

BUDGET CUTS FOR US BUT LIBERAL SNOUTS ARE IN THE TROUGH



THEORY

Are we too selfish for socialism?

WORKCHOICES

How the unions brought down Howard

WWI

The anti-conscription campaign



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SOLIDARITY: WHO ARE WE?

Solidarity is a socialist group with branches across Australia. We are opposed to the madness of capitalism, which is plunging us into global recession and misery at the same time as wrecking the planet's future. We are taking the first steps towards building an organisation that can help lead the fight for an alternative system based on mass democratic planning, in the interests of human need not profit.

As a crucial part of this, we are committed to building social movements and the wider left, through throwing ourselves into struggles for social justice, against racism and to strengthen the confidence of rank and file unionists.

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

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Things they say

If you ever wanted an example of the narcissism, self indulgence and immaturity that ran through the Labor party during its six years in government, Bob Carr is it.

Labor MP Anthony Byrne

That's not a question I expected at this press conference. Listen, that's not something I'm going to get into here. New NSW Premier Mike Baird's response on whether he stood by previous comments that homosexuality is a "lifestyle choice"

This afternoon I'll have [the opportunity] to actually meet the royals. It's something I never thought I'd do. Mike Baird on the perks of his new job

I love the young royals, because they represent hope. We love to hear a story about a prince marrying a princess and that's happened in this case. Baird again

I can think of a number of programs which could easily be cut...There's a number of other current affairs programs...not that I watch many of them, well not deliberately, which is why I get the view they're not good value.

Refreshing honesty from Senator Ian MacDonald on which programs should be cut at the ABC—the ones he doesn't want to watch

It was ignorant, it was medieval, the approach of these true believers in climate change.

George Brandis on people who think the science is settled on climate change

It's about empowering individuals in being able to choose their own employment.

Aaron Lane of the Institute of Public Affairs explains why the minimum wage should be abolished

Coal in Australia is under attack from powerful groups determined to shut the industry.

The coal industry's failed "Australians for coal" campaign tries to win sympathy

I, like all of you, groan when we hear the anecdotal stories of people who think that they've joined the Labor Party, only to find out that the paper-work's been lost, the cat's eaten the homework, that in the age of the internet the carbon didn't work.

Bill Shorten thinks the reason people won't join Labor is their website

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INSIDE THE \$Y\$TEM

US a plutocracy not a democracy

THE COUNTRY that is supposedly “the world’s greatest democracy” is not a democracy at all, according to a study published this year. Princeton and Northwestern University researchers found that ordinary Americans have virtually no say over government policy despite the rhetoric and trappings of democracy in the US.

The study examined 1779 policy issues in order to find out to what extent policy outcomes were actually shaped by ordinary people compared to the wealthy. The authors say that, “When the preferences of economic elites and the stands of organized interest groups are controlled for, the preferences of the average American appear to have only a minuscule, near-zero, statistically non-significant impact upon public policy.” The authors conclude that “the majority does not rule—at least not in the causal sense of actually determining policy outcomes.” After the Occupy movement denounced the influence of the 1 per cent, this comes as statistical proof that society really is controlled by a tiny minority.

Poor left to rot in NSW

MORE THAN a million people in NSW are living in poverty, according to a new report by the Council of Social Services NSW (NCOSS). This equates to one in seven people. One in five of the poorest households can’t pay their bills on time, leading to a 37 per cent increase in utility disconnections in the last five years alone.

The skyrocketing cost of housing was identified as a key cause of this growing desperation, compounded by the fact that there has been no real increase in unemployment payments for a decade.

NCOSS found that only 2 per cent of NSW homes are affordable for those on very low incomes while public housing is meeting less than half the current demand. Instead of offering a remedy for this disgraceful state of affairs the NSW Liberals are trying to evict public housing tenants at Millers Point, as Abbott comes after Medicare, pensions and welfare.

‘Age of entitlement’ not over for royals



ABBOTT GREETED the visiting Duke and Duchess of Cambridge with the enthusiasm of a sycophantic courtier. As far as the May budget is concerned it’s cuts, cuts, cuts but when it came to Will and Kate the tough talk melted. The Australian government footed the entire \$2 million bill for their trip. This included flying the royals and their entourage around the country in dedicated RAAF planes at a cost of \$17,000 per hour.

Despite being presented as “modern royals” the couple travelled with a small army of personal underlings: two private secretaries, a tour secretary, three press officers, a hairdresser, an orderly, a nanny, a personal assistant and a former diplomat. Their luxury accommodation at “Longitude 131” near Uluru is reported to cost \$2200 per night—and that’s just one stop in a ten day trip. It seems no expense is too great when pampering Prince William, a hereditary millionaire with a net worth of \$40 million.

CIA torture architect says he supports Amnesty International

THE ARCHITECT of the CIA’s post-9/11 torture program, Dr James Mitchell, has defended his actions, telling the Guardian that he’s, “just a guy who got asked to do something for his country”. The torture program recently came under renewed scrutiny in a still classified US Senate committee report 6600 pages long, that concluded it generated no useful intelligence.

It’s no wonder the CIA’s mad doctor is on the defensive; leaked sections of the report mention Mitchell personally and confirm already well-established records of “enhanced interrogation” methods that violate the Geneva Conventions. The program included waterboarding, wall slamming, sleep deprivation, sexual abuse and humiliation and confinement in a box. In one case Khaled El Masri, a German citizen, was handed over to the CIA in Macedonia in 2003 without ever getting a trial or so much as seeing a judge. After over four months of torture the CIA dumped him on an Albanian road. They had accidentally mistaken him for an al-Qaida suspect with a similar name.

Dr Mitchell used his expertise as a psychologist to construct the torture program and actually participated in some of the torture personally. Demonstrating the depth of his derangement, he described himself as a supporter of Amnesty International in his recent interview.

An Amnesty spokesperson said “If he wants to help Amnesty, Dr. Mitchell should start by supporting our call for all those involved in torture to be investigated and prosecuted. Should that day come, he can rest assured that we would campaign for...his right to a fair trial.”

Research and writing by
Adam Adelpour

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

Tourism body says rich should be able to skip queues

THE PEAK industry body the Australia Tourism and Transport Forum has called for new “premium processing” at airports to allow the wealthy to skip long queues at immigration and customs.

This would continue the trend started earlier this year when Abbott introduced new multiple-entry visas for rich business people. As the government tries to close the door on refugees, dumping them on Nauru and Manus Island and subjecting them to murderous attacks and Dengue fever, they are considering opening even more doors for the rich.

Chinese mining boss ran capitalism as organised crime

CHINESE BILLIONAIRE mining kingpin Liu Han has been netted in a high-profile government crackdown on corruption. After a 10 month long investigation the Sichuan province heavy-weight, his brother and many of his associates are facing charges for nine murders and other gang-related crimes designed to flatten business rivals.

The gangster-like activities of Liu Han are embarrassing for the Australian Foreign Investment Review Board who gave Liu Han’s mining company the all clear to take over Australian iron ore miner Sundance Resources in 2012, although the deal eventually collapsed.

Since Xi Jinping became President in 2013 his anti-corruption campaign has mostly been a self-interested attempt to sideline rivals. Liu Han is a classic example, he is linked to Communist Party player Zhou Yongkang, a backer of the now disgraced Bo Xilai. But this is not a fight to end corruption in China; it’s a fight over who gets the spoils.

EDITORIAL

Abbott targets us for cuts so rich can keep their loot

TONY ABBOTT and Treasurer Joe Hockey are lining up an ever-growing list of possible cuts for the May budget. Hockey says that “Every Australian is going to be asked to contribute to the Budget repair”—but the budget cuts are not aimed at the rich.

Hockey has signaled plans to increase the pension age to 70, and reduce future increases. This heartless move will force older workers to keep going until they drop, with five years of added stress and strain at the end of their working lives.

Cuts to healthcare and Medicare Locals are on the table. The plan for a \$6 fee for Medicare GP visits is set to go ahead, according to *The Australian*. The NDIS is likely to be delayed. Aboriginal housing is in the firing line.

Fairfax papers reported on plans for an “efficiency dividend” (read “cut”) at the ABC. Senator Ian MacDonald described ABC funding as “bloated”.

An increase in university HECS fees is also possible, after the government’s review of the sector recommended hitting students was the best way to cover government cuts. It also recommended government funding be made available to private colleges, opening the prospect of teaching-only universities. The Group of Eight elite universities are pushing for the return of full up-front fees for domestic students in marketable courses like law, economics and commerce.

In the public sector the job cuts are already rolling through, with another 100 sackings in Customs and 300 at the CSIRO announced in April.

At the same time that Hockey looks to cut welfare, Abbott has outrageously signed off to spend \$12 billion on 58 new Joint Strike Fighters.

The government is scare-mongering about spiralling budget costs for pensions, healthcare and the NDIS.

But total government income and spending in Australia is amongst the lowest of any of the OECD developed nations. Last year total government income from taxes and other sources was 33 per cent of GDP compared to 40.3 per cent in the UK and the OECD average of 37 per cent. Taking Australia’s tax income to the OECD average would raise over \$15 billion extra a year. The answer is obvious—we need to tax the rich to fund services.

Hockey claims we are facing a debt crisis. He says the deficit will balloon out of control without



Above: March in March was a sign of Abbott’s slumping popularity

tough action. That’s a lie. Australian government debt remains among the lowest in the developed world. The IMF report that Joe Hockey has been selectively quoting makes clear that Australia’s debt is among the lowest in advanced nations. By 2018 debt levels are projected to be around 20 per cent of GDP, compared to 80 per cent in the US, UK and France.

The Liberals are pushing cuts onto workers and welfare beneficiaries, but handing millions to mining bosses and big carbon polluters by axing the mining and carbon taxes. And the \$2.5 billion diesel rebate for the mining industry won’t be touched either.

While the Liberals demand austerity, they don’t practise what they preach. NSW Liberal Premier Barry O’Farrell resigned after he forgot about a \$3000 bottle of Grange sent to him by the same boss of Australian Water Holdings who was siphoning money to the NSW Liberal Party. Tony Abbott’s Assistant Treasurer, Arthur Sinodinos, is also under a cloud of suspicion after claiming that although he was the chair of Australian Water Holdings, he did not know that it was donating money to the Liberal Party, despite being NSW treasurer of the party at the time. Funny what a \$200,000 salary can do to your memory.

Fighting back

Even before it reveals its horror budget, the Abbott government’s popularity has vanished. It continues to trail in the polls, and the Coalition suffered

a combined 7 per cent swing against it in the WA Senate election.

The feeling against Abbott was obvious on the March in March protests. Thousands attended Palm Sunday refugee rallies in April; the largest demonstrations for refugee rights since the Howard years.

But the mood to fight Abbott is being squandered by Labor and by the union leaders.

Instead of opposing cuts outright, Labor has demanded that the Liberals cut their maternity leave scheme instead. Bill Shorten even backed the \$12 billion being wasted on the new fighter jets.

Shorten proposes to rebuild the Labor Party by making it easier to join! If Shorten really wanted to rebuild the party, he could start by fighting Abbott.

He wants to distance the Labor Party even further from the trade unions. But union action will be crucial to beat Abbott. The Your Rights at Work campaign, organised by the union movement, brought hundreds of thousands onto the streets to defeat Howard. That is the kind of movement that is needed again.

Sydney, Perth and Adelaide will hold a March in May the weekend after the budget comes down. These rallies will be the first chance to come onto the streets against the Liberals’ cuts. We need to use them to push for union-backed demonstrations that have the kind of power that can hit the bosses where it hurts and stop Abbott in his tracks.

.....
At the same time that Hockey looks to cut welfare, Abbott has outrageously signed off to spend \$12 billion on new Joint Strike Fighters

O'Farrell's demise shows Liberal culture of corruption



THE RESIGNATION of NSW Premier Barry O'Farrell has exposed the culture of corruption and political favours inside the Liberal Party.

O'Farrell told an Independent Commission against Corruption (ICAC) hearing he couldn't remember receiving a \$3000 bottle of 1959 Penfolds Grange. His lie was caught out after his hand written thank you note for the "wonderful wine" was produced at the hearing.

At the centre of the scandal is Liberal Party fundraiser and businessman Nick Di Girolamo. Di Girolamo was head of Australian Water Holdings (AWH), which billed hundreds of thousands in limousines, a corporate box at ANZ stadium, donations to the Liberal Party and huge salaries for its board to the NSW government.

O'Farrell put forward Di Girolamo for a well-paid position on a government board just two weeks after receiving the \$3000 gift. That job didn't proceed but the next year Di Girolamo landed a three-year \$100,000 position as a director of the State Water Corporation.

New Liberal Premier Mike Baird has tried to distance himself from the corrupt dealings, but it was Baird who made the appointment of Di Girolamo to the State Water Corporation.

AWH lobbied the NSW Liberal government in the hope of winning a \$1 billion contract. Disgraced Liberal Senator Arthur Sinodinos was put on the AWH board to "open doors" with Liberal politicians. Di Girolamo even went over Finance Minister Greg

Above: O'Farrell's "memory fail" has exposed the efforts to buy favours inside the Liberal Party in NSW

Pearce's head to get a direct meeting with O'Farrell that Pearce described as oddly "cosy".

Predictably, senior Liberal Party figures have responded by discussing how they can muzzle ICAC, according to the *Sydney Morning Herald*. Former Liberal Minister Bruce Baird told the ABC, "We may need to bring it back a bit". O'Farrell is not the first casualty in the NSW Liberal government over

corruption claims. Former Energy and Resources Minister Chris Hartcher and two other Central Coast MPs, Darren Webber and Christopher Spence, are under investigation for corruptly receiving payments in exchange for business favours.

The former NSW Labor government was shot through with corruption too, as the ICAC investigations into Eddie Obeid and former mining minister Ian Macdonald revealed.

But this is just the tip of the iceberg of insider deals and influence peddling in politics. The top politicians in both major parties all move in the same circles as businessmen, lobbyists and the super rich. This means favours and influence peddling, often bordering on outright corruption, are built into the political system.

The Liberals are determined to do everything they can to aid big business and make workers pay. No sooner had new Premier Mike Baird taken over than he called for the GST to be broadened, and declared privatisation the answer to underfunded hospitals.

Baird's entry into politics was backed by John Howard. He is reputedly close to Tony Abbott, who described him as an "outstanding individual". The Liberal Party exists to run government in the interests of their rich big business mates. Now we have finally had a glimpse of how they really operate.

James Supple

Moving away from unions

By Lachlan Marshall

LABOR'S DRUBBING at the WA Senate election has opened renewed demands for "party reform".

However, despite rhetoric about "democratising" the party, the main aim is further diluting union influence. This is the same agenda promoted by former leader Kevin Rudd and frontbencher Chris Bowen in the hope of removing unions as an obstacle to pro-market policies and ditching any organic links to the working class.

Labor leader Bill Shorten has called for scrapping the rule that party members must also be members of a trade union. This would have little impact.

But he has also proposed extending the new leadership election

process to the selection of state leaders. This gives rank-and-file members half the votes and the other half to the parliamentary caucus. In the federal ballot this made no difference to the result, with the MPs still determining the choice of leader.

There have also been calls to reduce union influence over pre-selections to the Senate and state upper houses, in favour of membership ballots. The backlash against the decision to put SDA union official Joe Bullock at the top of Labor's WA Senate ticket is fuelling this.

But it is mistaken to single out the unions as the cause of Labor's failings. Labor MPs realise that unions are a barrier to them taking the party further down the neo-liberal road of privatisations, cuts and attacks on the poor and workers.

Notable amongst Shorten's sup-

Unionists for refugees: 'They're no threat to us'

By Matt Meagher and James Supple

ONE OF the many highlights of Sydney's Palm Sunday rally in April was the 100-strong Unions for Refugees contingent. The group formed after last year's federal election and managed to get representation from 13 unions at the rally.

Unions for Refugees have gained official endorsement from Unions NSW and a number of individual unions. The task now is to deepen its support amongst the union rank-and-file.

As MUA member Harvey Norman told *Solidarity*, "We are going to take it to our comrades at the worksites because at the moment the other side of the story isn't being told by the politicians...or the media which is controlled by the politicians' masters.

"We can use our union contacts, we can use our workplaces to get to our people to dispel the myths and the lies that are told to them on a daily basis."

"Instead of calling them this, that and the other, refugees, boat people, queue jumpers. We all know they're lies. We've got to convince people that they're not a threat to us."

Refugees have been demonised as a threat to working class people's jobs



and living standards. Such scapegoating obscures the responsibility of governments like Tony Abbott's for cuts to public services and welfare

Above: Unions for Refugees at Sydney's Palm Sunday rally

that are the real threat to working class people. The unions' base within the working class means they are the most effective way to reach out to, and try to win over, hundreds of thousands of working class people.

The NTEU has begun building local refugee activist groups within the union. As Mark Johnston told *Solidarity*, "the Sydney University branch of the NTEU has its own working group called NTEU for Refugees which came about as a result of the Unions for Refugees initiative.

"We're leaflet dropping and campaigning generally to raise support for rallies amongst students and staff at the university. The other main aim that we have is to campaign for a scholarship for refugees at Sydney University.

"Refugees are educationally disadvantaged by the circumstances that they are fleeing, but also by the experience of prolonged mandatory detention itself."

Unionists also have the potential power to stop deportations and disrupt the government's detention regime, through strikes and industrial action at airports and elsewhere.

Refugee activists need to do all we can to deepen our links with union members.

won't fix Labor's woes

porters is Morris Iemma, whose plans to privatise electricity when he was NSW premier were thwarted by union opposition at the NSW Labor Conference in 2008.

Bill Shorten's move against the unions opens another opportunity for The Greens to try to break unions away from Labor's embrace. But The Greens are yet to recognise the strategic importance of pursuing this.

Giving power to members?

Shorten hopes that by playing down the union link and throwing open the doors of the party he can boost Labor membership from its current 44,000 to 100,000.

But despite his talk of empowering the membership, Labor politicians are not going to allow the membership to determine the party's direction. The MPs already breach party policy

with impunity, as shown by Labor's introduction of offshore processing in violation of Labor policy adopted at its 2011 conference.

Labor's drift to the right has betrayed the hopes workers held in them to defend public services, union rights, refugees and welfare. Instead, on every issue, Labor MPs have been desperate to close the gap separating them from the Liberals.

Distancing the party from the unions would only confirm this rightward drift.

Even if it resulted in the Left faction winning more pre-selections, this would make little difference, with their politics now barely distinct from the Right's. A fight against Labor's neo-liberalism and right-wing policies is what's badly needed. Without that the party's decline is bound to continue.

Racist policing reignites fight against Intervention in Alice Springs

By Paddy Gibson

ON 28 March over 500 people, most of them Aboriginal, marched on the Alice Springs police station under the banner “say no to racist laws and racist policing”.

Driving the protest was anger at Operation Leyland, a police offensive initiated by the Country Liberal NT government in February. Police have been stationed outside literally every bottle shop in town, enforcing NT Intervention laws, which prohibit alcohol on all Aboriginal lands.

Residents of Aboriginal town camps in Alice Springs have long been subjected to police raids and constant harassment under these laws. Police do not need a warrant to enter their homes. The laws were extended by the Labor government in 2012 for a further ten years under Stronger Futures legislation.

Operation Leyland has brought the racism of Stronger Futures into full public view. Police are using the skin colour of shoppers to claim a “reasonable suspicion” that they will be taking alcohol into Aboriginal camps. All Aboriginal people, regardless of where they live, are being questioned, searched and made to produce identification while police conduct background checks. Many Aboriginal speakers addressing the protest described the situation as “apartheid”.

Rally organiser Alison Furber told the crowd: “This is not about alcohol, it’s about racism. Police have just used the grog situation...This policy has been organised to put our people down, they want us to be under their feet”.

The alcohol regime is just one part of the apartheid of Stronger Futures. Most Aboriginal people who receive Centrelink are on a “BasicsCard” which limits where they can shop and what they can buy. White managers have been appointed to every Aboriginal community. Targeted “child protection” squads work solely to monitor and remove children from these communities. The NT has one of the highest incarceration rates in the world and 85 per cent of prisoners are black.

Broken promises

In September 2012, the Country Liberals cynically capitalised on anger at the Intervention, winning government with a massive swing in Aboriginal electorates.

But in power, the Liberals have



Above: A crowd of 500 march through Alice Springs in protest against police racism and the Intervention
Photo: Hilary Tyler

only strengthened the regime holding Aboriginal people down. New laws allow people to be picked up drunk off the street and incarcerated in “mandatory rehabilitation” facilities for three months despite having committed no crime. Meanwhile, catastrophic levels of Aboriginal unemployment are only getting worse. Aboriginal support workers have been cut from schools and there are proposals to close down remote high schools entirely.

The protest came as a fresh crisis

broke inside the Country Liberals. Three Aboriginal MLAs walked out of the party, bringing the government within a single seat of losing their majority. They had been a part of a cynical, opportunistic Country Liberal campaign in the last election, promising to help Aboriginal communities and feeding off dismay with Labor. The MLAs cited pressure from their constituents following the litany of broken promises since the election, as well as the intense racism they suffered trying to work within the party.

Tangentyere CEO stands up to racist laws

WALTER SHAW, CEO of the Tangentyere Council, which represents residents of Aboriginal town camps in Alice Springs, faced court on 17 April under Stronger Futures laws. This followed a police raid on his town camp that found alcohol on the property. Supporters rallied outside the courthouse calling for the charges to be dropped, led by the Four Corners men’s group from Tangentyere and the Intervention Rollback Action Group. Both groups are mobilising for further protests, including on 21 June, marking seven years since the NT Intervention was announced.

Below is an extract from the speech Walter gave at the rally on March 28:

“The targeting of Aboriginal people in Alice Springs is now so overt that no one even tries to hide it. Every hour of every day, police in this community watch and wait for

their Aboriginal prey. They move us on from public spaces, they search us, they chase us down. They arrest us, they place us in protective custody.

Alice Springs police recently put up signs at all bottle-shops, featuring a picture of crow. It’s an official police poster, and it is supposed to remind us that in Alice Springs some people have rights and some people do not. Police use the image of a crow, because crows are scavengers and hang around waiting for the scraps, that is how police in this town view Aboriginal people.

We are fed up with our men, our women and our children being treated like third class citizens, we are fed up with being beggars on our own lands... This is yet another sad day for Aboriginal Australia, where our social status has been diminished to that of a depreciated jigaboo, wandering the back corridors of Alabama. The back of the bus days are over!”

Liberals' aim to boost racism, not free speech

By James Supple

THE LIBERALS' moves to water down the Racial Discrimination Act (RDA) will give confidence to racists everywhere. Attorney General George Brandis has cited the court finding against notorious right-wing media celebrity Andrew Bolt in 2011 as the trigger for the changes.

The left should oppose the changes to the RDA. But the real issue at stake is not the detail of the legislation, but the Liberals' desire to give greater confidence to bigots like Bolt to attack Aboriginal people, Muslims, immigrants and refugees. Brandis's widely circulated comment that "people do have a right to be bigots" will help make racism more acceptable.

Racism in Australia remains a fact of life. The official racism promoted through the vilification of asylum seekers and the discrimination against Aboriginal people through the NT Intervention is breeding a rise in racism more generally. Racial discrimination against migrants has increased, according to a Monash University study released in March. Forty-one per cent of non-English speaking migrants reported racial discrimination within the last 12 months.

So it's no surprise that Aboriginal activists and ethnic community groups have come out strongly in opposition to the move. Brandis and Abbott have been left completely isolated, with even right-wing Aboriginal figures like Liberal MP Ken Wyatt and Warren Mundine voicing opposition to the changes.

Brandis has hidden behind rhetoric about promoting "freedom of speech". But tolerating racist bigotry does not simply allow debate. Increases in hate speech have been shown to lead directly to an increase in violent racist attacks and hate crimes. This is precisely what happened when Pauline Hanson emerged in the late 1990s.

Instead of recognising this, some on the left think the issue is genuinely free speech. Antony Loewenstein wrote in *The Guardian* that he supported changes to the RDA because, "we owe it to our democracy to defend the rights of the most offensive people in our community".

But concern for free speech is the last thing on the Liberals' minds. This government is already a byword for secrecy and intolerance for dissent. Abbott has no time for free speech at the



ABC, denouncing it as un-Australian. He has gone to extraordinary lengths to hide information about asylum boats.

As long as the mainstream media is controlled by big business and the rich genuine freedom of speech will not exist. Instead right-wing commentators like Andrew Bolt get saturation coverage. His columns are syndicated across Rupert Murdoch's media empire, controlling 70 per cent of Australia's newspapers.

Yet dissenting views are almost totally locked out. The recent March in March protests were all but completely ignored by the mainstream media—despite being some of the largest since the Howard years.

The left should not defend the right of racists and the likes of Andrew Bolt to spread their ideas. Gaining them greater leeway to say whatever they like will not open any greater space for anti-racists and the left.

The changes

There is no justification for changes to the Act. George Brandis has attacked the current provisions for penalising racial abuse, "merely because it might hurt the feelings of others".

But the current Act already contains free speech exemptions. Anything said "reasonably and in good faith" in the course of debate, or which is "a fair comment on any event or matter of public interest" is allowed. Only the most extreme racist abuse will fail these tests.

Andrew Bolt's case itself shows

Above: The Liberals' aim with their changes to the Racial Discrimination Act is to give greater confidence to racists

this. Bolt only lost because he was found to have made claims that were clearly untrue, falsely accusing a series of Aboriginal activists and academics of adopting an Aboriginal identity to boost their careers. The judge found that what he said was similar to defamation.

Yet the Coalition wants to remove any legal restriction on racism in public debate. Anything said "in the course of participating in the public discussion" would be allowed.

Using the courts

Brandis' proposals need to be defeated. But while defending the RDA, we also need to recognise that the courts and racial vilification laws are not an effective way to push back racism. Most cases taken to court fail. Even Pauline Hanson had a complaint against racist comments she made about Aboriginal people dismissed in court.

To fight racism effectively, we need to target the governments, politicians and mainstream media that are its main source. Tony Abbott and Scott Morrison are doing more than almost anyone else to make racism more acceptable, through their vilification of refugees as criminals and some kind of threat to society. The NT Intervention and the return of paternalist policies have encouraged racist views that blame Aboriginal people themselves for their own poverty.

The Racial Discrimination Act is not going to stop any of this. That requires mass movements and grassroots campaigning to challenge racism and the institutions that foster it.

Abbott and Labor both punished in WA election

By James Supple

BOTH MAJOR parties received a kicking from voters in the WA Senate election re-run in March.

In another sign of the anger against the Abbott government, the Liberals suffered a large swing against them of 5 per cent. The Nationals lost another 2 per cent. The Greens and the Palmer Party were the two main beneficiaries.

The result confirms that the Abbott government's popularity has faded fast. Abbott tried to dismiss the swing, saying it was "the kind of result you would expect in a by-election". But as Anthony Green pointed out in an analysis of federal by-elections since 1983, "The average swing against first term governments was a smaller 1.7 percentage points."

It was, however, also a disaster for Labor, who lost a further 4.9 per cent of the vote from their September election tally, polling a pathetic 21.7 per cent. It was their worst result in a Senate election since 1903.

Part of the reason was their choice of lead candidate, Joe Bullock. In a speech so shocking it was almost unbelievable, he told a conservative Christian group late last year that members of the Labor Party were "mad", described Tony Abbott as "potentially a very good Prime Minister" and made homophobic comments about Labor's number two candidate, Louise Pratt.

But it also a part of Labor's tepid opposition to Abbott and their long term decline. Federal Labor leader Bill Shorten addressed 20,000 striking teachers in the run up to the poll, as they opposed \$180 million of cuts that threaten 600 jobs.

But Labor's message in the WA campaign that they would oppose Abbott's cuts was hardly convincing, hamstrung by the fact they too support a pro-business agenda and attacked university spending, single parents' welfare payments and public sector jobs while in government.

The Greens' Scott Ludlam retained his seat with a 5.8 per cent increase in the vote, successfully tapping into anti-Abbott anger and positioning The Greens as an alternative to the major parties. Ludlam's speech denouncing Abbott went viral on YouTube, with over 800,000 views. There was a groundswell of enthusiasm behind



Above: The Greens' Scott Ludlam tapped into the anger against Abbott, mobilising hundreds of supporters

their campaign, with a big mobilisation of supporters to make over 60,000 phone calls.

This is the first major lift in the Greens' vote since 2010, when they entered their alliance with the federal Labor government.

It is a positive contrast to their approach in the Tasmanian election, or at the federal election last year, where they ran on their record of participating in unpopular, conservative Labor governments.

Clive Palmer's party was the other big of recipient of discontent. He won a Senate seat and polled an incredible 12.5 per cent. There is no doubt that his cash splash helped; Palmer spent \$477,000 on TV ads alone, more than double that of the Greens, Labor and the Liberals combined.

But it was also due to Palmer running a populist campaign in WA, which tapped into bitterness with both major parties. His TV ads declared "Labor and Liberal have destroyed our state" and played into Western Australian parochialism, demanding governments stop "sending our GST to Sydney and Melbourne". As an added flourish he railed at the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) stuff up which forced WA to vote again, urging voters to "stick it up the AEC".

As in the federal election, Palmer won votes by capitalising on the disillusionment with politicians and the mainstream parties. His success is a warning of where the disenchantment

can go if it is not turned into active opposition and campaigning against the government.

Balance of power

There is much discussion about how the make up of the Senate will effect Abbott's ability to get legislation through. But in the end the Liberals retained the three Senate seats in WA they won in September.

Clive Palmer's position has been strengthened, effectively giving him a veto over government legislation. His three Senators will have the ability to block government bills in their own right, where Labor and The Greens also oppose them. To get legislation through without the support of Labor or The Greens, Tony Abbott will need the support of the Palmer Party Senators plus three others.

Clive Palmer's maverick style might mean the Senate will sometimes be a headache for Abbott.

But as a billionaire mining mogul, Palmer supports the repeal of the carbon tax and the mining tax, and can be expected to favour Abbott's pro-business policies. Abbott will be able to cobble together a conservative majority, even if the cross-benchers extract some concessions on their pet issues.

The Greens', or Labor's, ability to change Abbott's direction via the Senate will be extremely limited. Mobilising the anti-Abbott anger outside parliament will be key.

Labor lost a further 4.9 per cent of the vote from their September election tally, polling a pathetic 21.7 per cent

Fight Abbott's attack on unions and CFMEU



By Tom Orsag
CFMEU member

TONY ABBOTT'S Royal Commission witch hunt into the unions has begun, with its first hearing held in early April. Abbott's "concern" about union corruption is a thinly-veiled attack the right to strike and routine union activity.

The construction division of the CFMEU is the main target. Employment Minister Eric Abetz and the construction company bosses are attempting to paint the CFMEU's defiance of anti-union industrial laws as serious criminal behaviour.

In April, the Federal Court ordered the CFMEU pay a \$1.25 million fine for the picket lines against Grocon in Melbourne in August and September 2012. Grocon labelled this "lawless behaviour". But the fact is the laws are designed to make effective strikes all but impossible.

Abetz's installation of hardline former ABCC deputy commissioner Nigel Hadgkiss as director of the Fair Work Building Industry Inspectorate, and former ABCC commissioner John Lloyd as chair of its advisory board, have seen the war on the CFMEU stepped up.

In WA, they are pursuing 33 rank-and-file workers for individual fines of up to \$10,000 each imposed for a strike in 2008. The unionists face having their assets seized, such as cars and houses.

There has been continual hysteria from construction companies and the Liberals about high costs in the industry. Abetz said in February that building workers were paid "exorbitant wages and conditions". Masters

Above: The more restrictions on the CFMEU and building unions, the more safety and lives on sites will be lost

Builders Australia has attacked fixed Rostered Days Off as inflexible and costly. But what the bosses really hate is that construction workers' wages reduce their profits.

But unfortunately the CFMEU is sending mixed messages—saying to members it will fight Abbott and the ABCC, but paying any fines it incurs in court. Nationally, the union response to the Royal Commission has been to meekly agree to comply and provide documents. There has been no effort to organise even the kind of demonstrations the unions held against the ABCC under Howard.

The Abbott government is also attacking union right of entry on work sites with new laws tabled in February. They will also reduce union power in negotiating agreements on new projects.

The re-introduction of the ABCC is almost inevitable once the new Senate sits from July. In the face of this attack, the Construction division of the CFMEU and other building trades unions need to be calling mass meetings of members nationwide, with a view to strike action against the Royal Commission and to make Abbott's new ABCC unworkable.

Super-A-Mart workers win victory against low pay

LOW PAID workers at the Super-A-Mart warehouse in Somerton, Victoria have won their first union agreement following a six-week lockout.

Workers won a 10 per cent pay increase over the next three years. The new union agreement guarantees casual conversion rights, improved redundancy rights and an elected OH&S committee for the site.

The members of the National Union of Workers were indefinitely locked out by management on 7 March after balloting for 24-hour industrial action following stalled EBA negotiations. Paid \$20 an hour without a pay rise since 2010, Super-A-Mart workers faced the prospect of a further three years without a pay increase. In an interview with *Working Life*, NUW delegate Rossario Consentino said:

"We're dealing with a very hostile company. After numerous negotiations, the company wouldn't budge from their position...They make millions...but they'd prefer to spend their money on everything except us, the workers."

Super-A-Mart is notorious for underpaying its staff, after being ordered to repay \$1.3 million in unpaid wages to 900 workers by the Fair Work Ombudsman in 2011. There are reports of widespread management

bullying and safety breaches on its sites, including workers being forced to continue working following leakages of hydraulic fluid from forklifts.

After the lockout began successful picketing stopped warehouse operations completely. But after a Supreme Court injunction all picketing stopped, including from community members and families of the workers. A high-profile publicity campaign drew in solidarity from the wider union movement and maintained pressure on the company.

NUW members and supporters in Melbourne and Sydney targeted Barbeques Galore and Quadrant Private Equity, the sister and parent companies of Super-A-Mart respectively, in a series of public protests. A "Low Wage Freedom Ride" of 27 locked out workers from Melbourne to Sydney drew attention to the issue of low-paid work and presented a symbolic "low wage contract" to Quadrant CEO Chris Hadley at the company headquarters in Sydney.

The victory for Super-A-Mart workers highlights that even under the Abbott government, low-paid workers can fight for improvements to wages and conditions through building strong unions.

Jimmy Yan

What the bosses really hate is that construction workers' wages reduce their profits

Nurses delegate: 'The \$6 Medicare fee is just the beginning'

Frances Usherwood works as a clinical nurse educator in a Paediatric hospital, and is a NSW Nurses and Midwives Association delegate and branch assistant secretary. Below is part of her speech to a Solidarity meeting in Sydney recently:

THE COMMONWEALTH government is talking about introducing a \$6 Medicare co-payment for GP visits. This means the end of free at the point of service health care.

Co-payments to see a doctor simply mean some families will have to choose between taking a sick child to the GP or other essentials like groceries or household bills.

It also is very easy to assume that this \$6 is just the beginning and horrific to think about what that cost will be in five, ten or 20 years.

Brett Holmes, the nurses and midwives union general secretary spoke at a "Save Medicare" rally [in February]. He said:

"We need all Australians to be crystal clear about what is going on here. We are witnessing the first stages of 'death by a thousand privatisations' of the public health and Medicare system Australians hold so dear".

We do not want a private health system in Australia. The inequalities in health caused by the two-tiered system are already apparent.

This is obvious in instances such as medical centers not bulk billing, patients with private health insurance getting priority treatment for elective surgeries and people without insurance finding it too expensive to visit specialists when needed.

An Australian Bureau of Statistics survey found that about 10 per cent of adults referred to a specialist delayed or didn't keep the appointment because of cost.

We do have a safety net with prescriptions, however a high number of patients with chronic illness never reach the PBS safety net because they cannot afford the co-payments on earlier prescriptions.

The NSW government has already announced the full privatisation of disability care in NSW and right across the state we are seeing new mental health facilities being handed over to non-government operators.

This means that as a state we are



Above: There have already been protests against the plan for a \$6 fee for Medicare visits, set to be introduced in the budget

privatising the care of what could be called the two most vulnerable groups in our society.

The NSW Government also plans to hand the new "public" hospital at French's Forest over to private operators.

This will create a hospital that has a public and private Emergency Department, and public and private beds. So if two patients present with the same condition, suddenly the private patient is the sickest and deserves hospital stay?

Last year, the journal the *Australian Doctor* published an article that further discussed inequalities in our current health system.

They found that most private specialists do not bulk bill, and because the poor can't afford to pay gap fees in the first place, less than 4 per cent of Extended Medicare Safety Net benefits go to the 20 per cent most socioeconomically disadvantaged members of our population.

In contrast, over 50 per cent of benefits are distributed to the most advantaged 20 per cent. This is an absolute disgrace.

Another recent Australian study reported that of people living with

advanced chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, 78 per cent experienced economic hardship from managing their illness, with 27 per cent unable to pay for medical or dental expenses. Thirteen per cent of Australians over the age of 40 suffer from this disease.

Pressure on Emergency Departments

The other issue that will be created by a \$6 levy is increasing pressure on our Emergency Departments (ED).

Working in the public hospital system and seeing the agitation and increased illness caused by people waiting in our EDs, or being moved to a less acute area too quickly, so the ED staff can cope with the influx of patients, is dangerous and distressing.

And this change to Medicare by the Abbott government will only make things worse. If you do need to see a doctor, something a GP can manage, but you don't have \$6, where would you go?

I'm sure you all heard about the teenage girl last year who spent nine hours on the floor of a overcrowded emergency department, suffering from excruciatingly painful appendicitis. After nine hours her mum took her home, and brought her back to ED the next day.

She could have died while at home. The hospital she was in has one of the longest wait times in the state, taking an average of 22 hours and 29 minutes to be moved or discharged from ED.

Despite an official "target" of four hours, these are the statistics we are still looking at and we can safely assume this will only get worse.

This four hours is important as your risk of dying in ED increases after the four hour mark. According to the *Medical Journal of Australia*, since establishing the national target time there has been a 13 per cent fall in patient deaths in emergency.

We, members of the health care profession and the community must fight to defend affordable health care, we must highlight the inequalities that exist in our two tiered system.

We must fight against further privatisation and the co-payment plan and protect Medicare from the forces that aim to turn it into an American-style profit making machine.

Business and the military still run politics in Indonesia

by Vivian Honan

LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS in Indonesia on April 9 offered a preview of what to expect in July's presidential elections.

The majority of Indonesians have little to be excited about, with the existing political parties ridden with corruption, histories of human rights abuses and pro-business agendas. One survey estimated that the abstention rate in the legislative elections was 34 per cent, up from 29 per cent in 2009.

Prabowo Subianto, the presidential candidate for Gerindra, is the son-in-law of Suharto. He is responsible for gross human rights abuses, including allegations that he ordered the massacre of nearly 300 civilians in East Timor.

Aburizal Bakrie, from the Golkar Party, is another candidate. Bakrie's company was responsible for a large mudflow in 2006 in East Java that destroyed hundreds of homes and displaced thousands of people. Many victims have still not received compensation. Bakrie has also said that the way to counter protests is to let the police use firearms.

Jokowi

However, most popular by far is Joko Widodo (Jokowi), the candidate for the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P). Jokowi, current governor of Jakarta, is popular particularly among the middle class due to his humble and "clean" (anti-corruption) image. He has a habit of visiting poor areas of Jakarta to talk to people about their problems and has also implemented modest reforms, such as the Jakarta Healthcare Program.

However, Jokowi has shown he is no friend of the working class.

In Jakarta and surrounding industrial areas, Indonesians are working ten hours a day for less than \$200 a month. In October 2013 there were strikes demanding a 50 per cent wage rise and an end to outsourcing. Jokowi, as governor of Jakarta, refused to meet these demands, and became known as "father of low wages" among workers.

Jokowi's "business-friendly" policies have excited foreign investors. After he announced his intention to run, the Indonesian stock exchange jumped. Jokowi has also begun negotiations for alliances with other parties, including Gerindra and Golkar, further proof that he won't be rocking the capitalist boat.



Above: Jokowi styles himself as a man of the people, but business is overjoyed at his policies

As the union movement grows discussions have begun about forming a labour party for the 2019 elections. This could be an important step that has the potential to draw in thousands of radicalised workers and union members.

Worryingly however, some major unions ran members for existing political parties during the legislative elections to gain experience. This suggests they could end up replicating the corrupt and unprincipled electoralism of the existing parties, and forming alliances with them. Said Iqbal, president of the

union confederation FSPMI, has already announced his support for Prabowo, claiming that human rights abuses are not a major issue for workers.

Whatever happens, workers will need to continue the struggle outside of parliament. Previous national strikes have won major wage rises and significant gains. Such action has been put on hold as union leaders focussed on the elections. The movement should be demanding now that whoever becomes president raise the minimum wage and improve conditions for workers.

Fascists thrive in France amidst austerity

MARINE LE Pen's fascist Front National (FN) achieved its best results ever in French local elections in late March. Recent polls indicate they may also top the European elections in May.

The FN, running on an anti-immigrant platform, finished with 1400 local councillors (up from 60) and won control of 13 municipalities across France (up from zero). The allied Southern League won another three municipalities. This represents a massive increase for the far right from their previous best showing in 1995.

Their success is a product of disillusionment with Socialist Party (PS) President Francois Hollande, in the context of continuing economic crisis and austerity. These are the same factors behind the rise of Golden Dawn in Greece. The FN appealed to French nationalism and blamed immigrants, especially Muslims, for France's declining living standards.

Hollande has maintained most of previous conservative President Nicolas Sarkozy's austerity policies and unemployment is now at 11 per cent up from 9.5 per cent when he came to power. The PS's approval rating is now 19 per cent. Hollande's reign has been defined by broken promises and concessions to big business. He has presided over tax cuts for the wealthy while raising France's equivalent of the GST.

Hollande announced this year that employers in France would no longer have to pay social security contributions for their staff, reducing the cost of hiring workers in the hope they would boost employment. Trade unions criticised this as a gift to businesses with nothing concrete demanded in return. "A 30 billion gift to big business is something monstrous in a period of austerity we live in," pointed out Left Party leader Jean-Luc Melenchon.

Disenchantment also expressed itself in a record low voter turnout, with 38 per cent abstaining.

The left vote fractured with the French Communist Party splitting from the Left Party in most areas to urge a vote for the PS. But on 12 April tens of thousands of people marched in Paris against austerity and the Hollande government. The New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA), the Left Party and trade unions marched for equality and sharing of wealth. "This is the first demonstration of the left-wing opposition against the government," said Olivier Besancenot, spokesman of the NPA. With disillusionment with mainstream politics growing, a stronger left alternative is more necessary than ever.

Matt Meagher

Afghan elections keep warlords in control

By Mark Gillespie

WESTERN POLITICIANS have been quick to claim the recent presidential election in Afghanistan as some sort of victory. More than 60 per cent of eligible voters defied Taliban threats and voted in the first round. While western newspapers were full of pictures of Afghan women lining up to vote, behind the democratic veneer is a deeply traumatised society where power depends on the support of rival warlords.

The two leading candidates to emerge from the first round of voting, Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai and Abdullah Abdullah, both have regional warlords embedded in their respective coalitions.

Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai's running mate is the Uzbek warlord Abdul Rashid Dostum. Dostum still maintains a militia and used it in June last year to surround the house of the governor of the remote Jowzjan Province. Dostum was initially aligned with Russia during its occupation but changed sides when he could see which way the wind was blowing.

During the civil war that followed Dostum was accused of looting, rape and summary execution in Kabul. Until his defeat by the Taliban he effectively ran a fiefdom in the north of the country. Dostum is also accused of ordering the massacre of over 2000 prisoners in Kunduz in October 2001. In parliament he was a supporter of the infamous amnesty law that pardoned and gave legal immunity to all individuals accused of war crimes and human rights abuses.

Abdullah Abdullah's running mates are no better. One is the Hazara warlord Mohammed Mohaqiq who was a commander of a militia that during the civil war deliberately targeted civilians and used rape as a weapon of war. He was one of the main architects of the amnesty law and was a keen supporter of laws that would have legalised rape in marriage.

Of the 11 candidates in the first round, six were severely compromised by their associations with warlords and drug barons. All 11 candidates, too, supported the Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) with the US. This agreement will allow the US to have ten permanent military bases in Afghanistan and an ongoing force of 10,000 troops. These troops will also have the right to carry out night raids



and house searches and will continue to be immune from prosecution.

Signing the BSA is necessary to keep the foreign aid flowing, and its plunder by Afghanistan's warlord politicians. It is estimated that only 38 per cent of foreign aid ever reaches the ground. The race for the presidency is essentially a race to see who gets their snout into the trough. Fraud and intimidation are part of every election.

Also fueling corruption is the money made from the booming opium trade that the US and other Western powers have turned a blind eye to. According to the UN 2013 Afghanistan Opium Survey, opium production was at an all time high, having increased by 36 per cent in 2013 to 5500 tons. Opium production has increased by more than 40 times since the last year of Taliban rule and Afghanistan produces 90 per cent of the world's supply. The country rates at number 175 out of 177 countries on Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index.

Failure of occupation

Tens of thousands of ordinary Afghans have lost their lives during the occupation, but there is very little to show for their suffering. According to the *World Affairs Journal*, Afghanistan, "has the world's highest infant mortality rate; 122 of every 1000 children die before they reach age one.

"UNICEF reports that 59 per

Above: Rashid Dostum, an infamous warlord, is the Vice Presidential candidate of one of the two Presidential front-runners

cent of the nation's children grow up 'stunted' for lack of nutrition during the early years of life...Afghanistan still ranks near the bottom on per capita income, literacy, life expectancy, electricity usage, Internet penetration, and on the World Bank's broad Human Development Index".

Much is made of how things have improved for women in Afghanistan. But Amnesty International describes it as "one of the worst places to be a woman". Just 36 per cent of Afghan girls are in school while only 12.6 per cent of women are literate. More females die during pregnancy and childbirth than almost anywhere else in the world.

Eighty seven per cent of women experience domestic violence, yet Afghanistan's politicians have pushed a bill that makes it almost impossible to get successful prosecutions.

Latifa Ahmady, director of the Organisation for Promoting Afghan Women's Capabilities, who initially supported the occupation, now says, "they were supposed to bring peace, security and equal rights for women. We have none of these things and that is why they must go."

The occupation was never about helping ordinary people, but about US power and influence. Those that opposed the war were right to do so. The Western powers are no solution to Afghanistan's problems.

Just 36 per cent of Afghan girls are in school while only 12.6 per cent of women are literate

OPPOSITION ON THE HOME FRONT STRIKES, CONSCRIPTION AND THE FIRST WORLD WAR

Clare Fester examines the campaign against conscription and opposition to the First World War in Australia

OVER THE next year we will hear endlessly of the heroic efforts young Australians made during the First World War. Thousands voluntarily gave up their lives for the cause, in the young nation's coming of age, we are told.

The story of the anti-conscription campaign punctuates this national myth.

The real history of the First World War shows that, on the home front, far from unity behind the troops, opposition to the war grew steadily.

Australia's ruling class happily sacrificed tens of thousands of ordinary people on the shores of Gallipoli and the fields of the Somme in order to defend the British Empire. At home they were happy to profiteer off the war effort while thousands of people went hungry and lost their jobs.

The anti-conscription campaign in Australia shows how working people refused to accept the war in Europe or at home. As we're thrown into Anzac commemorations their struggle is useful antidote.

The war at home

Initially the war was popular in Australia. The government did not even need to start a recruitment drive until a year after it began, because voluntary enlistment provided enough new soldiers to fight overseas.

It was not until word of the carnage on the front reached home that enthusiasm for the war in Europe began to wane.

The Labor party under Andrew Fisher won government in 1914 just after the outbreak of war, throwing its full support behind the war effort. Fisher famously pledged that Australia would fight "to the last man and the last shilling."

Overwhelmingly the general population supported the war.

But even at the outbreak of war in 1914, the union movement was

more sceptical. *The Worker*, published by the right-wing Australian Workers Union, wrote prophetically:

"This is not a war for which a single extenuating reason can be given on either side... Australia will suffer much in the struggle that seems ahead... Thousands of unemployed will be created; unscrupulous greed will seize the opportunity to raise the necessities of life to famine prices".

Only a day after war was declared, the *Sydney Morning Herald* similarly told readers that they would have to accept wage cuts and economic turmoil.

The war indeed plunged the Australian economy into deep trouble. Previously Germany had been a huge importer of Australia's metals. When they became an enemy government this threw metal production, and workers in those industries, into turmoil. At the same time Britain, a major colonial trading partner, began to restructure its economy for war-related production and bought less Australian export goods.

This had a flow-on effect especially for maritime and coal mine workers, whose livelihoods depended on those exports. Thousands were thrown out of work, with unemployment reaching 9.3 per cent in 1915.

Prices also rose dramatically—by between 60 and 70 per cent during the four years of the war, fuelled by big business profiteering.

Yet wages remained at pre-war levels until 1916 when some workers won a significant wage increase. Workers at home were being forced to accept cuts to their living standards as a consequence of the war. But far from patriotic acceptance of sacrifice to support the war effort, this produced increasing class bitterness and opposition.

Billy Hughes replaced Fisher as Labor Prime Minister in 1915. Due to pressure from the unions the party had pledged to hold a referendum to give



Above: An IWW anti-war poster that landed Tom Barker in court for "prejudicing recruitment"

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the federal government the power to fix prices and reduce the cost of living. One of Hughes' first acts as Prime Minister was to abandon the referendum proposal under pressure from big business.

This drew anger and resentment from the unions and the working class. As labour historian Gordon Childe wrote: "the tendency of Ministers to 'go slow' with social reform on the pretext of winning the war... engendered a widespread feeling of suspicion" towards the Labor government amongst unions and party members.

The initial war-fuelled patriotism declined. Workers grew tired of the decline in living standards and began to take the issue into their own hands.

A major strike wave began in 1916 after miners in Broken Hill won shorter working hours. This followed a seven month campaign where miners simply refused to work afternoon shifts and were then locked out. According to historian Robert Bollard, in the first year, "A bewildering variety of workers were involved: bakers and joiners, iron-moulders and storemen, shearers and bricklayers, metal workers and tramway drivers."

Workers were, predictably, attacked as disloyal and even "agents of the enemy" for striking during war time, which only increased their hostility to the war effort.

There was also significant Irish opposition to the war, due to the poverty and suffering in Ireland as a product of control by the British Empire.

This intensified following the Easter Uprising in Dublin in 1916, which was brutally repressed by the British army. Irish Catholic leaders like Archbishop Daniel Mannix became prominent in the campaign against conscription.

The increasing confidence amongst the workers' movement as a product of the strike wave increased tensions between the unions and the Labor Party leaders.

What had previously been minor opposition to Hughes within the party developed into a majority.

Hughes' announcement of a referendum to introduce conscription was the final straw. It brought into the open deep divisions with the Labor Party over the war and who should pay for it.

Conscription

Since 1911 compulsory military training and service had been a Labor policy, but Hughes sought to extend



Above: An anti-conscription poster featuring Billy Hughes, Labor rat

conscription to include overseas service.

In 1915 the Allied armies wanted to break through the impasse on the Western Front. New Zealand, Canada and Britain all debated introducing conscription at this time. They needed a constant supply of people to drag to the front and sacrifice for the war effort.

The need for recruits was compounded by waning enthusiasm for the war in Australia. As reports of the scale of casualties at Gallipoli and on the Western Front emerged in late 1915 and 1916, voluntary enlistment declined.

In July 1915 36,575 enlisted following the immediate enthusiasm produced by the first jingoistic reports about Gallipoli. But a year later the monthly recruitment total had dropped to only 6170.

In 1915 Hughes launched a war census that found that 600,000 men were "fit" for service.

Following this, Hughes announced plans to send another 50,000 troops overseas immediately, in addition to the monthly replenishment of 9500 required to replace those killed and wounded.

But it became increasingly clear

that these targets could not be met by voluntary enlistment. Hughes' war census raised deep suspicions inside the union movement, as it looked like a stepping-stone towards introducing conscription. This gave momentum to the burgeoning anti-conscription campaign.

After returning from Britain and a tour of the front, Hughes finally announced a referendum on conscription for October 1916.

Pre-existing legislation actually meant the government could have introduced conscription without the referendum. But the problem for Hughes was political.

Hughes hoped the referendum would silence opponents of conscription—especially in the unions and the Labor Party.

Quite the opposite happened. Discontent about the war was growing but fear of nationalist intimidation and lack of organisation made it difficult to mobilise this discontent.

The conscription issue brought thousands onto the street and into stop-work meetings, polarised the discussion about Australia's involvement in the war, and eventually split the Labor party.

Opposition in the unions

Conscription had always been unpopular in the labour movement. In part this was due to the influence of socialists and other radicals like the International Workers of the World (IWW) and the Victorian Socialist Party (VSP).

But during the First World War military conscripts were also used to break strikes in France, a fact "to be frequently cited by anti-conscriptionists", according to Robert Bollard. Conscription was potentially a threat to the values of working class solidarity that sustained the union movement.

Early on, angry returned soldiers and new volunteers about to depart for the front disrupted anti-conscription meetings held by the more radical opponents of the war.

The government used all the powers at its disposal under the War Precautions Act to persecute anti-conscription activists and censor union and socialist papers. Tom Barker, editor of IWW's newspaper was imprisoned in 1916 for 12 months on the charge of "prejudicing recruitment."

According to Childe, although most workers didn't share the IWW's radical anti-war and internationalist

positions “they did not like to see any members of the working class gaoled by the Labour Government merely for saying what they thought.”

But once the unions were won to the anti-conscription campaign it developed into a mass movement that the government could no longer silence.

As early as 1915 the NSW Labor Council carried a motion rejecting the conscription of manpower unless there was also a conscription of wealth. Secretary E. J. Kavanagh recalled:

“... the consensus of opinion was that a man should not be compelled to give his life when the stay-at-home capitalist would lend his money to the country only when he was guaranteed a high rate of interest.”

Melbourne Trades Hall was a particular centre for anti-conscription discussion.

In May 1916 they held a national Trade Union Congress with delegates from over 200 unions present. The congress voted unanimously against conscription. There unionists declared their “uncompromising hostility” to conscription and threatened sanctions against any Labor politicians who deviated from this position. A motion calling for a general strike if conscription were introduced was narrowly defeated, with the congress resolving to leave this decision up to individual unions.

In July 1916 acting Prime Minister George Foster Pearce banned the publication of the Trade Union Congress’ anti-conscription manifesto. Pearce raided Melbourne Trades Hall and destroyed all the copies of the manifesto.

But this ruckus actually made the manifesto all the more interesting to the public and probably made its audience much wider than it would have been otherwise.

The manifesto ended up being widely republished, even printed on the other side of the world in a British newspaper, such was the intrigue surrounding Pearce’s attempted censorship.

Even conservative unions like the Australian Workers Union opposed it—expelling their founder and leader W. G. Spence for supporting Hughes on conscription.

In NSW the Wharf Labourers Union had previously been a staunch ally of Hughes’. He had helped organise the union, and been its official secretary since 1899. It held a 3000-strong stopwork meeting in Sep-



Above: A poster from a government military recruitment campaign, a sign of flagging enthusiasm for the war

tember 1916 and almost unanimously rejected the conscription referendum proposal.

A month later 30,000 people marched to the Yarra riverbank in Melbourne against conscription. The United Women’s No-Conscription Committee led a march down Swanston Street of 60,000. That same month five unions called a mid-week stopwork meeting attended by 15,000 workers.

The crisis in the Labor party

After announcing the referendum Hughes shopped around the labour movement for support on the conscription issue, but he found little hearing.

Mass opposition to conscription grew as popular sentiment about the war shifted, driven partly by the labour movement, and this forced the division in the Labor party to the surface.

Both the Victorian and NSW State Labor conferences had already voted to dis-endorse any MP who supported conscription. State Labor Executives in Victoria, NSW and Queensland demanded anti-conscription pledges from all Labor MPs.

In August the NSW Labor Party held its first anti-conscription rally, attended by between 60,000-100,000 people. In a decisive step, the NSW and Queensland State Executives announced that they would not give candidature to any MP or Senator who voted for the Conscription Referendum Bill.

In defiance of this resolution Hughes continued to defend conscription. The Labor party as a whole had grown to so decisively oppose it that they were prepared to expel their own sitting Prime Minister.

Hughes was expelled from the party by the NSW branch in September 1916, a month before the referendum. This led to a major party split, in which Hughes walked out of Labor’s federal parliamentary caucus with his supporters to form a new party, and later, a coalition government with conservatives.

The conscription referendum in October 1916 was narrowly defeated with a 51 per cent vote against. Hughes held a second referendum in 1917, this time losing even more heavily.

The image we are fed today of a nation united behind the Anzac war effort could not be further from the truth. The war had sharply divided Australia on the home front, with a growing division between the wealthy establishment and the working class. Thousands faced court for speaking out against the war.

One hundred years on, as our rulers once more try to promote nationalist myths about the war effort, the real history is well worth remembering.

Further reading:

Robert Bollard, *In the shadow of Gallipoli: The hidden history of Australia in WWI*

V. Gordon Chile, *How Labor governs*

Hughes was expelled from the party by the NSW Labor Party in September 1916, a month before the referendum

THE YOUR RIGHTS AT WORK CAMPAIGN HOW THE UNIONS BROUGHT DOWN HOWARD

James Supple looks at the lessons from the union campaign that defeated Liberal Prime Minister John Howard in 2007

THE YOUR Rights at Work campaign was key to toppling the Howard Liberal government in 2007. As an unpopular Tony Abbott gears up to cut public services and welfare, there are important lessons for planning the fightback this time around.

Your Rights at Work is sometimes reduced to the TV advertising campaign. There is no doubt the ads struck a chord. But it was the mass demonstrations and strikes that were crucial to shifting opinion against WorkChoices and kicking out John Howard in 2007.

When Howard won re-election in October 2004, with control of the Senate for the first time, it was immediately clear that unions would face a major attack. Howard had already made several attempts to re-write industrial relations laws since 1996, but after the Workplace Relations Act, much of his more draconian agenda had been blocked in the Senate.

Initially senior union leaders showed no intention of trying to fight Howard's new offensive. Following an emergency meeting after the 2004 election, ACTU President Sharon Burrow meekly declared, "At this point in time, we don't have any plans to actually respond to the Prime Minister's agenda with industrial activity."

Instead the unions would try to work around the new laws. They planned to "box clever" and protect themselves, by negotiating new three-year wage deals before the laws took effect in the hope Labor would win the next election.

But as discussion developed in the unions, and the scale of Howard's attack became clear, this outlook started to shift. The left officials in Victoria, where the left unions controlled the Trades Hall Council, were the first to support a mass campaign against the laws. By early 2005, construction union secretary Martin Kingham and others were arguing to fight the laws,

saying the union leadership had a responsibility to encourage resistance.

The campaign began with a mass all-union delegates' meeting in Melbourne in March, bringing together hundreds of union delegates.

The size of the meeting and union members' enthusiasm surprised union officials, and in turn, generated pressure for further action. Buoyed by the Victorian success, delegates meetings followed in NSW in May and WA in June.

Strike action

The Melbourne meeting voted for a mass stopwork rally against the laws on 30 June. Again, this pressured the union councils in NSW and Queensland to call similar protest action.

There was an argument within the union movement about whether industrial action and mass protests were necessary at all. The ACTU continued to oppose mass stop work rallies outside Victoria. ACTU Secretary Greg Combet justified this by saying, "We should stop bullshitting ourselves that we can stop this legislation." Instead they remained focused on waiting for the next election and the hope of a Labor victory. In September Cath Bowtell from the ACTU was still trying to hose down action arguing, "We can't be stupid and afford copping fines," and that "we need to look to the next election or two."

At delegates' meetings in NSW in early 2005, then Unions NSW Secretary John Robertson argued that any state-wide or national stopwork would play into the government's hands, would be small, and would alienate public support. Instead the ACTU preferred to throw millions of dollars at the TV advertising campaign.

Despite the ACTU's conservatism, in Melbourne on 30 June 2005 150,000 workers joined the stopwork march. Elsewhere, with less organ-

The campaign began with a mass all-union delegates' meeting in Melbourne, bringing together hundreds of union delegates

ised industrial action to walk off the job, the rallies were smaller. But still 20,000 marched in Sydney.

Strike action to attend rallies was already illegal—unions and workers were defying the law to protest.

The next day of action in November saw the bosses of the Australian Building and Construction Commission threaten workers with individual \$22,000 fines for staging illegal industrial action to take part. To no avail—up to 500,000 took action nation-wide. Efforts by Ford, Holden, Toyota, Qantas, Visy and BOC Gases in Victoria to intimidate their workers from walking out all failed.

In Melbourne, *Socialist Worker* reported, "About 100 schools closed, with a massive teacher presence on the march. Postal workers stopped in larger numbers than on the last mass rally, despite Australia Post disciplining strikers who joined the June 30 protest.

"All three car plants stopped work, with the manufacturing workers' union having trouble booking enough buses to bring members to the rally. Centrelink workers at three offices—Moreland, Yarra and Darebin—walked out in a brilliant act of defiance against the federal government."

The strike action also pointed to a strategy for actually stopping Howard even passing WorkChoices into law. In Melbourne the first rally had cost bosses \$20 million. An ongoing strike campaign would have hit the bosses where it hurts, crippling their profits.

Even with their control of the Senate, the Liberals would not have been able to hold out for long the face of determined strike action, and employers losing hundreds of millions of dollars. But the campaign was a long way from considering such political strike action.

Nonetheless, the way the campaign developed shows two things. Firstly, that the union officials' posi-



Above: The Rights at Work rallies and mass meetings were key to building the groundswell against WorkChoices

tion as negotiators of labour makes them inclined to be conservative, and they will look to avoid a serious fight if they can. But it also shows the possibility of building up pressure from the rank and file within the unions to encourage and push union leaders into calling protests and strikes.

Motions moved across local union branches pressured union leaderships to call action. And successful meetings, protests and strikes generated pressure on other unions to call action too, by showing how it was possible to resist. Demonstrations that begin outside the union movement—like those against Abbott's threats to Medicare or March in March—can also have the effect of encouraging industrial resistance.

Electoral focus

The ACTU only ever saw the demonstrations as part of a push to elect a Labor government. After WorkChoices became law at the end of 2005, they directed the campaign into an electoral strategy. In November 2006, a new slogan was unveiled, with stark symbolism: "Your Rights at Work—worth fighting for" became "Your Rights at Work—worth voting for".

In the run-up to the 2007 election, the ACTU focused on organising local Rights at Work groups based in marginal electorates, to get the vote out for Labor.

WorkChoices was the key issue that finished Howard off at the elec-

tion. Essential Media polling during the election campaign recorded that 88 per cent of those who identified themselves as shifting towards Labor said WorkChoices was the main reason. In the 2007 Australian Election Study 67 per cent of people said industrial relations had been "extremely important" in deciding how to vote, and it ranked equal first out of 11 issues of importance.

The union delegates meetings and mass demonstrations had been decisive in making WorkChoices the focus of anti-Howard feeling at the election. The mass meetings mobilised key union activists across all the major unions, and armed them with arguments to take back to their workplaces.

Newspoll results showed that the number of people who rated industrial relations as "very important" to how they would vote went from 31 per cent before the campaign started to 49 per cent by early October 2005. Already by August 2005, 64 per cent of people interviewed in marginal seats thought WorkChoices would be "bad for the average worker".

The ACTU's TV advertising had an impact too. The first TV ad was launched two weeks before the June 2005 protest. But a short TV commercial can perhaps draw attention to an issue. Consolidating opposition to WorkChoices required a deeper knowledge of the changes and discussions about the need for action. For

this, the conversations that thousands of union members and delegates had at a workplace and community level were crucial. Opinion polls showed that the more people knew about WorkChoices, the less they liked it.

Stopping short

The union campaign succeeded in driving Howard from power. But it failed to get WorkChoices scrapped. Labor kept the bulk of WorkChoices when it took government, retaining requirements for secret ballots to hold industrial action, a ban on pattern bargaining and a ban on strike action outside of prescribed bargaining periods.

The consequence of collapsing the campaign into electoral local groups campaigning in marginal seats was that there was little focus on building in the workplace, where unions' industrial power is based.

Ironically, despite making WorkChoices a decisive issue of the election, the unions failed to build their fighting strength through the campaign. Total union membership actually fell by 5 per cent, or 89,000, in the year to August 2007 when the campaign was at its height.

Most of the local Rights at Work groups were shut down following the 2007 election. With Labor in government, a marginal seats campaign made no sense at all.

Without waging an industrial campaign using strikes and mass protests to fight the bosses and pressure Labor after it won government, the unions were not going to win fair work laws. But it was this very strategy of using their industrial power that they been rejected in the Your Rights At Work fight against Howard.

The lessons for fighting Abbott are clear. The unions still retain immense potential power to fight for change. Despite their membership decline, there are still 1.8 million union members. They still enjoy wide support and many more workers would join if they had the chance.

Their strongest weapons are mass protests and strike action—with the capacity to mobilise hundreds of thousands across the country. Any successful campaign against Abbott's cuts would need to centre on mass stop work action. And, following the disaster of WorkChoices-lite and the Rudd and Gillard Labor governments, the campaign shouldn't put its trust in Labor to deliver change.

It is industrial power that holds the key to fighting Abbott, and fighting the system. We will need to fight a future Labor government just as hard.

BOYCOTTS AND THE FIGHT FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

Erima Dall examines the strategy of boycotting to achieve social change

TWO BOYCOTTS have drawn the ire of Australian political leaders—both Coalition and Labor—recently.

An artists' boycott of the Sydney Biennale arts festival over its ties with Transfield Holdings achieved rapid success in March this year. The company owns 12 per cent of sister company Transfield Services, which has the \$1.2 billion contract to run the Nauru and now Manus Island offshore detention gulags.

After the public shaming, the Biennale cut all future financial ties with Transfield, and Transfield director Luca Belgiorno-Nettis resigned from the Biennale Board. Attorney General George Brandis blustered that the boycott was an “appalling insult”, “preposterously unreasonable” and “arrogant and shameful”.

The Coalition is also at war with the growing Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaign against Israel. The smears against BDS began under Labor. In keeping with the tradition of branding any criticism of apartheid Israel anti-Semitic, Former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd shamefully likened BDS to the Nazi Kristallnacht and joined a Murdoch press witch hunt against Sydney's Green-dominated Marrickville Council for supporting BDS.

Now Murdoch and the Coalition are after University of Sydney academic Jake Lynch. Lynch is currently in court defending his right to implement the academic boycott, after a Zionist law firm took him to court for his refusal to sponsor an Israeli academic, Dan Avnon.

Foreign Minister Julie Bishop has even raised the idea of cutting any government funding to academics or institutions supporting BDS.

A Sydney Staff 4 BDS group has formed, whose first aim is, “to exert pressure on the University of Sydney to withdraw all institutional and financial support from Israeli academic and research institutions”.

In both cases, these boycotts have pushed the movements for change—for refugees and Palestine respectively—forward, and propelled the issues into the spotlight.

These successes, particularly the Biennale boycott, have sparked discussion about the strategy of boycotting as a way to advance social change.

Boycotts themselves have a long and varied history, and the word can be used to describe a variety of different actions. Generally speaking, a boycott means withdrawing support in some way from a company, country or organisation as a punishment or protest. Boycotts initially gained prominence in the abolitionist movement in Britain, when activists refused to buy slave-produced sugar or rum from the West Indies.

Boycotts are a double-edged sword within any movement—even with the best of intentions, they don't always take the struggle forward. This is because they can tend to emphasise the power of individuals acting alone, or as consumers in the market, rather than collective power in protest actions, strikes and occupations.

Inside the campaign against apartheid Israel, for example, there's a tension between a mass campaign of protest and international solidarity and encouraging people to participate simply by not buying products with an Israeli barcode.

Consumer boycotts

NGO and environmental groups often push consumer boycotts as a way to win change. But they are the weakest and most dangerous form of boycott and almost entirely ineffective.

The web site Ethical Consumer lists scores of companies and nations with boycotts declared against them—a who's who of the world's corporate criminals, from Amazon to Coca-Cola to manufacturing giant Unilever and the world's biggest oil companies, BP and Shell.

It's common sense to argue that we can change the world by making choices about what we purchase. The environment movement promotes the idea that we can fight climate change and the treatment of animals by choosing better light bulbs and dolphin-free tuna. We can buy off our conscience by purchasing “fair trade” coffee and chocolate, support women

Consumer boycotts shift the blame from those making the decisions about what to produce and focus instead on individuals' behaviour

by funding breast cancer research when we buy a bottle of water, and shop at LGBT-friendly businesses.

But this is part of an illusion that ordinary people influence or control the world market and the economy with their purchasing power. The problem is that the mass of wealth is not concentrated in the hands of individual consumers.

A recent Oxfam report on global inequality showed that the richest 85 people in the world have a combined wealth (\$1.8 trillion) equal to that of the poorest half of global population (3.5 billion people). Such facts make a mockery of the idea we can “vote with our dollar”.

A tiny number of companies control the food, goods and services we purchase. For example, Coles and Woolworths control 80 per cent of retail grocery sales in Australia. Decisions about what to produce, where, and why are made by this tiny elite of business owners and governments who support them. There is no democracy in the free market.

Some would argue that while consumer boycotts might achieve little, “every little bit counts”. But there is also a danger that consumer boycotts shift the blame from those making the decisions about what to produce, or those implementing the policies, and focus instead on individuals' behaviour.

Collective power

Of course, not everyone who advocates boycotting Israel or boycotting the detention system is advocating consumer boycotts. BDS itself was inspired by the successful international solidarity, involving boycotts of goods, in the campaign against apartheid in South Africa.

Boycotts were also used in the struggle for Indian independence from colonial Britain and in the US civil rights movement.

These boycott actions were part of mass, collective movements that directly involved the working class taking action. The power of workers is key to winning real social change—and to transforming the capitalist system itself.

Workers under capitalism have a special power because they are the producing class. Workers are the ones who make the giant corporations run and who set the government bureaucracies in motion with their labour. When workers take collective action, they can stop production and hit profits. While a tiny minority control the world market, they are powerless without the workers who produce their wealth.

The most powerful social movements in Australian history, such as those against the war in Vietnam and for Aboriginal land rights, drew on the power of the working class. Tens of thousands of workers “stopped work to the stop the war” and joined huge weekday demonstrations.

In the fight against apartheid in South Africa, international solidarity provided sustenance to apartheid’s gravedigger—a mass movement of near-revolutionary strikes and demonstrations by black workers.

Boycotts against Barclays Bank, South African apricots, and South African sporting teams like the Springboks helped shame apartheid internationally and show those fighting in South Africa that the world was with them.

Protesting businesses and governments who dealt with apartheid South Africa was not about saying consumer choices could end apartheid, or targeting individuals, but part of turning South Africa into a pariah state and bringing the connections between the apartheid regime, Western governments and major corporations into the spotlight.

Naomi Klein, writing about BDS, has said, “The reason the strategy should be tried [on Israel] is practical: in a country so small and trade-dependent, it could actually work”. But the economic damage a boycott can do is minimal, especially for Israel, which the US has been willing to prop up economically when necessary.

What BDS can do, however, like the anti-apartheid movement, is build international support for Palestine, put pressure on implicated Western governments, and counter-act Israel’s propaganda push. (Known as “Brand Israel”, the Israeli state has gone to great efforts to try to create an image of Israel as a modern, fun, gay-friendly tourist destination).

BDS helps cut against some of the conservatism of nationalist Palestinian leaders, who have taken a negotiation-based approach in trying to win a Palestinian state and sought alliances with neighbouring Arab leaders in-



Above: A mass boycott campaign was part of the struggle internationally against South African apartheid, and has been adopted to campaign against Israel too

stead of mass movements in the region and around the world.

As with Israel, boycotting companies like Transfield, G4S and SERCO, who profit from the misery of detention, won’t by itself bring Operation Sovereign Borders to a halt. The Biennale artists rightly targeted the Biennale and Transfield itself. But it would have been a mistake if plans to protest individuals attending the Biennale had gone ahead. The artists’ boycott achieved an important moral victory for the campaign against offshore processing.

It didn’t however, inflict an economic wound on the detention system. Corporate profits are not the main driver of the bipartisan ideological assault on asylum seekers and the obsession with border protection. The detention network “supply chain”, often referred to, is a consequence of the border regime, not its motivating force.

This is not to underestimate the culpability of these corporations. As Antony Loewenstein points out in his book, *Profits of Doom*, outsourcing allows governments to wash their hands of responsibility for the horrors of the detention regime. As with any privatised service, it creates a motivation

to cut corners and skimp on necessary equipment and care, so as to increase profits.

Actions like winning union votes, as has been done in the National Tertiary Education Union and Australian Services Union, calling on superannuation funds to divest from companies involved in profiting from detention, are effective in building an argument against refugee detention, committing workers to opposing the horrific treatment of refugees, and building their confidence to take action.

At their best, boycotts can help sway public opinion, build solidarity, and win new recruits to movements for change. In that case they can be a valuable tactic.

But left as an action for individuals, or targeting individuals, they are ineffective—and can weaken the fight by drawing attention away from the main enemy and attempting to substitute for the strikes and mass action that have the real power to force change.

It will be the strength of ordinary people working together in mass movements, like those that ended apartheid and the war against Vietnam, that will one day close the refugee detention gulags and bring freedom closer for Palestine.

ARE WE TOO SELFISH FOR SOCIALISM?

Geraldine Fela looks at the claim that the selfishness of human nature means socialism is impossible

MANY PEOPLE are convinced socialism is impossible because we are “too selfish”. It is assumed that greed and individualism are a biological fact, inherent in so-called human nature, and that it follows that a truly co-operative, egalitarian society, based on the allocation of resources according to people’s needs, is idealistic and impossible.

Selfishness, however, is not “natural”—it is created by the world we live in. Greed and self-interest is encouraged under capitalism and handed down from the ruling class.

The system forces ordinary people to compete with each other every day: for a job or a place at university, for a seat on the bus on the way to work, for marks, or a promotion. Meanwhile the bosses and the elite drive their luxury cars into their specially assigned parking spots and enjoy the fruits of our labour and hard work.

And yet, in spite of this, people constantly demonstrate selflessness and solidarity. We don’t have to look far to see people acting in selfless and generous ways, from the thousands of volunteers who run soup kitchens everyday, to the record wave of donations that flooded into Indonesia and Thailand following the Boxing Day tsunami in 2004.

Even in the face of vile anti-refugee rhetoric from the Murdoch press, ordinary people come out in thousands for pro-refugee protests. Similarly, same-sex marriage rallies are invariably full of straight people who want to fight for the rights of their gay friends and family members.

Australia’s history is full of examples where working class people have seen beyond immediate self-interest and false divisions in order to change the world for the better.

In the 1970s, the radical Builders Labourers Federation (BLF) organised workers who were not only fighting for better wages, they were leading movements for social change. Contradicting the “macho” stereo-

Selfishness is a product of the brutal, dog-eat-dog system that is capitalism

type of construction workers, BLF members challenged the homophobia of Macquarie University management with a “pink ban”. Unionised workers refused to build on the campus until a gay student was reinstated at his residential college. Similarly, the BLF was instrumental in weekday moratorium marches against the Vietnam War and for Aboriginal land rights.

Capitalism and competition

The only real “selfishness” is that of the ruling class, the bosses in our workplaces, Vice Chancellors in our universities and politicians in our parliaments. They run a system based solely on competition for profit, and are driven by its logic to fight to the death to defend it.

These are the people who start wars for empire, stoke anti-refugee hatred, restrict marriage rights, cut wages, public transport, social services and force us to compete in order to survive.

This is not to say that ordinary people are never selfish. Life under capitalism is miserable; we tolerate boring, alienating work because it is marginally better than the alternative, unemployment and poverty. This, combined with the everyday struggle to get by in the face of job losses, inadequate social services and education cuts means that people sometimes do put themselves first and act out in cruel ways.

However, this is not some intrinsic aspect of human nature. As Marx said, “the human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of social relations.” Selfishness is a product of the brutal, dog-eat-dog system that is capitalism.

Contradiction

Crucially, however, capitalism is riddled with contradictions. It purports to be a system based on “human nature”, the idea being that the capitalist market reflects our natural individual-

ism and self-interest.

Yet co-operation between workers is essential for production. The industrial revolution in the 19th century meant that production became a collective activity; no single person can build an aeroplane or run a factory or a call centre. Capitalism does force us to compete, but at the same time, without co-operation between ordinary people not a single train would run, the factories that build our laptops and smart phones would grind to a halt, our universities would fall apart.

The “common sense” idea that people are naturally individualistic and selfish seems absurd when you consider that ordinary people are working together every day to create our society.

Moreover, the way that bosses, VC’s and parliamentarians constantly seek to erode our wages and conditions, social services and education for the sake of their profits and power, means that ordinary people not only work together but also must fight together constantly to defend our livelihoods.

In strikes and social movements we give up wages and our free time to fight for a better world. Essentially, cooperation and solidarity is built into the social DNA of the working class. If we stripped away the greedy ideas of the ruling class, if people weren’t forced to compete every day just to survive, we would live in a very different world.

What would this world look like? The generosity and solidarity that people already demonstrate could flourish. There would no longer be a small minority of people stealing the majority of the wealth we create. Competition would wither away because, without a greedy elite, the fruits of our collective labour could be shared equally and according to our needs.

Socialism would mean a society based on cooperation and collective organisation. This is the kind of world ordinary people can make.

Witness to the torture on Nauru



Above: Asylum seekers on Nauru protest their life in detention

The Undesirables: Inside Nauru By Mark Isaacs Hardie Grant Books, \$29.95

MARK ISAACS spent almost a year as a Salvation Army worker on Nauru. *The Undesirables* is his compelling firsthand account of the horror, injustice and disaster of offshore detention.

It vividly exposes Nauru's detention centre as a factory for mental illness, where asylum seekers are driven insane by uncertainty and cruelty. After expressing shock at one attempted suicide, Isaacs describes how, "A Wilson guard informed us that Christmas Island had two attempted suicides a day. That's what we had to expect. We were working in death factories." In a horrifying case, one man on Nauru is driven to a psychotic episode, acting like a dog and grunting in the dirt.

Band aids

Through his own experience as a Salvation Army worker, Isaacs became increasingly critical of

the idea that the Salvos or welfare groups can help asylum seekers within the confines of carrying out government policy. Isaacs draws the conclusion that the Salvos contract is "a band aid on a bullet wound".

Isaacs fought hard for recreational activities for the men on Nauru. But despite his good intentions, no Nauruan Premier League or Mr Nauru Cricket Cup could address why asylum seekers had fled their families and homes—the desperate need for guaranteed protection and safety. As one asylum seeker pointed out when the media picked up images of the asylum seekers playing games, "We may laugh but we are crying inside".

The efforts of Isaacs and other Salvos to improve conditions were constantly frustrated. The cruelty is deliberate. The government has created internment camps in an attempt to make life worse than the conditions asylum seekers are fleeing.

One of the asylum seekers, Pehzman, expresses his frustration at

having to line up twice a day for one hour in the heat and sun to get medication:

"The Wilson Guard offered a patronising barb into the tense silence. 'Just calm down, LIC029'.

"'He has a name,' I interjected.

"The guard put his face up to mine and whispered, 'When we go in there they are numbers. That is all.'"

The asylum seekers live on a knife edge, waiting for visits from former Labor Immigration Minister Chris Bowen or any action from the Immigration Department on processing their asylum claims. They have the

The efforts of Isaacs and other Salvos to improve conditions were constantly frustrated

power to immediately let the asylum seekers into the community and guarantee protection. Isaacs reports that before Bowen's visit, "In the days prior to his arrival it was all the men could speak of. They placed their hope in his hands. Chris Bowen came to Nauru, he performed a swift examination of the camp, and then he left."

Neo-colony

The "pressure cooker" of tension led to riots on Nauru. Property damage was the most widely reported aspect in the media. Isaacs coordinated a response from Salvation Army staff, a letter that revealed the underlying mental anguish of asylum seekers that led to the riots, along with horrific accounts of coordinated self-harm and attempted suicide.

The Nauruan reaction to the riots also revealed the problems created by Australia imposing the detention centre on Nauru. Australia still sees Nauru as its neo-colonial playground. Until independence in 1968 Australia oversaw strip-mining of over 80 per cent of Nauru-

an land, paying a pittance back to Nauru in royalties. Isaacs even heard that the Nauruan President was leasing his house to Australian officials.

There was no public consultation about the introduction of asylum seekers to their island. The detention centre is continuing Australia's environmental destruction of Nauru, with phenomenal use of plastic water bottles and other waste.

One incident on an excursion reveals the deliberate creation of a divide between asylum seekers and Nauruans. An asylum seeker who dared to try walking towards a Nauruan was stopped by a Wilson security guard: "The guard pointed over Fayiz's shoulder and said, 'You are an asylum seeker. You do not speak to Nauruans'." Isaacs tried to organise programs to help integrate Nauruans and asylum seekers, but nobody would implement them.

In July 2013, the Nauruan government reacted to the riot of asylum seekers by mobilising a section of the community into an emergency police force. A group of Nauruans were waiting outside the camp with weapons, including machetes. Many of the asylum seekers were seriously injured during the riot. Many were beaten in jail and denied food for four days. The detention centre was fittingly burnt to the ground by the asylum seekers.

Isaacs uses his own conversations with refugees on Nauru to debunk many of the anti-refugee myths, from the "people smugglers' business model" supposedly being the reason people take boat journeys, to the idea most asylum seekers are economic migrants. *The Undesirables* is a valuable tool in the fight against Australia's brutal border regime.

Feiyi Zhang

MANUS ISLAND, NAURU MORRISON'S REFUGEE BRUTALITY UNRAVELS

By Ian Rintoul

THOUSANDS OF people turned out for the Palm Sunday rallies across Australia to oppose the Coalition's brutal treatment of refugees. The 2000 people in Canberra made it the biggest-ever refugee rally in the nation's capital.

In every capital city there was a sizable representation from church congregations. In Sydney, 13 unions were represented in the Unions for Refugees contingent among the 5000 protesters.

Significantly, since the death of asylum seeker Reza Barati on Manus Island in February, there are the first signs of a break with the bi-partisan support Labor has given to the Coalition on refugee policy. Sue Lines, a Western Australian Labor Senator told the Perth rally, "A number of Labor politicians are now speaking out. What we want to do within Labor is to create a movement for change."

It is the movement outside parliament that will be crucial to the fight for change inside Labor and to force change in government policies. The broad support for the rallies show the movement is growing.

While Scott Morrison and Tony Abbott try to portray Operation Sovereign Borders as the stand out success of the Coalition, the truth is that the contradictions of offshore processing are growing sharper by the day.

Nauru's announcement that it will not resettle refugees has punched a huge hole in the policy. It is a hole that Morrison has hurriedly tried to paper over by suggesting that Cambodia might resettle refugees.

Meanwhile the crisis on Manus Island won't go away. Every revelation of the horror of the attack on the asylum seekers is a reminder of the lies Morrison has told and of the government's attempts to cover-up for the killers of Reza Barati who remain at large (and employed by Transfield) on the island.

Morrison tries to pretend it is business as usual, but more than two months after Reza's death, the government is still unable to re-introduce local security staff into the Manus Island detention centre.



Above: Melbourne's Palm Sunday march, a sign of the broadening support for the campaign
Photo: Laura Krazovitsky

It is unlikely that the government will be able to transfer any more asylum seekers there in the foreseeable future. The inability to use Manus Island is another huge blow to the offshore processing regime.

The contradictions are just as obvious over processing of asylum claims. On the one hand, the government is anxious to show that processing is happening and claims that processing has started on both Nauru and Manus Island. But the first successful refugee assessments on either island will immediately raise the question of where the refugees are going to be resettled.

PNG has said it is willing to resettle refugees, but there are still no laws to allow resettlement and the tensions around Manus Island rule out any possibility of resettlement there.

Even if asylum seekers are rejected, there are many that cannot be returned to their home countries: those from Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria to name a few. The Manus crisis and Nauru's refusal to resettle makes it far more likely that asylum seekers on Nauru and Manus will eventually be brought to Australia—just as they were under the Howard government.

That's why Cambodia matters so much to the government. Unless Morrison can find somewhere willing

to resettle refugees, a central plank of Operation Sovereign Borders—that offshore asylum seekers will never be settled in Australia—will collapse.

But Cambodia is a long way from being a done deal. The regional coordinator for the UNHCR recently warned the government that a "Cambodia solution" would violate the Refugee Convention.

On another front, High Court action to determine whether babies born to asylum seekers in Australia have a right to make protection claims in Australia is preventing Morrison sending asylum families with new-borns to Nauru. It is yet another potential obstacle to Morrison's offshore detention strategy.

In March, the Uniting Church wrote to Morrison offering to look after all the unaccompanied minors on Christmas Island to prevent them being sent to Nauru.

Behind his bragging about "stopping the boats", Morrison is more vulnerable than he seems. Over the next few weeks, there will be action to mark 100 days since Reza Barati's death. Refugee week in June will see more meetings, mobilizations, marches and protests to maintain the campaign's momentum. It is more important than ever to keep the pressure on: offshore processing can be beaten.

Cambodia matters—unless Morrison can find somewhere to resettle refugees, a central plank of Operation Sovereign Borders will collapse

Solidarity