

Solidarity

Issue No. 42 / February 2012

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GREECE, EGYPT, AROUND THE WORLD: CAPITALISM VS THE 99% IT'S THEIR CRISIS MAKE THEM PAY



INSIDE: THE 1972 TENT EMBASSY - THATCHER'S REAL LEGACY - STOP MURDOCH'S ASSAULT ON THE GREENS

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, in the interests of human need not profit.

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, against racism and to strengthen the confidence of rank and file unionists.

Solidarity is a member of the International Socialist Tendency. Visit our web site at www.solidarity.net.au/about-us for more information on what we stand for.

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/ up to date details of demonstrations and meetings

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Sydney

Thursday February 23

From Murdoch to Fairfax: Does the media control our minds?

Thursday March 8

International Women's Day Film Screening Special Fundraiser

The fight for equal pay:

Made in Dagenham

Thursday March 15

**Labor and the Great Depression:
"Socialism in our time"**

Sydney Solidarity meets 7pm every Thursday at the Brown st Hall, above Newtown library on King Street, Newtown.

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Tuesday February 21

Lessons from the refugee campaign under Howard

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Australian Christian Lobby email to MPs against same-sex marriage

"I find the opera here [in Australia] the halls, the dress, it's all a little shabby."

Andrew Bolt, a man of the people

"Thousands of people are still joining every year but now they are quitting just as fast... And it is not because they couldn't vote for a national conference delegate. It is because the government does stuff they hate ... and it never explains why."

West Australian ALP State Secretary Simon Mead explains why Gillard's plans to increase ALP membership will fail

"Our reasoning is to make a contribution to the democratic process"

ASX spokesperson Matthew Gibbs says the company's love for democracy explains why it donated \$50,000 to both Labor and Liberal parties in 2010

"This is the most serious security scare an Australian prime minister has faced since the Fraser era."

Chris Pyne tries to outdo the media hysterics over the Tent Embassy protest

"Preventive war can be a lesser evil than a policy of appeasement... It feels like the eve of some creative destruction."

Right wing historian Niall Ferguson calls on Israel to launch "a new Six Day War" against Iran

"On the current path... we may very well see Greek GDP go down 25-30 per cent, which would be historically unprecedented. It's a disastrous crisis for them"

Former World Bank official Uri Dadush

Labor's right-wing politics gives the Liberals a chance in Queensland



PREMIER ANNA Bligh's unpopular privatisations should mean Labor is headed for a trouncing in the Queensland state election on March 24. But the more voters see of Liberal National Party (LNP) leader Campbell Newman the less they like him.

The surge in Anna Bligh's popularity after last year's Queensland floods quickly disappeared as voters remembered her record as Premier. Labor's support plummeted when it announced a \$14 billion privatisation package back in 2009, just weeks after it failed to mention the plans at the last election. Public opposition to the sale of Queensland Rail freight and coal arms, forestry plantations and the Port of Brisbane was consistently rated at about 80 per cent.

Three unions have officially announced they will not support Bligh in the election as a result of the privatisations—the Electrical Trades Union, the Rail Tram and Bus Union and the construction division of the CFMEU.

ETU state secretary Peter Simpson told the media, "In the last state election campaign we worked hard for the return of the Bligh government... only to have the Bligh government kick us in the guts after they won".

Bligh has continued Peter Beattie's pro-business policies, with her Treasurer Andrew Fraser boasting, "The payroll tax is still the lowest in the nation and our tax take per capita is well below the average of other states".

As a result the state has less hospital beds than the national average, and in 2010 spent less on health per person than every other state. Bligh has an-

Above: Anna Bligh (left) and Labor might hand victory to Liberal Campbell Newman (right)

nounced a sweeping plan to reform the health department bureaucracy in an effort to be seen to act.

The latest Galaxy poll has the LNP leading Labor by 59 to 41 per cent—which should be enough to secure a wipeout.

But LNP leader Campbell Newman's campaign has been hit by scandals after a \$15 million property deal partly negotiated while he was Brisbane's Lord Mayor was referred to Queensland's corruption watchdog. The property company was a major donor to Newman's election fund.

His party's association with mining magnate Clive Palmer has also damaged his campaign. Newman was caught out lying after he claimed never to have discussed rail freight problems with Palmer.

Campbell Newman's own battle to win a seat from outside parliament is a straw in the wind. Newman needs a 7 per cent swing to take the seat of Ashgrove from the sitting Labor member—and current polling has them neck and neck. If the LNP cannot win seats like Ashgrove, it will struggle to take power.

A further problem for Newman is the emergence of maverick Bob Katter's new party, which could take four seats from the LNP. And if it wins a chunk of the vote in other marginal seats it could make them harder for the LNP to win. One poll suggested Katter's party would get 24 per cent in some North Queensland seats.

Labor only has its own addiction to neo-liberal policies to blame.

James Supple

The surge in Anna Bligh's popularity following last year's floods has quickly disappeared

Desperation in detention fuels need for Easter convergence

By Mark Goudkamp

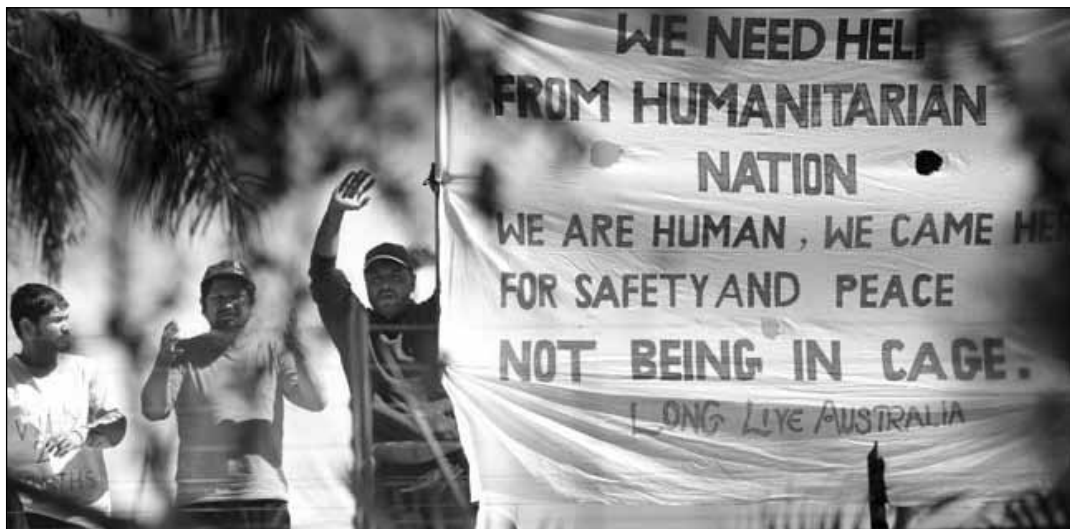
FROM APRIL 6-9, refugee rights activists will again focus attention on the reality behind the detention wire. This Easter activists will converge on Darwin, which is quickly becoming the detention capital, with up to 1000 imprisoned in three detention centres.

In early February, over the course of two days, four people in the Northern Immigration Detention Centre (NIDC) attempted suicide by hanging and overdose. A Kurdish man—who is among hundreds found to be refugees but waiting for ASIO security clearances—placed six stitches in his lips.

NIDC was in perpetual crisis throughout 2011. As former NIDC mental health nurse Ena Grigg told *Lateline*, “Being locked in a prison with not knowing how you are going to get out or when you are going to get out or why you are even there... is driving people mad.”

According to Immigration Department statistics, on January 31 there were 283 detainees in NIDC, 450 in Wickham Point (recently built on mosquito infested swampland 90 minutes outside of Darwin), and hundreds more in the Darwin Airport Lodge.

2012 is the 20th anniversary of the introduction of mandatory detention. Easter will mark ten years since the refugee rights movement’s first Easter convergence—Woomera 2002, when busloads of protesters were met by



Above: Asylum seekers in Darwin detention centre protest last year

protests by detainees, many of whom leapt through the fence—literally into the arms of the movement.

Across the country, 4783 people are in detention. A total of 528 children are still being detained.

After four years of Labor government, levels of self-harm and suicide in detention are, if anything, worse than they were during the worst years of the Howard-Ruddock regime.

The collapse of the government’s Malaysia Solution and the stalemate with Tony Abbott over offshore processing hasn’t led to any substantial changes to Labor’s policy.

Labor’s opening of the Pontville detention centre in Tasmania last year—where Afghan Hazaras recently

mounted a hunger strike—means there are now detention facilities in every state and territory except the ACT.

Over the Easter weekend, there will be protests at each of Darwin’s detention centres, beginning with a protest through central Darwin on Friday, and on Saturday night refugee activists will join with anti-NT Intervention campaigners for a Rock Against Racism concert. On Easter Monday, protests will target Villawood (Sydney) and Broadmeadows (Melbourne).

2012 is set to be a big year—from events in May to mark the 20th anniversary of mandatory detention, to World Refugee Day rallies in June, to increased campaigning aimed at stopping deportations.

Challenging Labor’s plans for forced deportations of refugees

ON FEBRUARY 8-9, an important case went before the High Court. The outcome—which won’t be known until at least March—will determine whether the Federal government can push ahead with plans to forcibly deport scores of so-called “failed” Afghan and Sri Lankan asylum seekers, and others considered by the government to be “out of process”.

This High Court case could have as significant an impact as the M61 case in November 2010, which resulted in offshore applicants having the same right as onshore asylum seekers to seek judicial review of their refugee assessments. Success this time would allow asylum seekers to seek judicial review of advice given to the Minister when making final decisions regarding appeals to remain in Australia.

Late last year, the attempt to

The outcome will determine whether the Federal government can push ahead with plans to forcibly deport scores of so-called “failed” asylum seekers

remove Ismail Mirza Jan, the first Afghan asylum seeker under Australia’s widely condemned Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Afghan government, was stopped by a High Court injunction. Two Tamil men Emil and Vithuran, who also faced deportation last December, are also among the claimants.

It is unthinkable that the government would consider sending asylum seekers to either Afghanistan or Sri Lanka. Describing Afghanistan, Human Rights Watch said that 2011 was, “the most violent year ever and the worst year for civilian casualties”. The US State Department admits “no part of Afghanistan should be considered immune from violence”.

As minority Shiite Muslims, Hazaras face systematic religious persecution. In early December 2011,

at least 58 Shiites were killed in a bomb attack on a Kabul mosque.

In Sri Lanka, Tamils remain subject to military harassment almost three years after the end of the civil war. A fact finding mission by Tamil MP M.A. Sumanthiran recently documented, “state brutality including sexual assault, land grabs and occupation”.

Raising the issue of deportation will be an important aspect of the refugee campaign in the period ahead. RAC groups held rallies in both Sydney and Melbourne to coincide with the start of the hearing. The movement has been circulating two petitions—one to the Australian government, the other to the Afghan ambassador—as part of striving to prevent any asylum seeker being deported to danger—as happened all too often during the Howard years.

Mark Goudkamp

Labor takes aim at people smugglers, but their detention policy is the real crime

By Ian Rintoul

AT LABOR'S national conference in December, Julia Gillard and Immigration Minister Chris Bowen managed to drag Labor's refugee policy even further to the right. While a Labor for Refugees' resolution to end mandatory detention was narrowly defeated, Bowen's resolution to allow third country processing of asylum seekers was carried. This means that the Malaysia Solution is now covered by official Labor policy.

Just afterwards, an asylum seeker boat sank on its way to Australia from Java. Around 200 lives were lost in the tragedy. Bowen did nothing to assist either the survivors or the relatives of those drowned living in Australia.

But cynically, and so typically, he used the tragedy to try and pressure the Coalition into agreeing to support the Malaysia Solution, in exchange for Labor agreeing to re-open a detention centre on Nauru.

Abbott's subsequent refusal to "play ball" has nothing to do with human rights concerns about refugees in Malaysia, but rather is a cold calculation that the Coalition can continue to gain electoral advantage out of refugee-bashing.

The Coalition did agree to meet Labor on Christmas Eve—but it came to nothing, except that it put Labor's abject capitulation on display and give Abbott another opportunity to insist on the re-introduction of temporary protection visas (TPVs).

As long as this stand off continues, asylum seekers will be processed in Australia. But there are still two determination systems for refugees: one for those who arrive on the mainland (usually by plane) and the other for those who arrive by boat on excised territory and are regarded as off-shore entry persons (OEPs).

The outcome of all of this is that thousands of refugees are still left stranded in detention.

Last November Bowen announced an increase in releases from detention via bridging visas. He even gave a figure of 100 a month, or more. But three months later and the best count is that only 185 have been released on bridging visas. Two hundred and thirty-four have been released into community detention.



Above: Three young Indonesian men facing the possibility of five years in jail for crewing asylum boats

But there are no rules and the arbitrary nature of the Immigration Department's decisions is causing even more stress as some people get out and others are left to rot. In late January, 150 Hazara asylum seekers launched a hunger strike at Pontville in Tasmania to try and get some answers. But all they got was hot air and excuses.

People smuggling

At every turn Chris Bowen uses the spectre of "evil" people smuggling to try to sell Labor's commitment to Malaysia and to mandatory detention. Bowen talks incessantly of "breaking the people smugglers' business model" (although he has never been able to articulate what that is). It is a not-so-thinly disguised attack on refugees.

At the Labor conference, Home Affairs Minister Brendan O'Connor absurdly likened people smugglers bringing asylum seekers to Australia with human trafficking and slavery. But asylum seekers want to take the boat, they're not forced against their will.

O'Connor also attacked the so-called "base criminal motives" of people smugglers. Now, it is without doubt that people smugglers make a profit—but since when has the Labor Party considered that to be a "base

criminal motive"? In any case, there are many examples of people smugglers offering free travel or financial aid to families with sick children.

In December, Labor and the Coalition combined forces to change the law to prevent a legal challenge that questioned the very idea that there was in fact anything criminal about people smuggling. The Victorian Court of Appeal had been about to consider the argument that transporting people who had a right to enter Australia was not unlawful.

Among human rights groups, lawyers and even judges, the tide is certainly turning against the mandatory sentencing element of the people smuggling laws that demands even the poor Indonesian crew of asylum boats are sentenced to a minimum of five years in jail.

Since Kevin Rudd denounced people smugglers as "vile scum", Labor has used such rhetoric to demonise asylum seekers. But as long as asylum seekers fleeing persecution need to get to Australia, they will have to use informal travel arrangements sometimes with fake documents or none at all.

To get a genuinely humanitarian refugee policy, we will not only to campaign to end mandatory detention, but also to scrap mandatory sentencing and end the criminalisation of people smuggling.

Behind the media beat up: Tent Embassy protesters have nothing to apologise for



By Penny McCall Howard

PROTESTS CELEBRATING the Aboriginal Tent Embassy have been subject to a vicious media campaign, after a snap protest directed at Tony Abbott and Julia Gillard. This ridiculous beat-up was an attempt to discredit legitimate demands for Aboriginal rights and self-determination.

Two thousand people from all over Australia came to Canberra on January 26 to celebrate 40 years since the Tent Embassy was established, demand sovereignty and to draw attention to the continuing horrific living conditions, police brutality and denial of land rights that still faces Aboriginal people.

That morning, Tony Abbott was asked about the relevance of the Tent Embassy today. He replied: "I think a lot has changed... and I think it probably is time to move on from that."

The truth is the opposite. As Redfern activist Lyall Munro told the crowd, "things are worse for us now than when I came out of a mission school over 40 years ago". In 1972 the Aboriginal activists who occupied the lawns of Parliament House were demanding land rights and an end to government assimilation policies (see page 9). But in 2012 both parties support Labor's "Stronger Futures" legislation that will extend the racist

NT intervention for ten years. The policy aims to assimilate Aboriginal people through the de-funding of communities and Protection-era controls on land, alcohol and income.

What actually happened?

At the protest, Abbott's remarks about the Embassy were relayed to the crowd by anti-Intervention campaigner Barb Shaw, who also reported that at that very moment Tony Abbott was a mere 100 meters away. People walked over and were surprised to see both Abbott and Gillard clearly visible through the glass walls of a restaurant.

Embassy veterans who asked to address Gillard and Abbott were refused. A few people banged on the glass and others chanted and took pictures.

Then, without any warning, riot police burst out of the restaurant, shoving aside demonstrators with their shields and kicking people out of the way, dragging Abbott and Gillard behind them.

Notably, Michael Anderson, the last surviving member of the original 1972 Tent Embassy, struggled to remain standing as he was crushed between riot police and the steel bars on the steps.

There have been no arrests and no one was harmed—apart from the demonstrators shoved by police.

Gillard and Abbott complained

Above: Images like this one were splashed across the front covers of major newspapers

about being trapped and worried about their safety. But there was never any threat. And they were protected by a phalanx of armed men. Aboriginal people have no such security. They are frequently assaulted by police. The levels of incarceration of Aboriginal people are the same as they were 20 years ago.

Hypocrisy and the Intervention

The incident pushed the Tent Embassy to the front of news coverage. Yet despite being forced to address some of the real issues, the media and politicians also initiated a vicious smear campaign against the Tent Embassy and the protest. They labelled the demonstration a "violent mob", a "riot" and covered the incident as if someone had attacked the Prime Minister.

Former NSW Premier Bob Carr commented, "The tent embassy in Canberra says nothing to anyone and should have been quietly packed up years ago. Every government in Australia is aware of its responsibilities to Aboriginal Australians." His message is the same as Abbott's—Aboriginal people have nothing left to complain about.

A layer of conservative Aboriginal people in positions of power have chosen to attack or dismiss the protest. Their attitudes correspond to their positions on the Intervention. They included Mick Gooda, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commissioner. It is rumoured that he and his office will not be opposing the new Intervention legislation.

Sue Gordon also criticised the protest. But she can have no credibility on what Aboriginal communities want after riding into communities in the NT accompanied by the army during the roll out of the Intervention.

The kind of movement that created the Tent Embassy is needed again today. We need to unite to campaign against the cementing of the Intervention for another ten years.

Julia Gillard must not be allowed to get away with reciting tributes to "elders past and present" and then getting her riot police to shove them out of the way when they criticise her policies.

The defiant spirit on display at the Embassy in 1972 and the tradition of struggle it represents must be carried on in 2012 by everyone who supports Aboriginal rights.

The beat up is an attempt to discredit legitimate demands for Aboriginal rights

Stop Murdoch's attack on The Greens— Defend Lee Rhiannon

By Amy Thomas

THE AUSTRALIAN newspaper is on the warpath against The Greens and Left Senator Lee Rhiannon again.

The Murdoch rag famously called on voters to “destroy” The Greens in September 2010 and played a major role in attacking the Green-dominated Marrickville Council’s support for the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaign against apartheid Israel in 2011.

Now journalist Christian Kerr has concocted a “reds under the bed” style scandal about a supposed meeting 40 years ago in 1970 between Rhiannon and the KGB, the notorious secret police of the former Soviet Union.

There was no such moral outrage from *The Australian* when Mark Arbib was outed as one of the US Embassy’s much more recent “best Australian informants” by WikiLeaks in 2010.

Unlike in Arbib’s case, there is no hard proof that Rhiannon, an activist against the war in Vietnam at the time, ever met the KGB. Rhiannon denies it, and has drawn attention to the fact that the story relies on parts of her ASIO file that are kept censored from the public, saying on her blog:

“An important question that emerges from Kerr’s stories is why and how this *Australian* reporter receives censored ASIO material about a Greens MP.”

New essay

Lamentably, *The Australian*’s campaign has been assisted by a new essay on debates between the right and left in The Greens in the nominally left publication *The Monthly*, “Divided we Fall”. *The Australian* usually does all it can to rubbish *The Monthly* and its star writer Robert Manne, but now they’ve become its biggest champions, republishing lengthy quotes from “Divided We Fall” from those in the right of The Greens who are critical of Rhiannon and the NSW Left.

Unfortunately the right in The Greens is no help in fighting of Murdoch’s onslaught. They have given Neighbour—and subsequently *The Australian*—plenty of ammunition to use against The Greens as a whole.

Following the onslaught against



The Australian has tried to dredge up anything it can to attack The Greens' Lee Rhiannon

Marrickville Council’s support for BDS, some Greens have abandoned the idea of defending the boycott.

Three Greens MLCs in the NSW Parliament voted with the Liberals to condemn protests at Max Brenner outlets as anti-Semitic—dove-tailing *The Australian*’s criticisms. Max Brenner is a chocolate cafe that donates to the Israeli Defence Force’s notorious Golani brigade.

The essay details a NSW Greens State Delegates Council last December where members rightly moved to discipline the three NSW Greens MPs for publicly condemning BDS. It depicts this as if it was some kind of assault on individual freedom—never mind following party policy, or even more importantly, defending the Palestinians!

The Greens’ strength has come from their principled opposition to the

slide right of mainstream politics. As the Labor Party capitulated to Howard’s attacks on refugees and the war on Iraq, huge numbers shifted allegiance to The Greens.

And as Labor has given up any commitment—even rhetorical—to redistributing the wealth of the 1 per cent, The Greens have stood for taking money away from private schools, covering hugely expensive dental costs via Medicare, and against the anti-union police on construction sites, the ABCC.

The Greens have made a reputation as the only major party that is willing to criticise Gillard’s race to the right with Abbott over refugees and that has consistently supported policies like same-sex marriage.

The Australian hates Rhiannon and her supporters in particular because they represent the social democratic potential of The Greens.

Rhiannon refused to cave into the right-wing media attacks over BDS last year and champions a vision of The Greens as a clearly left of Labor party.

She is known as an outspoken critic of the expansion of coal seam gas and corporate donations to political parties. On February 11 she fronted a rally opposing the expansion of income management in Bankstown. Last year she spoke out against Alan Joyce’s lockout of Qantas workers and she has recently lent her voice to the campaign against cuts at Sydney University.

This is in contrast to the pull towards pragmatism and respectability that leads Bob Brown and his supporters into seeing The Greens’ role not as a left force but as a party that can negotiate tiny concessions from Labor and appeal to conservative sections of society to win more votes.

While Rhiannon sees The Greens as a party of the left, the more conservative Greens, like NSW MLC Jeremy Buckingham, has said that, “We want to get outcomes, not just be this force that drags politics to the left.” That pull has led The Greens into backing policies like the disastrous carbon tax.

It’s the vision of a left alternative to the rightward shift in politics that *The Australian* wants to destroy. We can’t let them.

Rhiannon refused to cave into the right-wing media attacks over BDS last year

Hands off our education: Stop the jobs massacre at Sydney Uni

By Adam Adelpour

THE UNIVERSITY of Sydney is in a bid to slash 340 jobs. A staff and student campaign is gearing up to push them back.

Academics will be sacked on the basis of crude output measures—those who have produced less than four publications between January 1 2007 and 11 November 2009 are at risk. This has nothing to do with research quality, let alone their teaching, which makes up 40 per cent of their workload.

The Vice Chancellor Michael Spence (whose salary is over \$1 million per annum) has said the cuts are necessary for the university to reach financial targets for 2012. It's clear that the administration has concocted a budgetary crisis to justify the job cuts. The university recorded an operating surplus of \$113.7 million for 2012, the third highest of all Australian universities.

The selective nature of the austerity budget also makes it clear that the problem is not a lack of money, but spending priorities. As staff are lectured about “not pulling their weight”, the administration is spending \$385 million on infrastructure, including a new business school and another swimming pool.

Spence has now de-funded the



Above: Tony Abbott chats to Michael Spence. Both men are fond of job cuts

Refugee Language Program, that costs a measly \$42,000 a year and is run by volunteers. One hundred refugees were taught English by the program each year. But he thought the \$750,000 spent on redesigning the university logo in 2011 was worth it.

The University is already badly understaffed, with overcrowded tutorials and lecture theatres and threats to many courses. Student

protest saved the Political Economy from a planned merger with the Government Department last year. Biology subjects will come under the knife in the near future.

The neo-liberal logic of profit and competition is behind the University's warped priorities. Despite declaring an “education revolution”, Labor has failed to reverse Howard's enormous cuts to education spending. Less than 50 per cent of tertiary funding now comes from government investment. Meanwhile, Labor has uncapped university enrolments, creating extra places that universities must compete for. As a result, our universities increasingly act like businesses, competing for students, and crucially, for corporate funding.

Spence's slash-and-burn attitude to lecturers and staff is a stark example of where this logic leads.

Encouragingly, the staff have not hesitated to fight back. At one of a series of actions organised by the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU), 100 staff and students chanted, “Staff cuts hurt students” in earshot of the University Senate meeting.

As the new semester approaches, student activists are planning to blitz the campus with stalls and posters, and pass motions in classes to raise awareness, build protests and work towards direct action against the cuts. A mass student campaign can make life difficult for the likes of Michael Spence, embolden staff to exercise their industrial strength, and help win the fight for quality education and staff jobs before profit.

After a ten week lock out, Schweppes workers pushed into arbitration

AFTER A ten week lock out, 150 United Voice workers at Schweppes distribution and processing factory in Tullamarine, Victoria, are back inside the gate.

The workers had been maintaining a 24-hour picket since December 15 2011, demanding the maintenance of existing shifts, rosters and overtime penalty rates. Schweppes management are seeking to replace a 35-hour Monday to Friday roster with a 12-hour a day, six-to-seven day working week.

The lock out followed similar aggressive anti-union action taken by Qantas and POAGS stevedoring bosses late last year.

According to United Voice Assistant Victorian Secretary Ben Redford, “Schweppes launched a vicious attack on the eight-hour day,

as well as trying to rob workers of their weekends.”

Schweppes had initially lodged an application to Fair Work Australia for arbitration to end all industrial action, but was unsuccessful in its attempt.

But as negotiations continued with Schweppes, the union actually ended any serious attempt to picket the factory.

The picket became a token protest presence allowing the factory to maintain production at 60 to 70 per cent of normal levels using casualised labour hire contract workers and management as scabs.

Workers recently turned down a bribe of \$5000 from management in favour of maintaining an indefinite protest at the gates. But the officials made no attempt to spread the industrial action, build the picket or

get solidarity from other unions.

Now, after negotiations with the company, the dispute is once again headed for arbitration. There will be 21 days' conciliation to try to reach a settlement. Then Fair Work Australia will arbitrate if nothing is agreed.

But arbitration is a big risk. At the beginning of the lockout, with an effective picket line in place, output from the plant was seriously cut with some Melbourne shops reporting shortages of Schweppes in the run up to Christmas. Determined picketing and solidarity from other unions could have shut down its operations completely.

A 13-day all-out strike by Baiada chicken workers in November last year won all their demands for pay increases and job security.

Jimmy Yan

.....
The lock-out followed similar aggressive action at Qantas and POAGS bosses late last year

Gillard caves in to bosses' demands with Fair Work review

By James Supple

JULIA GILLARD has caved in to business complaints about her workplace laws by announcing a review of the FairWork legislation. This comes after months of howling from business that the laws do not provide “flexibility” and have not allowed the gains in productivity the Labor government promised.

Labor responded by saying it would consider changes if business could provide evidence. So now it has given them an independent review to dredge up proof the laws do not give business what it wants.

Restaurant bosses quickly made it clear what business is demanding. They called for an exemption from paying workers penalty rates for work on weekends and public holidays and the scrapping of the “better off overall” test that ensures any changes to basic award conditions must leave workers with a better deal overall.

By “flexibility” business means flexibility for them to boost casualisation and call in workers whenever they want, and to scrap such “restrictive” nuisances as penalty rates and overtime bonuses.

In other words they want to bring back WorkChoices. Big business was never happy about the end of Howard and his frontal assault on workers. While Labor’s Fair Work laws left most of WorkChoices in place, business would still prefer to have the whole thing.

According to the employer lobby group the Business Council of Australia, Labor’s workplace laws have unleashed, “a rising number of disputes and unreasonable claims by some unions”. Yet Bureau of Statistics data shows that wages grew by just 3.6 per cent in the year to last September, almost exactly the level of inflation, 3.5 per cent.

The only area where wage gains have been substantially higher is in mining projects in WA—an industry in boom time that can afford to pay.

There was a small increase in strike days between April and September last year, to 214,400 working days for the year ending in September. But this is about the same as the level of the year ending September 2008, three years before when the same enterprise agreements were expiring. And, as labour law academic Graham Orr wrote, all of the increase in the



Above: The anti-WorkChoices campaign helped bring Labor to power

last three months “is accounted for by public sector disputes in Victoria and New South Wales, the latter not under federal law.”

The WorkChoices anti-strike laws have been maintained completely—so the scope to take industrial action has not increased one bit.

Employers have been much more aggressive than unions over the last few months, launching lockouts at Qantas, stevedores POAGS and DP World and Schweppes.

The fact that it is the bosses shaping the public debate about Fair Work and getting what they want from the government—not the unions putting on any pressure—is an indication of how little the unions are doing to press their claims.

Abbott and IR

When Labor was riding high in the polls following their election win in 2007, business had to learn to live with a minor winding back of Howard’s laws. Now, in the aftermath of Labor’s backdown to business around the mining tax, they think they can lay down their demands.

This is aimed just as much at Tony Abbott as at Labor. The opinion polls point to the likelihood of a Liberal government following the next election. Yet Abbott has refused to outline

his own political agenda, earning himself the nickname “Dr. No”, by preferring to simply focus on attacking Gillard. So far this has been a winning formula, with Labor stuck at record lows in the polls.

But it has business a little worried. As *The Australian*’s Paul Kelly points out, “his political success derives from a stunning economic populism”. In addition to his cynical campaign against the cost of living impacts of the carbon tax, Abbott has sought to distance himself from WorkChoices. At the last election he famously declared it “dead, buried and cremated”. In late September he pledged not to re-introduce statutory individual contracts. This drew fire from Liberal Party elder Peter Costello who warned the Coalition against reviving the “protection and regulation” approach of the Democratic Labor Party, the right-wing split from Labor in the 1950s.

Business is ramping up its demands because its need for ever-growing profits is insatiable. It has an eternal desire to undercut rivals overseas and maintain its “competitiveness” and profits. But this will come at the expense of the rest of us, through working us harder for less. Whether under Labor or Liberal, unions will need to fight to stop these attacks on wages and conditions.

.....
While Labor’s Fair Work left most of WorkChoices in place, business would prefer to have the whole thing

NSW TAFE ballot: A wasted chance to beat O'Farrell's laws

By John Morris, Canterbury-Bankstown Teachers' Association

THE LEADERSHIP of the NSW Teachers Federation has shamefully squandered an opportunity to strike a serious blow against the O'Farrell Liberal NSW government.

In mid-February, NSW TAFE teachers were set to vote for industrial action over their salaries claim of 5 per cent for each of the next three years. But even before the ballot results were known, the new President Maurie Mulheron was on the phone to Liberal Education Minister, Adrian Piccoli, to offer to settle for 2.5 per cent, the wage cap set by the Liberal government.

The ballot was required as TAFE members are now covered by federal Fair Work laws, after O'Farrell passed legislation to separate TAFE teachers and from the bulk of school teacher Federation members.

Ironically, with Fair Work Australia wage increases running between 3 and 5 per cent, action by TAFE teachers would have likely broken O'Farrell's wage cap, and put serious pressure on O'Farrell's laws.

Education Minister Piccoli was already under immense pressure his failure to provide school transport for students with disabilities, an issue that had seen the sacking of two Education department sub-heads.

Teachers could also have built on the existing discontent with O'Farrell. The government suffered a 17 per cent swing in its first by-election late last year and there is widespread community anger over coal seam gas. Polling shows 85 percent of people oppose the intended power station sell off and the wage cap.

The TAFE ballot should have been a springboard to reignite the campaign to break the wage cap and win a pay rise above 2.5 per cent. The fact that Piccoli—and Treasurer Mike Baird—so readily agreed to fund the TAFE 2.5 per cent shows how limited the claim was.

The leadership claimed that TAFE members were more concerned about retaining their conditions than wages. But there was no real threat to their conditions.

Yet it is understandable that TAFE members were concerned. Federation officials left TAFE members out to dry in 2010. TAFE teachers then had



Above: Teachers' contingents were very strong at the anti-O'Farrell rallies

to take rear guard action to prevent trade-offs such as five extra hours of attendance time per week.

The bulk of TAFE members have little confidence that the leaders would stand up for their conditions, so were willing to settle for so little just to hang on to their existing conditions.

However the limited settlement for TAFE means there is no hope that the Federation fighting for anything more than 2.5 per cent for all teachers.

Instead the February state council has now carried a resolution to try to seek an additional rise with a drawn out "permanent" community campaign and lobbying policy. While further industrial action is authorised, the fact is the policy is a retreat from mobilising the tens of thousands of members who turned out for the union rallies in September last year.

There is a glimmer of hope with the state council resolution, moved by the Activist Teachers Network and supported by the officials, to call central rallies to resist the moves of both the Gillard and O'Farrell governments to give local principals the power to "hire and fire".

The wages deal settled is a setback. Rank and file teachers will need to work hard to turn that around to build support for the staffing rallies.

Senis workers keep union agreement—now for pay and permanency

OVER 50 enthusiastic Sensis Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union (AMWU) members held a lunch-time protest last October to stop the company's attempt to undermine their union agreement (the Advertising and Design Agreement). Workers were angry at the move by Sensis to try to rob their working conditions by rolling their union agreement into a larger non-union one (the Enterprise Agreement 2).

Shortly after the protest, Sensis caved-in, agreeing to renegotiate the Advertising and Design Agreement. However this victory was just one small step to a new, improved agreement. Enterprise Bargaining has now begun, and while Sensis has not directly responded to union members' claims, they have released their own disgraceful wish list.

It includes Rostered Days Off to be "grandfathered and not available to new employees covered by the Advertising and Design Agreement," which would mean that RDOs would be eventually completely phased out. They must be dreaming.

The also want to "maintain a pay for performance model as per current arrangements". But Sensis workers have successfully protested against this before.

Union members are demanding an across the board seven per cent pay rise each year for three years. Other key union claims include uncapped redundancy pay, and allowing only voluntary rather than forced redundancies; equal pay for labour hire temps (plus 25 per cent casual loading), and conversion to permanency after six months.

We also want to expand the coverage of the agreement to production workers who have been incorrectly classified, and are presently underpaid, and not entitled to RDOs. Sensis currently employs over 100 contractors. Some have been working full-time for four years, yet are paid up to \$10,000 less than permanent staff, with no entitlement to annual leave or sick leave.

The union has already won over 50 conversions of contractors to permanency, increasing the proportion of permanent Sensis workers.

The success of members' action to win renegotiation of their union agreement bodes well for the fight ahead.

By a Sensis worker

US and Israel's self-serving fear campaign against Iran

By James Supple

THE US and Israel have ratcheted up threats and sanctions against Iran. The media presents Iran as aggressive and a danger to the region, hell bent on developing a nuclear weapon.

But the real provocations are coming from the US and Israel, whose actual concern is not Iran's nuclear capabilities, but the threat Iran poses to US domination of the Middle East and its oil supply.

In separate interviews, both Leon Panetta, the US Secretary of Defence, and Israeli Defence Minister Ehud Barak have admitted that Iran did not have a nuclear weapons program. Iran's research into nuclear power is legal under international law and is strictly monitored by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). In order to build a bomb it would have to kick out the IAEA inspectors and spend several years on further research.

Yet the US happily seized on a November IAEA report as an excuse to impose new economic sanctions. The IAEA claimed that Iran had simulated nuclear detonations—but this claim is disputed and it's clear even the US and Israel don't take it seriously.

The new US sanctions aim to stop any country buying Iranian oil by targeting both direct oil sales and dealings with Iranian banks. The EU has followed suit with their own sanctions, banning new oil contracts and saying all existing oil purchases will end in July. Oil exports accounted for 80 per cent of Iranian export income in 2010, and half of government revenues.

The price of the sanctions however is paid by the Iranian working class. The currency has plunged by 50 per cent and prices of food and medicine have skyrocketed.

Much has been made of the Iranian threat to close the strait of Hormuz, through which 20 per cent of the world's oil supply travels, and its warning against the US sending aircraft carriers through the strait.

But this came in response to US sanctions. And the US reply was to almost immediately send an aircraft carrier back through the strait, flanked by British and French warships. For good measure, the US followed this up by moving a second carrier to the region.



Above: A US fleet of air craft carriers led a show of force in the Strait of Hormuz

US and Israeli threats against Iran have been escalating since 2005. The US, already overstretched in Afghanistan, has no appetite for war on Iran and has warned Israel against any attack.

But US Secretary of Defence warned in early February that Israel might unilaterally attack Iran as early as April.

In January an Iranian nuclear scientist was assassinated, the fifth since 2007, in circumstances that led *The New York Times* to comment, "experts believe [the campaign] is being carried out mainly by Israel".

US control

The US has long sought to control Iran and the whole Middle East for its own economic benefit. Iran has the world's third largest oil reserves and second largest gas reserves.

The US supports vicious regimes like Saudi Arabia. In December they signed a \$30 billion deal to give it 84 new high-tech warplanes.

In 1953 in Iran, it overthrew a democratically elected government and supported the Shah's dictatorship until it was overthrown in the 1979 revolution.

It invaded Iraq and Afghanistan to bolster its influence. But the US debacle in Iraq has shattered what was once an important regional power, boosting Iran's influence in the region.

So the US is desperate to push back against Iran by waging economic

warfare against the country. Ultimately it has a thinly disguised aim of regime change.

Israel's claim that Iran is some kind of "existential threat" to its survival is a cover for its own attempt to check Iran's influence. Israel itself is the only nuclear armed country in the Middle East, with between 80 and 200 nuclear warheads.

For decades the US has armed Israel, effectively its client state, to the teeth—with the aim of allowing it to "maintain its qualitative military edge" in the region, as senior Obama administration official Andrew J. Shapiro put it last year.

The Iranian government has warned that it will retaliate to an Israeli attack. But whatever its rhetoric, the Iranian government knows that an attack on Israel would be suicide. The Iranian regime is not irrational. It has been more than willing to cut deals with the US to stabilise Iraq. Like any country, its government is dominated by a layer of immensely wealthy individuals. Whether they happen to be Islamic clerics, military officers or private capitalists, they have a lot to lose from open conflict with the world's sole superpower.

But the sabre-rattling from the West does allow the regime cover to crackdown on pro-democracy activists—who want genuine regime change in the interests of Iranians.

It is Israel and the US that are the real threat to peace.

The US is desperate to push back against Iran's influence by waging economic warfare

Syria: Western intervention not the answer

By Mark Gillespie

SYRIAN PRESIDENT Assad's brutal crackdown on the city of Homs has killed up to 400 people in the space of a week, as the country's heroic revolt continues after ten months. But so-called "humanitarian interventions" into the region have been a disaster and Syria won't be any different.

After Russia and China vetoed a UN Security Council resolution designed to pressure Assad to step aside, US Secretary of State Hilary Clinton called on "the friends of democratic Syria" to strengthen the diplomatic pressure. Sections of the Syrian opposition are calling for the Western powers to create safe zones where Syrian army defectors can regroup. Qatar and Saudi Arabia are considering arming the opposition.

You only have to look at neighbouring Iraq to see why foreign military intervention would be a disaster that the left needs to oppose. Following the 2003 invasion Iraq was meant to become a "beacon of democracy" but tellingly, more than a million Iraqis fled to Syria where they felt safer living under the Assad dictatorship.

Libya is held up as a more recent "success" story for intervention—but it came at an enormous cost to the revolution. The young revolutionary leaders that started the revolt were sidelined as former Gaddafi officials in the National Transitional Council negotiated with Western powers for minimalist change that included signing up to the West's "war on terror" and abiding by all existing commercial contracts.

Libya today is looking increasingly like Afghanistan as rival militias seize public assets and stake their claims. The Zintan militia, for example, controls the Tripoli International Airport and is holding onto Saif Gaddafi as a bargaining chip.

Western intervention in Syria could be even more disastrous than Iraq. Syria is divided religiously and ethnically and is at the centre of numerous strategic rivalries.

While the left needs to oppose intervention, we shouldn't be fooled into thinking Assad's regime is somehow "progressive" as sections of the old Stalinist left do.

It's true Syria has played a role opposing Western domination of the region, supporting Hamas in Gaza and Hezbollah in Lebanon in their struggle



Above: Protest in Syria against the Assad regime from last year

against Israeli occupation. But Syria's anti-imperialism is inconsistent. When it suits the regime's interests it will cut deals with imperialist powers.

In 1975, for example, Syrian troops entered Lebanon to save a right-wing Christian Maronite regime backed by Israel that was threatened by the combined forces of the Lebanese left and the Palestinian Liberation Organisation. In 1991 during the Gulf War, Syrian troops were part of the US-led coalition against Iraq. Syria doesn't want to overturn the imperialist system but wants a place at the table. Internally, the Assad regime is a brutal one party state where all independent political organisation is crushed.

Bringing down Assad

The left needs to be unequivocally on the side of the Syrian people who have shown such tremendous courage in opposing Assad.

This raises the question, how can such a brutal regime be broken without outside help?

Western commentators see the struggle as a military one, but it is first and foremost a political struggle. Assad attempts to isolate the opposition by labelling them as "terrorists", "Islamists" and tools of "foreign powers".

Undermining Assad's political arguments is the key to spreading the revolt across the country. Initially key

cities like Damascus and Aleppo were not part of the revolt, but the movement has extended its reach into the suburbs of Damascus and unrest has begun to spread in Aleppo. Dissent in the armed forces has grown with the emergence of the Free Syrian Army based on defectors from the military.

Continuing the mass mobilisations, extending them into strikes that hit industry and put economic pressure on the regime's support base and fraternising with the lower ranks of the military, is the way to break the regime's power. Local Coordinating Committees have been thrown up by the revolution and are already carrying out many of these tasks.

Foreign intervention—as in Libya—would end this revolutionary process, militarise the struggle and give Assad an enormous propaganda coup.

For many years opposition in Syria was held back by the feeling the regime was one of the region's last bastions of anti-imperialism. The revolutionary movements in Egypt and Tunisia have now opened up new anti-imperialist fronts and the Syrian people now feel free to fight for their rights.

We need to be clear who the real "friends of democratic Syria" are—not the Western powers that backed the likes of Mubarak, but the people of the region who are in revolt against all dictators. Long live the Arab spring.

While the left needs to oppose intervention, we shouldn't be fooled into thinking Assad's regime is somehow "progressive"

Anger as the West's regime sells Libyans short

By Simon Assaf

IN JANUARY an angry crowd of some 2000 people stormed the offices of the ruling National Transitional Council (NTC) in Benghazi, the birthplace of the Libyan revolution. NTC leaders were planning to announce the publication of the new electoral law that evening but were forced to transfer the announcement to Tripoli.

The Benghazi crowds smashed computer equipment and refused to allow NTC chief Mustafa Abdel Jalil to address them. They then torched his armoured Land Rover. The immediate impact of the protest was to force the resignation of NTC number two, and former Gaddafi-era minister, Abdel Hafiz Ghoga.

Behind these protests, and mounting discontent, is growing disillusion with the NTC and its attempts to limit and stunt expectations that emerged during last year's uprising. The NTC is seen as corrupt and riddled with nepotism and is widely perceived as trying to create a new patronage system based on regional and tribal interests.

Anger has focused on the new electoral law. The draft law dropped a minimum quota for representation of women in a new parliament, set at 10 per cent of the 200-strong assembly.

It declares that any candidate must have a "professional qualification", a provision that carves out the majority of those who made the revolution. And those it deems "criminals" would not be allowed to vote, even if they were convicted under the old regime.

Libyans holding dual citizenship would also be barred from the elections, despite many of them being forced into exile by the old regime and returning to take part in the uprising.

Many Libyans now openly talk about how the NTC has "hijacked the revolution" while delivering very few real improvements on the ground.

The clearest indicator of the intentions of the NTC was exposed immediately after the fall of Tripoli last August. The Amazigh (Berbers) who had fought an effective insurgency in the mountains south of Tripoli (which opened the door to the rebel advance on the capital) were carved out of cabinet posts in the new interim government.

The Amazigh discovered that despite the central role they played in the uprising, their lot would not be



fundamentally different from that under the old regime. This was widely seen as a betrayal of the aspirations of a long-oppressed people.

The NTC also made it clear that it would not abandon the neo-liberal economic policies unveiled by Gaddafi in the 1990s, despite the vast potential wealth brought by oil, an industry now back on its feet, recovering production lost during the uprising.

Instead the vast oil fortunes swilling around Western banks in the form of the Libyan sovereign wealth fund are being eyed up for rich pickings by cash-strapped European economies. NATO has also taken its cut as Libyans have discovered that they have to pick up the bill for the air campaign.

Roots of revolt

It is worth remembering that the Libyan revolution was not launched to hand the country over to the West, or to a new unelected and unaccountable cabal.

The February 17 uprising had the potential to place the country under popular control. The body that grew out of the uprising, the NTC, at first represented these aspirations. But the scale and ferocity of the regime's counter offensive forced the revolutionaries into a reluctant alliance with outside forces. By March 2011 the revolution, now an armed rebellion, slipped out of the control of the mass popular movement into the hands of

Above: Protesters set on the car of NTC chief Mustafa Abdel Jalil

those in the NTC.

The "no-fly zone" gave Western powers control in the air, but less influence on the ground. That was left to their new allies inside the NTC. For many who made the revolution this was an alliance of convenience. NATO warplanes acted as the rebel airforce and covered the advance of armed civilians, while special forces from the West, Qatar and the UAE provided some training and logistical backup.

But the bloody business of war, the battles for towns and cities, was carried out by those who launched the uprising.

Western support came at a heavy price as the NTC sought to limit the scope of the revolution.

Many saw the NATO Intervention as a war for control of Libyan oil. But despite its rhetoric, the old regime never broke its ties to Western oil companies. Western powers also ensured that the incoming government would not alter these, or any other, Gaddafi-era contracts. The intervention was about the West placing itself between the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions by taking control of the Libyan revolution.

But the re-emergence of popular protests is a reminder that this is far from certain. Despite massive setbacks, the popular aspiration that grew out of the revolution remains alive and unfulfilled.

Socialist Review UK

The NTC made it clear that it would not abandon the neo-liberal economic policies unveiled by Gaddafi in the 1990s

TENT EMBASSY 1972: 'LAND RIGHTS NOW OR ELSE'

The establishment of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy was one of the high points of the Aboriginal rights movement. **Clare Fester** looks at what it achieved and its relevance today

THE TENT Embassy 40th anniversary protest this year (see page 8) has reopened the debate about the relevance of Aboriginal protest.

The right-wing media has attacked it, using comments from conservative Aboriginal figures such as Warren Mundine, who called the protest “a disgrace” and declared that the Tent Embassy no longer represented the majority of Aboriginal people.

But 40 years on, the Tent Embassy’s demands are every bit as relevant today as they were in 1972. The Northern Territory Intervention laws expire in June this year, and although the punitive policies have failed by every social measure, Minister Jenny Macklin is determined to entrench the government’s racist policies for another ten years.

The Tent Embassy showed that a protest movement that set out to confront the government could put Aboriginal rights on the agenda and win real changes. Its story contains important lessons for the fight today.

‘Land now, not lease tomorrow’

In 1971 a Supreme Court challenge by the Yirrkala people against the Nabalco mining company ended with Justice Blackburn ruling that Aboriginal people had a spiritual connection to their land, but no property rights to it under law.

Then, on the eve of Invasion Day in 1972 Coalition Prime Minister Billy McMahon announced that the government would not recognise land rights through legislation.

The next day four Aboriginal activists, Michael Anderson, Billy Craigie, Bertie Williams and Tony Coorey, travelled from Sydney to Canberra in a car driven by Communist Party photographer Noel Hazard to establish an Aboriginal Tent Embassy. They planted a beach umbrella on the lawns of parliament house and held placards that read “Land rights now or else”, “Legally this land is our land. We shall take it if need be” and “Land now not lease tomorrow” on the morning of Invasion Day 1972.

Originally this was intended as a protest stunt to highlight how Aboriginal people continued to live as

They planted a beach umbrella on the lawns of parliament house and held placards that read “Land rights now or else”

aliens in their own land. But when they arrived they discovered that a legal loophole allowed camping on the Parliamentary lawns. When they realised they could not be removed they began erecting tents. The Tent Embassy remained for several months and became a central rallying point for the Aboriginal rights movement.

Queensland University students raised the money to send a busload of radical black activists down to Canberra. Others came from across the country to join them.

The Embassy was a constant embarrassment to the McMahon government. Hoping it would disappear they claimed it represented only a “handful of militants.” But the Embassy represented the demands of more than a handful.

After the landslide 1967 referendum, which extended citizenship to Aboriginal people, campaigners had hoped conditions in Aboriginal communities would improve.

But very little changed. The government continued to revoke Aboriginal reserve land, forcing families into the cities. Aboriginal people lived in squalid housing, facing the constant threat of eviction, lived in segregated communities and encountered daily police violence.

The failure of the Yirrkala court action and McMahon’s subsequent rejection of land rights showed many people that neither parliament nor the existing legal system was going to guarantee an end to discrimination against Aboriginal people.

Radicalism

The Tent Embassy drew inspiration from the growing student and working class radicalism of the 1960s and 1970s, including widespread strike action, the movement against the Vietnam War, as well as the anti-colonial struggles across the world and the civil rights movement in the US.

Since the 1960s demands for land rights had grown. In 1966 over 200 Aboriginal workers on Lord Vestey’s cattle station in the NT began a three-year strike against virtual slavery conditions.

White unionists from the Actors

Equity Union and the Building Workers Industrial Union toured Gurindji people in workplaces across the country to speak about their struggle. The NSW Builders Labourers’ Federation (BLF) raised over \$600 to support their strike action.

With the support of white workers the Gurindji people not only won equal wages, but eventually the ownership of their land in 1975. The Gurindji strike put land rights on the political agenda.

In 1971 white students, Aboriginal activists and the union movement mobilised against the apartheid South African Springbok rugby team when the government tried to tour them around Australia. Airline workers made it impossible for the rugby players to fly. Postal workers refused to handle South African mail. In Melbourne 4000 wharfies struck for a week against the rugby tour. Due to the success of the campaign, no South African team toured Australia until apartheid ended in 1994.

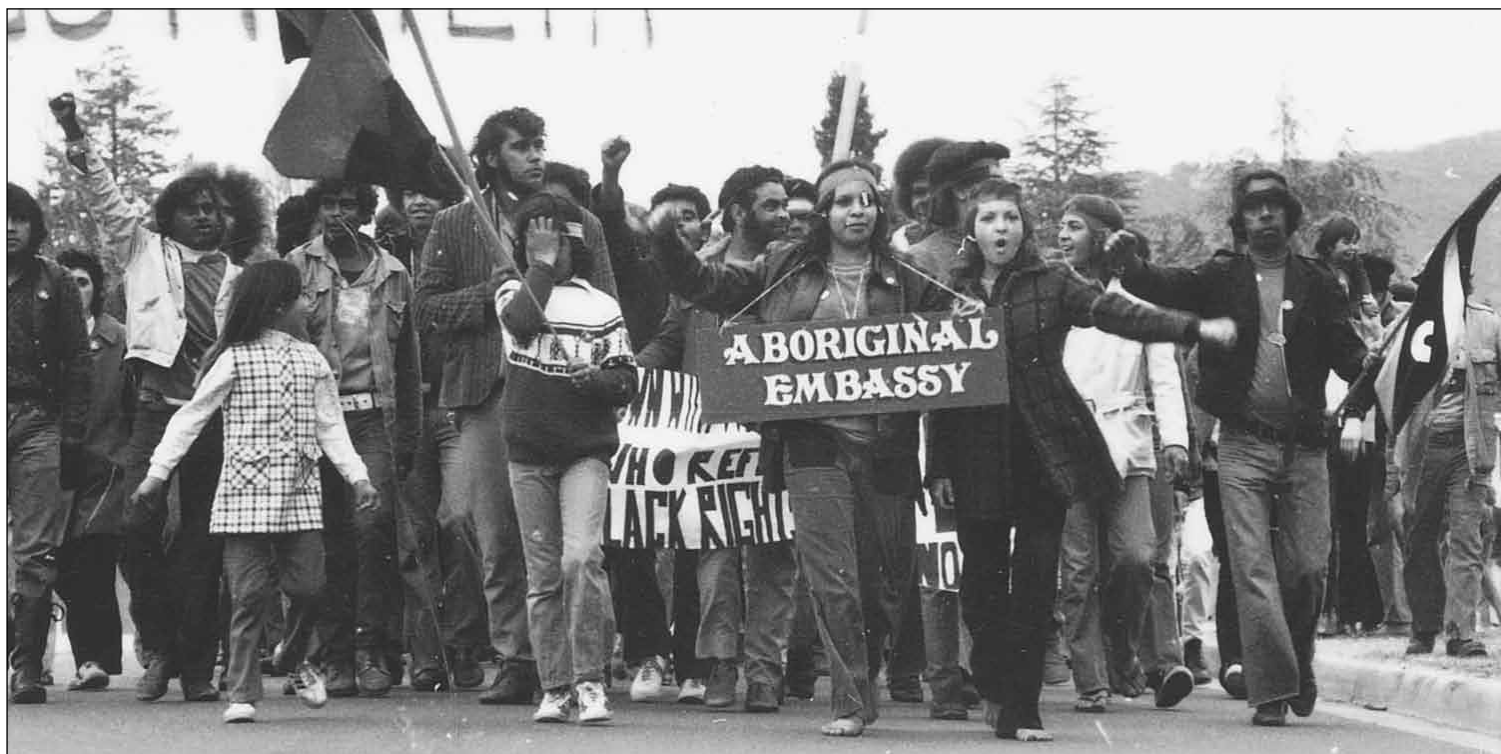
A leading activist from the time, Meredith Burgmann, recalls: “young Aboriginal activists of the time were very prominent in the demonstrations against the Springboks, so people like me had actually met and started working with Aboriginal activists.”

The union involvement against apartheid showed how workers could be won to taking up anti-racist demands. These struggles showed how Aboriginal people could unite with white workers to fight back and win against racism.

Land rights

The Tent Embassy gave a boost to the campaign for land rights. On July 14 in the same year the Tent Embassy was established, 6000 people marched in Sydney as part of the “Black Moratorium”, demanding land rights for Aboriginal people.

The idea of Moratorium marches came from the successful Moratoriums against the Vietnam War. Five hundred Aboriginal people led a march including 2000 Sydney University students, as well as Builders Labourers, wharfies and teachers. In Sydney a BLF



worker dropped a banner advertising the rally from his crane on a construction site. In Wollongong the South Coast Trades and Labour Council joined the march. Another 1000 marched in Melbourne.

The same month, the McMahon government drew up a new law making camping on parliamentary lawns illegal. Without warning, on July 20, 100 police descended on the Embassy and violently cracked down, removing the tents and arresting eight people.

Three days later, on July 23, 200 demonstrators tried to re-establish the embassy and were met with a vicious response from police. Bob Pringle, the NSW BLF Secretary, was there on the day and recalled: "362 Robots of the law marched out in military fashion and turned about in unison and then mechanically smashed us. Many people were seriously injured".

But Aboriginal activist Bobbi Sykes, a leading member of the Tent Embassy's "diplomatic staff" said: "The actions of the police are creating militants for us. People would come from all over Australia to support us if they had the money to get here."

On July 30 the movement responded with a 2000-strong march that included white students, builders labourers and workers from across Canberra. It was the largest land rights demonstration in Canberra's history.

In the spirit of gross over-policing at the Embassy, the government cancelled all police leave in the ACT, kept the riot squad on hand and had

Above: The march to the Tent Embassy on July 30 in Canberra that mobilised 2000 people Photo: Ken Middleton collection, National Library of Australia

the Royal Military College on alert for good measure.

In the end police allowed the protesters to re-establish the embassy again for two hours. After that the police were allowed to take down the tents without a further confrontation.

What did it achieve?

The 1970s were a period of some of the most important gains in the history of Aboriginal politics.

The Tent Embassy's demands included: an Aboriginal controlled state in the NT; legal title and mining rights to all reserve lands, as well as the land around capital cities; the preservation of sacred sites and compensation for lands lost including a \$6 billion down payment. Underlying them was a desire for an end to the policy of assimilation into white society and a demand for self-determination and Aboriginal control over their land, communities and lives.

The Whitlam Labor government rode to power at the end of 1972 on the back of social movements, including the Aboriginal rights movement. Whitlam dropped the charges against activists over the Tent Embassy protests and abolished assimilation as official policy, creating the first Department of Aboriginal Affairs. His government also drew up the NT Land Rights Act that was eventually passed under the Liberal Fraser government, which finally gave the Gurindji and many other Aboriginal communities in the NT back their land.

These steps were significant gains for Aboriginal people showed the power of political protest to win gains.

But the government never fully delivered self-determination or the compensation for dispossession that were demanded in the 1970s. In the decades since the Tent Embassy, subsequent governments have left Aboriginal communities poverty-stricken, under-resourced and disadvantaged.

Today there is an attempt to wind back the gains of the past through an ongoing assault on the "rights agenda" and the goal of self-determination for Aboriginal people.

The NT Intervention is in many ways a return to the assimilationist policies in place before the 1970s. Communities operate under government control and there is pressure on Aboriginal people to leave their traditional land where the government deems communities "unviable".

Native title has not delivered anything for the majority of Aboriginal people.

The Tent Embassy represented the emergence of a mass movement for Aboriginal rights and a layer of radical black activists who rejected the idea that the courts or politely lobbying parliament could win change.

The unity between Aboriginal activists and the organised working class was a central feature of the Tent Embassy's successes.

A return to these politics today could begin to reverse the backlash against Aboriginal rights.

ONE YEAR ON: EGYPT'S DEEPENING REVOLUTION

Mass people power brought down Mubarak's dictatorship one year ago. **Amy Thomas** and **Ernest Price** look at where Egypt's continuing strikes and demonstrations are heading

"MASSIVE AND effective street protest was a global oxymoron until—suddenly, shockingly... it became the defining trope of our times. And the protester once again became a maker of history."

This was *Time* magazine in December last year explaining its decision to award their Person of the Year to "The Protester". That a magazine like *Time* (not exactly known as a bastion of radicalism) would celebrate street protest is a sign of just how much ordinary people changed the world in 2011.

Egypt's revolution became a symbol for global resistance—from the "Indignados" in Spain, who, moved by the scenes of Tahrir Square, replicated them at home, to the Occupy movement in the United States that drew attention to the vast class inequality, to the Greek workers who have led the way against austerity in Europe with a series of general strikes.

Egypt's revolution was itself encouraged by the toppling of Ben Ali in Tunisia and has since inspired the masses of Libya, Yemen, Bahrain and Syria to rise up.

Linking all the struggles is the devastation caused by the economic crisis. In the United States last year, two million Americans lost their homes to the banks. In Spain, youth unemployment is nearing 50 per cent and both major parties support austerity measures that are making this worse.

In Egypt, just prior to Mubarak's downfall, the crisis had pushed up food prices as much as 25 per cent. Remittances sent home from families working in Europe were decreasing as immigrants felt the brunt of job cuts.

Mubarak was not just a brutal dictator, but a multi-billionaire one (worth \$70 billion according to some reports) in a country where 40 per cent of people live below the poverty line. The slogans on the street in January 2011—"bread, freedom, dignity"—were not just for toppling the regime but for tackling poverty and oppression. Wassim Wagdy, an Egyptian

socialist, explained this dynamic in January 2011: "They [Egyptians] have amalgamated the economic and political, the call for a better life and desire for freedom, and concentrated it all in the will to change the regime."

And that is precisely why, more than one year later, the revolution remains "unfinished". Egyptians have torn the head off the beast but the body lives on in the form of the Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF)—which assumed power when Mubarak fell.

The army

During the struggle against Mubarak the army positioned itself on the protesters' side. A popular slogan was "the people and the army are one hand". Socialists were alone in consistently putting the case that SCAF was there to wind the struggle down, as an agent of counter-revolution rather than revolution.

But the experience of SCAF's rule has given that argument a new audience. Now, a common slogan is "the people and the army are one very dirty hand."

The army has been the ruling institution in Egypt since 1952. The top levels of the army are built into the networks of wealth and privilege of the top 1 per cent, or the ruling class. Up to 15 per cent of the Egyptian economy is run by the army—and they don't pay any taxes on the profits.

Mubarak met his end thanks not just to the mass protests in Tahrir but to a mass strike wave that threatened the flow of profits. The military generals thought they could sacrifice Mubarak to appease the movement while leaving the rest of the dictatorship in place.

But they didn't count on the transformation of Egyptians in the course of the revolution. Emboldened by their victory, Egyptians were not going to settle for cosmetic change without a fight. And the struggle had already brought profound change to its participants who had been given

Emboldened by their victory over Mubarak, Egyptians were not going to settle for cosmetic change

a glimpse of their collective power. Women, long fearful of sexual harassment on the street, had joined the revolution as men's equals and slept alongside their fellow revolutionaries in Tahrir Square without harassment, debating politics and playing a leading role.

The workers' movement

The strike wave that brought down Mubarak gave workers a sense of their power to act collectively as a class.

Their new-found confidence fed back into the union movement. Before the revolution there were just three independent trade unions, now there are over 100. In September, 500,000 workers took industrial action in the biggest strike wave since the 1940s.

Economic demands for a minimum wage have been raised alongside political demands to sack the "little Mubaraks" in the form of Mubarak-era bosses and corrupt union officials (a process referred to as "tahrir" or "cleansing").

Doctors, for example, led a national strike in May to demand better funding for health care alongside demands about their own wages and conditions, and took their union back from corrupt officials.

In her book *The Mass Strike*, Rosa Luxemburg theorises from the experience of the Russian revolution of 1905, how mass strike action can be a bridge from day-to-day struggles to the battle for a new society. Strikes may begin over what appear to be small economic demands but can rapidly generalise to broader political demands.

The links between the political and economic demands are encouraged in Egypt by the refusal of management and SCAF itself to give any concessions in the face of the economic crisis. In February 2011, SCAF officially banned strikes.

Now, SCAF is proposing Europe-style austerity in the form of \$20 billion in cuts to public spending.

So in demanding economic change, Egypt's workers are facing



up to SCAF's stubborn commitment to the logic of capitalist profit and competition, and beginning to push against it.

The working class, the biggest in the Middle East, has immense power. Using strikes as their weapon, Egypt's workers could stop the flow of oil through the Suez Canal and shut down every single one of the army's businesses.

But there are big challenges before the workers' movement can get to such a point. A call for a general strike on February 11 was only successful across the education sector. A massive media campaign by SCAF associated the main agitators for the strike, the Revolutionary Socialists, with foreign agents. Textile workers' leader Kamal al-Fayoumy was taken into custody for several days.

SCAF's generals understand the power of the working class on the move and will do what they can to slow it down.

The elections and the Brotherhood

SCAF hoped that the elections held in late 2011 would deflect mounting opposition. In reality, the landslide victory for the Muslim Brotherhood—the only major (and semi-legal) opposition party under Mubarak—reflected the desire for change.

The Muslim Brotherhood gained around two thirds of the parliamentary seats. The experience of voting in a clean parliamentary election was

Above: Egyptians in Tahrir Square in Cairo calling not just for the removal, but the execution, of Field Marshal Tantawi, head of SCAF Photo: Hossam El-Hamalawy

something most Egyptians had never experienced. The high hopes were reflected in the fact that a call from some of the left to boycott the elections went nearly entirely unheeded.

But the direction being taken by the Muslim Brotherhood's leadership is already starting to raise questions about its role.

Contrary to Western media hype, the danger presented by the Brotherhood is not radical Islamism but the commitment of the top layer of the Brotherhood to pro-market policies. They are firmly involved in ruling the country and running the economy and are willing to appease SCAF in order to keep their seat at the table.

As much as they might scaremonger about Islamism, US diplomats have met repeatedly with the Muslim Brotherhood and want them to use their legitimacy and popularity to hold the revolution back. The danger is very real. The Brotherhood joined SCAF in condemning the February 11 strike.

But the Brotherhood is also being pulled in the other direction by their young members involved in the revolution, who support the call for nationalisation of industry and a minimum wage.

Last November, mass demonstrations calling for the immediate transfer of power, particularly in the cities, broke out against the violent repression of a protest in Tahrir Square.

Scores of Egyptians were killed in the crackdown, but the repression

encouraged a layer of young revolutionaries to call for SCAF's overthrow. The demonstration in Tahrir Square on January 25 on the revolution's anniversary turned into a demonstration against the new regime. Estimates put the crowd at over one million in Cairo alone.

The Brotherhood had come simply to celebrate the revolution, but large sections of the crowd attempted to drown them out with chants like, "This is a revolution, not a party", and "freedom, justice, social equality."

All of these demonstrations were attended by Brotherhood supporters from the mosques.

A challenge for the revolutionaries in the coming period will be to win over those with faith in the Brotherhood and parliament.

The future

The aspirations of Egypt's masses will not be met by SCAF, parliament—or within the limits of capitalism itself. But the struggle within capitalism in Egypt for democracy and economic reform has the potential to turn into a socialist revolution against the system.

In the Russian revolution of 1905, mass strikes and demonstrations led to the creation of workers' councils that began to organise every aspect of life, offering a new form of power against the Tsarist dictatorship.

The direct, popular democracy that was a feature of Tahrir Square can be extended to the workplaces and all of Egypt. Workplace councils can come together across Egypt to co-ordinate the struggle and to take control of society away from SCAF. The army itself could be literally disarmed if workers were strong and united enough to win soldiers over to their side.

Such a society could redistribute the wealth of the country (now controlled nearly-exclusively by the military and a group of 100 super rich families) and use it to meet human needs.

For this to happen, the independent organisation of workers will need to deepen, and the strength of the forces arguing for revolutionary politics in the workplaces and the squares will need to grow and spread.

The bravery and courage of the Egyptian people has opened up the possibility of a socialist alternative to capitalism, a vision that holds the key to the struggles in the Arab world, across Europe, and everywhere else. It's their bravery and courage that can make it a reality.

CONTAGIOUS STRIKES: HOW CHINA'S WORKERS ARE FIGHTING BACK

Ralf Ruckus is a labour researcher and activist studying Chinese workers' struggles. His work can be found at www.gongchao.org. He spoke to *Solidarity* on a recent visit to Australia.

The level of protests and strikes in China seems to have increased over the last few years. What are the reasons for this?

Statistics include workers of different types: migrant workers and urban workers, the old working class that work for the state-owned companies.

Migrant workers for a long time were called peasant workers, indicating that technically they are still part of the rural population [although] some have been in cities for ten years or even grown up in the city and can't farm.

In terms of the urban workers there was actually more going in the late 1990s, early 2000s. State workers, always a minority in China but tens of millions still, got attacked in the late 1990s when the Communist Party allowed redundancies and closures of state companies. There were large-scale strikes, demonstrations, riots even.

The increased struggle of the migrant workers started about 2003-04. Migrant workers, a kind of new working class, are responsible for the large increase [in strikes] of the last few years.

There is one big change in the last ten years. The first generation of migrants entered the cities and industrial zones in the 1990s. They were farmers, [not] used to city life and factory discipline. Their plan was to work, [earn enough to] build a house

in the countryside or send someone to school in their family and then go back home.

What's responsible for this increase in struggles is the second generation [of migrant workers]. They have siblings or parents who had already been to the city, and some of them grew up in the city. They don't want to go back [to the villages] and their cultural perspective is urban.

They also don't carry the trauma of [the] Tiananmen [square massacre]. They are more openly demanding improvements and use the internet or mobile phones to organise.

In other cases of rapid industrialisation: in the US, in Central Europe, in Brazil and South Korea, it was also this second generation that started struggling on a larger scale.

You could say that these struggles represent the formation of a new working class.

It's often not the worst paid workers organising the struggles [but] foremen or skilled workers.

Workers who do most of the unskilled work earn so little that they cannot settle down in the city. They have to live in dormitories and can't bring their families into the city.

Line leaders and skilled workers who are also migrant workers also can't settle down for legal reasons, [as there is a] system that divides Chinese people into migrant or urban populations, and all migrants keep their rural

status and cannot settle down permanently in the city.

But skilled workers [do hope for this], because they earn enough money to rent a flat and bring their family.

A lot of ordinary workers go on strike because they are angry and they want more but they don't have the same expectations yet.

What issues and grievances typically cause disputes?

In the boom times, and most of the last few years have seen industrial growth, a lot of the issues are around wages, conditions in the dormitories (most workers live in dormitories with six, eight, ten in one room) food in the canteen and unpaid wages.

In times of crisis, for a few months in 2008, and now in the last few months [when] there was also talk of a recession, we have a lot more disputes around people being fired and [not getting] their redundancy payment and also demanding back pay, because if a factory closes the workers are really scared they won't ever get [unpaid] wages.

These are often the immediate demands, but what lies behind [the desire to] strike is the situation of exploitation, being put into a dormitory, working overtime, not really having the chance to advance and hopes being destroyed—so there's a lot of anger involved.



A mass revolt in the village of Wukan, pictured above, brought to the world images of the struggle of peasants and workers in China last December

In 2010 successful strikes at Honda triggered a wave of similar actions across the car industry. What was the outcome of this?

Honda wasn't the first time this happened, where there was a strike in one factory and a copycat effect where others then strike themselves in the same industrial region. The first case I know was 2004 in the electronics industry.

Honda was special because it was larger and concerned one of the pillar industries, the car industry.

[In most disputes] workers in one factory or one department go on strike because of an issue, and management or the local state try to solve it within a day or two.

Honda, [where there was] two weeks of strike action was very unusual. We don't have any statistics or know the full extent of this movement. But the length of struggle at Honda and the fact that it spread all along the east coast, that was special.

How do workers organise given the amount of state repression?

Many struggles happen in places where people have had little experience [of striking], but the conditions at work and the fact that there are few channels to express grievances leads workers to use various kinds of

resistance.

The unions are not on the workers' side but openly on the [bosses'] side and try to prevent struggles. So workers have to self-organise. They use their everyday social forms of organisation to do that.

For instance they all live in dormitories and have [small] communities there. People from a certain region or village would socialise together and help each other.

This is not specific to China, but since there is no official representation, it is much more important to Chinese workers.

In recent years experienced worker militants who know how to do this [have emerged]. An example: in China if you organise a struggle and it ends with direct negotiations between workers and the boss, usually the local government will ask the workers to elect representatives to negotiate. Afterwards they will get [sacked by management].

So in some struggles workers just won't elect anyone, and flyers with their demands are thrown down from the dormitory into the factory compound. Or a piece of paper will go down the line, saying strike today at 5 o'clock, and no one will know who made this demand. Often management has to just raise wages because they don't know who to attack or who to fire.

Most strikes are successful because of the rapid economic growth

and the fact that the wages are really low so there's room to improve conditions.

Even if they lose their job it has been pretty easy for them recently to find a new one. Many change their jobs after a few months or one year, or they go back to the countryside for a month to relax and recover. There is not a labour shortage everywhere, [but] there are localised labour shortages. Usually this means workers aren't willing to work under the conditions offered. So there's pressure anyway to improve the conditions to make them accept work.

Whenever the government hears about any more permanent cross-company, cross-regional forms of organisation they step in and try to destroy it. So people engaged in this will not openly acknowledge it.

But we can say that during the Honda struggle for instance there were several organised groups in China and NGOs from Hong Kong trying to get involved and publish the demands and write about them.

Workers have a [computer] chat [program called] QQ. Websites are important, and a lot of them are closed down by censorship, but for a while they circulate information about workers' struggles.

Twitter is banned but they have [a Chinese version called] Weibo. If there's a dispute you search Weibo and there will be information. So there's a network for circulating information.

There is a discussion amongst workers about strikes, there are experienced militants, there are people who try to theorise what's happening and publish that, there's a culture of even migrant workers who write songs and poems about [struggle] and circulate them. So you could say there's a proletarian counter-culture developing.

Do people hear about events like the Arab revolutions or movements overseas?

Migrant workers I have talked to know about May 1 and what it means in Western countries. The problem is they only speak Chinese and it's difficult for them to follow certain events because there is no coverage [in Chinese] apart from the government coverage. However government coverage of events outside China is much better than events in China.

I was in China during the Occupy movement and I saw TV interviews with the people in Wall St on the news.

WORLD WAR I AND CONSCRIPTION: HOW THE UNIONS FOUGHT TO EXPEL A LABOR PRIME MINISTER

Tom Orsag begins a series on Labor Party history with a look at the major split in the party during the campaign against conscription in WWI

LABOR UNDER Gillard and Rudd has been a disappointment—and the sense that the Labor government doesn't stand for anything is wide-spread.

But the party's history shows that Labor in government has disappointed its supporters right from its beginning. Few of the betrayals of Labor governments have been more bitter than that of Billy Hughes' government during World War I.

The slaughter and hardship of the war provoked social upheaval even in Australia—and this crisis was reflected inside the still young Australian Labor Party, which only began to form in the 1890s. The war would lead to a rank and file rebellion culminating in an historic split, with both the Labor Prime Minister and NSW Labor Premier expelled from the Party.

Labor and the war

Historian F. B. Smith described the enthusiasm for the start of WWI, "The nation had entered the war outwardly united. Leaders of the Liberal and Labor Parties, the daily press, churchmen of all Denominations, spokesmen for friendly societies, sporting associations and trade unions, all supported the stand of the Mother Country."

Even pro-Home Rule Irish leaders such as Melbourne's John Gavan Duffy argued the Irish should forget their historic grievances with England and fight with "the great Empire to which they belonged."

Few were more enthusiastic than the Labor Party leadership. The election campaign of 1914 was under way when the war started. Labor leader Andrew Fisher told a campaign meeting, "Australia is in the war to the last man and the last shilling". Labor's manifesto said, "Our interests and our very existence are bound up with those of the Empire."

Even Labor Party branch meetings would end with a singing of the then national anthem, "God Save the King".

From the party's inception, Labor

leaders had wrapped themselves in nationalism, declaring Labor the party of nation, as opposed to an identification based on the working class the party was meant to represent.

This reflected the aim of the Labor Party to take hold of government, which, in turn, meant accepting the logic of managing capitalism, and looking after business owners and the rich.

The Labor leadership's loyalty to Australian nationalism meant they were loyal to the British Empire, as a powerful imperial sponsor who would protect Australian capitalist interests in the South Pacific.

The Australian ruling class saw "blood sacrifice" as its rite of passage into the club of nations. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, in August, declared, "It is our baptism of fire".

This blithe willingness to join the imperialist carnage meant that only 7000 of the first 32,000 volunteers returned home.

But the logic of running capitalism clashed with the aspirations of working class Labor Party members and voters for genuine social change. The war exposed those contradictions even more graphically.

The initial enthusiasm among the population for the war saw Andrew Fisher and Labor win the 1914 election. The only Labor member who lost his seat, Senator Arthur Rae, had spoken out against the war.

Fisher, due to ill health, was replaced with the warmonger Billy Hughes in late 1915.

But cuts to living standards as a result of the war began to turn the working class against it. In the first year of the war, prices rose by 12 percent and by 29 per cent over the course of the war. The annual consumption of meat per head in NSW fell from 260 pounds (weight) in 1913 to 162 pounds in 1917-18.

Profiteering by business only sharpened workers' discontent. Shipping company profits increased by twelve-fold between 1913 and 1916.

Cuts to living standards as a result of the war began to turn the working class against it

In 1907, wage earners received 56.2 per cent of national income. By the end of the war, this had fallen to a low point of 48.4 per cent.

Trade union officials

The hardships felt by working class people began to open up the divisions between trade union leaders and the Labor Party leadership. The union leaders themselves are no radical layer—their position as paid officials who negotiate with employers exerts a conservative influence on them, and there are plenty of careerists among their ranks.

But the immediate interests of union officials are different to the interests of Labor parliamentarians. The unions had been the basis for forming the Labor Party, as the big strikes of the 1890s were defeated. They looked to Parliament and political action to provide some defence from the aggressive employers. But once in Parliament, Labor politicians were more strongly committed to running the system, rather than legislating to defend the workers who voted for them.

Labor parliamentarians are two steps removed from the day-to-day struggles of the working class. Elected union officials are more immediately accountable to the union membership and elected shop stewards. As the workers moved to the left under the impact of WWI, union officials felt the pressure to move to represent their members' interests.

In addition the Labor MPs were not delivering the kind of pro-union legislation wanted by the union officials. So they moved to bring the Labor MPs into line by forcing the issue inside the party.

The fight inside the party

The NSW State Labor conference in May 1915 was stormy as the unions expressed their disappointment with NSW Labor Premier William Holman's failure to legislate to control prices.



Holman outmanoeuvred the unions, avoided a censure motion, and maintained overall control of the conference. But the conference carried a call for the federal Labor government to hold a referendum to give the federal government the power to control prices—something that the federal Labor leaders had promised at the 1914 election.

But soon after he became Prime Minister in October 1915, Hughes broke that promise and abandoned plans for the referendum. Only his threat to resign prevented the Federal Labor Executive from condemning him. But, as the left-wing Labor MP, Maurice Blackburn, wrote, “The rank and file were not appeased.”

The fight against conscription

A few months earlier the government had legislated for a “War Census” to determine how many men were available to enrol into the military. It was highly unpopular, as one of its questions asked, “If you able to enlist, what reason do you have for not doing so?”

This raised suspicions that Hughes intended to introduce conscription, and was the signal for the anti-conscription campaign to begin in earnest.

Revolutionary left groups like the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) had opposed the war from the beginning, exposing it as a war fought by workers for the benefit of the rich,

Above: A Labor Party poster campaigning against the conscription referendum

saying, “Let those who own Australia do the fighting”.

In 1916, Tom Barker, the editor of the IWW paper *Direct Action*, was jailed for “prejudicing recruitment” with an anti-war poster reading “War! What for?”

In 1915 the IWW in Sydney and the Victorian Socialist Party in Melbourne seized the opportunity, and set up anti-conscription leagues, which went on to win motions against conscription in the Victorian and NSW Trades Councils by late that year.

The fight to get the Labor Party to oppose conscription gave the union officials another reason to assert their control over the party.

In November 1915, the NSW branch of the conservative Australian Workers Union (AWU) called a meeting of the unions to form an “Industrial Section” of the Labor Party with the aim of taking control of the branch away from Premier Holman.

In March 1916, PM Hughes left Australia to go to Britain. Meanwhile, the campaign against conscription inside the unions and Labor Party built up to the point where the overwhelming bulk of union and party members were against it. By the time Hughes returned in late July, the tide had turned against conscription.

The Dublin Easter Uprising for Irish independence in 1916 and the subsequent British crackdown helped turn the local Irish population against the war—and against conscription. Dr

Daniel Mannix, the Catholic Archbishop of Melbourne, was their outstanding spokesperson.

In April 1916, there was only one dissenter when the Victorian State Labor conference voted to dis-endorse any MP who supported conscription.

In May, the NSW State Labor Conference voted for a similar motion. The Industrial Section captured the NSW State executive and requested a Federal Conference to deal with conscription; officially the Federal Parliamentary Labor Party platform had no position on the issue.

Maurice Blackburn summarised, “Each Conference elected to its Executive a number of new men, filled with anti-conscription ardour and determined to carry out their [ie the Industrial Section] instructions.” State Labor Executives in Victoria, NSW and Queensland demanded anti-conscription pledges from all Labor MPs.

Unity against conscription was growing across the labour movement. In June 1916, an open-air meeting in Sydney’s Domain attracted 6000 people to hear speakers from the NSW Trades and Labour Council, the AWU, the Executive of the Political Labor League of NSW (Labor Party) and the IWW.

In Broken Hill, Mick Considine, the head of the Miners Association, told a meeting he had started to raise an army of “eligibles” to fight conscription and defend unionism.

In the First Battle of the Somme, July 1916, the Australian Imperial Forces lost 28,000 killed or wounded in seven weeks. Hughes returned to Australia the next day, July 31, but did not put conscription to a vote in Cabinet.

By then a majority of Labor parliamentarians, including the pro-war Minister for Trade, Frank Tudor, had promised their State Executives that they would oppose conscription. Tudor’s Richmond branch and others in his Yarra electorate had given him an ultimatum he couldn’t refuse—campaign against conscription or be disendorsed for his parliamentary seat!

In August, the NSW Labor Party held its first anti-conscription meeting in the Domain attended by between 60,000 and 100,000 people.

So Hughes announced a referendum, or technically a plebiscite, for late October 1916, hoping that a successful “Yes” vote would silence opposition to conscription inside Labor.

Hughes tried to seek support from the state Labor Executives and the unions for his pro-conscription position. But when he met the Victorian

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State Executive on September 1, he did not get one vote. He went to Sydney the next day and won only five of 26 votes on the NSW State Executive.

He was so distrusted that the Victorian Labor Secretary Arch Stewart had taken the “precaution” of travelling to Sydney on the same night to prevent Hughes giving the impression that he had won the vote in Victoria!

When Hughes ignored the party’s anti-conscription position and continued to promote a yes vote for the referendum, the NSW Executive expelled him from the party—and banned NSW Premier William Holman and two other MPs from standing again as Labor candidates.

Hughes remained the Prime Minister, and would do anything to win the plebiscite. John Arrowsmith, the left-wing historian of the anti-conscription campaign, wrote, “The full weight of war-time regulations were used against supporters of the ‘no’ case. Violence—trumped up charges resulting in gaol sentences—deportation in some cases—and censorship—were some of the measured used.”

There were 3442 prosecutions under the War Precautions Act, including Broken Hill miners’ leader and future NSW Labor MP for Broken Hill, Percy Brookfield.

Racist fears drove Australia’s rulers

BILLY HUGHES was feted in Britain because of his belligerent speeches in favour of the war.

Henry Boote, in the *Australian Worker*, argued that Hughes had been “duchessed”—seduced by the attention. Some even argued that Hughes had been bribed by the British.

In fact Hughes was a loyal servant of Australia’s ruling class, sharing their fear at Japan’s defeat of Russia in their 1905 war. The rise of a serious military competitor in the Asia-Pacific, and a non-European one at that, filled them with terror.

Conscription was a way of showing Australia’s loyalty to the British empire and also securing a place at the Peace Conference at the end of the war, which would allow the government to limit Japan’s expansion into the Pacific.

At a “secret session of Parliament” in 1916, reporting of which was banned, Hughes set out his reasons for wanting conscription.

Major Piesse wrote that it was, “widely believed that an authoritative statement had been made to the

In response to an order by the Governor-General, instigated by Hughes for all “single and childless men” to enlist in the armed forces, the trade unions called a one-day general strike on October 4. In Melbourne, a crowd of 50,000 rallied on the Yarra Bank.

Two weeks before the referendum 12 IWW members were arrested for arson in Sydney. The frame-up was opposed by the anti-conscription movement, especially by Henry Boote, editor of *The Australian Worker*, paper of the AWU.

Despite the viciousness of Hughes’ campaign, heroically, out of the 2.5 million votes cast, the “No” vote won by a small majority of 72,476.

But Hughes was unrepentant. He called the result, “A black day for Australia. It was a triumph for the unworthy, the selfish and treacherous in our midst.”

At the Caucus meeting of Federal Labor MPs on November 14, Hughes, the quintessential Labor rat, walked out with 24 pro-conscription Labor MPs to form National Labor. Hughes won an early election in May 1917 and combined with the Liberals to form government and later a new party, the Nationalist Party.

Having lost the first conscription

meeting that Japan would challenge the White Australia Policy after the war... Australia would then need the help of the rest of the Empire, and that if she wished to be sure of getting it she must now throw her full strength into the war.”

Hughes calculated that once Britain and all the other Dominions of the Empire (Canada, South Africa and New Zealand) had adopted conscription, Australia would appear to be avoiding its share if it did not.

Socialist historian Humphey McQueen has written, “Hughes ‘referred to the danger to which Australia was exposed, owing to her close proximity to hordes of the coloured races, with particular reference to Japan, who although our ally in the then World War, might at some future time be our enemy’.”

Hughes put upholding the racist White Australia Policy, and Australia’s imperialist desire to grab German colonies in the Pacific, ahead of ending the suffering imposed by the war.



Above: Billy Hughes, the Labor “rat”

vote in October 1916, he held a second in December 1917. But conscription was again rejected, this time by a much bigger margin, 166,588 votes.

Conscription could not have been defeated in two referenda if the unions and rank and file Labor members had not asserted themselves against Hughes. The expulsion of Hughes was a victory inside the Labor Party against the right and against the war.

It had taken an enormous fight to bring the MPs under the control of the party itself. This has become a historical pattern, the result of the basic contradiction at the heart of Labor. It is a party that represents workers, yet sets out to run the capitalist system through control of parliament, an institution that leaves real power in the hands of the business owners who control the economy.

This has led Labor governments again and again to capitulate to the demands of big business and to attack their working class supporters.

But it also shows the gulf that exists between the Labor Party’s leaders and the *labour* movement.

A mass campaign of industrial and political action deepened the contradictions inside Labor and fed divisions between Labor governments and members of Parliament on the one hand and union leaders and the mass of party members and supporters on the other—ultimately defeating conscription and the right of the Party.

Honest depiction of homophobia in daily life

Weekend

Directed by Andrew Haigh
Out now, selected release

WEEKEND IS a beautiful and sad film about same-sex love. The most impressive and unique thing about this movie is how true to life it is.

In too many mainstream films and TV shows that portray gay and lesbian life, even in a positive light, the characters inhabit a fantasy world where everyone is filthy rich (think of the *The L Word*) and where the characters rarely experience homophobia (like last year's *The Kids Are Alright*). Many of the better films, like *Brokeback Mountain* or *A Single Man*, are tragedies. But *Weekend* captures much more of the day-to-day experience of being in a same-sex relationship and facing homophobia.

Russell meets Glen at a gay nightclub and after they spend the night together, Glen interviews Russell in the morning for an art project. They fall for each other, but find one another challenging—and central to this is the two characters' different approaches to dealing with their oppression.

Glen yells out Russell's window at someone shouting homophobic insults and gets into an argument with a pub owner who doesn't appreciate how loudly Glen is discussing his sex life. Russell, however, doesn't discuss his personal life with his straight friends. He is hesitant to express his affection for Glen in public.

There is one particular scene that is painfully familiar. Russell is on the train, on his way to a date with Glen, listening to a bunch of school kids say cruel things about someone they think is gay, even imitating his supposedly "gay walk". You can see the anger on his face, but he doesn't move and says nothing. There is an element of self-loathing in Russell's restraint that Glen's confrontational attitude begins to challenge.

More than 40 years on from the birth of the gay liberation movement, *Weekend* shows us the reality of the still-hostile world in which LGBT people navigate their lives and relationships. That a basic human right like same-sex marriage is unlikely to pass through the Australian parliament when it is debated this year is another sign of that. But despite how grim reality might be, *Weekend* helps send a message that it's a world we can challenge.

Amy Thomas



Ollie Butterfield: a loss to all struggles for justice

SOLIDARITY WOULD like to offer our deepest condolences to the family and friends of Oliver Butterfield who died in a car accident on December 29, 2011.

Ollie was a brilliant musician and activist. Aged just 26, his death is both a tragedy and a serious loss to all struggles for justice. Whether shouting down racists on the streets of Alice Springs, sitting in at Centrelink against Income Management, or locking on to detention centre fences and mining equipment, Ollie taught us all that the forces of oppression must be confronted head on.

Ollie had a razor sharp mind, which sketched out some brilliant tracks to last for all time. Below is an extract of some lyrics from *Call-out to the Nation*.

Out in the desert
Deserted people eyes diverted
Look away from a world gone a bad way
The dreaming tells of a different fate
Than being surrounded by hate
White collar white man white lease papers and a white police van
Blind to contrition
Third world hidden politicians
With racist ambitions

From basic cards to prohibition

Stop the intervention

Rich from the land that they promised to protect
People got good reason to suspect
That the intervention is land grab assimilation
Macklin's forcing little children into starvation
Canberra's figures got no citation
We're all watching country become plantation
And waste dumps for uranium
Stealing Muckaty station
The whole corrupt institution needs replacing

So this is a call out
To the nation
Do you want an island paradise or an abomination
It's not what we think, it's what we do
Look after country, from the Florentine to Kakadu
That's the only way that this land can look after you
If you fall outside the guidelines
Then next it could be you
Forced underground from the life that you knew

THATCHER'S REAL LEGACY: RULE FOR THE RICH

The Iron Lady
Directed by Phyllida Lloyd
In cinemas now

MARGARET THATCHER was a ruling class warrior whose policies created record unemployment and misery in Britain. Thatcher's destructive legacy is obscured in the new biographical movie *The Iron Lady*.

To quote the film's blurb, Thatcher, Prime Minister from 1979 to 1990, is a woman, "who broke through the barriers of class and gender".

In truth she did more to entrench sexism and class inequality than just about anyone else in 1980s Britain. Thatcher extended the power of the rich, cut back the welfare state, and created millions of unemployed men and women.

Women who supported the miners' strike against Thatcher protested outside the first screening of the film in Britain. Jean Innes, who joined the protest, told the media:

"In the film, Thatcher is made out to be some sort of wonderful woman who helped the women's cause, but in reality she put it back 100 years. We're still suffering for what she did now, and it shouldn't be trivialised in a film."

Along with Ronald Reagan in the US, and Hawke and Keating here in Australia, Thatcher led an attempt to restore corporate profits following the 1970s economic crisis. In their own countries each pioneered what are now known as neo-liberal policies. They

were so strongly identified with Thatcher that in Britain the new policies were often referred to as Thatcherism.

Following the radicalism of the 1960s and 1970s, Thatcher wanted to crush worker militancy and the idea there was any alternative to free market capitalism.

In her biography she described a key part of her legacy as the emergence of New Labour—the transformation of the British Labour Party after its acceptance of her own policies into a party that denounced socialism and supported the free market.

Our own Gillard Labor government is another example of this legacy. The leadership of the Labor Party here is committed to the market and hence consistently disillusions its working class supporters, dragging politics to the right.

It was the British Labour Party's devotion to running capitalism that saw Thatcher elected in the first place. In government, British Labour started pushing public sector job and welfare cuts in response to the 1976 recession. Widespread strikes, famously dubbed the "winter of discontent", broke out in 1978-79. Disillusionment with the Labour government opened the door for Thatcher to win power in 1979.

Thatcher attempted to undercut the idea that government could tame the excesses of capitalism. She famously stated that there was no society—if you had problems in life or were unemployed this was your own fault not

the government's or the system's.

Alan Bund, a former economic adviser to Thatcher, explained Thatcherism in an unusual moment of honesty: "The 1980s policies of attacking inflation by squeezing the economy and public spending were a cover to bash the workers".

The effects were devastating. The poorest were made to pay through cuts and doubling VAT, the British version of the GST. This allowed the Tories to cut the top rate of income tax from 60 to 40 per cent and reduce corporate tax from 52 to 35 per cent. Inequality rose substantially. A UN development report in 1997 stated that in no other country had seen poverty increase faster since the 1980s.

Thatcher privatised two-fifths of government-owned industries. The new private owners sacked staff and forced those remaining to work harder for less.

Thatcher's conservative political ideology also combined individualism, anti-Communism and nationalism, aiming to direct blame for the crisis away from the market and onto unions, state bureaucracy, social welfare spending and the decline of "British values".

Unstable

But Thatcher's rule was never secure. Polls in the 1980s indicated that the majority of people supported increased public spending and were willing to pay higher taxes for it. Her approval rating fell to 23 per cent in 1980—lower than any previous

Thatcher led an attempt to restore corporate profits following the 1970s economic crisis

British Prime Minister. High unemployment fuelled mass resentment, as it increased from 5.4 per cent in 1979 to 12 per cent in 1982, the highest level since the 1930s.

However Thatcher was able to win again at both the 1983 and 1987 elections. Her policies did start to have some effect as growth picked up in 1982. While they increased inequality and unemployment the wealth of a section of the British middle and working class did rise, giving Thatcher a support base.

The privatisation of public housing was a crucial factor to sustaining Thatcher's popularity. This allowed people to buy homes at lower than market prices. It also led to speculation on property prices, allowing families to borrow against their property assets, giving the illusion of increasing living standards.

But Thatcher was only able to secure repeat election victories due to the conservatism of the British Labour Party and their failure to offer an alternative. In the 1987 election Labor leader Neil Kinnock argued the Labour Party was "Thatcherism with a human face".

The Labour Party leadership accepted the need to maintain business profitability, so that they were incapable of presenting an alternative to Thatcherism, disillussioning their working class supporters. In the 1983 election remarkably only 39 per cent of union members voted for Labour.

Thatcher's 1983 election victory came follow-



ing the Falklands War with Argentina. Thatcher launched the war to drum up patriotism and distract people from the misery her policies were creating. Labour disgracefully supported the war.

The Falkland Islands off Argentina were a relic of the British Empire and of little economic value to Britain. But when Argentina occupied the islands Thatcher spent millions to send a fleet to South America.

Taking on the unions
After 1983 Thatcher intensified her attack on

the unions. She aimed to crush union power to keep wages down and allow economic restructuring to continue unopposed. Thatcher had learnt from the defeat of Tory governments in 1972 and 1974 by the miners. The Tories planned to pick off and defeat weaker unions first, before isolating and attacking stronger unions, using fines, scab labour and police repression.

Thatcher faced enormous resistance. In 1984 she announced the closure of 20 of the 174 state-run mines—leading to an immediate 20,000 job losses.

Above: A graffitied film poster—Thatcher remains hated two decades after she was removed as Prime Minister

The miners' strike of 1984-85 was the biggest and longest mass strike in British history. Around 165,000 miners, two-thirds of the mining workforce, struck for a year.

Thatcher was ruthless. She organised fuel stocks, paid for oil to provide electricity in place of coal and decked out police with riot gear.

She was assisted by the weakening of activist networks among the miners and their replacement by full time union officials. The Labour Party had itself promoted this as a way of reining in worker militancy.

Joe Henry, a miner in 1984, explained that: "When miners struck in 1972 there were 80,000 miners out each day on active picket duty. In 1984 there were perhaps 4000 involved out of 170,000."

But it was the failure of other unions to take any solidarity action in support of the miners that left them isolated and ensured their defeat.

In March 1985 the mining union conceded, calling off the strike. Thatcher was lucky to claim victory—she would later admit in her biography that there were times it had looked like the miners would win. The coal and electricity industries lost £3 billion fighting the miners—all of which was covered by the government.

Thatcher's defeat

The mass movement against the poll tax finally defeated Thatcher in 1990.

The poll tax aimed to replace a variety of property taxes with a flat rate—so that regardless of the value of your property everyone paid the same. Large numbers refused to pay the poll tax and anti-poll tax demonstrations took place across the UK.

In London 200,000

marched against the poll tax. When protesters rioted, lashing out at banks and luxury cars following a vicious police attack on the demonstration Labour Party Deputy Leader Roy Hattersley condemned the protest and called for mass arrests.

Councils sent summonses to millions of families for non-payment. Thousands of people showed up to court, bringing the legal system to a halt when judges were overwhelmed by the number of cases. In December 1990 the first non-payers of the tax were sentenced to prison time. Amongst them were students, Labour MPs and single mothers.

The government admitted the tax was finished in 1991. Public hatred of Thatcher led the Tory party to remove her from the leadership. It was fitting that after the tragic union defeats at the hands of Thatcher, it was mass united resistance that brought her downfall.

Thatcher's legacy is twofold. On one hand are her destructive neo-liberal policies. But her defeat showed that mass working class resistance, led by socialists against the wishes of the Labour Party leadership, could stop the attacks on workers.

As we face a new crisis this lesson is crucial. The potential for the working class to fight back remains, in the face of economic crisis and the Labor Party's capitulation to big business.

In Australia we face a Labor government just as committed to the market and to increasing corporate profits at the expense of the rest of us. Building working class resistance, through mass strikes and protests, along with a larger Left, can defeat austerity and win a new world.

Eliot Hoving

'THEY WERE REALLY ROUGH, AND THEY WERE LAUGHING' TERRANCE BRISCOE: KILLED BY POLICE?

By Paddy Gibson

EIGHT YEARS after the shocking deaths and police cover-ups of the killings of TJ Hickey in Redfern and Mulrunji Doomadgee on Palm Island, there are all the signs of another disgraceful death in custody and cover-up in Alice Springs.

On January 4, Terrance Daniel Briscoe was picked up by Alice Springs police at around 9.30pm for being intoxicated in public and taken into "protective custody". By 2am, January 5, he was dead in a police cell. Terrance was a 28 year-old Anmatyerre man. His death is another tragic reminder that 20 years since the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody the problem is worse than ever. The circumstances surrounding Terrance's death are extremely suspicious.

The family was not informed until 6.30am on 5 January. They were initially told that Terrance had suffered head injuries due to a fall (although the police never bothered to get medical attention) and that he had died of a heart attack.

The time delays that characterised the police's tainted investigation of Mulrunji Doomadgee's death on Palm Island are just as much a feature of the Briscoe case. It was hours before the police notified the family of Terrance's death and they've had weeks since then to make their story fit the facts. On Palm Island, the Coroner found police had lied during investigations and worked together to cook their stories.

Currently there is no criminal investigation and all witness statements of distressed family members and other vulnerable Aboriginal people for the Coroner's report are being taken solely by the police.

The Royal Commission recommended among other things that the family of the deceased be able to inspect the scene of the death and to have an independent observer at the autopsy, as well as being able to engage an independent medical practitioner to be present at the post-mortem. It also recommended that each black death in custody be treated as if it may be a homicide. Of course, none of these things have happened.

Amnesty International, The Greens, Australians for Native Title



Above: Protests in Alice Springs have been pushing for answers

and Reconciliation (ANTaR), and the National Police Accountability Network (of community and Aboriginal Legal Services) and the Central Australian Aboriginal Congress are all calling for an independent inquiry into Terrance's death.

But almost two months since, the family has not even been given an interim autopsy report. There are CCTV cameras in every room of the Alice Springs police station. This footage must be released immediately.

While no official cause of death has been announced, the family has information that the autopsy shows that "asphyxia", or suffocation, is the most likely cause of death. The testimony of two witnesses who were in custody with Mr Briscoe indicates that police may have suffocated him while roughing him up at the police station.

Oscar White told AAP that one officer pushed Mr Briscoe hard onto the ground and held him face down and sat on his back while other officers put their feet on him. He said Mr Briscoe struggled to breathe and a stitched cut above his eye was opened and began to bleed.

"They were really rough, and they were laughing at the same time," White said. "They were making a mockery out of him. He was short of breath too, because he was actually really, really suffocated."

Mr White stated that Mr Briscoe

was like a rag when police picked him up off the floor and dragged him to his cell. One of the main recommendations of the Royal Commission was the decriminalisation of public drunkenness, but like most of its recommendations, this has been ignored and Aboriginal people continue to die in custody at the rate of one a month.

Protest

Immediately following the death, the Briscoe family began protesting. His cousin, Dean Briscoe, and supporters carried placards around the town against black deaths in custody. Two hundred people held vigil outside the Alice Springs courthouse.

In Sydney the Stop the Intervention Collective Sydney held a protest on February 5 outside NT Tourism offices to mark one month since Terrance's death.

So far, no police officer has ever been convicted for the death of an Aboriginal person in prison. The Queensland Department of Public Prosecutions initially refused to charge Senior Sergeant Chris Hurley for the death of Mulrunji Doomadgee. But mass protests at the obvious injustice forced the state government to press manslaughter charges.

Charging Chris Hurley was a first in Australian history. If Terrance and the Briscoe family are to get justice, we need to campaign to make sure it's not the last.

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The testimony of two witnesses indicates police may have suffocated him