents a return to Howard's ultra-conservative politics over workers' rights, sexism and racism. The hatred of such openly right-wing policies is a sentiment the left should try to connect with, not simply dismiss.

Labor's members and supporters are people the left has to try to win over. They can be drawn into joint campaigns alongside the left, as the experience of Labor for Refugees and recent campaigns against privatisation in NSW and Queensland demonstrate. Labor for Refugees carried motions to change Labor's refugee policy at every state Labor conference and

have been part of many pro-refugee demonstrations.

Every Labor branch except one in NSW carried motions against power privatisation and the Labor Premier was defeated on the issue on the floor of the NSW Labor conference.

The strong union support for the Labor Party is another factor that makes the party very different to the Liberals. Unions still control 50 per cent of the votes at party conferences. Unionists who are Labor Party members have spoken at and provided crucial support to scores of left demonstrations and events. Many rank-and-file members are unionists.

Labor's membership and support base is in long-term decline. Party membership was around 45,000 members when the party split in 1955, and had declined to 40,000 in 2006, despite the population more than doubling. Labor's “rusted on” vote has declined too. According to the ANU's Australian Election Study only 20 per cent of voters described themselves as lifelong Labor voters in 2007, versus 32 per cent in 1969 and 38 per cent in 1987.

But Labor's core support continues to be drawn from the working class, and the more unionised and “class conscious” sections of it in particular. The proportion of union members who vote Labor remained at 64 per cent between 1987 and 2004, despite Labor losing office and a further 8 per cent of union members voting Green (and likely giving Labor their second preference). Conversely, a study of 2007 voting data showed that the higher the percentage of managers in an electorate, the lower the Labor vote. The natural home of managers and the rich is the Liberal Party.

A victory for the Liberals also sends a message to activists in the unions and political workers that most people in society are right-wing and racist. This sets back their confidence about the possibilities of changing the world through mass struggle.

It is impossible to build political campaigns or a left with any social weight without relating to the people who continue to support the Labor party.

That's why the left needs to make it clear we are against a Liberal victory, as the precondition for trying to win Labor supporters into campaigning alongside the left, or ultimately to socialist politics.

.....
Labor's members and supporters are people the left has to try to win over

Independents calling the shots is no shift to the left

By James Supple

WITH INDEPENDENT MPs positioned to determine who forms the next government there has been all sorts of talk about the beginning of a different kind of politics in Canberra. Independent MP Rob Oakshott called the result a chance to end, “the way politics is played on these rigid adversarial lines between a blue team and a red team”.

But there is nothing progressive about a swing to the right that boosted the Liberal vote and produced a hung parliament that could still see Tony Abbott become prime minister. The decision about who forms the government is now in the hands of three independent MPs who are former Nationals.

Some of them may have progressive views on some issues, like refugees. But Tony Windsor supported a Liberal minority government in NSW after 1991 for four years. Rob Oakshott has said he is, “probably more conservative in my economics than not and naturally leaning towards the Liberal Party normally”.

And then there is Bob Katter—a right-wing crazy who is a climate denier and was invited by Pauline Hanson to join One Nation because of his racist claims about migrants. His start in politics came as part of the notorious right-wing Joh Bjelke-Petersen government in Queensland.

There is nothing left wing about having a gaggle of ex-Nationals determining the formation of the new government. It is a travesty of democracy.

Some people think the hung parliament and the Greens’ balance of power in the Senate is the beginning of a break with the “two party system”, as if that is the main obstacle to pushing for radical change. But this hung parliament is no break with electoralism nor is it a break to the left. Working class interests are never well represented in parliament—but a far better outcome for this would have been a clear parliamentary majority for Labor and The Greens.

There is wide enthusiasm at the prospect of reforms to parliament procedures, but the independents’ list of proposed changes—question time, campaign finance, private members’ bills—have nothing to do with improving people’s lives.

Adam Bandt seems to think they will have a big impact. He told the *Sunday Age* that an increased role for private members bills, “will mean



Above: Mad Katter in control—how can this be a good thing?

I could move legislation on areas important to me—like tackling climate change, ending mandatory detention and removing discrimination against same-sex marriage—and it would have to actually be dealt with”. But the same thing would happen to Bandt’s legislation as happens to Greens’ amendments. They are voted down, and no one ever hears about them.

Given the massive disillusionment with mainstream politics, it is tempting to think that a little tinkering could make the system “work for the people.” But independent MPs have had similar measures introduced before. Independents controlled the balance of power between 1991 and 1995 in NSW and after the 1999 election in Victoria.

In NSW they negotiated four-year terms, changed parliamentary procedures and introduced a bigger role for private members. But nobody could call the NSW parliament a model of democracy or one that delivers for ordinary people. NSW’s Labor government has left the state’s public services crippled and seen the influence of property developers on government run rampant. Victoria’s Labor government may not be quite as hopeless, but nor has the introduction of proportional representation in the upper house or fixed-term parliaments made it any more democratic.

Stable government

Independent Rob Oakshott’s comments that “we are committed to the national interest [and] stable government” echo a key concern for a minority government. The Greens Senators have also

continually stressed that they too want to be “responsible” and give the government a stable working arrangement.

But what does stability in “the national interest” mean? You can get an idea by looking at who else is concerned about it. The Australian Industry Group called the result, “a worrying outcome for business. It will potentially lead to instability, uncertainty and short-termism in policy development, all of which poses risks and challenges for the economy”. The Business Council of Australia said the challenge for the independents was, “to put national interest ahead of sectional interests,” and to support the big business “reform” agenda, which it spelled out in the *Financial Review*.

By “national interest” they mean the interests of the people that own and run the economy—the big corporations and their millionaire CEOs. There is not a single national interest—Australia, like all capitalist countries, is divided by class.

Working class people struggling to balance their household budgets, the unemployed, or those living on a pension have very different interests to the banks and mining bosses that make their profits from exploiting them.

Yet there is precious little talk of the social change we really need—abolishing the ABCC, funding renewable energy, money for teachers, schools and hospitals, or withdrawing troops from Afghanistan. But if the election has taught us anything it is that for real change we have to look to the parliament of the streets, not the one that sits in Canberra.

.....
There is nothing left wing about having a gaggle of ex-Nationals determining the formation of the new government

Election promises expand market agenda for education

By Shannon Price

THE BATTLE over NAPLAN testing and the MySchool website earlier this year indicated Julia Gillard's vision for the future of education. Market reforms aimed at forcing competition between teachers and schools would be used to blame teachers for the government's failure to properly fund the sector.

Both Gillard and Abbott announced policies during the election that indicate they want to speed up this agenda. Their plans included performance pay for teachers, a continuation of the inequitable schools funding model introduced by the Howard government and an ongoing commitment to NAPLAN testing.

This is all part of the ongoing attempt to build the "New York Model" of schooling in Australia. Yet this market model has seen American schools slipping down the international rankings for the past 20 years.

The focus on standardised testing and NAPLAN in particular is set to increase. The Coalition wants to expand it, making tests an annual event from Year 3 to Year 10.

Currently students complete the tests in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9. This would divert millions of dollars that could be spent on more teachers and improved infrastructure.

Meanwhile Gillard's working party of unions and department officials, established to negotiate the "improvement" of the MySchool website, is adding additional information to the website in an attempt to divert attention from raw NAPLAN data. However there are no guarantees about a ban on league tables or the misuse of NAPLAN data, let alone the scrapping of the tests themselves.

Standardised testing narrows the curriculum, with teachers expected to improve results—which means spending valuable classroom hours teaching students how to answer the tests rather than spending time on engaging and relevant work.

Gillard and Abbott announced similar programs to "reward" teachers through performance pay. They have been vague about how they will judge these "high achieving" teachers, but it is likely that results on NAPLAN tests will play a crucial role.

Performance pay seeks to do a number of things: To stymie ongoing,



sector-wide pay increases, to undermine solidarity in the workplace and to place an increased emphasis on standardised test results. If failing to improve test results costs a teacher \$10,000, the pressure is going to be on to teach to the test.

Gillard's model, which also includes a proposal to pay one-off reward payments for school-wide improvements on tests, would not only pit teachers against each other—it would turn school against school. Currently, schools in similar regions share strategies for improving retention and achievement—but if it could cost \$100,000, the incentive to share will dissipate.

Funding private schools

The notorious Howard government funding arrangements for private schools also remain unquestioned. Federal funding for private schools is set to increase to \$9.5 billion per year by 2016 compared to \$3.1 billion for public schools.

Labor has delayed the findings of a review into this funding model until 2013, effectively guaranteeing its continuation for the medium-term future. Many private schools receive more than they are entitled to even under this model, but the model says that no schools' funding can be cut.

The Coalition plans to entrench the model. On top of this, Abbott pledged to cut \$3.1 billion from education if the Coalition forms government, which is set to disproportionately affect public schools.

Above: Performance pay and other measure to force competition between teachers and schools will simply deepen inequalities in the school system

The private school lobby justifies this model on the basis that the majority of public school funding comes from state governments—however the very idea that private schools receive any government funding, let alone three times that of public schools, is anathema to the heartland of Labor voters.

But both Gillard and Abbott should be on notice that the teachers' unions oppose the market agenda.

Whilst the unions hesitated at the final moment in the confrontation over MySchool, widespread anger remains over league tables and standardised testing.

The unions also oppose performance pay and must fight its introduction every step of the way. Whilst the unions are seeking greater autonomy over the spending of infrastructure funding from the Building the Education Revolution spending, they still support the spending in principle and will fight the budget cuts from the Coalition.

As was seen with MySchool, teacher activists are willing to fight the conservative agenda for education.

As the battle lines are drawn in the coming months we need to ensure that when the pressure is on this time, union leaders don't flinch.

Bligh does nothing as woman goes to trial for abortion

ON OCTOBER 12, 20 year-old Tegan Leach will be the first woman in Queensland legal history to stand trial for procuring an abortion. Leach could go to prison for seven years if found guilty. Her partner, Sergie Brennan, could face three years behind bars for aiding the procurement of abortion.

The charges have sparked demands for a rewrite of the state's nineteenth-century abortion laws to take abortion out of the criminal code.

Queensland obstetrician Dr Caroline de Costa has researched the history of abortion in Australia and has found that this case is unique.

Despite the laws being condemned as "archaic," the state government has, since 2009, been actively enforcing the anti-choice legislation in public hospitals, meaning women have been unable to access publicly-funded abortions.

A recent survey published in the Medical Journal of Australia showed a massive 90 per cent of Australians believe abortion should be lawful in the first 12 weeks of pregnancy.

But Queensland premier, Anna Bligh, repeatedly refuses to put a private members' bill to parliament for a vote on legalising abortion.

Pro-choice campaigners are not waiting for Bligh. A national day of protest is planned for October 9, the Saturday before the trial.

Anti-Intervention campaign builds Greens vote in NT

By Paddy Gibson

LARGE SWINGS to the Greens in the Northern Territory have shown the anger at the NT Intervention and its continuation by Labor. But they are also evidence of the impact of the campaign against the Intervention—which continued to build through the election period.

The NT Greens ran two outspoken Aboriginal candidates: Barbara Shaw from Mt Nancy town camp for the lower house seat of Lingiari, which covers most of the NT outside of Darwin, and Warren H Williams, a country singer from Hermannsburg, for the Senate. Shaw is a spokesperson for the Intervention Rollback Action Group (IRAG) in Alice Springs, which has led an uncompromising grassroots campaign against the Intervention since 2007.

The Greens' vote in Lingiari jumped from 6.9 to 12.5 per cent. In the Senate it reached 14 per cent. Anti-Intervention Independents Deirdre Finter and Kenny Lechlietner also received a combined 9.3 per cent of the vote. Across Central Australian Aboriginal communities "prescribed" under the Intervention, where the IRAG campaign has established strong roots, the Greens outpolled all other candidates.

Barbara Shaw explained that, "In 2007 [Labor] received 90 per cent of the remote vote, as people reeled from Howard's Intervention and responded to [Labor MP] Snowdon's promise to defend the Community Development Employment Program (CDEP)."

"But Labor has made things worse. We have lost thousands of jobs as the old CDEP closes down. Snowdon's new CDEP is forcing people to work for the BasicsCard."

Even Snowdon could not ignore the result. He told ABC radio, "People are sending a strong message to Labor that they weren't happy with many aspects of what's happening in Aboriginal communities, the Intervention".

Struggle the key

The Greens' success at the ballot box demonstrates the importance of the grassroots anti-Intervention campaign.

IRAG's consistent campaign activity since 2007 has helped push the case against the Intervention into public life, consolidated a core of activists in Alice Springs and resulted in Aboriginal community leaders across



Above: Ampilatwatja Community elder Banjo Morton poses with a Greens corflute and other local Greens supporters

the Central Desert identifying strongly with the campaign.

Regular IRAG stalls were held outside the local supermarket in Alice Springs to support The Greens but also to argue that the campaign was not just about votes. Twenty-five new people signed up to join IRAG. Two activist meetings in three weeks sought to draw new people into the campaign. At a protest at Centrelink, candidate Barb Shaw demanded to be taken off Income Management.

Greens Senators and local representatives' association with the campaign has not gone unnoticed. Then by backing Shaw, The Greens transformed the election into a referendum on the Intervention.

In the Top End, where some of the biggest Aboriginal communities are located, there has not been the same level of co-ordinated political resistance. While powerful Aboriginal voices have blasted the Intervention consistently from regions like Arnhem land, consistent campaign work has not taken place.

Voter discontent still led to massive swings against Labor in Top End communities—some of 30 per cent. But the main beneficiary was the Country Liberal Party, along with informal and donkey votes. Despite its support for the Intervention, candidate Leo Abbott admitted his success in these communities was because: "Income Management is seen as discriminatory... people are not being properly consulted... with the SIHIP [Intervention] housing program people

want to play a bigger part instead of getting people from outside".

The other important struggle that had an impact in Lingiari was the fight against the expansion of the nuclear industry in Central Australia.

Tennant Creek is near a proposed nuclear waste dump that Labor has continued to pursue despite 2007 election promises. Here, the Greens came second to Labor by just five votes.

The campaign against the waste dump has held some of the biggest rallies ever seen in Tennant Creek and galvanised a powerful alliance of black and white leaders in the town. Greens Senator Scott Ludlam has visited Tennant Creek to address packed public meetings. Former local Labor MLA Elliot McAdam, who has championed this campaign, was out publicly campaigning for the Greens. Again, this crucial break was the result of years of joint work with grassroots activists.

A major "vote Nuclear Free", lunchtime election rally was held in Alice Springs in the week before the poll. Plans to build a new uranium mine at Angela Pamela 20 kms from Alice Springs have been the subject of continuing protest in Alice, in which the Greens have played a leading role.

These mobilisations set the tone of debate in town. Introducing their coverage on election morning, local ABC radio in Alice Springs said, "the big issues this election will be Indigenous affairs, nuclear mining and the NT Intervention". The election campaign has given these ongoing campaigns confidence and won them a wider base of support.

.....
Regular IRAG stalls were held outside the local supermarket in Alice Springs to support The Greens but also to argue that the campaign was not just about votes

Union power could strike Abbott out

By Ian Rintoul

IN 2007, the mass union mobilisations through the Your Rights at Work campaign were the central force driving John Howard from office. It beggars belief that only three years later, we face the possibility of a Coalition government led by Howard's clone, Tony Abbott.

But instead of holding Rudd to his promise to rip up WorkChoices, the ACTU negotiated WorkChoices Lite, Fair Work Australia.

And the attacks continued. Under Rudd and Gillard, the ABCC continued to harass construction workers, trying to jail Victorian CFMEU official Noel Washington in 2008 and has taken action against scores of other workers and union organisers. Just three weeks before the election, 1500 workers in the Pilbara were warned they faced fines of up to \$28,000 each if they were found guilty of taking illegal strike action.

On September 13, a magistrate will hear final submissions in the case against Ark Tribe, another building worker facing jail because he wouldn't tell the anti-union ABCC what workmates said at a safety meeting on a Hindmarsh building site.

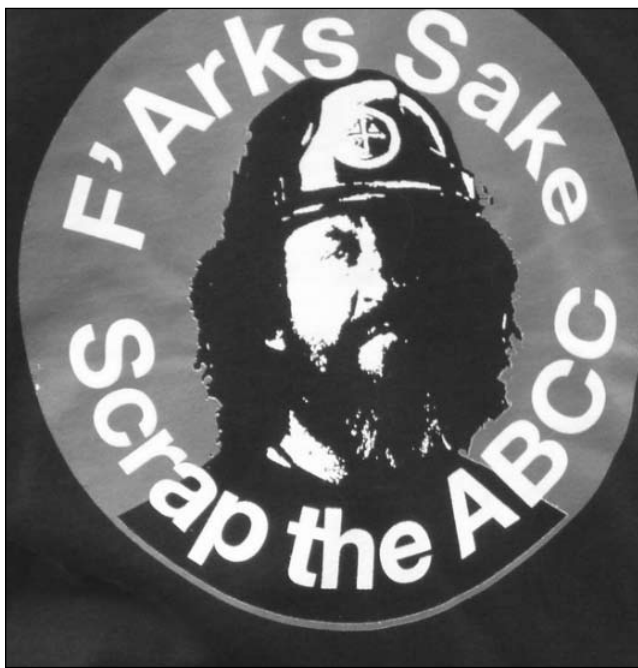
Workers face the clear and present danger of the return of WorkChoices—yet while the outcome of the election is in limbo, the ACTU is remarkably mute.

Here's what ACTU Secretary Jeff Lawrence said the day after the election, "Our two million union members, and the more than 10 million workers in Australia have succeeded in forcing all major parties in this election to commit to fair work laws." Really?

ACTU President Ged Kearney went on, "Whatever party forms Government, the ACTU will continue to advocate for better rights at work on behalf of working Australians and hold the Government to account for its workplace policies."

Advocate? Like they've been doing for the last three years?

The CFMEU has threatened a national strike if Ark is jailed. Not before time. A campaign of strike action from 2007 could have ended the ABCC long ago. A decisive call now by the union leadership that they will not al-



Above: A popular slogan at the last rally against the ABCC

low Abbott to steal this election could help settle the outcome of the election and the future of the ABCC.

A mass mobilisation of unions against Abbott and the ABCC could tip the balance against any possible deal that could put the Liberals back into government.

In 1996, a mass union march on Parliament House against Howard almost broke through the doors when the anger against Howard boiled over. If that mobilisation had been followed up with industrial action, Howard's rule would likely have been cut short and we would never have seen WorkChoices or the ABCC. We can't afford three years of Liberal government or to wait another three years to see what Labor has to offer.

We can stop Abbott before he even gets a foot in the door. NSW rail workers threatened strike action and held a no-fare day just three days before the election and won an agreement that there would be no forced redundancies over the four-year life of the agreement.

There is an old union saying "If you don't fight, you lose." Too much has been lost already. If we can strike over Ark Tribe and the ABCC, we can strike against those that spawned it. And if the union leaders aren't prepared to lead that fight, we will need to push them from below.

Building on un anti-Intervention

By Paddy Gibson

AROUND THE country, the campaign against the Intervention needs to step up the fight with a renewed mandate.

Campaigners should draw encouragement from the anti-Intervention vote in the Northern Territory, as well as the way the campaign built through the election period (see page 9).

The release of another report by the UN in August under the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, that criticised the suspension of the Racial Discrimination Act to allow the continuation of Intervention measures as "embedding" discrimination in Australia, has again confirmed the injustice at the heart of the policy.

In the coming months, Jobs with Justice initiatives offer a way of seeking to draw unions further into supporting the campaign. The closure of Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) and the resulting mass unemployment is one of the main weapons being used to gut Aboriginal communities and organisations and to force assimilation.

While workers at the remote outstation community of Irrultja were queuing up to vote Green this was their primary complaint with the Intervention. Geoffrey Dodson, an employee of the Barkly Shire said:

"Before with the Ahrrenge [local Aboriginal] council we used to work for better wages. Since the Shire and Intervention took over it's really hard. We're just working for the same amount as Centrelink, it doesn't rise up.

"We used to have 11 or so men working here and 13 ladies, now it's just three or four of each.

"We get no help grading the road these days. We get no help maintaining our houses since they've been taken over, even though the rents have gone up. It's getting a lot harder now."

Under Intervention measures Aboriginal workers doing work under the hollowed out CDEP program are paid only Centrelink benefits, half of which are quarantined onto a BasicsCard.

ion openings key for on campaign

Jobs with Justice initiatives offer a way of seeking to draw unions further into supporting the campaign

Before the start of the election campaign, a successful east-coast speaking tour by a Gurindji construction worker being forced to work for the BasicsCard galvanised strong support.

CFMEU members on Sydney building sites were outraged at how poorly Aboriginal workers like him were being paid.

Extending union support for the campaign offers a way to build pressure inside the Labor Party to change its policy, as well as beginning to mobilise people with real power to force changes in government policy. Significant alliances with unions have already been forged.

Another speaking tour is being planned by city-based collectives in the second half of October.

This will build up to a National Day of Action demanding an end to the Intervention and Jobs with Justice for Aboriginal workers on October 29.

The campaign is requesting that unions, land councils and all progressive organisations endorse a statement condemning the attacks on Aboriginal workers and the expansion of income management, to be published on the same day.

Gillard a clunker, Abbott a denier—we need a climate fight

By Amy Thomas

ABBOTT TOLD ABC's Q&A during the election period that the science of climate change is "highly contentious". Yet Labor's attempts to play on his climate denial were totally unconvincing—because unsurprisingly, nobody believes they care about climate change either.

The farce of the citizen's assembly has only added to the dismay Labor generated when they dropped the CPRS in April. Gillard's lame attempt to dress up the cash for clunkers scheme as an environmental measure was a joke.

Revealingly, cash for clunkers will be funded by a budget cut of \$520 million partly from the government's Solar Flagships program and a rebate scheme for solar hot water.

If you needed any more confirmation that the climate movement needs to radically shift the agenda, this was it.

10,000 marched nationwide at Walk Against Warming in the lead up to the election, but it was an action limited by the central demand for a carbon tax. The Greens have led the charge for a carbon tax; new MP Adam Bandt has called it "the key to dealing with the climate change

challenge." All the environmental NGOs are pushing the same line. It won't get us anywhere.

Carbon taxes overseas have pushed price rises onto consumers. Business has found "innovative" ways to deal with carbon, like Sweden's StatOil who have started to bury carbon underground to avoid paying a carbon tax. They have not stopped pumping oil. In Australia, petrol prices have risen in the past decade, but where are the new, free bus systems? The expansion of the rail system? Relying on the market is a recipe for failure and delay.

Australia is not immune from the economic crisis and it will get worse. Wages are stagnating and the minimum wage was frozen last year. We need a movement for higher living standards, not one that attacks them. There is popular support for a carbon price because it represents a form of action—but there is not support for rising living costs.

In Melbourne before the election a small group of climate activists built a rally for renewable energy at Parliament House, calling on the government to fund renewables. Unions are holding climate action conferences in Sydney and Melbourne in the coming months. Initiatives like this put winning jobs and investment at the centre and can shift the debate.

We can and must win union support for action. The ACTU has been won to opposing the construction of the nuclear waste dump at Muckaty station—if we encouraged the same for the two planned new coal-fired power stations in New South Wales it would put enormous pressure on the state government to abandon the plans.

Many climate activists were excited about The Greens' high vote, and so they should be. But The Greens argument that it would have passed the CPRS if the government negotiated with it instead of the Liberals shows the movement can't rely on them. What stopped The Greens voting for the CPRS was the climate action movement. It must now shift The Greens from support for a carbon tax to support for direct investment in renewable energy and public transport. Bold demands can win bold change. There is no shortage of enthusiasm—let's make it count for something.



Rallies for same-sex marriage took place around the country the week before the federal election on August 14, with up to 10,000 taking part nationwide. The rallies marked six years since the Marriage Act was amended by the Federal government to exclude same-sex marriage. The Melbourne rally is pictured above.

Lessons from success of refugee movement under Howard

By Mark Goudkamp

AFTER AN election characterised by both Labor and the Liberals using asylum seekers as political footballs, the refugee movement is faced with both opportunities and challenges.

The bi-partisan refugee bashing has made “stopping the boats” seem more mainstream. But on the bright side the swing to The Greens showed there are tens of thousands of people disgusted with Labor’s anti-refugee shift. Nonetheless, there is a huge challenge ahead if we are to push back against the attacks.

Under Howard, Refugee Action Collectives prioritised a mixture of direct action via convergences outside detention centres and hounding successive immigration ministers, mass protests, and education via fact sheets, forums, stalls and speaking tours of ex-detainees.

The Howard government joined the US’s Coalition of the Willing to invade Iraq—at the same time it was locking up Iraqi refugees who were the victims of Saddam’s Hussein repression. Our leaflets “If you are anti-war, you must be pro-refugee” linked the issues and won more people to the refugee campaign.

Similarly, we built contingents for the anti-WorkChoices mobilisations—“Refugees need strong unions”, explaining why the refugee movement was against Howard’s anti-union laws and how Howard was locking up asylum seekers persecuted for fighting for union rights in Iran and Iraq.

From the very beginning the campaign sought to undermine Howard’s racism by connecting with the union movement, encouraging the formation of both union groups and Labor for Refugees to take up the argument in workplaces and inside the Labor Party itself. And while there were occasional tactical differences with more moderate sections of the movement, diversity—encompassing unions, lawyers, psychiatrists, actors, playwrights, artists and musicians, to suburban and rural activist groups—gave it strength. It’s urgent that these networks are rebuilt.

While the movement may not have decisively won the argument against mandatory detention per se or about people smuggling, remarkable victories were achieved—against kids in detention, long-term detention, tem-



Asylum seekers in Leonara greet the Compassion Caravan

porary visas, and the Pacific Solution. It is again crucial to break bipartisan support for mandatory detention, for offshore processing, and for trying to associate boat arrivals (and anyone who supports them) with people smuggling. Passing resolutions through union conferences and Labor branches is again vital.

It is timely that Labor for Refugees is re-activating. Excellent resolutions were passed at the Victorian State Labor conference. The pro-refugee resolution passed by the Blue Mountains Council, that noted Western Sydney was “the most culturally diverse community in Australia and has a proud history of welcoming new citizens” needs to be replicated wherever possible.

Hopefully pro-refugee statements by some country independents will encourage more local Rural Australians for Refugees groups to meet again. The thousands of people who mobilised and lobbied to get children out of detention will be horrified to discover that hundreds of children are back behind wire fences.

The campaign last time shifted public opinion to the extent that by 2007, the demonisation of refugees was no longer a vote winner. We need to do that again, so there really are no more Tampa elections.

.....
From the very beginning the campaign sought to undermine Howard’s racism by connecting with the union movement

‘Welcome to the Leonara Family Rejection Centre’

ON AUGUST 13, 22 people set out on a 1600 kilometre return trip from Perth—the Compassion Caravan to Leonora Alternative Place of Detention (Leonora APOD). This is an excerpt from one person’s account of the visit.

“The centre itself looks like the sort of prison camp you would expect to see in a third world country. There is nothing but red dirt and dongas, surrounded by high block-out fences and guards standing to attention at intervals around the perimeter. We were separated by padlocked gates, a double fence, a 100 metre wide dry moat and a plethora of stony-faced guards. They have made a deliberate barrier to stop the world seeing in and the detainees seeing out.

“The people inside had heard we were coming and were very obviously excited. Children were hoisted up on shoulders in order to see over the compound walls and faces popped up over the fences. They were waving homemade signs, one reading ‘Welcome to Leonora Family Rejection Centre’. The children started ... shouting ‘Hi!’ and cheering. We responded with ‘Azadi!’ (freedom!) and blew party whistles. We laid the toys outside the fence and an army of guards came and took them inside. We received no information on how the donations would be distributed or even if they would be. The detention centre manager responded to most requests with, ‘I don’t have to answer that.’

“The media are denied access to the centre ...visitors must give 24 hours notice and have the name of the person they want to visit. They can be refused if the name is incorrectly spelled. They can also be denied entry on the discretion of the centre manager without a given reason.”

Read the rest at:
<http://www.ran.org/report-leonora-welcome-leonora-family-rejection-centre>

Afghans languish while High Court hears challenge to offshore processing



The refugee rights campaign needs to focus on Christmas Island and the crisis in Australian detention centres

By Ian Rintoul

BOTH JULIA Gillard and Tony Abbot went to the election with proposals to extend offshore processing—to East Timor (Gillard) or Nauru (Abbott).

Tony Abbott even met Nauru's Prime Minister. Shadow Immigration Minister Scott Morrison went one better, flying to Nauru to inspect the derelict Howard-era detention camp and absurdly declaring that the camps could be operational within a week. But all that remains of the centre is 20 broken-down buildings with no power or water. Those not boarded up have broken windows and doors.

While we can expect any incoming government to push a version of Howard's Pacific Solution, it is offshore processing on Christmas Island that provides the immediate focus of the refugee rights campaign.

Offshore processing challenged

Two days after the election, the High Court began hearing a challenge to the legality of the offshore refugee determination process on Christmas Island. Offshore processing is an administrative arrangement established by the Immigration department—until now, beyond the reach of Australian courts. The extent of political interference in the process has become increasingly obvious. Any idea that it is independent is a farce.

Shortly after Rudd's visa freeze on Sri Lankan and Afghan refugee asylum seekers in April, the rate of re-

jections by the department-appointed refugee assessors dramatically increased—they had gotten the message from their political masters. Between 80-90 per cent of those rejected are overturned on appeal—that's not good enough, but it shows the initial decisions are seriously shonky.

Hundreds of asylum seekers still face potential deportation to Sri Lanka, Iraq and Afghanistan, obviously unsafe countries. A Sinhalese asylum seeker deported from Australia in December 2009 was not only detained and beaten on his return, but has been beaten in front of his village as a warning to anyone thinking of fleeing Sri Lanka.

In June, ten Hazaras of the Afghan Shia minority (who constitute the majority of Afghan asylum seekers in Australian detention) were beheaded in Oruzgan province where Australian troops operate. A week before the election, 25 Hazaras were killed in Kabul, which Australian immigration authorities insisted was safe. The International Organisation for Migration (IOM), the same outfit that used to run Nauru under Howard, is now inside Christmas Island encouraging asylum seekers to agree to be "voluntarily" repatriated to these areas.

Fighting the detention regime

Meanwhile hundreds of Afghans who arrived after the April 9 visa freeze announcement are languishing in Curtin, Leonora and other detention centres.

Just as under Howard, the UN Committee on the Elimination of

Racial Discrimination (CERD) has damned Australia's treatment of refugees. The committee recommended that the government review mandatory detention and offshore processing, end the suspension of processing visa applications from Afghanistan; develop proper reception arrangements, especially for children; and ensure that asylum seekers are not forced back to their countries of origin when they are being returned.

But history tells us that the government will likely ignore the finding. And we could be waiting months for the High Court to hand down its decision on offshore processing. It is going to be up to the refugee campaign to undo the damage left behind by Gillard and Abbott's election attack on refugees, and to fight the offshore processing policies of any incoming government.

The protests in Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne, Canberra and Perth in the lead up to the election were an encouraging sign. Dissident Labor councillors in the Blue Mountains sent Julia Gillard a message before the election, rejecting the idea that Western Sydney is racist and carrying a resolution demanding that the policies of all parties adhere to the UN Refugee Convention. Refugee Action Coalition in Sydney has called a "Stand up for refugees" rally on Saturday October 23 on the anniversary of the SIEV X tragedy, calling for an end to offshore processing, to close Christmas Island, and for no deportations. Join us at 1pm at Town Hall.

Sustainable population debate is a dogwhistle

By Paddy Gibson

THE ISSUE of population took centre stage in the federal election. Gillard and Abbott blamed immigrants for everything from traffic congestion to climate change.

Julia Gillard moved quickly to junk Kevin Rudd's support for a "big Australia". She presented this as driven by environmental concerns—Population Minister Tony Burke was re-badged the Minister for Sustainable Population.

Workers from marginal electorates in outer suburban Sydney and Brisbane have suffered from decades of neglect to infrastructure and services. Even the federal government's Infrastructure Australia has said that the NSW government lacks future planning for transport infrastructure and is not ready to build any new rail. Since the 1970s, goods transport by rail has declined from 70% to single figures, meaning more trucks on the road and more congestion nightmares. There are similar stories in health and education.

Gillard's "sustainable population" was designed to tap into anger at this, deflect it from government and direct it at immigrants: "If you spoke to the people of Western Sydney, for example about a 'big Australia' they would laugh at you and [say]... where will these 40 million people go?"

Her stand was bound up with a sharp lurch to the right over refugees, and provided fertile soil for Abbott.

Abbott tried to wedge the Labor party earlier in the year by attacking Rudd's "big Australia". During the televised leaders debate, Gillard and Abbott traded blows over delivering the biggest immigration cuts. With everyone agreed that "stopping the boats" was the aim of refugee policy, Abbott could consistently point to the Howard government's cruel record of "success". It shows the way population arguments serve as a dog whistle to racism.

Green weakness

Tragically, The Greens proved unable to take this racist scapegoating head on, because of confusion in the party about population and sustainability.

Left-wing Greens have provided useful critiques of Gillard and Abbott's arguments. New Melbourne MP Adam Bandt, in an interview with *Farrago* student magazine, pinned ur-



This scene from Dick Smith's *Population Puzzle*, where he throws up his arms about the poor in Bangladesh, is a frightening example of the kind of racism the population debate encourages

ban congestion on lack of investment: "Before we can have any sensible discussion about population, we need to have a discussion about infrastructure, and the part of the reason why people feel that the city is overcrowded and congested at the moment, is that we have failed to properly invest in infrastructure, particularly in areas like transport, to make the city move more efficiently."

Lee Rhiannon rejected the idea that Australia had a fixed ecological "carrying capacity": "For much of Australia's history population numbers were low but that did not stop extensive vegetation loss, soil erosion, widespread pollution and species extinction."

But neither Bandt nor Rhiannon argued against immigration cuts, or challenged the idea that population was a problem.

The Greens are hamstrung by Bob Brown's strong commitment to cutting immigration. Brown was one of the first politicians to attack Rudd's "big Australia", calling for a Senate inquiry into population.

He played a terrible role in the Q&A special that followed the screening of Dick Smith's xenophobic documentary, *The Population Puzzle*.

Brown declared that the 18th century British reactionary Malthus "was right... we're chewing up more than the planet can sustain." In an infamous 1798 essay, 'Principles of Population', Malthus argued that Britain's growing population would soon outstrip food production. But just as changes in agriculture have allowed for massive increases in population, changes in energy production—for

example from fossil fuels to solar and wind—would mean a growing population and decreasing carbon emissions. It's not population that determines how environmentally destructive a society is, it's the way production is organised.

Brown defended refugees, but attacked "business immigration", saying restrictions on immigration were a blow to the "big end of town". He said "we've concentrated ridiculously on one or two percent of the immigrants to this country who come as refugees on boats ... meanwhile immigration as been calibrated according to business immigration".

It's true that Australia's bosses are in favour of migration. A constant flow of workers helps stimulate the economy. This sometimes brings business into conflict with populist politicians who play on xenophobia to win elections. The pages of *The Australian* and the *Financial Review* have been scathing of "irresponsible" populism. But it still serves their interests, because it directs attention away from their own criminal responsibility for problems like climate change.

Immigrants—"business migrants" or otherwise—aren't the ones driving up carbon emissions, it's the governments and private companies planning to open twelve new coal-fired power stations. Cuts to company tax like that proposed by Gillard mean less money for investment in public transport, less money for rail and more roads congested and full of polluting trucks. It is politicians like Gillard that we should point the finger of blame at. Australian workers have nothing to fear from immigration.

.....
The private sector, even with government subsidies, cannot possibly implement a plan of this scale within a decade

French burqa ban sows division



A recent rally against the British National Party in the United Kingdom. The left needs to build an alternative to the far right's racism

By Erima Dall

A BILL to ban Muslim women from wearing the burqa and niqab in public went through the lower house of French parliament last month.

The French government dressed up the bill as a move to safeguard secular values and promote women's liberation. But it is the latest attack in a wave of anti-Muslim racism sweeping Europe. The vote passed 335 to 1. Members of the Greens and Socialist parties abstained. The bill will go to the senate in September. If it passes there, women who wear the burqa will face a \$216 fine.

The ban on the burqa is part of an increasingly open vilification of Muslims in France. Several MPs have described the veil as a "walking coffin." President Sarkozy said that it turns women into "prisoners behind screens."

But it is Sarkozy who will be making prisoners out of women, by confining them to their homes if they would otherwise wear the burqa to go out. Forcing women out of their jobs and schools because of their religious practice is not a path to liberation.

What underlies the burqa ban is not a concern for women's rights, but a crisis of government. Of five million

French Muslims only 2000 women wear the burqa or niqab. The government is scapegoating a tiny minority of women in an attempt to turn attention away from rising unemployment and unpopular austerity measures.

Prime Minister Fillon recently announced spending cuts of \$140 billion over three years and a rise in the retirement age from 60 to 62. A total of two million people protested against these measures in January, March and August. A general strike is planned for early September.

Islamophobia is taking hold in other countries. Belgium and Spain have debated a ban on the burqa.

In Australia, Christian Democrat Fred Nile has proposed a ban to the NSW cabinet, claiming, "There is a world-wide movement to prohibit face coverings." Tony Abbott added his voice to the chorus, calling the burqa "confronting", while Gillard supported a court order forcing a woman in Perth to remove her burqa before she can testify.

A burqa ban will be no victory for women, for Muslims or for workers. Far right parties have won gains in many European elections.

The success of the resistance to cuts in France and across Europe will depend on the working class rejecting the racism that threatens to distract and divide them.

Pakistan's floods made worse by US terror

IN PAKISTAN, millions of the world's poorest people are desperately battling to survive the aftermath of torrential rain. Up to 13 million are affected.

Whole villages have been swept away by floods that cannot be diverted because money for even the most basic infrastructure is instead put into the hands of the military.

The government is failing to provide even minimal relief to those whose houses and livelihoods have been washed away.

An airbase outside Jacobabad, which could have been used to save lives, is instead being used by the US military.

Since joining the war on terror with the US, the Pakistani military has launched daily mortar bomb attacks on its own villages along the Afghan border. Some 30,000 Pakistanis, mostly civilians, have been killed in an attempt to "drive out terrorists" and clear threats to the US supply line that runs from the port of Karachi to Afghanistan.

Many villages are completely cut off from help as the roads that connect their towns have been destroyed in the war.

There are dire shortages of clean water, food and plastic sheets for shelters.

And, while the West has been able to supply the Pakistani military with seemingly unending credit, humanitarian aid has been less than forthcoming. Pakistan receives more than \$1 billion a year from the US for its help combating "militants". But, the US government only managed to lift its initial pledge for disaster relief in the country from \$10 million to \$25 million.

The people of Pakistan are beginning to protest about the lack of response to the disaster. Crowds attacked the motorcade of Britain's development minister in Islamabad.

Analysts expect protests to grow as flooding spreads from the north to devastate farms in the Punjab and Sind in the south.

As the Pakistani elite abandons millions of its poorest people to poverty, pestilence and disease, the US has every reason to worry that those who are suffering will turn against its client state.

Socialist Worker UK

The government is scapegoating a tiny minority of women to turn attention away from unpopular austerity measures

All out truck strike: New stage in Greek resistance

By Carl Taylor

FOR A week in July over 33,000 Greek truck drivers staged an industry-wide strike that paralysed much of the Greek economy. It follows six general strikes in six months, and shows how all-out, indefinite strike action can force back attacks on jobs and living standards across Europe.

The truckers' strike was triggered by the PASOK government's attempt to abolish the current road freight licensing system. Many of the drivers, some of whom re-mortgaged their homes to buy the \$140 000-280,000 licenses, would have been bankrupted by the move.

Greek Prime Minister Giorgos Papandreou insisted that deregulating the haulage sector and other so-called "closed-shop professions" (workplaces with 100% union membership) is necessary to overcome "investor skepticism." He has said that the "Greek people can take the pain."

The truck drivers, however, refused to pay the cost of the government's economic woes and voted for an all out strike. Without fuel deliveries, petrol stations across the country ran dry within days. Hotel and holiday bookings were cancelled due to food shortages at tourist destinations. Lost revenue within tourism alone was estimated at around \$1.4 billion.

The truckers strike shocked the Greek ruling class. A BBC reporter described the feeling: "Of all the strikes that have affected Greece during the eight-month-long financial crisis, this is the one that posed the most serious threat to the government's determination to impose austerity measures and liberalise the economy."

Two days into the strike the Greek transport minister issued orders to forcibly requisition individual driver's trucks. But in response, drivers picketed oil refiners to stop the delivery of fuel. Then the Prime Minister signed a rarely-used civil mobilisation order that effectively made the truck drivers part of the armed forces. The forced conscription meant that drivers could be jailed for refusing to resume work. But the truckers again refused to bow down and they stayed out on strike.

By Friday the government drafted in the Army to attempt to get fuel supplies to airports and electricity plants—a symbol of how far they were willing to go to break the truck drivers' resistance.



Greek truckers face off against Greek police during the strike in July

The leaders of the driver's trade union, the Panhellenic Union of Commercial Land Transportations (PSX-EM), began to wilt under pressure from the government to end the strike, and convinced the drivers to return to work, a week after the strike began.

A unified working class can win

Despite the leaders' timidity, the truckers' strike shows how targeting crucial sections of the economy can cause massive disruption. On a big scale they could make Papandreou's austerity measures too expensive to implement. Encouragingly, power industry workers are discussing a sustained strike, and there may be a Europe-wide strike in late September.

Already this year the PASOK government has forced a 20-30 per cent drop in real wages and the Greek GST has hit a record high of 23 per cent on some items.

There is a genuine anger and will to resist among the Greek working class. There are obstacles, though. The trade union leaders have so far been reluctant to build sustained industrial campaigns. The national trade union federations, the General Confederation of Greek Workers and Civil Servants' Confederation, did not build support for the truck driver's strike. Workers will need to agitate to force the unions into a more consistent stance against the cuts and for longer, all-out strikes if they are to force the cost of the crisis onto governments and the bosses.

Massive strikes put South Africa on the brink

OVER ONE million striking South African workers are threatening to bring the government of President Jacob Zuma to its knees. Initial demands for an 8.6 per cent public sector pay rise have grown into the most militant display of working class solidarity since the battle to end apartheid.

Massive secondary strikes in support of the public sector workers are planned. Cosatu, the South African trade union federation, has pledged a general strike on September 2 that will shut down South Africa, while the National Union of Mineworkers promised that, "every mining operation, every construction site and every energy worker [will] join...the strike."

Zuma's government is staring down the barrel of a working class uprising threatening to take on the insurrectionary qualities of the anti-apartheid movement of two decades ago. One unionist, itching to join the fight, encapsulated the mood of South Africa's workers, "Enough is enough. The battle lines are drawn."

Australian meddling part of agenda to dominate Fiji

By Tom Orsag

THE GILLARD government's continuation of the old Rudd and Howard policy of meddling in Fiji's politics saw the Australian High Commissioner to Fiji, Sarah Roberts, expelled from the country in July.

Since Fiji's expulsion from the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) in May 2009—which is dominated by Australia and New Zealand—Fiji's ruler Commodore Bainimarama has sought other forums to have dialogue with Pacific island nations.

Fiji pushed for a Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG), consisting of PNG, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, to endorse Bainimarama's strategic roadmap for elections in 2014.

However, the Australian government saw this MSG as undermining its influence in the region. High Commissioner Roberts actually campaigned among the MSG member states to stop an MSG "Plus Summit" in Fiji from going ahead, as did the Federal Labor government in Canberra.

The PM of Vanuatu, Edward Natapei, cancelled attending the MSG meeting. Vanuatu is the current MSG chair. Bainimarama believes he made the decision due to pressure from Australia in the form of \$66.4 million in aid.

Foreign Minister, Stephen Smith, admitted that Australia approached Melanesian countries "advising them" not to attend the meeting.

The Australian government has said it wants elections in Fiji earlier than 2014—as if has the right to tell Fiji when they should be called. It condemns Bainimarama as a military dictator with no respect for human rights—but its real concern is promoting Australian strategic and business interests.

Australia may be happy with a weak and divided Fijian ruling class so it can step in and intervene at will. A stronger Fijian regime would clash with Australia's existing economic control and political influence, one it has worked hard to attain, even lobbying Britain to annex Fiji in the 1870s. In 2007, Bainimarama nationalised the Australian-owned Emperor Gold mine.

Bainimarama is promoting Fijian control of business with a new media decree for 90 per cent Fijian ownership of the media in three months time. This will hurt Murdoch's News



Above: Bainimarama's agenda is anti-racist, but is driven by elite concerns

Limited's control of Fiji's main paper—the *Fiji Times*.

Undoing racial divisions

In contrast to Fiji's previous military rulers, Bainimarama is attempting to undo the country's entrenched racial divisions.

This means undoing years of damage. The electoral system is still based on "communal" rolls, unlike Australia which has universal electoral rolls. In Fiji, a voter can only vote for a member of their own community—Fijian or Indian—with a handful of "open" seats.

This is a divide which Australia has never objected to in Fiji's history.

Fiji has three coups in 20 years before the fourth, led by Bainimarama. It was effectively a one-party state, based on the indigenous Fijian chiefs, from 1970-1987.

The election of the multi-racial Labour Party's in 1987 saw the first coup, led by Lt. Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka, with the express aim of shoring up the power of the Fijian chiefs. The chiefs had been promoted by Britain, in a conscious divide-and-rule policy against Indian Fijians.

The Fiji Labour Party won by appealing to indigenous working class Fijians on a class basis, breaking the hold of the Fijian chiefs. Fijian politics since then has been dominated by attempts of the chiefs to shore up their political and economic interests.

When the Labour Party was elected again in 1999, again it was

overthrown by a coup by an indigenous Fijian, linked to the chiefs—George Speight.

Bainimarama's coup has been different from the past three, in that Indian Fijians have not been the target of a racist leader.

The Commodore may be anti-racist, but his project seems to be to create a unified Fijian ruling class that can run the country competently—and not fracture along ethnic lines the minute a clan thinks its business interests are threatened or could be advanced by a coup. Fiji has faced skills and investment capital shortages, with Indians leaving Fiji after the various coups.

But he is increasingly at odds with the Labour Party and its efforts to stand up for Fijian workers across the racial divide. It was initially part of Bainimarama's interim government but withdrew in 2008. Now Bainimarama has had the Labour Party leader Mahendra Chaudhry, charged with tax evasion and money laundering charges. This comes after the Labour Party called for a referendum on postponing the elections, and criticised the lack of media freedom.

Bainimarama's has many hurdles to overcome, one of which is Australia's imperial meddling. But his aim is not to unify the Fijian working class across the racial divide, only its ruling class, so that it can maximise its profits. The Fijian Labour Party and trade union movement need to organise independently of Bainimarama.

REAL POWER DOES NOT LIE IN PARLIAMENT

The corporate CEOs and big business owners hold real power in our society, and changing it requires struggle outside parliament write **Matte Rochford** and **James Supple**

THE ENTHUSIASM in the aftermath of the election about parliamentary reform, from ending corporate donations to introducing proportional representation, rests on the idea that parliament needs to be reclaimed from the major parties.

But the idea of making parliament work in the interests of the majority rests on false hopes.

We're told that elections to parliament every three years determines who runs the country. Yet the power of parliament to change things has severe limits. John Howard was able to commit troops to the war in Iraq without even discussing it in Parliament.

Real power in our society rests with the corporate CEOs and the major shareholders who own Australia's biggest companies—a tiny, immensely wealthy capitalist class. While we get to vote for our political representatives, the CEOs and big business owners who control economic power are unelected.

BHP's mine workers do not elect the company CEO. Yet they control major decisions about the economy—decisions that can destroy people's lives. If a company decides to close down or move its factories, as Pacific Brands, one of Australia's biggest companies, did in 2008, sacking 1850 workers, this has a devastating impact on them and their families.

In practice the enormous wealth controlled by big business also allows them to dominate the process of political decision-making and to bring to heel any government that challenges it.

These days most governments make no attempt to challenge big business at all, and spend much of their time consulting business about what it wants. This is natural for the Liberal Party, which is packed with former businesspeople.

But the federal Labor government under Kevin Rudd and Julia Gillard has been exactly the same. Kevin Rudd allowed business to shape his emissions trading scheme which

provided major carbon polluters with huge amounts of compensation. He was so close to Heather Ridout, the CEO of the Australian Industry Group, that she was referred to as a de facto member of his cabinet.

Big business will do anything to resist a threat to its profits and power. We had a demonstration recently of how big business reacts to such a threat from government, when Labor announced plans for a tax on mining super-profits. Even though it would have been only a small cut to their massive profits, the mining companies launched a huge campaign against the tax, claiming jobs would be lost and it would destroy the Australian economy.

The richest people in the country staged a bosses' rally, spent huge amounts on television advertising and even threatened an investment strike. The government was forced into an embarrassing political back down. After removing Kevin Rudd, Julia Gillard slashed the level of the tax.

The response to such a modest increase in tax gives some indication of how big business would react to a serious threat to their profits. The ultimate example is that of the left wing Allende government in Chile.

It came to power in 1970, on the back of a huge wave of struggle, promising to lift living standards, carry out land redistribution and nationalise key industries.

Terrified by the encouragement this gave to worker and peasant struggles, the rich launched an investment strike, began hoarding goods and where possible shifted money overseas. They staged "bosses strikes" to prevent the transport of food and basic goods to blackmail the government.

Finally the Chilean ruling class turned to the military to stage a coup in 1973, which involved the assassination of President Allende. Thousands of unionists and left-wing activists were imprisoned and

Big business will do anything to resist a threat to its profits and power

executed. They preferred to remove an elected government and dispense with parliamentary rule than allow a challenge to their wealth and power.

In the last years of the Whitlam government in Australia, when big business decided it wanted to get rid of the Labor government, it began a program to destabilise the government. The media went on the offensive against the government. Whitlam himself insisted that Labor was the "the party of propriety and convention". But by the end of 1973 the financial press began to talk of a "business-government gap".

The president of the Associated Chamber of Stock Exchanges complained he hadn't seen a minister in three weeks! The ability of big business to withdraw investment and bring the economy to a halt revealed the power of the capitalist class to undermine an elected government.

State bureaucracy

Parliament also has little control over the vast bureaucracy of a capitalist state. Unlike parliament, the bureaucracy doesn't change after an election. The public, Treasury, the courts, police, intelligence and defence forces remain intact have huge power over society.

There is a myth that the public service is "independent". But in fact at the upper levels of the public service there is a revolving door between the corporate world and people who work for government departments. Guy Pearse revealed the scale of corporate influence on climate policy under the Howard government. Pearse noted that many corporate lobbyists had "previous involvement in government departments, mainly the industry department but other departments as well, before coming out and running industry associations and often playing musical chairs between those associations".

The government bureaucracy is dominated by people from the same class as those who run big business

and is dedicated to run the country in the interests of the capitalist class.

The recent experience of the Venezuelan government under Hugo Chavez is also instructive. While the government has tried to push through significant measures to redistribute wealth, in areas like health care and education, it has found that the government bureaucracy's power to sabotage policy is a powerful obstacle to radical change.

Struggle outside parliament

But the power of big business can be challenged. Mass social movement and working class struggles are capable of winning widespread social change outside parliament and forcing governments to act.

The Whitlam Government in 1972 delivered reforms such as Medicare, free university education and the first land rights laws.

This was not because its MPs were personally more left-wing. In fact Whitlam himself was from the right of the Labor Party and often looked to water down left wing party policy on the excuse that such policies would make Labor electable.

But Whitlam was elected on the back of mass struggles including the Aboriginal land rights movement, the anti-Vietnam War movement, and the 1969 general strike that freed jailed Melbourne Tramways unionist Clarrie O'Shea. These struggles showed the way strike action and mass mobilisations on the streets could win change regardless of the government.

Workers in particular have power to challenge the system. It is workers that co-operate on a massive scale on a day-to-day basis to produce profits—people like Andrew Forrest, the boss of Fortescue Metals, relies on workers' labour to run his mines. When workers withdraw that labour by going on strike, they cut off the bosses' profits and can bring whole sections of the economy to a halt.

Although the penal powers remained on the books, after the Clarrie O'Shea strike, neither governments nor the bosses used them for almost another 20 years.

When Whitlam tried to reintroduce fines on strike action as party policy, a storm of protest from the unions forced the Labor caucus to override Whitlam just a few days after his announcement.

Whitlam had also tried to soften Labor's opposition to the Vietnam War after the 1966 election, and joined with conservatives to ban collections for the Vietnamese NLF after



The union mass demonstrations against WorkChoices helped win the argument against the laws and finish off Howard—it is class struggle, mass demonstrations and strikes that can bring real change

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Mass social movement and working class struggles are capable of winning widespread social change outside parliament and forcing governments to act

students at Monash began campaigning around the issue.

But as the anti-war movement turned the tide of public opinion, in 1969 Whitlam announced that Labor, if elected, would withdraw all Australian troops by June 1970.

The mass movements of the day had shifted Australian society to the left, forcing the Labor Party to tack left as well.

Today too it is mass movements outside parliament that are the key to change. When John Howard was defeated in 2007 it was in no small part due to the tens of thousands of people who marched in the streets demanding an end to WorkChoices and a more humanitarian approach to refugees.

The mood for change allowed Kevin Rudd to win a landslide victory and many believed that an era of bigotry, racism and anti-union laws was over.

But despite the massive mandate for change, Rudd was more influenced by business interests than the needs of the working families he talked about so much.

He was more concerned with the US alliance than the majority opinion against the war in Afghanistan.

Without rallies, strikes and strong social movements to force Labor's hand, they rule for the rich, not for

those who elected them.

Socialists care about what happens in elections. The Liberal party openly represents the ruling class. It remains a fact that Labor is connected to the organised working class through the unions and most working class people look to Labor and The Greens to represent their interests.

A narrow concern with the numbers in parliament, and thinking that this is the key to change, can set back the struggle outside parliament.

It is through struggle that workers have won significant reforms and it is struggle that pushes society, parliament, Labor and The Greens to the left.

For all the success of The Greens in this election, simply getting people elected is no substitute for building union power and the mass movements. Mobilising a small proportion of those who voted Green and those that begrudgingly voted Labor to keep Abbott out would be a major step forward.

To change the system and win genuine democracy we need to take power out of the hands of our unelected rulers.

The struggle in the unions and the campaigns for social change can be the start of a struggle for a socialist society.

LABOR IN POWER: THE LESSONS OF THE ACCORD

Hawke and Keating's Accord agreement was designed to hold back wages and conditions and weakened union power, argues **Feiyi Zhang**

IN THE 2007 elections, mass opposition to Howard's neo-liberal agenda led to a landslide victory for Kevin Rudd and the Australian Labor Party.

Rudd promised to rip up Howard's Workchoices legislation, the pinnacle of Howard's attacks on rights at work and union organising. But Rudd didn't rip up WorkChoices, it became Fair-Work Australia, or WorkChoices Lite.

But it is less well known that the neo-liberal policies that laid the basis for Workchoices actually began in the period of Labor rule between 1983 and 1996, during the Hawke and Keating governments. Looking at this period of history reveals the limitations of Labor in government today.

The origins of the Accord

The Australian economy was plagued by economic crisis from the mid 1970s to the mid 1980s. The failure to solve the crisis was central to the end of both the Whitlam Labor government in 1975 and the Fraser Coalition government in 1983. Whitlam attacked working conditions, cut jobs and rolled back social services, but was sacked by the Governor General and later replaced by the Fraser Coalition government, ushered in on a promise to solve the economic crisis and rein in the unions.

But working class resistance continued throughout the period of Fraser in power. A wave of strikes from 1979-81 involved more than four million workers in nearly 7400 disputes, accounting for more than 11 million strike days. Like the strike wave in the early 1970s, it won wage increases and raised union membership. This occurred alongside important political movements such as opposition to the stripping back of Medicare and resistance to new uranium mines.

The Accord was the ruling class' solution to this problem of working class militancy. The Accord was a tripartite agreement between Australia's

peak trade union body, the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU), business and the Labor government under Prime Minister Bob Hawke.

Hawke pitched the Accord as an agreement that would enable an increase in the "social wage"—the redistribution of taxes and things like maintaining Medicare. In exchange unions agreed to wage restraint. This meant no wage claims outside six monthly indexes set by the Arbitration commission, effectively a no-strike agreement. The union leaders portrayed this as a "less confrontational and more rational approach" with the Labor Government.

Such was the level of support among union leaders at the time that NSW Nurses Association was the only union that voted against the agreement.

The "consensus" relationship of the Accord is still commonly claimed to have been beneficial for all involved by many senior trade union figures. Even those critical of the Accord think that the problem was the way in which the Accord was managed. Some claim it was responsible for holding at bay the sharp attack on workplace rights and conditions that came with Howard. Even when union officials saw the impact of the Accord in degrading former structures of union power or causing a decline in wages, there was still overwhelmingly no real challenge to the Accord itself.

Neo-liberalism: making the working class pay

But a closer examination of the Accord shows it was used by the Labor government to manage the problems of capitalism and to make the working class pay for both the economic crisis and recovery. It went along with the neoliberal restructuring of Australian capitalism that ushered in a period of deregulation, privatisation and economic rationalism.

The Accord paved the way for Howard's attacks on work rights

Through seven phases of the Accord from 1983 to 1996, successive Labor governments in alliance with business, attacked working conditions and job organisation. The Accord paved the way for Howard's attacks on work rights with the Workplace Relations Act 1996 and the introduction of Australian Workplace Agreements (AWAs).

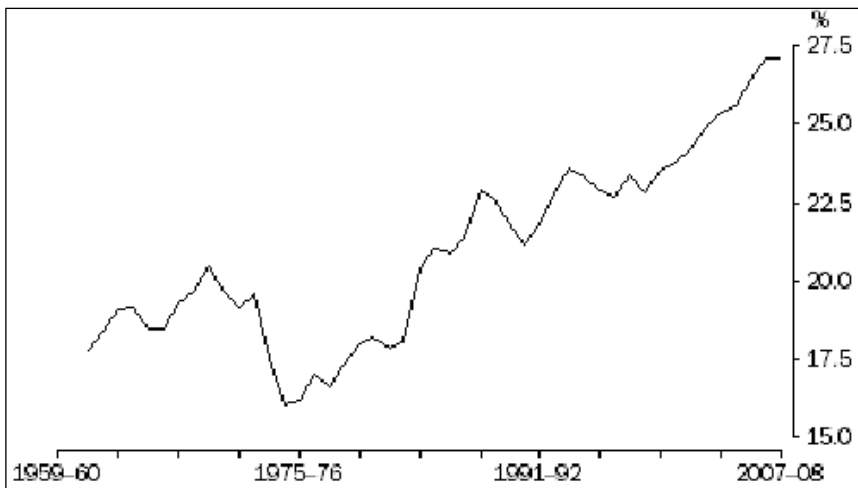
The appeal to business and government lay in the Accord's ability to restrain wages. Wage restraint is a key mechanism used to restore profits—decreasing the cost of wages increases total profit. The initial Accord program included a commitment by unions not to pursue wage rises. The Accord was also designed to improve profit rates by increasing the intensity of work. This meant attacking any union or sections of workers that challenged the Accord.

The Accord meant that that wage determinations went from a centralised arbitration system to what was called "managed decentralism". Centralised arbitration had tied wages to the cost of living. But a decentralised system meant tying wage increases to increased productivity, and later into enterprise bargaining. Enterprise bargaining drove greater labour flexibility (read: an attack on standard hours and conditions) by tying wages to the productivity of individual businesses. In 1993, under PM Paul Keating, Labor's Reform Act installed enterprise bargaining as the primary mechanism of wage determination.

This was a drastic restructure that boosted profits by increasing the exploitation of workers.

Phase 3 of the Accord, in 1987, focused on the "elimination of restrictive work practices"—which meant wage increases only in exchange for trade-offs.

From 1981-92 wage growth averaged only 0.25 per cent per annum. Since the introduction of enterprise bargaining in the early 1990s, real



GRAPH 1: Profits Share of Total Income (From ABS, 2008)



GRAPH 2: Wages Share of Total Income (From ABS, 2008)

wages have stagnated. The boost for business over the last 25 years has been dramatic. The profit share of total income in Australia reached record levels in 2007-8, while the wages share hit record lows (refer to Graphs 1 and 2).

Labor in power

To understand how Labor was able to implement the Accord, it is essential to understand its relationship with the trade unions (in particular the trade union leadership) and the working class in Australia.

The Accord agreement was characteristic of the social democratic nature of the Labor Party.

The ALP originated from working class struggles demanding economic and social reforms through government. In contrast to the conservative parties, the ALP has a distinct connection with the trade unions and the working class. The trade unions still control 50 per cent of the national Labor conference. Trade union officials often become members of Parliament

and senior leaders of the Labor Party.

Bob Hawke, for example, was a secretary of the ACTU, the peak trade union body, before becoming a Labor Prime Minister. Greg Combet was secretary of the ACTU and ran the unions' Your Rights at Work campaign, before getting a safe Labor seat. Moreover, there is still a significant (but declining) working class membership of the Labor Party and it is still the party that the more class-conscious workers look to to represent their interests. The material and ideological link between the Labor Party, trade unions and the working class was essential to Labor's ability to implement the Accord.

A Labor government in power is fundamentally committed to managing the capitalist system and therefore to resolving class contradictions in favour of business. In the years prior to the Accord neither Whitlam nor Fraser had been able to successfully rein in the unions sufficiently to make the working class pay for declining profitability.

When the recession hit in 1974,

union militancy produced the highest number of workdays lost due to industrial action in Australian history. This underpinned the efforts of big business to drive the Whitlam government out of office. In 1975, the Fraser Coalition government took office in particular to take on the unions. Yet a short commodities boom from 1979-81 gave unions and workers the confidence to push for another strike wave and win an increase in real wages.

In 1982 the boom in commodity prices collapsed, part of the sharpest downturn in the world economy since the Great Depression. There were mass sackings and a sharp decline in business investment. Rising unemployment gutted the unions and sapped the confidence of rank and file workers to fight.

A former centre of union strength was the Amalgamated Metal Workers Union (now Australian Manufacturing Worker Union, AMWU), whose "hot shops" set the benchmark for national wage increases. But the recession meant the left unions, previously willing to use their industrial muscle in the good times to get a share of the profits, were now looking for an alternative political (read: parliamentary) strategy.

It was the combination of this recession and the election of a new Labor Government under Bob Hawke in 1983 that made the Accord possible. The Accord seemed to offer union leaders an alternative to industrial action, something they were never entirely comfortable with. Union leaders accepted the no strike agreements, and policed them when workers rebelled, in return for wage increases determined by the Arbitration Commission. Wage agreements previously won through workplace militancy were now the subject of bureaucratic machinations with top officials and government institutions. Union activity was demobilised and organisation on the job declined as a result.

When the Accord was challenged, the Labor government used the state to attack workers. But it was the willingness of the union leaderships to isolate the rebel unions that allowed the Hawke Labor government to break the Builders Labourers' Federation (BLF), and later the pilots, when they tried to break out of the Accord straightjacket.

Throughout the 1970s and early 1980s, the BLF had led important struggles that won victories for all building industry workers, including holiday pay, sick leave and dozens of other entitlements. Despite signing the Accord, the BLF continued to fight for wage rises and improvements in

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conditions, effectively breaching the Accord agreement. In 1986, the ALP, with the support of the bosses, deregistered the BLF. Police were called onto worksites to break picket lines and arrest BLF members. Collaborating union officials refused to allow workers with BLF tickets onto work sites.

In 1980, the Australian Federation of Airline Pilots lodged a 29 per cent pay claim on behalf of pilots at Australian Airlines (later Qantas) whose wages had significantly fallen behind inflation. A successful campaign would have boosted the confidence of other workers suffering under the Accord. But the ALP, again with the support of the ACTU, cancelled pilots' awards, deregistered the union and threatened dismissals. Hawke even used RAAF planes and pilots to break the dispute, brought in overseas pilots as scab labour and bailed out airlines with tens of millions of dollars. Only a small number of pilots were re-employed in Australia, and only then on individual contracts. The examples of the BLF and the pilots demonstrate the real agenda behind the Accord "consensus".

Labor today

The introduction of enterprise bargaining under the Accord led to a shift away from the idea that wages should be tied to the cost of living. It also formally introduced the idea of "protected industrial action", restricted to a defined bargaining period. It paved the way for Howard's hugely unpopular Workplace Relations Act and then the WorkChoices legislation, which placed further restrictions on collective bargaining and enshrined individual contracts.

The experience of the Accord and enterprise bargaining has led some union officials to realise that they cannot rely on good relations with a Labor government to deliver gains for the working class. But in practice, their unwillingness to lead industrial action to win back the conditions taken off them led them straight back to relying on getting Labor elected as a strategy to defeat WorkChoices.

Nearing the 2007 election, the Your Rights at Work campaign officials changed the slogan from "Your rights at work, worth fighting for", to "Your rights at work, worth voting for".

The Accord demonstrated that although voting Labor still reflects an important union and working class vote, Labor in power is more concerned with the rights of business than the rights of workers. A Labor government will



A police raid on BLF offices during the deregistration

ruthlessly subordinate working class interests to the needs of the system if they think it is necessary.

Rudd and Gillard's FairWork Australia is essentially WorkChoices Lite. It maintains key aspects of WorkChoices, including outlawing pattern bargaining (campaigning for wage rises across more than one workplace, e.g. industry wide) and limiting the right to strike to bargaining periods. They have kept the Australian Building and Construction Commission (ABCC), that fines building unions for organising on the job, in place.

But the union officials wound down the Your Rights At Work campaign. There have been occasional protests, and even illegal one day strikes, against the ABCC's prosecution of construction workers—but no sustained campaign, mobilising the rank and file, to force Labor to scrap all of WorkChoices. The ACTU promised to make no demands of Gillard going into the 2010 election.

The defeat of the BLs and pilots by Hawke was never inevitable. If officials of other unions had been prepared to lead militant industrial solidarity action, there would have been a serious challenge to the Accord.

Similarly, if unions had used the industrial power of workers to really fight for our rights at work after Rudd's election, we would not have WorkChoices Lite, unions would not be facing record fines and Ark Tribe would not be facing jail at the hands of the ABCC. The CFMEU has promised a national strike if Ark is jailed. But far more is now at stake.

The threat of an Abbott minority government is a threat to the union movement as a whole. A mass mobilisation against Abbott would be the best action the unions could take to send a message to Labor and to ensure we don't see a return of the Coalition.

We cannot rely on Labor governments, but only on workers' industrial power. If the unions had fought Rudd and Gillard, we would not have a hung Parliament.

Regardless of whether Abbott or Gillard forms government, there is an urgent need to rebuild rank-and-file organisation and the political networks in the unions that can lay the basis for a renewed militancy. Until unions are willing to use their industrial power for political and economic ends, ordinary people will keep paying for crises of the system.

HUNGARY 1956: THE REVOLUTIONARY ALTERNATIVE TO STALINISM

The workers' rebellion in the Eastern European state of Hungary in 1956 shows how real socialism is possible, argues **Clare Fester**

SINCE THE end of “Communism” in 1989, Hungary has seen a decline in economic output, rising unemployment, decreasing living standards for the majority of people, and growing social inequality.

In recent years Hungary has been particularly badly hit by the economic downturn and in 2008 the government was forced to ask for a \$25 billion bailout from international lenders to avoid their mounting debt crisis. The economic crisis rapidly turned into a political crisis: the ruling socialist-liberal coalition is in complete disarray, and in the European Parliament elections last year the fascist Jobbik Party came third, with almost a sixth of the overall vote.

Hungary's transition to Western-style democracy and free market capitalism has had few desirable results. But Hungary's past provides one of the best examples of how an alternative to both Western market capitalism and the Russian imposed Stalinist system is possible.

The significance of the 1956 Revolution

The Hungarian 1956 Revolution exposed Stalin's Russia for what it was: a perversion of socialism, which was more than happy to attack workers' self-government when it threatened Russian power. The workers' councils that emerged during the revolution showed what true socialism looked like and are an inspiring example for us today.

The Russian Revolution in 1917 saw workers take power but had morphed into something horrific under Stalin. His regime of state ownership was controlled from above, not by ordinary people. Stalin used any means possible, be it decreased living standards or even forced starvation, to drive the Russian economy forwards. A new “Communist” ruling class



Victorious Hungarian workers climb aboard a siezed Russian tank in Hungary, 1956

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Stalin's regime of state ownership was controlled from above, not by ordinary people

brutally oppressed any kind of dissent. Stalin's Russia had nothing to do with socialism and is best described as state capitalist.

At the end of the Second World War in 1945 Hungary fell into the Russian sphere of influence and up until 1956 its people suffered hugely as Stalin's model of state capitalism was introduced.

Hungary's industrial centres in the north and agricultural land in south were an asset to Stalin. Capital accumulation was achieved by keeping production high and wages low. The Soviet Union would buy goods made in Hungary at low cost and then sell them back at inflated prices. This was part of an effort to bleed the Hungarian economy to speed industrial development in Russia.

A worker from the industrial district of Csepel Island in Budapest said: “The communists nationalised all the factories and similar enterprises, claiming the slogan ‘the factory is yours—you work for yourself’. Exactly the opposite was true. The promised us everything, at the same time subjugating us and pulling us down to the greatest misery conceivable.”

Despite the havoc state-run factories and collectivised farming caused, living standards generally rose for Hungarian people during the immediate post-war period. While their own living standards were rising, the mass of workers were prepared to put up with the class antagonisms and injustices Russian control brought.

In 1955 the economy went into crisis due to bureaucratic blunders

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The Russians were willing to destroy Hungary in order to maintain their power

and economic mismanagement. The oil fields in Western Hungary were accidentally flooded due to a too rapid a rise in production ordered by Hungary's Stalinist leader Matyas Rakosi. This was just one example of a ruling class's interest in production at any cost, environmental or social. Amongst Hungarians there was a rising feeling of discontent.

The 'Secret Speech'

When Stalin died in 1953 there was confusion among the Soviet ruling class around how to move forward; indecisive policy and leadership changes showed there was debate at the top.

The height of this was when Stalin's successor Khrushchev made his "secret speech" (that everyone in the world would come to hear) to a small group of the Communist Party elite in February 1956. He denounced Stalin's repressive regime, the paranoid murder of intellectuals and dissidents, and other brutalities and failures during Stalin's leadership.

Inside Russia and its satellite states the "secret speech" was the first time anyone had openly criticised Stalin without legitimately fearing for their own or their families' lives.

The speech had much greater implications than Khrushchev intended. Denouncing Stalin not only cast doubt on his rule, but the entire Soviet

system. By opening up criticism of the Stalin regime at the top, Khrushchev also allowed debate to trickle down to intellectuals, sparking the debates seen in the Communist youth forum the Petofi Circle in Hungary, and then down to the working class where long-standing dissatisfaction erupted. Communist leaders who had justified imprisoning or executing dissidents and former leading figures during the 1940s and 1950s were forced to admit they were wrong – and people started to demand answers about why their leaders hadn't told the truth in the past.

For the Soviet ruling class denouncing Stalin was supposed to promote the image of reform whilst legitimising the next phase of Soviet rule. In reality it gave political fuel to resistance.

1956 was marked with protests in Poland, Georgia and Hungary.

Prelude and radicalisation

The Hungarian Revolution was initially triggered by events in Poland.

The Polish government responded to demonstrations in the industrial city of Poznan by restoring Gomulka, a reformer who Stalin had earlier imprisoned, as Polish leader. For a short time it looked like Poland would face intervention by Russian troops.

In October Hungarian students called a demonstration in solidarity

with the Polish people. Initially the Hungarian government allowed the demonstration to take place. But when the students were joined by tens of thousands of Hungarian workers, they panicked and tried to crack down.

The revolution took shape as spreading protests forced the Hungarian government into disarray. In Budapest during late October some of the Hungarian elite fled to underground bunkers to wait out the violence. Many members of the police force including the police chief joined the demonstrators. Only one army corps followed orders to quell the protests, while others remained neutral or even defected to the protesters. The only force seriously obeying the state's commands was the state security police. In light of this Hungarian Stalinist leader Gero called on Soviet forces for military support to crush the revolution.

At its peak in October there were around 15,000 protesters in Budapest fighting the state security police and the Russian army.

Workers' councils

The emergence of workers' councils that sustained the 1956 Revolution were its most striking feature. Budapest was the centre of the movement. It produced more than half the country's industrial output and 46 per cent of Hungary's workers lived there.

The first workers' council was established on October 23 at the United Lamp factory in Ujpest that employed some 10,000 people. By October 31 the councils had spread to other industrial suburbs of the city and a central council was set up. It issued a statement saying:

"The supreme controlling body of the factory is the workers' council democratically elected by the workers ... The director is employed by the factory. The director and the highest employees are to be elected by the workers' council... the director is responsible to the workers' council in every matter which concerns the factory."

The councils were democratically elected bodies controlled entirely by the workers. They effectively took the means of production into their own hands and oversaw things like wages, hiring and firing and food distribution.

The Communist Party and official trade unions, which upheld the Stalinist system and helped repress Hungarian workers, were made redundant and replaced by the democratic self-government of workers' councils.

The councils were most successful



Workers tore down a giant statue of Stalin and dragged it far outside the city

in highly industrialised areas in the country's north and west and university towns. Even though radicalisation in major agricultural areas was less than in the industrial centres, many peasants left their state-run farms. By 1957 only around 6 per cent of peasants were left working for the state farms.

General strikes

During the revolution Hungarian workers sustained one of the most comprehensive general strikes ever; they produced food, electricity and gas, as well as allowing public transport to continue in order to keep the revolution going, but nothing beyond that.

Workers closed down around 80 per cent of industrial production for over a month. Rail workers refused to transport Russian troops or supplies. The Communist ruling class had huge military power behind it, but the Hungarian people controlled the useful bits of society. They couldn't make all the workers work at gunpoint.

Out of the general strike the workers' councils demanded a program of democratisation. Imre Nagy, a member of Hungary's Communist elite with a reputation as a reformer, took power and reached a ceasefire agreement that saw Russian troops pulled out of Budapest on November 1.

Crushing the revolution

But the Russians knew that losing grip

on Hungary to the workers' councils could topple their entire power structure. If Russian and satellite state workers could see success in the Hungarian Revolution they too might seek to overthrow Soviet rule.

Nagy was replaced with the Russian puppet Kadar and Russian troops re-entered Hungary for a second round of fighting on November 4. Industrial areas maintained the strongest opposition.

This was a hugely bloody period of the revolution. Overall 200,000 people left the country and over 2000 were killed, most of them under 30, and 60 per cent of these died in the second wave of fighting.

Kadar denounced the revolutionaries as fascists and counter-revolutionaries funded by Western imperialism. He claimed, "We are going to defend the interest of the workers and peasants and the achievements of the people's democracy".

But his action received no support from the mass of Hungarian workers.

He oversaw a wave of mass arrests and executions, particularly against the organisers of the workers' councils. Russian military might made communication impossible between the councils and resistance all over the country crumbled.

The last pocket of resistance in Csepel called a ceasefire on November 10. Despite overwhelming military force it took until early January to completely destroy the revolution.

Isolated strikes and demonstrations continued well into 1957.

Crushing the revolution today

In western media sources then and Hungarian political culture now, the 1956 Revolution is portrayed as part of a story of Hungary's march toward western free market capitalism. 1956 is presented as a precursor to 1989—when all the Eastern European satellite states overthrew their Stalinist leaders and brought down the Soviet system. But these revolutions led to a transition to free market capitalism, which is very far removed from what the workers' councils were trying to achieve in 1956.

One of the leaflets distributed by the Gyor Railway Workers in 1956 read: "We stand opposed to the restoration of the land to the aristocracy and industry and banking to the capitalists. At the same time we oppose any restoration of the Stalinist-Rakosi clique."

We can see this revolution wasn't about transitioning from Stalinist state capitalism to Western market capitalism; it was a genuine socialist revolution which commentators and historians have tried to write out of history.

Lessons for the future

The Hungarian revolution was one of the major ideological turning points for socialists in the 20th century.

David Widgery said in *The Left in Britain 1956-68*: "In Hungary in 1956 Stalin's tanks blew apart the left in the rest of the world. Old complacencies were shattered and new parties, new ideas and events brought a new militancy. The ferment continued for a decade and burst out in 1968 in Paris and across much of the world."

The dominance on the Western left of the pro-Moscow Communist Parties was weakened. Hungary showed an alternative to both Stalinism and Western capitalism. The workers' councils in Hungary are an example of what socialism from below looks like and how it could be achieved.

Socialist historian Mike Haynes calls Hungary a country built on lies. The biggest lie perpetuated is that "Communism" in Russia and Eastern Europe during the 20th Century represented any kind of socialism, and that there was no other alternative to capitalism.

This is a lie socialists face all the time. Knowing the truth about Hungary's revolution makes us better equipped to debunk these lies and fight for a better world—just as they did.

SPYING EYES: ASIO AND THE COMMUNIST PARTY

The Family File
 By Mark Aarons,
 Black Inc, \$34.95

WRITING A four-generation history of a family intimately linked with the history of the Communist Party of Australia (CPA) is not an easy task, especially if you are a member of that family.

Mark Aarons has done this and in the process has tried to make a judgement of the political strengths and weaknesses of himself, his family members and the party.

It is a painful process for anyone to face up to political errors, particularly serious ones.

If he has not fully succeeded in facing up to past mistakes, he still paints a portrait of a radical Jewish family which made great sacrifices for what they believed was a noble cause, but which was in large measure in the service of counter-revolutionary Stalinism.

Aarons is a political and trade union activist who has written books such as *Sanctuary: Nazi Fugitives in Australia* and *East Timor: A Western Made Tragedy*. A member of the CPA until 1978, he served as a senior adviser to the NSW Labor government from 1996-2007.

In the past period he has emerged as a leading representative of a drive to turn the ALP into a Blairite New Labor Party with his call to reduce union representation in the party.

Aarons points out that from the 1920s to the 1970s, and beyond, his family were the principal target of a range



The Communist Party of Australia, pictured here at a May Day rally in 1966, played a significant role in the labour movement at the same time as supporting the counter-revolutionary Stalinist regime and its crimes

of spy agencies including the Commonwealth Investigation Branch, the Security Service, the Commonwealth Investigation Branch, ASIO and the state police Special Branches.

Aarons had 13 of his families' ASIO files declassified: 209 volumes of files, photographs, films and tapes—a total of 32,000 pages. Aarons' father, Laurie, had 85 volumes of over 14,000 pages.

Despite all this Aarons has a remarkably benign attitude to ASIO—which

is completely unaccountable and has had an enormous increase in its draconian powers under the Howard government with Labor Party blessing. Aarons concludes that ASIO “had a legitimate task”.

Communist Party's role

In the case of the CPA, all of ASIO's efforts were based on a fundamentally flawed premise: that the CPA represented a revolutionary threat to Australian capitalism. But for much of its history it was any-

thing but that.

Among its other crimes the CPA denounced Trotskyists, and other lefts, as “fascist” and supported the Moscow Trials; the Hitler-Stalin Pact; and the crushing of the East German workers' uprising in 1953 and the Hungarian Revolution in 1956. Aarons deals with some of these—even if in a limited way.

It is correct, nonetheless, that the CPA made some positive contributions such as leading industrial struggles around the forty-hour week

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and job safety, supporting Aboriginal rights, and playing a role in the anti-war movement and international solidarity.

But there are some aspects of the CPA's role after its limited break with Stalinism around the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 that need to be challenged.

Although Aarons does not deal with it, for whatever reason, the CPA was instrumental in the development of the Prices and Incomes Accord in the early 1980s. Metalworkers' leader and CPA leading member Laurie Carmichael played a crucial role in promoting this policy.

While it is commonplace now in the union movement to correctly criticise the Accord for having a major effect on weakening industrial struggles, at the time only one delegate opposed this policy—Jenny Haines of the NSW Nurses Association.

Aarons does not claim to be writing a history of the CPA and his book must be accepted within the limitations of a family political biography.

But he does draw some lessons from his family's history—unfortunately often the wrong ones.

Stalinism versus Bolshevism

The central problem is that Aarons identifies Stalinism with Bolshevism and can only see two options: either Stalinism/Bolshevism or capitalism.

He cannot see a revolutionary alternative to Stalinism and so his rejection of Stalinism is also a rejection of Marxism. For him the end of the CPA is the end of the socialist project and Marxism is "a fatally flawed ideology".

There is scarcely a

mention of Trotskyism in the book and those—such as Nick Origlass and Issy Weiner—who fought the Stalinist politics of the CPA well before the late 1960s, are ignored.

Aarons argues that the CPA's difficulties can be attributed, at least in part, to the adoption of a model of party building that was appropriate in Tsarist Russia, but is not applicable in countries like Australia.

This included "a steely discipline that demanded that members subjugate themselves to 'democratic centralism', under which the central apparatus exercised ultimate power."

Writers such as Paul Le Blanc (Lenin and the Revolutionary Party, 1990) have demolished this view and shown that in fact the Bolshevik party under Lenin was full of tendencies and groupings at various times which gave it enormous life and vitality.

The monolithic Stalinist model, which was gradually imposed on the CPA in the 1920s, was the very opposite of Leninist democracy.

Nonetheless, Aarons has written an interesting account of the development of Stalinism from one family's point of view and how some family members tried to come to terms with that terrible legacy.

In 2000, after a gap of 30 years, Laurie Aarons met Jack McPhillips, an ex-CPA member who remained a hardline Stalinist.

Asked about Stalin, Aarons said:

"Well, Jack, I don't think there is much in favour of a man who murdered 20 million of his own people." At the age of 90 McPhillips replied: "Yes, I suppose you're right."

Phil Sandford

LETTERS

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Chavez no advocate of the Cuban model

In Mark Gillespie's article on Cuba (*Solidarity* Mo. 26), the figure of Hugo Chavez is pictured prominently with the caption that he "invokes the Cuban model as a goal for the whole of Latin America" this is simply not true.

Chavez has clearly and repeatedly stated that the movement that he leads does wish to follow a Cuban model but develop its own path.

This has actually been used on occasion to reject policies that *Solidarity* would, I presume, support, such as further nationalisations of industry. Further, the mentioning of Venezuela and Bolivia within the introduction appears to suggest that the article is aimed as a partial polemic against the role of the Cuban model within those two countries political process.

Further, while not advocating an uncritical approach towards Chavez' government, reforms implemented under his leadership have seen the massive growth in grassroots democracy and the beginning to a challenge to the dictates of capital.

This challenge has been paralleled by the massive growth in the US propaganda war that wants to paint Venezuela as undemocratic and Chavez as supporting both drug smugglers and the "terrorist" FARC in neighbouring Colombia.

Underpinning this campaign is the attempt to claim that Chavez wants to take Venezuela down the Cuban path.

By all means criticism of Cuba is necessary to reassert that socialism has to be led the working class and based on a massive extension of democracy but I can't see how it benefits a critique of Cuba or our understanding of the political situation in Venezuela; by making it out that the Cuban model looms large within the Bolivarian movement. Admittedly there are people who are unreconstructed Guevarists or Stalinists but these are on the margin and don't play a significant role.

Venezuela is perhaps the most exciting and dynamic anti-capitalist movements on a continent that is leading the way in showing that "Another World is Possible".

I would rather read articles that attempt to relate to this exciting new development in the socialist movement and draw out its many contradictions than this guilt by false association.

Stephen Martin

Debate on Cuban model is relevant to Venezuela

Steve is reading a little too much into things to criticise an article on the basis of a photo caption. Mark's article itself makes only one reference to Venezuela, which is simply to say, "it is being looked to as a model for 21st century socialism". This is clearly true. There is an obvious connection between supporters of the Cuban model and those that champion Chavez.

Given that a range of groups internationally, including some from Trotskyist backgrounds,

have wrongly seen Cuba as socialist the subject is clearly of much more general importance—both inside and outside Latin America.

Chavez may have rhetorically rejected a Cuban model on occasions. But to understand the political dynamic of Venezuela's Bolivarian radical nationalism, you have to look at the reality not the rhetoric.

There are thousands of Cuban technicians and advisers working for the Venezuelan state, and commentators such as Chris Harman and Mike Gonzales have noted that they seemed to be advising the Venezuelan government to opt for a Cuban version of democratic participation—where the mass of the population participates in the implementation of policy but the direction is set from the top down.

The future direction of Venezuelan revolutionary process is not settled, but the mixture of top down state control, nationalisation and popular participation is obvious.

The only guarantee of the process moving forward is the development of the independent initiative and strength of Venezuelan working class.

While there may be much to celebrate in the involvement of the masses in recent Venezuelan history, this not mean socialists should take an uncritical attitude towards Chavez's role.

Finally *Solidarity* has never done anything other than defend regimes like Cuba and Venezuela from US imperialism.

James Supple

WIKILEAKS EXPOSES COST OF AFGHAN WAR

By Tony Bozdagci

THE RECENT leak of over 90,000 secret US military documents on the WikiLeaks website reveals the truth about the war in Afghanistan.

Mounting, unreported, civilian deaths are compounded by an increasingly popular and defiant Taliban resistance—both thorns in the side of a US administration struggling to justify its nine-year occupation of the country.

The 90,000 pages of event logs shed light on what is becoming an unwinnable war for the US and its allies. The leaked documents reveal the glossing over of civilian deaths and an increasingly well organised and well resourced Taliban resistance. For example, Stinger surface-to-air missiles previously supplied by the US to the Mujahideen to fight the Soviet Union have been used by the Taliban against coalition military aircraft.

The documents reveal the US covered up a missile attack on a helicopter in 2007 to avoid publicly admitting that the Taliban possessed advanced weaponry.

The leaks confirm that the US presence in Afghanistan is the source of violence, particularly against civilians.

Countless documents even report civilian deaths at peaceful demonstrations.

This makes a mockery of any claim about winning the “hearts and minds” of the Afghan people. It also illustrates that the immediate withdrawal of all foreign troops is the only way to end the violence.

Rising civilian toll

Reports of bombings and deaths of civilians continue to mount. Three US-led attacks within four days in July—one in Nangarhar, and two in Helmand province—killed 94 Afghans, including 70 civilians.

The first of these attacks in Helmand province, which killed 50 civilians, is one of the worst cases of indiscriminant slaughter in the nine-year war. Taliban fighters had warned residents to leave the area where intense gunfire was being exchanged.



The ballooning civilian death toll in Afghanistan has made it impossible for the US to win popular support for its occupation

Members of eight families fled the area and sought refuge in a house in a nearby village. The house was later blasted to rubble by a NATO air strike.

One resident, Abdul Samad said, “they targeted an area which we believed was safer, but in one hit they killed over 50 people.

“Most of them were children and women, and I have lost my relatives as well.”

Regarding the same incident, communication director Rear Admiral Greg Smith said, “All fires were observed and accounted for and struck the intended target.”

This is a sanitised and clinical portrayal of US war tactics, but represents the failure to uphold the façade. Widespread support for the Taliban resistance has led the US military to treat Afghan civilians as combatants during firefights.

Speaking at a news conference in

Kabul in August, UN special envoy Staffan de Mistura said, “We are worried about the future, because the human cost of this war is too much... Afghan children and women are increasingly bearing the brunt of this conflict.”

In the US, even before the documents were leaked, popular opinion had turned against the war. President Obama is feeling the pressure. He has postponed the US summer offensive and has promised to reduce troop numbers by summer 2011.

Here in Australia, Defense Minister John Faulkner admitted that the recent spate of Australian troop deaths will put pressure on his government to withdraw the troops. A recent Essential Media poll revealed 61 per cent of Australians want a full troop withdrawal.

Growing opposition to the war reflects the crisis in the US war strategy. Obama’s surge of troops has failed to stabilise the US-led occupation. The town of Marjah, scene of the first major test of the new strategy, has returned to Taliban control.

Shortly before he was dismissed by President Obama, former head of US operations in Afghanistan General McChrystal described it as a “bleeding ulcer”.

With so much blood on their hands the US forces can never win the “hearts and minds” of the Afghans. Moreover, their divide and rule strategy has not been successful.

In the south and the east, the Taliban resistance controls the villages, and in the north and west, the government of Hamid Karzai has begun to lose control. Non-Pashtun militias have refused to succumb to ethnic divisions and instead work with the Taliban.

The Taliban has captured control of large parts of the country due to their increasing popularity as the only serious resistance to the US-led occupation.

This shows us once again that oppressed people the world over are not oblivious to the bloody history of US occupations and wars, and they will fight them—and do whatever is necessary to win.

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