


Solidarity

Issue No. 57 / June 2013

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OPEN THE BORDERS
FREE THE REFUGEES
STOP ABBOTT, NOT THE BOATS

Turkey's Spring: the
fight against Erdogan's
regime

Send in the clowns:
The politics of Bob
Katter and Clive Palmer

Six years of shame:
Aboriginal assimilation
and the Intervention

SOLIDARITY MEETINGS

Sydney

7pm Thursday June 20

Open the borders, close the camps: why socialists oppose all immigration controls

7pm Thursday June 27

The vote - how it was won and how it was undermined

7pm Thursday July 5

PUBLIC MEETING: THE NEW STOLEN GENERATION
with guest speakers **Paddy Gibson**, anti-Intervention activist and **Sue Gillett**, Aboriginal activist

Sydney Solidarity meets 7pm every Thursday at Brown St Hall, Brown St, Newtown

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Melbourne

6pm Tuesday 18 June

The Turkish Spring: freedom, democracy and the fight against Erdogan

6pm Tuesday 18 June

Eddie McGuire, Adam Goodes and racism in Australia

with special guest speaker

Tamar Hopkins from Flemington Kensington Legal Service who have fought racism against African immigrants

Melbourne Solidarity meets 6pm every Tuesday, Second floor Union House, Melbourne Uni

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Solidarity is published monthly. Make sure you don't miss an issue—send in this form along with cheque or money order and we will mail you *Solidarity* each month.

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WHO ARE SOLIDARITY?

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.

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HALL GREENLAND

Greens candidate, author and activist since 1960s

Things they say

My excuse? I was a bit zoned out. Bad luck, every gun is loaded, every mic is on.

Collingwood President Eddie McGuire on why he referred to Aboriginal footballer Adam Goodes as someone who should play King Kong on radio

As I explained in introducing [Tony] Abbott at the IPA anniversary dinner, Abbott must operate within the cultural space allowed him. My role is to help expand the cultural space so that what was once thought too hard, too risky, becomes the easy and sane. It is also to point to what needs doing, before most people are ready for the bother.

Right-wing commentator Andrew Bolt explains his role

I will have to downgrade my house if I go and live in The Lodge.

Clive Palmer is prepared to sacrifice for the Prime Ministership

[The influence of the Greens] has taken policy more to the left rather than the centre. I think that hasn't been helpful from a business perspective.

Heather Ridout, Reserve Bank board member and former Australian Industry Group chief executive

For my labour I expect to be paid an amount that reflects my service.

Westfield Chairman Frank Lowy explaining why he and his sons paid themselves \$18.9 million this year on top of the \$91.6 million they got from Westfield dividends

They must have thought I was hungry.

Julia Gillard after a child ruined her photo op in a school by throwing a sandwich at her for the second time in a month

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INSIDE THE \$Y\$TEM

Ranks of Australian millionaires swell

ACCORDING TO Boston Consulting Group the ranks of Australia's millionaires are swelling. Their study measures cash and shares and says the number of millionaire households leapt by 19 per cent from 148,000 to 178,000 in only one year, an increase at a rate more than double the global average.

But this rosy picture of growing wealth is only the situation at one end of town. At the other, 72,000 sole parents have been driven into poverty by Gillard's sole parenting payment cuts and NewStart hasn't been increased in real terms since 1994.

Queen gets a belated birthday gift from admirer

A MULTIMILLION dollar gold coach commissioned for the Queen's 80th birthday, partly paid for with \$245,000 from the Howard government, has just been finished in a workshop in Manly and is ready to be shipped off to England. As if a gold coach for an unemployed millionaire wasn't redundant enough, the Queen's 80th birthday was actually in 2006.

Detention hunger strikes and self harm threats no big incident for Serco



DETENTION LOGS published through a new media partnership reveal Serco treats visitors taking photos and minor protests outside detention centres as more serious than hunger strikes and some self-harm. The new detention logs site is compiled by journalists at the *Guardian Australia*, *New Matilda* and *The Global Mail*.

One "incident report" lists photos taken outside the Christmas Island centre by two visitors from refugee advocacy group Chilout as "critical". This is considered a higher level of emergency than hunger strikes lasting longer than 24 hours or asylum seekers making threats of self-harm.

Also on the critical list are any demonstrations outside detention centres. As a report from May 2010 reveals, even a group of 19 Christians gathered outside Maribyrnong detention centre in Melbourne was considered "critical". Yet the report notes operations in the centre were not affected by the protest in any way at all. Clearly, for Serco, the welfare of asylum seekers is not the key priority.

Police kill the mentally ill

NEW STATISTICS from the Australian Institute of Criminology show almost half of all people shot dead by Australian police over the last 22 years had a mental illness. The study reveals 44 out of 105 fatal shootings by cops since 1989 fit this description, with those suffering from schizophrenia and psychosis most likely to be killed.

The shocking figures come as the mother of a 15-year old boy killed by police launches a landmark action at the UN to try and put an end to Australian police investigating themselves.

Tyler Cassidy was drunk and emotionally distressed when Victoria police shot him three times as he stood alone in his local skate park with two knives in 2008. His mother said "Tyler's death was investigated by members of the same police force at whose hands he died. The police officers who killed my son were not even treated as suspects." Only 73 seconds passed between when police approached the boy and when he was shot.

Since then Victoria police have agreed to extra training aimed at dealing with "irrational people", but refuse independent scrutiny.

Racism thrives in the defence force

THE AUSTRALIAN Defence Force's office of the Inspector-General has received a stream of complaints in recent weeks about soldiers posting Islamophobic comments on known hate pages and social media. One serving officer revealed his friend had ripped off a woman's headscarf, another called to "kill them all". In 2012, a Facebook page used by 1000 former and active personnel proudly displayed images that sadistically mocked injured Muslims.

But of course, such attitudes shouldn't be a surprise when killing Muslims is all in a day's work. Two children were killed by Australian soldiers in Afghanistan in March.

Research and writing by
Adam Adelpour

Send suggestions for INSIDE
THE SYSTEM to solidarity@solidarity.net.au

Sick, disabled woman evicted from public housing

"LESLEY LONG has one leg, is partially blind and deaf, and has diabetes. She is also homeless due to the government's three strikes eviction policy, designed to target trouble-making public housing tenants engaging in anti-social behaviour," reported the ABC in June. Lesley and her partner were found sleeping in a neighbouring park. She is now in hospital.

In true empathic style, Department of Housing executive director Steve Altham said in response that tenants are, "responsible for the behaviour of others who visit their homes... at the end of the day, at what point does the community get to say enough is enough?" The "three strikes" policy has recently spread to Queensland.

Newman hacks down land clearing laws

QUEENSLAND LNP Premier Campbell Newman has passed legislation that will help undo the single biggest carbon emissions abatement measure in Australian history. Land-clearing restriction laws that came into effect in 2007 saved an estimated 24 megatons of CO₂ per annum.

Queensland was levelling its bushland at a rate comparable to that of the notorious clearing in the Amazon Basin. A study by the World Wildlife Federation has estimated that Newman's changes will immediately allow the clearing of land that holds 323 million tons of carbon when the vegetation is fully grown, a big number given Australia's annual emissions are roughly 550 million tons.



EDITORIAL

Labor's shuffling deck chairs on the Titanic

ANOTHER ROUND of infighting has broken out inside the parliamentary Labor Party as the reality of defeat this September finally sinks in.

Factional hack Laurie Ferguson—who holds his seat by a margin of 6.8 per cent—went public over Labor refugee policy. This was not to urge Julia Gillard to abandon the long-failed attempt to out-do Abbott on this issue, but to shift even further to the right over refugees. As if that would save him, or Labor.

Instead of implementing policies that would be popular with Labor voters, Labor MPs are fighting like cats while following the same sorry rightward trajectory that has given Abbott the initiative in the first place. Discussion has again emerged about replacing Gillard with Kevin Rudd in a last ditch attempt to win back votes.

Like the proverbial rat abandoning a sinking ship, Laurie's brother, Martin, infamous for his adoration of nuclear power, announced his retirement in early June. But it was Liberal leader, Tony Abbott, who could barely hold back tears as he declared Ferguson "Labor Party royalty". Some right-wing commentators have tried to claim there is a gulf between Ferguson and Gillard and Swan, but Ferguson is modern Labor to the core.

He was a senior minister from 2007 until he stood down following Rudd's aborted leadership challenge in March. Announcing his resignation, he lauded "working with business" as opposed to "pointless class rhetoric". He praised the Accord of the 1980s and the "tough decisions" to trash jobs and wages it involved and declared, "I am proud that I have stayed true to... market principles". Like so much of Labor's leadership, Ferguson would have been at home in the Liberals.

Prospects

It's all-but-forgotten that Labor rode to power on the back of hopes for an end to Howard's right-wing agenda. These hopes have been systematically squandered. Six years of Labor in government has left almost all of Howard's laws on the books. There is still a ban on same-sex marriage and most of WorkChoices remains in place. Gillard has done Abbott's work for him by pushing single mothers onto NewStart and cutting \$2.3 billion from higher education.

Even Labor's recent attempts to pose as reformers have been half-



Above: Labor is imploding as Gillard takes them towards electoral oblivion

baked. The Fairfax press claims schools will only get a \$393 million increase in the next year from the Gonski school funding, and will actually lose money in the two following years compared to previous arrangements. This is because existing schools funding programs are being cut to find the money for Gonski funding.

Now, the ripples from the global economic crisis are hitting the mining boom and investment is drying up. Without mining, the economy grew by just 0.9 per cent in the year to March.

This is producing widespread job cuts. Twelve hundred jobs will go as Ford closes. Another 2500 jobs in the car parts industry are also threatened. Ford has received \$1.1 billion in government subsidies since 2000 to keep its plants open but this didn't stop them throwing workers on the scrap heap.

.....
Building a fight against the Labor government's cutbacks and racism will strengthen the activist networks we will need to fight Abbott

Target has cut 260 jobs from its Geelong headquarters. GlaxoSmith-Kline has sacked 120 workers and hundreds of jobs are expected to go at Telstra. Swan Cleaning has collapsed leaving 2500 people without jobs or entitlements (see p10).

Abbott has already promised to axe 12,000 public service jobs. Meanwhile he is ramping up anti-refugee rhetoric, declaring he will "stop the boats" in his first term.

Everything we do now to prepare for the fight against Abbott matters. Resistance to Abbott won't come from the Labor Party or parliament. Building a fight for jobs and against the Labor government's cutbacks and racism now will strengthen the activist networks we will need to fight Abbott.

Workers at Sydney Uni have set the example. Management is using the federal budget cuts as an excuse to refuse staff a decent pay rise. But five strike days this semester have left management rattled. Over 380 new members have joined the union since the start of the year, strengthening its capacity to fight.

Fighting the racism and attacks on refugees will also be important to take the fight to Gillard and Abbott. Labor has implemented policies that are unsustainable. Thousands of asylum seekers have been left in limbo and without work rights in the community. Hundreds more are detained indefinitely on Manus Island and Nauru. This will lead to more and more desperation and chaos.

As tensions rise again, there will be opportunities to step up the refugee campaign and turn opinion back in favour of asylum seekers.

Building these struggles now can be the start of turning around politics in Australia, and fighting from below, for real change.

Women left behind by Gillard

GILLARD HAS revived the issue of Abbott's misogyny again, launching "Women for Gillard" and declaring that under an Abbott government abortion will become "the political plaything of men."

But her passion for abortion rights is a recent discovery. When a woman in Queensland was charged for having a medical abortion in 2008, Gillard did nothing as she was dragged through the courts. Abortion is still in the criminal code in Queensland and some other states. It is almost always performed in private clinics. Gillard has not used her position to improve this situation.

The gender pay gap has actually continued to widen under Labor, from 14.9 per cent in 2004 to 17.6 per cent in 2012, according to the Gender Equality Agency. Gillard's attack on single mothers has been, in the words of academic Sarah Charlesworth, "a black stain on the government."

There is no doubt of the sexism and misogyny of the right-wing shock jocks and their friends in the Coalition. Abbott's right-wing view of the world will have to be resisted. But working class women, Aboriginal women and single parents have all been left behind by Gillard's government.

New report shows 457 claims scaremongering



By Penny Howard

THE GILLARD government is continuing its campaign of scaremongering about 457 visa workers. It has announced new laws requiring mandatory “labour-market testing” for jobs before employers are able to sponsor a worker on a 457 visa. This means employers must submit proof all jobs were advertised widely and none of the local applicants had the skills to undertake the job before a 457 visa application is submitted.

The government and many unions claim 457 visas are being used to undermine wages and put local workers out of jobs. But all the evidence of rorting is anecdotal or on a small scale. The Fairfax press exposed over 200 cases of exploitation of 457 workers in early June, but all involved one employer, Radovan Laski, already previously accused of being a conman.

A major survey of 457 visa holders published in May by the Migration Council of Australia involved a much larger investigation. Researchers interviewed 3812 workers who had held 457 visas for at least 10 months. Far from being temporary guest workers, 40,485 workers on 457 visas became permanent residents of Australia in 2011-12 (20 per cent of all new permanent residents).

In total 88 per cent of 457 visa workers surveyed said that their working conditions were “equal to their Australian colleagues”. About 85 per cent said that they were “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with the 457 program.

Union membership

While 457 visa workers had lower rates of unionisation than the wider population, the results show they are by no means impossible to organise. About 7 per cent of workers on 457 visas report-

ed being union members, compared to the Australian average of 18 per cent. But a high number of 457 visa holders are managers (15 per cent).

Union membership rates varied widely according to the sector of employment, as in the wider population. There were higher levels of union membership in health care and social assistance (24.5 per cent), education and training (11.7 per cent), and construction (10.3 per cent).

Reforms to 457 visas

In addition 1600 employers were also interviewed. Worryingly, approximately 20 per cent said that workers on 457 visas have “increased loyalty”, and 2-3 per cent report they had “great control of the employee”. But most employers reported the main benefit of using a 457 visa was in finding highly skilled workers.

The biggest problem with the 457 visa is the extent to which workers are dependant on employer sponsorship for their ongoing and permanent residence. The legislation currently before parliament will extend the period of time that workers on 457 visas are able to be in Australia between jobs from 28 to 90 days. This is a good start.

The report also identified some of the discrimination that 457 visa holders and their families experience, such as the huge school fees charged in NSW and the ACT and the fact partners and children of 457 visa holders have no access to migrant settlement services. These measures are not addressed in the new legislation.

Instead the proposed “labour market test” will increase the discrimination 457 visa holders experience. It cements the idea that they take jobs from Australians. Improved wages and working conditions for all can only be won through all workers fighting together to improve conditions.

Former Nauru

ON 26 August 2001, the MV Tampa rescued Palapa 1, with 438 asylum seekers on board (369 men, 26 women and 43 children). In September 2001, the Howard government signed an agreement with the Nauru government to establish off-shore processing of asylum seekers on the island—marking the beginning of the Pacific Solution. It ran until February 2008, when the Rudd Labor government formally announced its closure.

In November 2001, Mohammad Ali Baqiri was a ten year-old Afghan asylum seeker who was travelling to Australia with his brother’s family, and a cousin; together making five kids under ten years old. They left because of the Taliban and the war that came with the NATO occupation. Mohammed and his brother sailed straight into Howard’s Pacific Solution.

How did you get to Australia?

We sold everything we had in Afghanistan and spent it all to get smuggled to Australia. They took us to Pakistan and made fake passports for us. Then we spent six months in Indonesia until a boat was ready to take us to Australia. Different smugglers all worked together because they couldn’t afford things on their own like the boat.

It took us seven days and nights to get to Australia. As soon as we reached Australian waters we were intercepted by the Australian Navy. They told us to go back but most of the people said we were not going to leave. Then they said they were going to force us to leave. All of the sudden a fire started on the boat.

Everyone was panicking; children, families. My brother’s family had six kids. Everyone was throwing themselves in the water. Luckily we had some life jackets. But they didn’t fit the kids. Two people died in that incident and my own nephew was unconscious for six hours. It took the navy two hours to pull us out of the water.

We were kept on the navy ship for a few days; then we were taken to Christmas Island. We didn’t even have beds at first. One pair of shorts and t-shirt was all I had for more than a month. We didn’t have any shoes and it was very prickly ground.

Then they said that if we wanted to go to Australia or have our cases processed we needed to go to Nauru. We were happy—we thought why not? But, we were in Nauru for nearly three years.

In total 88 per cent of 457 visa workers surveyed said that their working conditions were “equal to their Australian colleagues”

refugee: 'We can't let this happen again and again'

What was it like in the detention centre on Nauru?

Our detention centre was in the middle of Nauru. [This detention centre at Topside was the one re-opened by Julia Gillard.] We had to shower with salty water; the toilets were really dirty. It was just off. For a few months the food was good but after that it just kept getting worse. Most people slept on the ground because there weren't enough beds. You had to do all your washing by hand.

I was young but for my brother it was very difficult. Many people suffered depression and anxieties.

They interviewed us and told us that we were not refugees. They told us that whoever wants to go back will get \$2000. But people like us had sold everything. Half of the people took the money and left because they thought there was no hope. A couple of people I knew went back and they are now dead.

Before you came did you know anything about Australia's policies?

When you live in Afghanistan, when you're a refugee, you don't think about whether you will be accepted because of policies. You are just running away to be in a safe place.

Why did people start hunger strikes?

They were sick of staying there for two and a half years and still being told there was no way they were getting to Australia. People got angry and thought we have to do something; we can't stay here. They thought if we aren't the real refugees, who are the real refugees? Unless we do something we wouldn't be heard. We needed to do things together.

Three people sewed their lips and groups of people would join in every week to support them. My brother didn't sew his lips but he was part of the hunger strike. He became unconscious and was sent to the hospital. Every time someone became unconscious we would send a picture to the media.

What was the result of the hunger strikes?

The hunger strikes put a lot of pressure on the Australian government. They showed that the government was keeping us there with no decisions. Then, suddenly, without any interviews they said that people were



accepted into Australia.

People were happy but also crying because they wanted to know [why] didn't they recognise us as refugees at the start, why did they keep us here for three years and now you are telling us that we can go to Australia?

The manager of the detention centre would say we would never go to Australia. But, we were actually the first family after the hunger strike to land in Melbourne.

I was ten when I got to the detention centre on Nauru; when I got out I was 13. They gave us Temporary Protection Visas and we got to

Above: Mohammad Ali Baqir, who spent three years on Nauru under the Howard government, speaks at a recent refugee rights rally

Australia in July 2004. We were given three years and then they reconsidered whether we could stay.

What do you think about asylum seekers being sent to Nauru again?

They are going through the same problems we faced. We can't let this happen again and again. I just feel really sorry for those people in those far away places and there is no media..

People need to take action, join forces and tell the government to not do it anymore. It's also a waste of taxpayers money, they could spend money on something that is actually good.

Nauru detention unlawful?

AS SOLIDARITY goes to press, the constitutional challenge to detention on Nauru is winding up. A successful challenge could mean that asylum seekers would be free to leave the detention centre.

Human rights lawyer, George Newhouse, told the ABC, "Under the Nauruan constitution it's unlawful to hold an asylum seeker unless they are being deported, removed or extradited, which clearly these people aren't."

All the asylum seekers have now been moved from tents into the newly-erected buildings in the Topside camp, which unfortunately is reported to now have room for another 100 asylum seekers. In recent weeks, the Australian government sent another 28 asylum seekers to Nauru, and told them it will be six months until they get an interview. But the half of the camp that arrived after 12 October 2012 are still waiting for their first interview.

Meanwhile the waiting takes its toll. The numbers using sleeping pills grow weekly and there are still reports of self-harm. Yet, there are plans to expand Nauru's detention regime. More dongas and heavy construction equipment have recently been shipped in. More reasons then to oppose off-shore processing.

Bridging visas mean life in limbo

SINCE THE Labor government announced the re-opening of offshore detention on Nauru and Manus Island on 13 August last year over 19,000 asylum seekers have arrived by boat. The policy has clearly failed to stop refugees coming to Australia—because they have no other place to turn to escape death and danger at home.

But with Nauru and Manus Island overflowing, the government has begun releasing asylum seekers into the community in Australia on bridging visas which deny them the right to work. Instead they must survive on \$440 a fortnight—89 per cent of the lowest Centrelink payment. There are now over 7000 asylum seekers living in this desperate situation. The ‘no advantage’ measures introduced last August mean that these asylum seekers are not being processed. The Immigration Department estimates they will be joined by another 500 every fortnight. The refugee rights movement is demanding the right to work and an immediate start to processing.

Reverend John Jegasothy of the Uniting Church spoke recently at a Refugee Action Coalition forum in Sydney on his experience working with newly arrived Tamil refugees living on bridging visas. John is a refugee himself who arrived here from Sri Lanka 20 years ago.

“ASYLUM SEEKERS come out of detention into an empty home. When they go in there’s nothing in the house. Red Cross and their case managers try to connect them with service providers like the Salvation Army and Vinnes but they are inundated with calls and don’t have enough [furniture and clothes] to give.

We get calls from various people telling us [things like] that in this particular house six fellows are sleeping on the floor; they have no blankets, no sheets, no pillows. The same thing with utensils to cook. Help comes from the community but with thousands coming out of detention, how many can we look after? How many calls are we going to get? It’s a nightmare for us.

For those who have come after 13 August, there’s no right to work. They get \$215 a week, \$440 a fortnight, but it’s \$36 a day, it’s a very small amount for them to survive. How do they survive? Mohan, one asylum seeker I know, lives eight people in one house, in a three bedroom house with mattresses everywhere. They put in \$30 per fortnight for food, and some



Above: A protest against the new ‘no advantage’ measures that include removing work rights for those on bridging visas



Left: Reverend John Jegasothy

good soul comes and takes them to the shops, to buy vegetables and fruits and all the things they need. They try to set apart a little money to save so they can pay their \$500 to \$600 electricity bill every few months, and then they pay \$91.25 for their fortnightly rent.

Two of the guys I know couldn’t find a house in Sydney so they moved to Melbourne. They ended up in a crisis home with drug addicts and they got scared. A church picked them up along with an Iranian sleeping in a park freezing for three nights, they all now live in one house.

They save a little bit of money so they can send money back home. Because they’ve all pawned their land, or the parents have pawned

their jewels, or those who have loaned them money are at their throat. And their family back there don’t really understand. Some of their marriages are on the rocks because their wives are so sad on the other side, they can’t get any support from them from here. Their families are also in a dangerous situation because people know the man is out and the women and their children are alone. They are very vulnerable over there. Some of the guys have stopped talking to their wives because they can’t handle it. When are the families going to come? Five years, six years, ten years?

They have to learn English, but with all the uncertainty: when are they going to be processed? When are we going to get permanent residency? They don’t have the mind to learn English. To learn the language there should be some hope of settling down in this country which is not there.

We’re trying to integrate them as soon as they come, there’s a group called meet and greet formed with the assistance of the Migrant Resource Centre in Parramatta to try to cater for these guys and accept them as part of the Tamil community.

Mohan says, we suffered over there, now we are suffering in a different way. Getting up in the morning they worry, what is happening at home, what will happen to us tomorrow?”

.....
“We get calls from various people telling us [things like] in this particular house, six fellows are sleeping on the floor”

Hall Greenland: 'The best opposition to Abbott is The Greens'

HALL GREENLAND, a longtime left-wing activist, is The Greens candidate for the seat of Grayndler in Sydney's inner west. Hall participated in the Freedom Ride for Aboriginal rights and the movement against the Vietnam War as a student.

He was a member of the Labor Party for 22 years before being expelled for supporting radical Labor councilors Nick Origlass and Isssy Wyner in Leichhardt. He went on to become one of the founding members of The Greens in Sydney and has been involved in numerous local campaigns, notably the campaign to save Callan Park. *Solidarity* spoke to him about his campaign.

What are the key issues for your campaign in Grayndler?

Education's a big one whether it's the cuts to the higher education sector or cutting aid to the wealthiest private schools and boosting investment to public schools, 100 per cent renewables and no new coal or CSG projects, in terms of industrial relations, it's about time workers getting the right to industrial action back rather than the very circumscribed rights now.

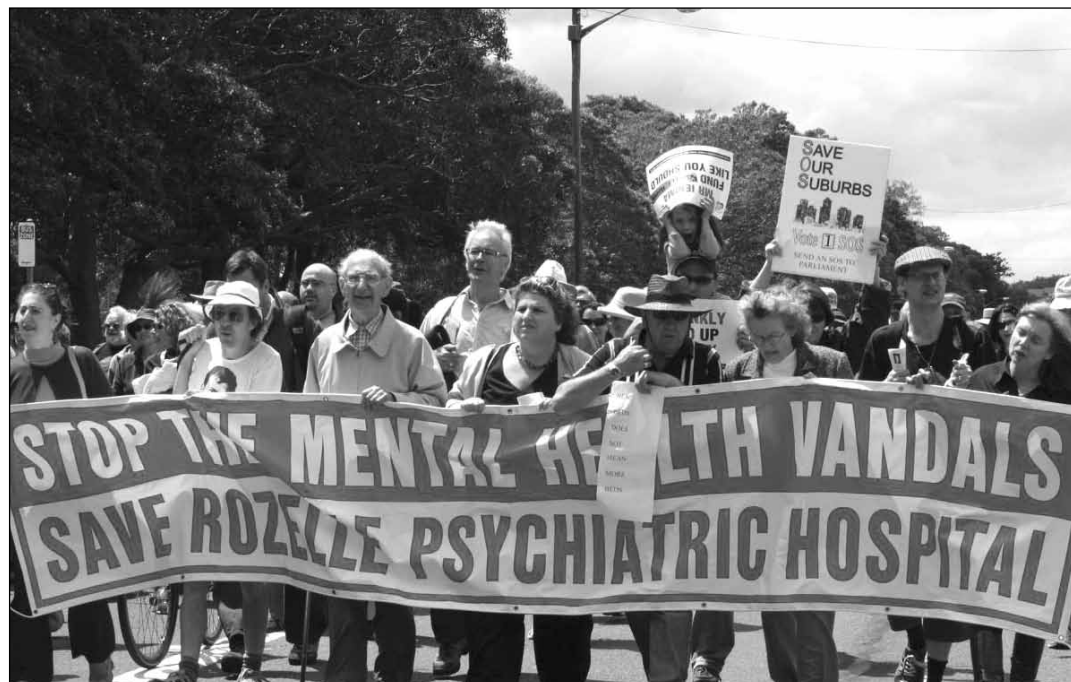
We'll also be calling for a boost to Newstart and the restoration of single parent pensions, fixing the mining tax and a super profits tax on the big four banks, and all in all saying that Australia's wealthy enough for everyone to have a better life, with more pay at work, job security, parental leave, decent public transport, public housing, and a clean planet.

An Abbott government after the election in September appears more and more likely. How are you dealing with this threat?

Simply by saying that the best opponent you can get for the Abbott government is The Greens. The best principled, active opposition is The Greens and you can always give your second preference to Labor to absolutely guarantee that no votes go to the Liberals.

In terms of The Greens relationship to Labor, do you think the party got too close to the Labor government through its Agreement with Julia Gillard?

I think most Greens would agree that it was a good choice to support a minority Labor government in 2010 and that it did have some positive impacts



Above: Hall Greenland at a march as part of the Callan Park campaign

like the clean energy package, Denticare, an inquiry into high-speed rail, and at least a debate on the commitment of troops to the unwinnable war in Afghanistan. But we could have been, and I think most Greens think we could have been, more critical of some of the worst excesses of the Gillard government as the months rolled on, and its Howard-era policies.

Why should people vote for The Greens as a party to the left of Labor?

Labor is virtually without any progressive voices, its old left wing, limited as it was, seems to have all but disappeared. It's part now of the neo-liberal consensus, it's no threat whatsoever to the status quo, it is Howard-lite in so many of its policies and on some policies like on refugees, worse than Howard.

One of the things about voting Green is you send a message to the Gillard Labor Party that it must break with the neo-liberal, reactionary consensus in Australian mainstream politics.

Grayndler is one of the most enlightened, politically advanced electorates in the country. But it has not got a representative that articulates majority views on a whole range of issues, whether it is cuts to single parents payments and funding for higher education, the Intervention in the Northern Territory, treatment of refugees, or aid to the wealth-

est private schools. In that very old fashioned way, to get a democratic advocate, is one of the key reasons I'm running in Grayndler.

How will your campaign direct preferences?

The Greens in Grayndler have always recommended a second preference to Labor ahead of the Coalition. I don't expect that will change but it is a decision that the members in Grayndler will make closer to the election.

How do you think The Greens should respond after the election, especially if we do end up with Tony Abbott as Prime Minister?

If there is an Abbott government it will be necessary to campaign to stop some of the inevitable excesses of that government. And we know from Australian history whether it was against the penal clauses and the old industrial laws, the Vietnam War, or saving James Price Point recently over in Western Australia, that extra-parliamentary campaigning, does work.

We know it in Grayndler around things like saving Callan Park from the developers. So it's going to be necessary to be out on the streets. The Greens have their origins in extra-parliamentary public campaigning and we haven't forgotten those lessons. We are still involved in campaigns like the movement against CSG. So I'd expect the Greens to be fully involved in any resistance to the Abbott government.



Hall Greenland

The other foreign workers—exploitation, racism and international students



By Robert Nicholas and Amy Thomas

THE COLLAPSE of Swan Cleaning has brought to light the exploitation of international students in Australia. Nearly 2500 workers, most of them international students, have lost their jobs. Because they are foreign workers, they are missing out on their entitlements.

Swan owes \$1.6 million in wages, and more for employees' leave and superannuation. Yet the governments' Fair Entitlements Guarantee scheme that provides support for people who cannot recover their entitlements after businesses go bust, only covers Australian citizens, or holders of a permanent or special category visa.

The Queensland United Voice Secretary, Gary Bullock, described the situation as "nothing short of racist." One worker who lost three weeks' pay and one week of annual leave told *The Age*, "I can't pay my myki [public transport card], I can't go to buy food. I have a little savings but I have to use that to pay for my studies ... I don't know what to do."

Exploitation

There are over 500,000 international students enrolled at universities, TAFEs and vocational schools in Australia. Under current arrangements, international students can legally work only 20 hours

Above: Many international students are forced into jobs like cleaning, where they face low pay and discrimination

a week. Naturally, the high cost of living in Australia, combined with the pressure of paying upfront university fees, forces international students to seek work off the books.

Many international students work long hours driving taxis, where in NSW, they earn an average wage of \$11 with no entitlements (the minimum wage is \$15.80).

In restaurants, cafes and the service sector, international students often earn less than half the award wage. It has become so common that it would be no surprise if business models are based on this low-wage workforce.

An expose in the *Fairfax* press in January reported that an investigator with the Fair Work Ombudsman had seen rates of between \$8 and \$10 for hospitality workers.

One well-known, exclusive, French bakery in Brisbane has a racial pay scale. Australians get the award, European students a few dollars less, while those from Asia are on 60 per cent of the award rate.

Yet the response of Australian workers to this situation is instructive. There have been no calls for expelling these workers, stopping them coming, or putting "locals first". In workplaces where I have worked, there has been a recognition of the need to make sure international students know their rights and pay rates—and that because

of the precarious nature of their situation, Australian workers must take the lead in this. As a union member, I have always fought wage inequality and succeeded in getting international students award rates.

While this may not be the experience across the whole industry, there is no generalised hostility.

Ensuring all workers are paid what they are entitled to means organising and campaigning for it collectively in the workplace. Demanding the abolition of the 20-hour a week limit would also take the pressure off international students to accept dodgy conditions.

Solidarity

Since Gina Rinehart announced plans to employ 1800 foreign workers last year, the union movement has pursued a "local workers first" campaign that puts the blame for unemployment onto foreign workers. Many on the left have stood behind this campaign, denying its racist overtones and claiming that because the 457 visa is exploitative the left must demand it be abolished.

If the same logic was employed in the case of international students, the unions and the left would be calling for scrapping the international student visa. Obviously, this would create a complete breakdown in solidarity between workers and encourage a climate of suspicion towards international students. This is why the left has never done this.

The actions of the unions involved in defending the cleaners at Swan and elsewhere is setting a welcome example. The "Clean Start" campaign for fair pay deals in the cleaning industry, and now the "Get Respect" campaign for international students' work rights, both run by United Voice, actively campaign against the racism that allow these workers to be hyper-exploited.

Get Respect's aims include assisting "international students to learn their rights, and arming themselves with the knowledge they need to stand up for themselves and resist this ugly exploitation and racism that is such a hallmark of their experience in Australia."

Unfortunately, this does not mirror the 457 campaign. The Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) have responded to a recent report of up to 200 workers on 457 visas being ripped off by migration agents and employers by backing legislation to put Australian jobs first through "labour market testing".

It is solidarity and action in the workplace, not racism and division, that can save jobs and fight exploitation.

Sydney Uni: five strikes in, staff show they can win

STAFF AT Sydney University from the NTEU and CPSU held their fifth successful day of strike action this year on 5 June as they face off against the aggressive anti-union management of hated Vice-Chancellor Michael Spence.

After conceding to several union demands in bargaining meetings, management finally made their first offer on pay—an insulting 2.5 per cent. The figure actually amounts to less, as staff have not had any pay rise since last year. It would mean a real pay cut. They arrogantly declared all the items previously agreed would be off the table unless staff accepted this offer.

Previously, the campaign has beaten back a number of management's outrageous efforts to attack union rights, slash sick leave and abolish restrictions on working hours. Management's zig-zagging shows two things. One is that the strikes are having an impact. Two is that until management sign an agreement for decent wages, job security, fair review processes and basic union rights, the industrial campaign must continue and deepen.

Management still want to take away the union office on campus, have not agreed to link new permanent jobs for casuals to reducing the overall level of casualisation and have not guaranteed fair review committees

Right: Picketers on June 5 tell management what they think
Photo: Liam Kesteven



The NTEU has committed to escalating the campaign, with the threat of multiple days of strike action in the first weeks of semester two

for staff who face losing their jobs.

Support for the latest strike, held in the last week of semester, remained strong. Once again the police violently attacked pickets, targeting student activists in two separate rounds of arrests at the Carillon Avenue gate. In all 11 students were arrested—for no more than holding up traffic so picketers could talk to cars as they entered and try to convince them to turn around.

The NTEU has committed to escalating the campaign, with the threat of multiple days of strike action in the first weeks of semester two, a protest at the University Senate meeting on 1 July and action to disruption Open Day in August.

With over 380 new members having joined the union since the start of the year, including 125 casual staff, staff are well placed to win.

Victorian teachers' rage is stoppered (for now)

VICTORIAN AEU officials lowered the coffin of our EBA campaign into the ground in June with one final and successful push for a yes vote to an atrocious agreement. This followed a rebellion against the deal among the membership. At the union-run regional ballot meetings, members had grilled officials about the dodgy pay rise figures they concocted to sell the deal—which still don't add up. The officials were hammered for hanging contract and "excess" teachers out to dry, and for settling for an agreement that leaves our class sizes and preparation time utterly unmanageable.

But the sense that we could challenge the officials and demand the campaign be put back on had not sunk deeply enough into the membership. The officials won a union run ballot at the end of May. The Education Department then held their ballot to

The AEU needs a rank-and-file group that can win the trust of its members

confirm that we all agreed to the new EBA. This was an opportunity to generalise the enthusiasm to reject the deal and keep fighting. But without a strong "no vote" campaign, bitter resignation to the deal had set in.

The EBA campaign lifted the lid on the latent power public school teachers have—our strikes shut down schools and the city three times. The work bans gave us a taste of saying "no" to despotic principals and their insane demands on our time. Fighting performance pay meant we were finally on the front foot in the battle against the business model agenda for public schools.

The feeling of renewed power this gave us makes it all the more miserable to have to wind up our industrial campaign and hand power back to the department and the principals without having won a thing. Hearing Victo-

rian Premier Napthine prattle on about plans to sack teachers and implement performance pay—and seeing our union officials pretend it isn't happening—is crushing.

The Victorian AEU desperately needs a rank-and-file group which can win the trust of the membership. The Teachers and ES Alliance consistently put up amendments that sought to strengthen the campaign, and we pushed hard for a "no" vote in the union ballots. But the group refused to campaign for a no vote in the department-run ballot that followed—effectively giving up the fight.

Between now and the next EBA we need to engage not just ready-made-radicals, but all teachers and support staff who know that we must fight the neo-liberal schools agenda threatening to steamroll us.

Lucy Honan

Fight for jobs stalls—now Sensis want to police behaviour

By Chris Breen

AMWU delegate at Sensis

SENSIS HAS launched a new attack on its workers, with management proposing to introduce a new behaviour based pay system.

Sensis management are confident to go on the attack because they appear to be getting away with their outsourcing plan that would decimate the most unionised section of the company. Without AMWU officials backing an industrial strategy that could win, many workers have begun to give up and look for other jobs.

Sensis is counting on demoralisation to push through its behaviour pay plan.

That's why a fighting response to this latest attack is so crucial.

HR says the new pay proposal will focus on, "both 'what' you've achieved as well as 'how' the work is performed".

Performance pay is already divisive and unfair. But allowing performance to be assessed against such subjective measures as acting, "in a way that promotes Sensis behavioural expectations" would give management a tool to attack union organisation, and erode wages and rights.

It would be a green light for discrimination against union activists, or anyone management doesn't like. It would mean a return to an atmosphere of bullying and petty tyranny that union members have fought hard to change over the years.

Workers will still be measured on productivity and quality. But even if workers hit the top productivity measure, but are judged to be only "partially meeting behavioural expectations", they will get a 1 per cent pay rise (an effective pay cut) instead of 5 per cent otherwise.

Staff can't be marked up for "behaviour" or "leadership", only down. It is a system designed for punishment.

The proposal is intended to be implemented in three weeks, and the AMWU has not been given paid time to consult its members. The AMWU is going to Fair Work as a result, and a clause in our agreement gives Fair Work the power to arbitrate disputes.

It would be great if Fair Work throws a spanner in Sensis' works, but we can't rely on that. The stronger



Above: Sensis workers have rallied to save jobs but the fight threatens to wind down

our response the better the chance of stopping the new pay system.

Jobs fight

The last mass meeting at Sensis to deal with the outsourcing was down in numbers from around 130 to 45. Morale is down for several reasons. It was hit when solidarity organised for the AMWU rally against 457 visas (which was not a fight for jobs) did not materialise at the second Sensis rally.

It has been hit because an argument for a longer strike has not been won, and so a clear strategy that appears capable of winning has not been adopted. AMWU officials have constantly emphasised doubts about waging a longer strike rather than try to build members' confidence to fight.

Sensis workers voted to call on other Telstra unions and Trades Hall to organise a Telstra-wide delegates meeting. Delegates organised a meeting with Sensis CPSU delegates and have been invited to speak to CEPU members' meetings, but the Telstra wide delegates meeting has not even started. AMWU officials have done nothing to try and make this plan a reality.

The Greens' parliamentary amendment to force Sensis to do the work in Australia raised faint hopes, and was a tribute to members' campaigning, but hasn't turned things

around.

The Greens amendment will be voted on by 27 June, yet the ALP says it is still "considering its position". The ALP is currently facing electoral wipe out, but their commitment to the free market and fear of getting business offside gets in the way of doing things that might boost their support, such as backing a fight for jobs.

The same timidity saw the ALP give in to the big mining companies over the mining tax. Elsewhere they have used racist rhetoric against foreign workers on 457 visas, saying they will "put local workers first". But that won't create or protect jobs. Here, where the ALP could save actual jobs, it has so far refused to act.

The AMWU will send a delegation of Sensis workers to Canberra for the vote. Labor MPs Bill Shorten and Stephen Conroy both indicated support for Sensis workers. But if the ALP won't give a clear commitment before the vote, we should organise a protest at Conroy's office to put further pressure on them.

If the vote goes down, a strategy aimed at stopping the Yellow and White Pages coming out before the jobs go in November could still succeed. However a strong fight against the new behaviour pay plan, which has already sparked anger, could also reinvigorate the fight for jobs.

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Sensis is counting on demoralisation to push through its behaviour pay plan

Turkey's revolt, Islam and the military

By Mark Goudkamp

A SMALL protest that began with 50 people in Gezi Park, Istanbul, to save it from becoming a shopping mall, became the spark for weeks of resistance against Turkey's Prime Minister, Tayyip Erdoğan.

From 1 June, not only the park but the symbolic Taksim Square (the site of a massacre on May Day 1977) witnessed the brave resistance of tens of thousands of people against police violence.

Protests quickly spread to Turkey's other major cities. Despite Kurdish hesitation that the nationalist opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) could become a beneficiary of the movement, the main Kurdish cities in the country's east have also seen mass protests. Not surprisingly, the repression meted out there has often been the most severe.

On 11 June, riot police used rubber bullets and tear gas to eject protesters from Taksim Square. Yet within 12 hours, thousands of people had poured in to take it back.

Erdoğan has backed away from plans for a shopping mall in Gezi Park, though he remains stubbornly committed to building a replica of an old Ottoman barracks there.

As *Solidarity* went to press the government was talking of holding a referendum over the future of Gezi Park in the hope of ending the protests, while also promising further tough action if they continue.

But the protests have become about more than a park. The government will find it difficult to put this genie—a wide movement spearheaded by the young, seething about social and economic issues—back into its bottle. Faced with growing income inequality in Turkey, they don't see the booming economy that Erdoğan speaks of. And every time they express their grievances, they have been teargassed and persecuted.

The movement has exposed the limits of Turkey's parliamentary democracy and the growing authoritarianism of a regime held up as a "model" for Egypt, Tunisia and other "Arab Spring" countries.

The regime

While Turkey's state-controlled media tried to ignore the protests, much of the Western media has portrayed the



Above: The protests in Turkey have turned Gezi Park into a display of "people's power"

revolt as a secular one opposed to the Islamic politics of Erdoğan's AKP party.

But the picture on the ground is not so simple. Zeyno Üstün, a demonstrator who occupied Gezi Park from the outset, told *The Nation*: "Sure, there are hardcore secularists in the crowds. But there are also feminists, LGBT activists, anarchists, socialists of various stripes, Kurdish movement leaders, unionised workers, architects and urban planners, soccer hooligans, environmentalists, and people who are protesting for the first time!"

In addition, left-wing Muslims and even some supporters of Erdoğan's party have been present.

Since coming to power in 2002, Erdoğan has been seen as a reformer popular with not only his Muslim constituency, but also with many liberals who applauded his standing up to the military. The military has been the real power in Turkey since the country's foundation, staging four coups since the Second World War, the most recent in 1980.

It has been the backbone of the so-called "Turkish deep state", a shadowy network of secular-nationalists who span the intelligence apparatus, military leaders, the judiciary, and organised crime. Secular-nationalism has repeatedly been used to justify the military's active intervention into politics.

However the AKP government is also totally committed to neo-liberalism. And since its second electoral victory in 2007, it has itself brutally repressed dissent. As a US-based Turk-

ish socialist put it: "May Day demonstrators, striking workers, student protesters on almost every single college campus in the country, community organisations opposing evictions and, of course, Kurdish activists are often brutalised by the riot police during peaceful demonstrations. What's more, Turkey's prisons are full of political prisoners: students, journalists, unionists and community activists, all waiting for their day in court."

But the AKP still has a large support base—50 per cent of the electorate. Erdoğan himself realises this, and has started calling his own rallies in many cities to consolidate his support base. Winning more of them over to the side of the protests is an important task.

Ozan Tekin from *Solidarity's* sister organisation, the Revolutionary Socialist Workers Party (DSİP), told *Ahram Online*, "Some opinion polls indicate that 16 per cent of AKP supporters are sympathetic to the resistance—that is a good starting point."

However in some places, secular-nationalists have tried to hijack the movement, physically attacking Kurds and other minorities.

The active involvement of the organised workers' movement will be a crucial counterweight. A two day strike by public sector unions was co-ordinated with anti-government demonstrations on 4-5 June. A steel-workers strike is proposed for later in June. Such action can ensure that it is the victims of Erdoğan's neo-liberal policies, not the nationalists, who gain from the movement.

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Since its second electoral victory in 2007, the AKP government has brutally repressed dissent

Imperialism a growing threat to Syria's revolution



By Adam Adelpour

SYRIA'S REVOLUTION, which was inspired by the Arab Spring in Tunisia and Egypt, has now become a full blown civil war open to growing imperialist interference. But it retains a democratic core which is determined to maintain its independence.

Since 2011 the Arab revolutions have dissolved the certainties that competing imperial and regional powers have counted on for decades. Interference in Syria is part of the fight over who will come out on top.

Russia and the West have been increasingly trying to profit by influencing different sides of the conflict.

Last month Russia announced it would be sending advanced S-300 missile defence batteries to Assad, in addition to supplying large quantities of arms to the regime and defending Assad against UN sanctions.

It is quite clear Russia's geo-strategic and economic interests are threatened by the revolution—Assad has been Russia's only Arab ally and hosts Russia's only Mediterranean naval base in Tartus.

The Western powers have lost allies in both Ben Ali in Tunisia and Hosni Mubarak in Egypt. Combined with the legacy of defeats in Afghanistan and Iraq, this means that the US and the West are anxious to co-opt Syria's revolution.

A central goal is to make sure the

Above: Hassan Nasrallah of Hezbollah, Bashar Al-Assad and Iranian dictator Mahmoud Ahmadinejad

revolution serves Western interests by maintaining secure borders with Israel.

The US announced a \$250 million non-lethal aid package for the rebels in April. At the behest of France and Britain the EU also lifted its arms embargo in May allowing them to arm the rebels.

But the West doesn't trust the rebels on the ground. There are no immediate Western plans to arm the rebels and only a fraction of the aid announced has reached them.

Instead the West is using the prospect of military aid for the rebels to try to push Assad into peace talks aimed at securing a settlement with the rebels over the coming months.

Nevertheless, we have seen the outcome of foreign intervention by the West in Libya. Its result would be acceptance of Western control of the region as well as neo-liberal policies and the strengthening of sectarian groups on the ground.

Assad's anti-imperialism

Some who supported the revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia against Western-backed dictators have been unwilling to support the Syrian revolution. They claim it would remove an anti-imperialist regime hostile to the West.

Syria under Bashar al-Assad and his father Hafiz has been an opponent of Israel at times. After the 1973 Arab-Israeli war Syria refused to sign

a peace deal with Israel, and Assad has helped funnel arms to Lebanese resistance group Hezbollah.

But Assad's anti-imperialism has been completely inconsistent. He joined the West in the 1990-91 Gulf War on Iraq. Tellingly, Israel's military chief Benny Gantz has said he's now more worried about the rebels than Assad.

In a disastrous development, Lebanese Hezbollah fighters are now fighting in Syria to help prop up Assad. The fact that the mainly Shia group is helping to prop up a Shia dictator will only fuel sectarianism and undermine the pan-Arab solidarity which has been key to the major offensives against Israel such as that in 1973.

The revolution's character

The military nature of the struggle makes it easier for world and regional powers to buy influence. The rebel groups are desperately short of arms and many have called for Western support. This has produced a growing influence for Islamist fighters able to secure weapons through foreign funding.

But much of the Syrian revolution remains determined to maintain its independence. In areas abandoned by the regime, many towns are run by popular committees that attempt to maintain services and food supplies.

A legitimate popular revolution is still taking place that deserves our support.

The Syrian revolution began as a protest movement in March 2011, demanding increased political freedoms. The movement emerged against the backdrop of neo-liberal policies that had seen the rich get richer and the poor get desperately poor in preceding decades. Assad responded to the protests with mass arrests, torture and live ammunition. By April he was launching military operations. A defensive armed response by revolutionaries was fed by defecting sections of the military. By mid-2012 the regime had lost control of massive sections of the country.

Despite the democracy at the root of the revolution, sectarianism poses an urgent threat. With sectarian attacks against Sunnis being carried out by Assad, Hezbollah joining the fray and the increasing influence of Sunni Islamist groups, a strong political counter-weight will be needed to keep the heart of the revolution beating.

Wave of anti-Muslim hate follows attack in Woolwich

By Mark Gillespie

BRITISH POLITICIANS and the media have been singing from the same Islamophobic song sheet following the murder of British soldier, Lee Rigby, in Woolwich. This has fed a wave of racist attacks and a frightening revival of the far right.

Extremist Muslim clerics are “poisoning” the minds of young people “with sick and perverted ideas” argues British Prime Minister David Cameron. Tony Blair, the former Prime Minister, wrote a piece arguing, “there is a problem within Islam...And we have to put it on the table and be honest about it”.

The entire Muslim community is expected to take responsibility for the attack. Any Muslim leader that dares question this “radical cleric” narrative is rapidly denounced. Meanwhile the usual demands for the “integration” of British Muslims and their need to assimilate superior “Western values” have surfaced.

Their solutions for combating terrorism give the police more power to monitor and harass Muslims. British Prime Minister David Cameron has established a task force to look into Muslim extremism and wants to “drain the swamps”. Theresa May, the Home Secretary, is investigating ways to deny radical clerics access to the airwaves. London’s Mayor Boris Johnson has called for university Islamic societies to be more tightly monitored.

The “war on terror” and its role in provoking more attacks is never mentioned. Yet before Tony Blair signed Britain up to the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, there had been no “Islamic terrorist” attacks in Britain.

The standard reply to this argument is to say “the 9/11 attack came before the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq”. But 9/11, too, didn’t come out of thin air. It was a response US imperialist policies like support for the brutal state of Israel and the murderous sanctions on Iraq. Osama Bin Laden cited these as reasons for 9/11.

Iraq and Afghanistan have only added more fuel to the fire. Close to a million people have been killed in Iraq and more than four million displaced. Afghanistan has seen hundreds of thousands killed. The West continues to spread its “war on terror” into Pakistan, Afghanistan, Yemen and Somalia via drone strikes. Torture,



Above: A mosque burnt to the ground in a hate attack in north London

renditions and imprisonment without trial have all been justified as part of the “war on terror”. Mixed with the demonisation of Islam and the attacks on civil liberties, it’s little wonder people are becoming radicalised.

Michael Adebolajo, one of the murder suspects of Lee Rigby, even cited the killing of Muslims abroad by British troops as his motivation.

Yet the authorities are still in denial. It’s not about “Iraq or Afghanistan” says British Colonel Richard Kemp, but hatred of “our liberal, democratic society”.

For them it’s important to deny this link because they want to keep the focus on the Muslim community and not on their own actions abroad. “Radical clerics” are a useful scapegoat. Attacking a lone British soldier with a meat cleaver will do nothing to stop this imperialist horror. But it’s important to understand what drives individuals to take such drastic actions.

Fascists from the English Defence League were in Woolwich within hours of the murder attempting to provoke a race riot

The far right

The Islamophobia being pushed by mainstream politicians is music to the ears of Britain’s far right. It gives them legitimacy as they try to capitalize on the tragedy and direct hatred and violence toward Muslims.

Fascist thugs from the English Defence League were on the ground in Woolwich within hours of the murder attempting to provoke a race riot. Twelve mosques have been attacked

since the murder and individual attacks on Muslims have jumped dramatically. Petrol bombs were thrown at a mosque in Grimsby while people were inside praying—but were luckily soon put out.

Both the English Defence League (EDL) and the fascist British National Party (BNP) have been organising rallies and marches—their largest for some time. In the days after the attack the EDL brought out 1000 people in London and 1200 in Newcastle. But anti-fascists haven’t been complacent. When a mosque in York was threatened with an attack, the doors were opened and a community tea party was organised and over 200 people came.

A diverse range of unions and other groups have been drawn into counter mobilisations. Anti-fascists had a significant victory on Saturday 1 June when they confronted a planned BNP march from Whitehall to the Cenotaph war memorial. More than a 1000 anti-fascists locked arms and blocked their path chanting, “We are black, white and Asian and we’re Jews” and “There are many many more of us than you”. Outnumbered ten to one, the BNP march was abandoned with their leader Nick Griffin saying it would be “suicide to march today”.

While it is important to stand on the toes of the fascists every time they raise their ugly faces, it’s also important to fight the mainstream Islamophobia that gives the far right its oxygen.

SEND IN THE CLOWNS: THE POLITICS OF BOB KATTER AND CLIVE PALMER

David Glanz looks at what's behind the rise of maverick Bob Katter's Australia party, and mining billionaire Clive Palmer's Palmer United Party

ON 13 May, the ABC's Q&A program saw a remarkable, double-barrelled attack on the Liberal National Party government in Queensland, which brought heart-felt cheers and applause from the audience.

ACTU president Ged Kearney and Greens senator Larissa Waters' criticism of Premier Campbell Newman's 14,000 sackings and welfare cuts was politely received.

But it was fighting words from conservatives Bob Katter and Clive Palmer that galvanised people in the studio. Billionaire Palmer was cheered as he promised to take back into public ownership any assets privatised by the LNP, with no compensation—the kind of slogan last raised by the far left in the 1970s.

Katter has now launched Katter's Australia Party (KAP), and Palmer is bankrolling and leading the Palmer United Party (PUP). Both intend to run candidates across the country. Both are confident of making an impact on September 14, Palmer modestly talking of himself as a future prime minister.

The signals are mixed. An opinion poll taken among rural Australians and published in the *Financial Review* showed Senate support for the KAP averaging just 2 per cent and peaking at 5 per cent in Queensland, where Katter holds the seat of Kennedy.

But a union-commissioned poll in the Queensland city of Maryborough put the PUP on 13.4 per cent and the KAP on 9.3 per cent. A statewide Galaxy poll in the *Courier-Mail* had both parties on 6 per cent—between them almost enough for a senate seat.

Emergence

Why have these two parties emerged now? There are two reasons: the crisis in the Labor Party, which opens up a larger space for the right, and the crisis in the economy, which is generating

dissatisfaction with the traditional Liberal agenda.

Much media commentary has focused on parallels with the Joh for Canberra campaign in 1987, which saw Queensland National Party premier Joh Bjelke-Petersen make a tilt at national politics.

In his book on the Australian right, *The Right Road*, Andrew Moore writes that Bjelke-Petersen “genuinely saw himself as a leader chosen by God to oppose a vast communist conspiracy in which the ALP, the Liberal Party and the churches were all involved”.

Bjelke-Petersen, having fallen out with his Liberal Party coalition partners, set out on a farcical and short-lived mission to stop the “socialist” Bob Hawke federal Labor government.

Katter and Palmer, on the other hand, are not challenging for a share of the conservative vote because they think Tony Abbott is too soft on Labor. Rather, they are so confident that the Liberals will hammer the Gillard government on 14 September that they judge they can safely stake out their own ground.

While the likes of Scott Morrison and Cory Bernardi are trying to drag the Liberals to the right from within, Katter and Palmer are aiming to carve out political space by organising their own power bases.

Katter and Palmer have different styles—the first man is a conviction politician, the second a blatant showman and opportunist—but more importantly, they represent different ruling class fractions, differences reflected in the flavour and policies of their parties.

It is the priority given to those differences in economic policy that helps explain why neither party relies on racism as the central plank of their populism. The KAP and PUP are not, at this stage at least, the equivalent of

the UK Independence Party, let alone the French National Front.

Economic bitterness

Palmer has fallen out with his erstwhile Coalition mates over the measures he thinks are needed to prolong the mining boom.

The big miners are in retreat, mothballing multi-billion dollar projects and cutting profit forecasts. This year's *BRW* Rich 200 list was headlined “Miners feel the squeeze”. Palmer alone dropped by \$1.6 billion to a mere \$2.2 billion.

The Australian reported: “Campbell Newman's state LNP government copped it after giving the nod to Indian company GVK and Gina Rinehart's Hancock Prospecting group to develop a rail corridor through the emergent Galilee coal basin in central Queensland, which Palmer was counting on to get his own mine up ...

“The suspicion among senior figures in the LNP and the Newman government is that [the launch of the PUP is] payback by Palmer over the Galilee snub.” It is therefore not a surprise that the party's top five policies include “creating mineral wealth” and for “wealth to flow back to the community that generates it”.

Palmer originally wanted to claim the name United Australia Party in a nod to the party which was dissolved in 1945 to make way for the establishment of the Liberal Party. He sees himself as the true inheritor of the UAP.

His policies have a populist edge (ban political lobbyists, abolish the carbon tax retrospectively) and a socially liberal flavour (a free vote on gay marriage, encouragement for “boat people” to fly to Australia, with assessment at the airport).

But at the core of the party's DNA is the belief in “the creation of wealth and in competitive enterprise”, “reducing taxation” and “the family”. The PUP is a rival to the Liberals on their

Palmer has fallen out with his Coalition mates over prolonging the mining boom



Above: Renegade MP Bob Katter leads a march against imports

own turf—big Australian business—but with a maverick, ego-driven edge. (In fact, the UAP's program includes whole sections cut-and-pasted from the Liberals' program).

Nationalism

The KAP is an entirely different entity, pitching much more to disaffected rural and regional Labor voters (as the National Party once did). It pays great attention to issues like food security, the right to clear land and shooters' rights.

It is socially conservative, not just against gay marriage but believing that "modern Australia was founded on Christian values" and even that "homes are to be safe and exclusive havens for all those who reside within them" (although this presumably applies only to heterosexuals).

Crucially, it has also appealed for—and won—union support, making it closer in style and policy to the Democratic Labor Party, a conservative anti-Communist split from Labor in the 1950s, than the Liberal Party. This makes Katter's party a much greater concern for the left.

Katter's biggest coup is the recruitment of the former Victorian state secretary of the Electrical Trades Union, Dean Mighell, as his industrial relations spokesperson. What would bring Mighell, a militant unionist and an occasional ally of the radical left in Melbourne, who brought his members to the mass, anti-capitalist May 1 rally in 2001 that targeted the city's stock exchange, into the Katter fold?

Part of the reason is Mighell's passion for hunting. Last month, he became national president of Austra-

lia's peak shooting lobby group, the 150,000-member Sporting Shooters Association of Australia. But the decisive factor is Mighell's admiration for Katter's economic nationalism, his fierce opposition to free trade and his defence of collective bargaining and arbitration.

The KAP "is committed to providing support and protection to Australian industries ... bringing jobs back home and reviving our once proud manufacturing and agriculture industries. To see this happen, we will push to ensure Australia does not sign any more free trade agreements, especially with countries like China".

The KAP is opposed to privatisation, recognising that only the state can provide adequate infrastructure in regional areas.

It also harks back to the tradition of industrial arbitration on which many in the union movement relied for most of the 20th century. KAP policy states: "Governments must ensure that every Australian is, and in particular employees, farmers and franchisees are, able to bargain collectively to protect and promote their economic interests and that all, wherever practicable, have access to compulsory arbitration."

These policies have won the KAP the support of the Victorian ETU, the Queensland CFMEU, the Australian Institute of Marine and Power Engineers and, potentially, the Australian Licensed Aircraft Engineers Association.

This support can be shaken. The starting point for the ETU and CFMEU is not racism or homophobia, but opposition to neo-liberalism.

That's why sections of both unions have also supported The Greens.

After endorsing Katter's party in the 2012 Queensland state election, the Queensland Council of Trade Unions (QCU) was forced to back away after the party notoriously ran homophobic advertisements about LNP leader Campbell Newman's personal support for same-sex marriage.

With Labor on the rocks and manufacturing in decline, union leaders are looking for ways to demonstrate to their members that they are doing something about the steady flow of jobs cuts. One is hitting out at Labor's pro-market economic policies by backing alternative parties.

Another is the "local jobs" campaign. Unfortunately the nationalism of Katter coincides neatly with the unions' campaign against 457 visas.

KAP national director Aidan McLindon said in April that those angry about 457 visa workers should vote for them: "When there is approval of 125,070 workers last year coming in from overseas on 457 visas who are taking our jobs, who else does the union movement have to turn to?"

Katter provides no real alternative for the union movement. This is the man who was a minister in the Bjelke-Petersen state government which, in 1985, sacked 1,000 union members employed by the South East Queensland Electricity Board (SEQEB), replacing them with contract workers.

He may now attend pickets and protests, but his aim is to minimise any union fightback, not build it.

In February, he introduced an amendment to the Fairwork Act that would allow arbitration, emphasising: "We should not have in this country a requirement that to get into the arbitration commission you have to dislocate people's lives and disrupt and damage the economy. This legislation today gives you access to the arbitration commission through conciliation without having to go to strike."

Nowhere on the KAP website is there a call for unions in Queensland to step up their campaign against Campbell Newman's cuts, or of support for the University of Sydney strikers who have defied riot police on their picket lines.

Palmer is another Liberal, and Katter is a conservative nationalist. They are the reactionary beneficiaries of disillusionment with neo-liberalism. But they are no alternative to it, and their influence must be countered. Neither can provide a way forward for workers facing attacks today and the coming offensive of an Abbott government.

THE LAWRENCE STRIKE OF 1912: ‘WE WANT BREAD AND ROSES TOO’

In one of the most famous strikes in US history, women and migrant workers in Lawrence challenged oppression and proved their ability to organise and fight, writes **Eliot Hoving**

IN 1912 US workers at the Lawrence textile mill struck against reduced pay and poor living conditions. Led mainly by women and migrant workers, the ten week strike demonstrated the potential for uniting male, female and migrant workers in a common fight at the point of production.

Work and living conditions in Lawrence were grim. The average wage of just \$9 a week was simply not enough to cover housing, food, medical expenses, and savings for a rainy day. Many workers were forced into overcrowded shared accommodation. In one case 17 people occupied a five bedroom apartment. As one worker described, “When we eat meat it seems like a holiday, especially for the children”.

Mill workers worked long hours, in cramped, damp and humid mills. The risk of injury, tuberculosis and pneumonia was high. Elizabeth Shapleigh, a local doctor, wrote, “A considerable number of the boys and girls die within the first two or three years after beginning work—36 out of every 100 of all the men and women who work in the mill die before or by the time they are 25 years old.”

At the same time, Lawrence produced 25 per cent of all woolen cloth in the US. William Wood, who owned half the mills in Lawrence, became a multi-millionaire off the backs of mill workers.

The strike breaks out

Effective on 1 January 1912, a Massachusetts state law reduced the maximum hours of work each week for women and children. This was an acknowledgement of the long hours they were forced to endure. But in response the American Woolen Company refused to increase the wage rate in order to maintain workers’ take home pay. At the same time it increased the intensity of production in order to

maintain output.

When Polish women weavers found their pay had been cut they stopped work, and marched out of the Everett Cotton mill chanting: “short pay, short pay!”. Their loss of pay was significant, amounting to several loaves of bread a week. Workers from other mills joined in and by the week’s end 25,000 workers were on strike.

They included 28 different nationalities, such as Lithuanians, Poles, Russians and Italians, and spoke 45 different languages. They were largely non-unionised and half were young women between the ages of 14 and 18.

The Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) had built a base of 1000 members in the mills before the strike, and quickly sent their best organisers to help. These included Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, a leading female member of the IWW and Bill Haywood, who was greeted by 15,000 workers on his arrival. Unlike other unions at the time, the IWW, made up of anarchists, socialists and other radicals, was willing to organise migrants, women and all workers in united class organisation.

They ensured the strike was democratically organised around mass meetings where tactics were regularly discussed. In between these meetings, a strike committee, consisting of four representatives from each ethnic group, was elected to make major decisions.

Its meetings were translated into 25 different languages. A committee, composed of nine workers from the Lawrence Mills, only one of whom was US born, and IWW organiser Joseph Ettor, negotiated with the textile corporations.

The logistical challenges that emerged were immense. There were 85,000 people either on strike or

dependent on strikers. The strike relied on community support to sustain itself. Multi-ethnic community groups emerged to run soup kitchens, and share coal to keep fires burning in winter. A Franco-Belgian soup kitchen fed over 23,000 people during the strike, even though the Franco-Belgian population was only 1200. The Franco-Belgians also offered their 500-seat auditorium as a strike headquarters.

To keep morale up, songs were sung in different languages during marches—so much so that the strike became known as “the singing strike”. This included singing the Internationale, and singing at night to keep known scab workers awake.

Across America supporters held meetings and rallies to raise awareness of the strike. Resolutions were passed in support, and money raised for the strikers. In New York City events were held almost every day during the strike.

State repression

The strike faced considerable state repression. On 19 February 200 police with clubs broke up a picket of 100 women. A Boston paper described the scene: “A woman would be seen to shout from the crowd and run into a side street. Instantly two or three police would be after her. Usually a night-stick well aimed brought the woman to the ground like a shot and instantly the police would be on her”.

A week into the strike a local undertaker planted explosives around the town and attempted to frame the strike leaders for it. He was arrested and later charged over the incident, but only after the arrest of several strike leaders. It was later discovered the undertaker had been paid by the owner of the American Woolen Company, William Wood. Despite this Wood was not charged.

On 29 January, a scuffle between

The workers were largely non-unionised and half were young women between the ages of 14 and 18

strikers and police led to a bystander, Anna LoPizzo, being shot in the chest and killed. It is likely she was shot by police, as the bullet that hit her came from a police gun. Despite this, strike leaders Joseph Ettor, Arturo Giovannitti, and Joseph Caruso were arrested and charged over the incident. At the time Ettor and Giovannitti were five kilometres away at a workers meeting, and Caruso was at home eating dinner. All three were held in jail for the rest of the strike.

Following this, Governor Foss, who just happened to be a mill owner, called in an additional 12 companies of infantry and two troops of cavalry. Parades, open air meetings, and gatherings of three people or more were banned. A second death occurred when troops armed with bayonets charged a rally as it started to assemble.

Banned from amassing outside individual mills, workers were increasingly creative. They organised moving pickets that continually marched around the mill district. These regularly attracted 3000-6000 people, who would block and shame scabs entering any of the mills.

In an effort to relieve the burden on families, the strike committee organised to send children to live with supporters across the US, where they could be properly fed and clothed for the duration of the strike. The strike gained national attention as the scandalous health conditions of children were publicised. A thousand strong crowd met children arriving at Grand Central Station, New York, and led a parade through the city.

In an attempt to disrupt the tactic, militia and police tried to prevent children boarding trains to Philadelphia. Women and children were injured and arrested—generating further sympathy for the striking workers and their families.

Victory

After ten weeks the American Woolen Company gave in to the strikers' demands. Wages were increased by between 5 and 25 per cent, paid overtime work increased by 25 per cent, and workers were guaranteed they would not face discrimination for taking part in the strike. Furthermore many other textile companies and manufacturers across the US introduced reforms to avoid any similar strike wave. The *Detroit News* estimated that 438,000 textile workers received \$15 million in raises in the aftermath of the strike.

The victory demonstrated the



Above: Men and women, including many migrant workers, marched and stood together during the strike

ability of women and migrant workers to fight for their rights and as political leaders. The momentum of the strike continued into the defence campaign for Joseph Ettor, Arturo Giovannitti, and Joseph Caruso. Fifteen thousand workers struck for one day to demand their release. The IWW threatened a general strike, with Bill Haywood famously demanding, “open the Jails gates or we will close the mill gates”. At one point the defence team was even arrested in an attempt to intimidate them. But the campaign proved successful, and the three were acquitted of murder on 26 November 1912.

Lessons

The strike was not simply about economic concerns but also broader issues. The main slogan adopted was: “We want bread, and roses too!”, with roses symbolising dignity. Women and migrant workers demanded respect as well as decent pay.

At the time women were still not allowed to vote in Massachusetts, and the main union federation at the time, the American Federation of Labour (AFL), disgracefully refused to support the strike. The AFL adopted the sexist attitudes of the time viewing women and migrant workers in the

mills as passive victims that could not be organised. Yet women in Lawrence took up leading roles in the struggle and made up half the workers on strike.

The strike saw migrant, women and male workers unite in one of the most militant and successful strikes in US history. The IWW was instrumental in organising the strike because it understood that the fight against sexism and racism was inextricably linked to fighting class exploitation. For women workers, the struggle for better work conditions, wages and housing, then as now, were key to the fight for women’s liberation. In this struggle it was mainly socialists and the working class movement that were their primary allies. Rather than all women having a universal common interest, this showed that they were divided by class.

In the process of struggle divisions between races and genders were broken down, and women used their power as workers to win change for themselves and others.

The strike showed the power of united working class movements to challenge oppression and give women and migrants confidence to organise and fight.

SIX YEARS OF SHAME: ABORIGINAL ASSIMILATION AND THE NT INTERVENTION

Six years after Howard sent in the troops to Aboriginal communities to begin the Northern Territory Intervention, **Paddy Gibson** surveys the impact of assimilationist policies

ON JUNE 21 2007, Liberal Prime Minister John Howard launched the Northern Territory Intervention. The Racial Discrimination Act (RDA) was suspended to allow the imposition of an explicitly racist regime over Aboriginal lives and communities. The army was sent in to Aboriginal lands as a “shock and awe” tactic to send a clear message that the Commonwealth was in complete control.

Howard had fought assiduously to re-establish the politics of assimilation throughout his eleven years in office, to push back the gains made by the Aboriginal rights movement and the fight for self-determination. He mercilessly manipulated the issue of child sex abuse and wild assertions about “pedophile rings” to push his assimilation agenda. Those assertions were disproven by extensive investigations by the Australian Crime Commission.

Howard’s new assimilation project also came with a hard neo-liberal economic edge. He declared that Aboriginal people had “no future outside the Australian mainstream”.

Funding agreements with the NT government restricted productive investment to a handful of larger communities—the rest were written off as “economically unviable”.

In 2012, Labor passed Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory, a package of laws extending most Intervention measures until 2022. Draconian controls first mooted as an “emergency response” have become the touchstone for Aboriginal politics into the foreseeable future.

The impact

The Intervention has had a devastating impact on Aboriginal communities. At the core of this has been the destruction of employment opportunities and municipal and other community services with the closure of the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP). A recent report

by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) reform council found that the NT had the highest level of Indigenous unemployment.

After six years of the Intervention, the NT Children’s Commissioner Howard Bath says that, “on the whole, the child well-being indicators in remote communities are getting worse”.

Most disturbing is the huge increase in the rate of suicide and self-harm. A recent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commission report says that between 2001-2005 and 2006-2010, the incidence of Indigenous youth suicide in the NT increased by 160 per cent. In contrast, non-Indigenous youth suicide had declined by one third. The number of incidents of attempted suicide and self-harm being reported in remote communities has exploded by more than 500 per cent.

The report noted: “We know that feelings of hopelessness and disempowerment contribute to vulnerability to suicide. These types of feelings are well documented and widely acknowledged symptoms of the local government reforms and the Intervention.”

Aboriginal imprisonment has almost doubled since 2007, giving the NT one of the highest imprisonment rates in the world. The number of Aboriginal women being incarcerated is now more than three times pre-Intervention levels. Conditions in NT prisons resemble concentrations camps, with 15 people in a cell, thin mattresses on the floor and cells which flood when it rains.

More than twice the number of children are being removed from their families by child protection authorities (see back page).

Despite racist legislation and a massive police crackdown, alcohol-related domestic violence incidents have increased with every year of the Intervention. Fewer children are going to school, despite three layers

The Intervention has provided the framework for spreading the politics of assimilation and punishment across Australia

of punishment for parents—fines from the NT government, income management through Centrelink and cuts to Centrelink payments under the new School Enrolment and Attendance Measure (SEAM).

The \$700 million Strategic Indigenous Housing and Infrastructure Program (SIHIP) has done more to line the pockets of multi-national construction companies who won the contracts than alleviate the shocking housing conditions in Aboriginal communities; more than 20 people in a house is still common.

The government’s own figures show there will be no improvements in overcrowding rates. New housing is only planned for 16 of the hundreds of Aboriginal communities and outstations. The NT Housing department has taken over administration from Aboriginal organisations, leading to increased rents and deterioration in services.

The compulsory five-year township leases seized through the Intervention lapsed in June 2012. But the government is putting a new ultimatum to communities—sign a 40-year lease over housing stock and administrative buildings or suffer cuts in funding.

National agenda

Besides the devastation in the Northern Territory, the Intervention has provided the framework for spreading the politics of assimilation and punishment across Australia.

In every state, more punitive measures are imposed on Aboriginal people. The number of Aboriginal children being removed by child protection authorities has increased 68 per cent over the years of the Intervention.

Labor cut CDEP across Australia, crippled communities and threw more than 20,000 Aboriginal people out of work.

Rene Adams, head of the

Toomelah Aboriginal Co-op in North West NSW told *Tracker* magazine, “all people who were on CDEP are basically unemployed now... Mental health issues and suicides have increased. There’s more drugs, more violence, more alcohol. It’s heart-breaking.”

Since the Intervention, the government’s major Indigenous employment initiative has revolved around a corporate venture, Australian Employment Covenant (AEC) and GenerationOne, run by mining boss Andrew Forrest. It supposedly aims to get 50,000 Aboriginal people into jobs pledged by the corporate sector.

When the AEC was set up in 2011, the then Labor Indigenous Employment Minister, Mark Arbib, told the Senate that the explicit aim of the AEC was to “mainstream” Aboriginal people away from their communities. “The issue that you are raising, which is people in remote areas being mobile enough to move from, say, Yirrkala down to Melbourne to take up a job through the AEC, is extremely difficult... [but] I am confident that we will see further improvement, because we are making the connections now that allow for better channelling of people into jobs.”

More than 50,000 “pledges” have now come in from corporate Australia—but these are pledges, not actual jobs. Only 14,000 jobs have been secured in the last five years, and according to the AEC’s own figures 30 per cent of the jobs did not last six months.

Andrew Forrest says he has personally contributed between \$50-100 million of his personal fortune to the project. It would have been far better if he had just handed the money to Aboriginal organisations to fund vital services. The AEC is being supported by a slick “campaign” called GenerationOne to similarly drive assimilationist “solutions”. In May, they threw their weight behind a social media campaign to push for more government funding for the Australian Indigenous Education Foundation—an organisation which funds places for Indigenous children in elite private boarding schools. Meanwhile in the schools that most Aboriginal people attend the “close the gap” education indicators are going backwards.

Collingwood AFL CEO Eddie McGuire has been a very public supporter of GenerationOne, yet, in the middle of the AFL “Indigenous round”, managed to “joke” about Aboriginal Sydney Swans captain Adam



Above: Canberra’s signs of shame that mark the prescribed communities, this one outside Yuendumu

Goodes being “King Kong” and suffer no consequences.

The Intervention has failed to smash the idea of self-determination. If anything its dramatic failures have on the one hand increased the opposition to the notions of assimilation behind the Intervention, and on the other increased the institutional support for policies backing Aboriginal self-determination.

Hundreds of submissions from across Australia were made to an inquiry into the proposed laws, calling on the government to abandon Stronger Futures, including from the Australian Council of Trade Unions, the Australian Council of Social Services and national Aboriginal organisations. A statement by the Yolngu Nations’ Assembly in Arnhem Land rejecting the Stronger Futures bill was supported by the Unit- ing and Catholic Churches.

Empty symbolism

At the ideological level the government is trying to cover their deprivation of Aboriginal people and their ongoing racism with symbolic gestures.

The first was Kevin Rudd much-acclaimed apology to the Stolen Generations. Now we have the government-backed push for constitutional recognition of Indigenous people. The first politician to seriously float this idea was John Howard in the final month before the 2007 election, immediately after he launched the NT Intervention.

In late May, Labor, Liberal and corporate leaders participated in the launch of a flashy government funded campaign for changes to the constitution, branded “Recognise”.

But there will be no recognition of Aboriginal people’s rights to land—or rights to anything at all. There will just be a simple statement that Aboriginal people were here before colonisation.

The support by Australia’s political elite for constitutional recognition is designed to incorporate Aboriginal leaders into a tokenistic process that provides cover for the ongoing racism and devastation wrought by government policy.

“Recognise” offers no relief from *Stronger Futures* or the shattering of Aboriginal communities through child removal, deaths in custody, increasing incarceration, funding cuts and disempowerment.

Nor will it offer any protection from an Abbott government determined to push through more draconian Intervention-style policies and market-based amendments to the Land Rights Act to undermine collective ownership.

The ongoing campaign against the spread of Income Management and the growing outcry over the new Stolen Generation, can be the basis for pushing back the offensive begun by the Intervention and renewing a rights-based campaign for self-determination.

LATIN AMERICA'S NEW LEFT GOVERNMENTS: ON THE ROAD TO SOCIALISM?

Latin America's turbulent transitions
By Roger Burbach,
Michael Fox and
Federico Fuentes
Zed Books \$34.95

THE NEW millennium has seen the rise of new left governments across Latin America, from the more radical governments in Venezuela and Bolivia, to others such as Ecuador and Brazil. This book, a joint effort by prominent academics in the area Roger Burbach and Michael Fox with *Green Left Weekly's* Federico Fuentes, sets out to examine Latin America's left governments and their promise of "21st century socialism".

Latin America is the continent where the rebellion against neo-liberalism has gone deepest. For two decades the economic policies imposed by the US and international institutions like the IMF and World Bank ravaged the continent. Cuts to social spending and widespread privatisations led to increased inequality, and economic growth slumped to just 0.5 per cent a year between 1980 and 1999.

The result was an explosion of social movements demanding an end to neo-liberal policies. Venezuela produced the Caracazo urban uprising of 1989 against cuts to government subsidies that sent the price of gas and public transport soaring. It was violently repressed, with 3000 people killed. The city of Cochabamba in Bolivia rose up in the "water wars" against privatising water in 2000,

and mass marches on the Presidential palace toppled two presidents in 2003 and 2005.

The book situates the new left governments as a product of these waves of mass struggle. It looks at the devastating impact of neo-liberalism and examines the key left governments in separate chapters that examine what they have done while in power.

In Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador in particular it details how the new governments have significantly boosted government spending on healthcare, welfare programs and social services. The result has been a major reduction in poverty. In Venezuela the number of people in poverty dropped 24.5 per cent between 2003 and 2006, and fell from 38.2 to 25.4 per cent of the population in Bolivia between 2005 and 2010.

This has largely been funded by income from nationalised oil industries and higher taxes on mining.

It is well known that higher government spending in Venezuela has relied on income from the country's enormous oil wealth, which provides close to half of government income. It is estimated to have the largest oil reserves in the world, greater even than Saudi Arabia.

Although the book does not really acknowledge the extent to which government revenues have relied upon it, there has been a minerals boom across the continent, powered by China. Between

2004 and 2008 growth across Latin America averaged 5.3 per cent a year, before dipping briefly as a result of the global economic crisis.

Even left governments like those in Bolivia and Ecuador have been strong supporters of expanding the mining sector in order to boost government revenues. The book examines the criticism that they are continuing an "extractivist" strategy for economic growth that is no different to other capitalist governments.

Marc Beker, who writes the chapter on Ecuador, levels this charge against the left-wing government of Rafael Correa, arguing that he has, "frequently clashed with many on the traditional left and other members of Ecuador's well organised social movements".

Correa has been willing to send in the military to crush indigenous protests against new mining developments and prosecuted hundreds of activists under terrorism laws. However, it is not clear that the editors agree with Beker's assessment, as they include Ecuador in their list of the countries that are moving in a more radical direction.

But the authors clearly defend the governments of Bolivia and Venezuela, both because of the scale of their nationalisations and their wider efforts to encourage mass popular democracy and new economic models.

The chapter on Venezuela illustrates the development of the revolu-

tionary process there but it is also honest about some of the problems faced in driving the process forward.

The new government spending programs in areas like health have often created a new layer of bureaucrats that have enriched themselves from corruption. This "bolibourgeoisie" as it is often known have worked to obstruct popular power, such as workers' control in the factories, as well the implementation of more radical government decisions.

The passing of Hugo Chavez, who died after the book was completed, has shown that the "bolibourgeoisie" may threaten the very future of the revolutionary process. His successor Nicholas Maduro beat the right-wing opposition candidate by a narrow 1.5 per cent, or just 224,000 votes, to retain the presidency.

While the book depicts the revolutionary process as still moving forward as a result of ongoing nationalisations, many left-wing activists within Venezuela seem to believe that the process of self-organisation from below capable of transforming the country has stalled.¹

When it comes to Bolivia, the book vastly overstates the government's radicalism. As in some of Fuentes' other writings, the account relies heavily on the claims of Vice President Alvaro Garcia Linera, who it describes as "the leading theorist of the new Bolivian revolution". But, Linera has described the government's aim

The book situates the new left governments as a product of waves of mass struggle



Miners, teachers, health workers and university staff have been in conflict with Bolivia's Morales government recently over pensions

as building an “Andean capitalism”, as socialism is impossible in the short term and said that “Bolivia will still be capitalist in 50 or 100 years”.

One of the government's key moves has been the re-organisation of most of Bolivia's gas companies along with tax increases so that private companies can only keep 18 per cent of production value and the government takes the remaining 78 per cent. However these changes did not really amount to nationalisation, rather the government re-negotiated existing contracts with the multinationals without taking over their gas installations.

Government revenue has surged, but this has been helped by the large growth in export volumes and gas prices. The amount of gas exported

more than doubled between 2005, the year before Morales took office, and 2012, and total export income has grown from \$1.5 billion to \$5.5 billion.

The Bolivian government is presented as a government of the social movements, and while it is true that most movements do support the government this leads the chapter to play down conflict between the government and the workers' and indigenous movements. Many protests are dismissed as representing sectional interests. This is particularly unconvincing when the claim is a senior government minister.

These conflicts included major protests against government efforts to cut gas subsidies in 2010 that forced up transport prices, something that was in line

with IMF advice, as Jeffrey Webber, the left-wing academic and Bolivia specialist notes. The government backed down but left open the prospect of cutting the subsidies in the future. In 2010, there were strikes demanding higher wages, and recently there have been large strikes by miners, health workers, teachers and university staff demanding higher pensions. The push to expand mining development has also produced clashes with indigenous groups whose lands are threatened, mostly famously the plan to build a highway through the TIPNIS area.

The book's argument that the revolutionary process is moving forward is also justified by the claim that, “none of these protest movements put forth any serious proposals or a program that posed a

political alternative to the MAS government”. But the fact that there has been no mass political party to the left of MAS hardly proves that such a political project is not needed. The argument implies that mass parties simply materialise when social interests demand their existence. But as Karl Marx stressed, the existence of classes with their own distinct interests is an objective question, not only a subjective question of whether they have fully come to understand those interests.

These issues stem from a deeper problem in the book's political framework—its understanding of the capitalist state and how to build socialism.

Socialism of the 21st century

The authors rightly point to the importance of Hugo

Chavez's declaration at the World Social Forum in 2005 that his aim was to reinvent socialism in the 21st century, and the discussion this has opened up about the continuing relevance of socialism today.

They see at least some of the countries discussed as “emerging socialist societies” that have “implemented important transformative reforms”.

Yet the book is distinctly unclear about what socialism is and how to get there. This is unfortunate given the different competing conceptions of socialism and the need (which they acknowledge) to rescue it from association with the Stalinist state-controlled economies.

Marta Harnecker's summary of “five key components” of socialism

is offered as the book's definition. Among these are social ownership of production "organised by the workers" and decentralised participatory planning. But it is not clear which "components" are more important or how they fit together.

This is complicated further by the depiction of Cuba as already a fully-fledged "socialist society" and even the assertion that China and Vietnam are, or at least once were, socialist countries.

This fuzziness is a problem for activists and social movements in Latin America faced with the issue of relating to any of the new left governments. If the new governments are capable of taking Latin America towards socialism and completely transforming society, then there is no need to form an independent revolutionary organisation, and movement activists are justified in joining the governments to help implement their policies.

And it also carries wider implications: if Latin America has been at the forefront of the struggle against neo-liberalism then it must provide lessons for the left all over the world. *Turbulent transitions* thinks the lesson is that voting in a left-wing government through parliamentary elections can be the path towards socialism. This view dovetails with the enthusiasm for broad left parties like Syriza in Greece, which similarly advocates a government of the left as a way to reverse Europe's austerity agenda.

The Marxist view of socialism, and the route to a socialist society, rests on which class holds power. A socialist revolution can take place only when the working class seizes power from the old ruling class under capitalism.

As Marx himself put it in the *Communist Mani-*

festo, "the first step in the revolution by the working class is to raise the proletariat to the position of ruling class".

The lesson Marx drew from the Paris Commune in 1871, reaffirmed by Lenin in the Russian Revolution of 1917, was that this requires destroying the old capitalist state. In its place would be a workers' state based on workers' councils, made up of delegates directly elected from the workplaces and subject to immediate recall. Such organs of direct democracy have begun to be formed on numerous occasions during high points in class struggle—from Russia in 1917 to Spain in 1936, Chile in 1973, and Iran in 1979. In a slightly different form, based on community assemblies, organs of popular power in El Alto, Bolivia were formed to organise the near insurrectionary mobilisations in 2002 and 2005 that brought down successive neo-liberal governments.

Within the state

Yet *Turbulent Transitions* argues that the capitalist state can be an instrument of socialist transformation, claiming that, "In recent years the popular movements [in Latin America] have sought to alter the state, to make it responsive to their interests and needs."

But the states in Bolivia, Venezuela and throughout Latin America remain capitalist states. The new left governments have delivered reforms, but they continue to promote capitalist development. So in Venezuela outside the oil sector the bourgeoisie continue to make healthy profits and the state has done little to challenge their wealth. In Bolivia and elsewhere the government has been at pains to encourage private investment, particularly in

The new left governments have delivered reforms, but they continue to promote capitalist development

mining.

These efforts make clashes with workers, peasants and the poor inevitable—because the governments continue to serve opposing capitalist interests. They are not whole-heartedly "governments of the social movements" on the side of workers and the poor.

Turbulent transition's mistaken view of the state also means that it ignores the way in which the new left governments have served to co-opt and demobilise the movements from below.

This can be seen in the way activists and social movement leaders have been drawn into helping to implement new social programs, like the misiones in Venezuela. As a result, activists now being paid, or having their projects funded by the state will come to see it as "their" government, and can more easily be drawn into defending its unpopular actions. When these states remain capitalist, as even the authors admit, this means demobilising the fight to move beyond capitalism.

Bolivia is an important example. As Jeffrey Webber wrote, "the left-indigenous insurrectionary period between 2000 and 2005 did indeed amount to a revolutionary epoch" that could have opened the way to a social revolution.

Chris Harman wrote in July 2005, that there were reports, "of general strikes; of columns of peasants marching on the city; of the occupation of oil wells and airports; of striking miners handing sticks of gelignite to striking teachers to throw against police lines; of attempts to invade the presidential palace... Yet they also tell of a 'truce' between the two sides, with an end to the strikes and the departure of demonstrators from La Paz."

Future President Evo

Morales argued to accept a compromise to hold elections later that year, and the movement was not united in understanding the possibility of taking power into its own hands.

In the months following, "politics shifted from the streets to the electoral terrain" and "we witnessed the common turn toward a dampening of revolutionary possibilities and social movements demobilized as a moderate political party came to office", writes Webber.

The reforms that the new left governments have clearly implemented need to be defended against any right-wing backlash, such as the coup attempts against Chavez or the effort by sections of the corporate elite in Bolivia to secede and divide the country.

But a consistent effort to both demand further reforms, and deepen the revolutionary process, requires a revolutionary perspective within the movements, and the working class, based on maintaining political independence from the capitalist state.

The victory of socialism requires the building of new institutions of mass popular democracy strong enough to replace the existing capitalist states.

Turbulent Transitions provides a wealth of information about Latin America's "pink tide" of new left governments. But it does not present a clear argument about the path towards socialist change.

James Supple

Notes

1 See for instance the Historical Materialism roundtable with revolutionary activists and academics on Venezuela, "The Bolivarian Process in Venezuela: A Left Forum" *Historical Materialism* 19.1 (2011) 233–270

Gatsby: a parody of itself



The Great Gatsby
Directed by Baz Luhrmann
In cinemas now

THE GREAT Gatsby, is based on F Scott Fitzgerald's tragedy written in the 1920s and set in New York.

Luhrmann has stayed with the original story of Gatsby the poor boy obsessed with rich and married Daisy Buchanan.

Gatsby becomes a billionaire and believes he can buy Daisy's love with wealth and power.

Luhrmann has repackaged it to fit with his overblown visual style and a modern soundtrack. And it still raises questions—can anyone ever truly change themselves, can love transcend class and can the American Dream ever be obtained?

The story has come to epitomise the Jazz Age.

It shows the excess and hedonism of a ruling class enjoying a financial boom in Wall Street and greater sexual freedom.

But they are pushing themselves and the country towards the stock market crash and the Great

Depression at the end of the decade.

Luhrmann has said he wanted to make the film because of its relevance to today's world, still reeling from the 2008 financial crash.

The film shows the corruption the rich use to shore up their power. The speakeasies where they drink illegally are filled with police commissioners and politicians conspiring with gangsters.

The rich are not just shallow and wasteful, they destroy lives by amusing themselves with ordinary people who can be used and discarded at a whim.

It also shows the millions of African-Americans on the move to northern cities during and after the First World War. They went north for jobs and homes and jazz music grew out of their experience.

It shows the excess and hedonism of a ruling class enjoying a financial boom

Women too went into factories and struggled for independence.

In Gatsby's world there is a clear commodification of sexuality—women are objects for rich men's affections.

The soundtrack populated by current music stars must hope to help a modern audience relate to the story. It also reminds us that jazz has been central to all modern forms of music.

The track by Jay Z, \$100 Bill, makes the link between the 1929 crash and the financial crisis today explicit. But at times the music spoils the mood of the period.

This version tells the story well, but has too many visual gimmicks. The 3D, CGI effects, and general cinematography have a dizzying and unreal quality.

Luhrmann said he hoped these would create greater "intimacy" between the audience and characters, but all it has done is show their world for exactly what it is—a fantasy.

Josh Hollands
Socialist Worker UK

A time when change seemed possible



The Spirit of '45
Directed by Ken Loach

THERE ARE more than a few awkward moments in the official accounts of Britain's glorious history. One of them was when beloved wartime leader Winston Churchill was defeated resoundingly in the 1945 general election, which took place just months after the end of the barbarism of the Second World War.

So why did voters flock to the polls in such huge numbers to evict History's Greatest Briton from Downing Street? Hadn't he just won a war for them?

Ken Loach's new film—a documentary—explores this and other issues arising from the resounding demand for change in 1945. It brings together footage from the time with the stories of those who lived through it, told in their own words. We hear from dock workers, nurses, miners and others.

Labour

Labour under Clement Attlee stormed into government in 1945 with a programme of mass nationalisation, the creation of a national health service, extensive house building and a whole host

of radical moves.

The interviewees give powerful stories about their lives as children, sleeping five to a bed (and that doesn't include the vermin), seeing their friends die of illness, and losing their families in the war.

The Attlee government does not escape criticism. Despite its radical legislation, it was all done on behalf of the working class, rather than giving workers any power themselves. The same old bosses often returned, but now exploiting workers in a nationalised company instead.

The Spirit of '45 gives a timely reminder that it has not always been "common sense" to let the private sector run our public services, to curb trade union power or to cut benefits to encourage people to work.

The film is shot in black and white and hasn't become distracted with trendy production techniques.

Loach himself, who conducts the interviews, is always out of shot and never heard.

But even without talking, the veteran left wing director can make a very powerful argument.

Patrick Ward
Socialist Review UK

An apology for American wars and racism

The Reluctant Fundamentalist
Directed by Mira Nair
Coming to DVD

MIRA NAIR'S film *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is particularly outrageous viewing in light of the racist backlash to the Woolwich murder. Nair's protagonist is the ultimate liberal depiction of the "good Muslim"—one who remains loyal to the US Empire, however poorly it treats him. The film is not a complex exploration of racism, as some critics have said. It is an apology for the imperialist actions of the US in the Middle East.

As Manola Dargis said in *The New York Times*, "Comparing books to the movies made of them isn't always necessary or productive, but it's instructive when the results are as thuddingly crude as Mira Nair's take on *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*."

Nair's adaptation of Mohsin Hamid's 2007 novel of the same name destroys everything that was worthy in the book. Where the book's protagonist is pushed into action and opposition to US foreign policy by his experiences of racism, the film's protagonist chooses to actively support the US despite the fact that it literally destroys everything he has.

This conservative interpretation is particularly outrageous given all that has occurred in the five years between the publishing of the book and the release of the film. As the Woolwich murderers themselves pointed out, the brutal ongoing occupation of Afghanistan has further fuelled opposition to the US and its allies. That is why the influence of the Taliban inside Afghanistan



has grown. Similarly, the drone attacks on Pakistan are rightly encouraging opposition to the US war machine.

Changing ideas

The film is structured around the abduction of an American academic, a crime in which the main protagonist Changez is a key suspect. Bobby, an American journalist in the pay of the CIA, is sent into a tearoom in central Lahore to interrogate Changez and gather intelligence.

This thriller plotline is an invention of the film. In Hamid's book the American antagonist has no name, no stated profession, no dialogue. The reader is placed in the position of the American, with Hamid mocking the reader's assumption that a young Muslim man deeply critical of US foreign policy in the post-9/11 age must be a terrorist motivated by religious fervour.

Bobby extracts Changez's life story across

Above: Despite his sympathy for protests like this one, the film's Changez gives into the greater good—the United States

the table. Changez charts his life, from growing up in a ruling class Pakistani family to excelling at an Ivy League college in the US. Riz Ahmed as Changez, details his hunger for the high life in the US as he works his way into the financial firm Underwood Samson on Wall Street. The not-so-subtly named firm represents everything that is lecherous in American capitalism, making ridiculous profits advising firms in developing countries on how to downsize.

Against this backdrop Changez falls in love with the beautiful "free spirit" Erica (again, the symbolism of the name is not particularly subtle), who reflects the idealistic arm of the American

dream that he is chasing. Changez is enamoured with both the drive of Underwood Samson and the mysterious Erica.

This all changes however as we see Changez smiling whilst he watches the Twin Towers fall on television from a motel room in Manila. 9/11 catalyses Changez's shift from a young man wedded to the empire's agenda to a young man questioning his place in the American dream.

Re-entering the US in the days after 9/11 Changez is strip-searched and detained in separate instances. The pain is palpable and believable—a common experience for a young Muslim in America.

Hamid's novel relies on ambiguity and complexity, encouraging the reader to examine their own prejudices and assumptions about what it means for a young Muslim man to be critical of America.

The book relies on the knowledge that America's

foreign policy creates enemies.

In contrast, Nair's film sympathises with Changez's critiques of the extremes of the US, but actively discourages any resistance to their activities. Nair suggests that whilst the actions of the US may be troubling at times, they are the lesser of two evils. Changez struggles, but he ultimately chooses to betray the forces of resistance. He chooses to aid the US.

The film version of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* apologises not only for the brutal occupations in the Middle East but also for the racism these wars breed within the US. At a time when anti-Muslim forces are galvanising and activating across Europe, it is a dangerous message. The film would have done well to return to the message of the book—that racism, war and occupation will always breed resistance.

Ernest Price

Weather Underground: dead end strategy for fighting US power

The Company You Keep
Directed by Robert Redford
In cinemas now

THE POLITICAL commotion of the late 1960s and early '70s gave rise to many radical organisations, including America's Weathermen, whose ex-members in hiding are the subject of Robert Redford's latest film, *The Company You Keep*.

Initially a faction of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), the Weathermen—inspired by the Bob Dylan lyric “You don’t need a weatherman to know which way the wind blows”—morphed into an outfit (renamed Weather Underground) dedicated to armed struggle against military, corporate, and political targets in an effort to topple the capitalist system and imperialism.

The Weathermen correctly identified the roots of the Vietnam War, but their actions represented a desperate lashing out borne of a mistaken political analysis that believed it was possible to overturn capitalist social relations and the state through an urban insurgency. Moreover, the group's bombing attacks on ruling class symbols were carried out in a highly clandestine manner that allowed no room for mass participation.

The ultra-militancy of organisations such as the Weather Underground was unthinkable except in the context of state killings of radicals and the more general intolerance of protest. For instance, Ward Churchill counts a minimum of 27 Black Panthers and 69 American Indian Movement (AIM) activists murdered by the US state between the years



The Weathermen's “days of rage” against the Vietnam War in 1969 was conceived as an ultra-militant demonstration that aimed to fight police and damage property

1968-76.

Nonetheless, their actions reflected a misguided belief in the ability of individual radicals and organisations to challenge the armed might of the capitalist state.

Flawed strategies

But, contrary to the implication of the film, there was nothing inevitable about defeat for the radical left. Commenting on the experience of former European radicals such as the one-time member of Revolutionary Struggle turned German foreign minister, Joschka Fischer, Chris Harman in a 2001 *Socialist Review* article argued that the tendency of some former rebels to embrace parliamentary politics had roots in political defeats and strategic setbacks.

Key actors among this generation pursued a flawed political strategy involving small-scale individualist tactics that isolated militants. Defeat in the streets led them down the corridors of par-

liament, as one dead end led to another. Relatively few were won over to a socialist perspective based on winning the support of the majority of the working class to mobilise their economic power through strikes and mass mobilisations against the capitalist system.

The Weathermen fetishised street actions: their “Days of Rage” protests in Chicago in 1969, characterised by attacks on property and police, were poorly attended and largely crushed by authori-

Their actions reflected a misguided belief in the ability of individual radicals and organisations to challenge the armed might of the capitalist state

ties, helping to drive them underground. But their actions reflected a wider confusion among the radical left.

Former SDS President Tom Hayden had lent his support to Free Territories in the Mother Country, autonomous zones of radicalism. After some attraction to the Weather Underground, he left for Berkeley, California and became associated with the Red Family, which idolised the North Korean ruler Kim Il-sung and prepared itself for guerrilla war. Hayden's trajectory went from bad to worse when he settled down to become a career Democrat politician.

Hayden's one-time fellow activist, the former Yippie (Youth International Party) Jerry Rubin had combined brave opposition to the Vietnam War and involvement in the Berkeley Free Speech campaign with street theatre and political stunts. But he emphasised the latter, believing that “[h]istory could be changed in

a day. An hour. A second. By the right action at the right time”.

Street theatre and political stunts are intrinsic to any movement, but they are limited in their ability to upset the daily violence of capitalism and the state. Rubin tried consciousness-raising, health foods, tai chi, and various other new age experiments in the 1970s, before becoming a Yuppie (a term apparently coined with him in mind) businessman in the 1980s.

One should not underestimate the importance of psychology in understanding these individuals' zigzagging transformations. But the defeats of radical left strategies gave full rein to such fragile psyches.

Does the film offer any insights into these events? Unfortunately, it's a sad trip down memory lane—the contemporary figures appear as jaded and beaten shadows of their former selves—with no hint that things might have turned out differently.

As well as slandering Marxism—in one scene a former radical lectures college students on a historical materialism that requires no “human effort”—the film is stuck in a '60s time warp.

The Occupy movement that erupted spectacularly in 2011, and which reverberated in solidarity occupations in some 1500 cities across the globe, is nowhere to be seen. Anti-systemic dissent is presented as part of a bygone age.

Thankfully, in the wake of Occupy, the Arab Spring, and general strikes and continent wide mass protests in Europe in response to the global economic crisis, nothing could be further from the truth.

Ashley Lavelle

ABORIGINAL CHILD REMOVAL RATES SKYROCKETING A NEW STOLEN GENERATION

By Paddy Gibson

ONE OF the first acts of the Labor government in 2008 was to apologise to the Stolen Generations. Then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd said “the injustices of the past must never, never happen again.” But Aboriginal children are being removed from their parents in numbers far higher than during the Stolen Generations and the rates are skyrocketing.

The paternalism of the Protection-era that saw thousands of Aboriginal families ripped apart has been reborn. The numbers of Aboriginal children removed has increased five times in the past 15 years. The majority of children are not placed with relatives or kin. Aboriginal Legal Service workers say that child protection agencies often refuse to engage with families before babies are removed and consistently favour non-Indigenous carers.

The rate of removal is highest in NSW, where in 2011, 9.6 per cent of Aboriginal children were in out of home care. Nationally it is 5.5 per cent.

The Queensland Child Protection Commission of Inquiry found that “up to 197 babies were taken from their parents hours after birth in north Queensland hospitals between July 2009 and June last year”. Witnesses said, “People in communities are calling it a Stolen Generation, just with another name”. Many women who have their babies taken away are not represented at their initial court appearances—or don’t challenge the order because they do not know they can.

At a recent conference of the Secretariat of Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC), advocates reported a shocking rate of surveillance. Up to 62 per cent of Aboriginal children in Queensland are currently “known to child protection”. From every state, there were stories of armed police accompanying child protection workers to raid houses and rip children away.

Delegates at the conference voted unanimously to initiate a national campaign to stop the removals, reunite children who have been taken and win resources for Aboriginal con-



trolled agencies to support struggling families.

Neglect?

Most removals occur because of supposed “child neglect”. But the real neglect begins with a racist system that holds Aboriginal people in extreme poverty and squalid living conditions.

A recent United Nations Human Development Index report rated Australia second in the world for quality of life. But according to researcher Gerry Georgatos, on the same indicators Aboriginal people would be 122nd. Overcrowded housing is endemic in communities, with more than 20 people commonly cramming into one house. Third world health conditions such as otitis media (ear infections) and trachoma, eradicated in the rest of the developed world, are common.

Aboriginal family support services are barely surviving. Howard-era funding cuts and the abolition of Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) destroyed many. Funding agreements for 33 Aboriginal child and family centres are set to expire in 2014, yet neither major party has committed to continue the funding.

One former worker from the Daguragu family centre in the NT told the Intervention Rollback Action Group about the terrible consequences of the closure of her program, “It’s really hard for them now... if their little babies don’t put on weight for two or three weeks, they be taken away from their mother’s arms by welfare”.

Where support services do exist in the NT, they can’t be accessed unless parents agree for 70 per cent of their Centrelink payments to be quarantined under “income management”.

Paternalism

According to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women’s Legal and Advocacy Service, “the child protection system is too closely related to the historical discriminatory policies of the past which deemed Aboriginality to be sufficient grounds for removal of children.”

This is the result of many years of a blame-the-victim approach in Aboriginal politics, aiming to shift responsibility for chronic social problems away from government neglect and racism and onto the Aboriginal people who are suffering. This culminated with Howard’s Northern Territory Intervention supported by Labor.

Now Liberal NT Chief Minister Adam Giles is calling for even more removal—he wants to change NT laws that specify that agencies must try to give a child a home with Aboriginal people before giving them up for adoption to non-Aboriginal people. (These laws, however, have done nothing to stop two thirds of current foster placements being with non-Indigenous carers).

According to Giles, “People were too scared of the Stolen Generation. And I believe that’s why there’s a lot of kids out there with such social dysfunction”.

Rupert Murdoch praised Giles’ “leadership and courage”. *The Daily Telegraph* carried a double page spread and an editorial celebrating Giles’ “Saved Generation”. A.O. Neville, the Commissioner for Native Affairs during early years of the Stolen Generation, put it similarly in 1934: “They have to be protected against themselves whether they like it or not.”

Above: Rudd’s apology to the Stolen Generations came as the NT Intervention was spreading around the country

Nationally the rate of removal is 5.5 per cent

Solidarity