

Solidarity

Issue No. 78 / May 2015

\$3/\$5

Abbott says: Let the refugees die



We say:

**STOP TURNBACKS
RESCUE THE
ROHINGYAS**

INSIDE

BUDGET CON: ABBOTT KEEPS HIS CUTS



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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.

SOLIDARITY MEETINGS AND BRANCHES

Sydney

Fortress Australia and the case for open borders
6.30pm Thursday 23 April

Sydney Solidarity meets 6.30pm every Thursday at Brown St Hall, Brown St, Newtown
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Things they say

We have got hundreds, maybe thousands of people drowning in the attempts to get from Africa to Europe and I suppose we must grieve for the loss

Tony Abbott shows how little he cares about asylum seeker drownings in the Mediterranean

Some of the ways that Australia acts on these things are tougher than we in Britain and Australia can perhaps stomach.

Even Nigel Farage leader of British anti-immigrant party UKIP's thinks Abbott's refugee policies are too extreme

Their wives may have done it and they didn't know

Treasurer Joe Hockey's attempt to explain why government ministers have taken up what the government says is "double-dipping" on parental leave

I have used that word 'rort' in relation to the scheme itself, not in relation to those using it

Scott Morrison tries to get out of his attack on those "double-dipping" on parental leave

Just answer the frigging question

3AW caller Jo was sick of yelling at her radio after Bill Shorten's on air meltdown

I dread to think where I'd be without the Army. Bring back National Service

Prince Harry

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INSIDE THE \$YSTEM

NT youth to be tracked with ankle bracelets

ANY NT youth on bail will be tracked using electronic ankle bracelets as part of a punitive new “law and order” process. The NT has the highest rate of juvenile incarceration in Australia and 95 per cent of the children locked up are Indigenous.

Currently only youth bailed from the Supreme Court can be tracked with ankle bracelets and 108 are currently being worn, but the planned changes will massively increase the scope of the surveillance. Ex-cop Attorney General John Elferink has also upped the ante, renewing a pledge to trial ankle bracelets that not only physically track the wearer, but can also take automatic blood alcohol readings every 30 minutes and transmit the results to a remote database.

Surprise: 50 per cent of Fox's statements false

FACT CHECK analysis by the *Tampa Bay Times* has found that over half of the statements made on Rupert Murdoch's Fox News are completely false. 60 per cent of the statements on the US news outlet sat somewhere between “mostly false” and “pants on fire”. Eight per cent were “completely untrue”.

These findings were confirmed by a study coming out of Fairleigh Dickinson University. It found that “people who say they consumed no news” fared better on a current events questionnaire than those who said they looked to Fox.

Queensland private schools Gorge on profits

ELITE PRIVATE schools subsidised by the government are raking in profits and generating millions in surpluses. A recent Queensland Audit Office report found that last year eight Grammar schools in Queensland collectively generated an \$18.1 million surplus, up from \$11.3 million in 2013.

Three grammar schools in Toowoomba, Rockhampton and Brisbane enjoyed a combined \$6.2 million increase in government grants last year, allowing them to spend around \$5 million extra on staff. The most profitable school, Toowoomba Grammar, raked in an enormous \$5.9 million surplus on its own.

Union sued over suicide prevention meeting



FAIR WORK Building and Construction (FWBC), headed by Nigel Hadgkiss, is suing the CFMEU over a suicide prevention meeting at the South Australian Medical Health and Research Institute site in November 2013.

The legal action by the regulator is directed at CFMEU official David Kirner and the union, who allegedly entered the Adelaide site without authorisation to help with a suicide intervention involving one of its members.

The CFMEU says it had permits to arrive without notice and according to Kirner, “The union had to come on site over suicide intervention because workers on the site said one of their mates was in trouble”. Increased deaths on construction sites have coincided with the FWBC's use of its coercive powers—28 workers died in the construction industry in 2014, up from 17 in 2013.

Bono defends tax dodging

BONO, LEAD singer of Irish rock supergroup U2, has defended the band's tax dodging practices as “smart”.

In 2006 the band moved parts of its business to the Netherlands to take advantage of tax breaks. When questioned about these practices in an interview to promote their upcoming tour, Bono said “It's just some smart people we have working for us trying to be sensible about the way we're taxed.”

The band's front-man, high profile global poverty awareness campaigner and supposed philanthropist, is known for his association with the Band Aid charity albums, Live 8 performances and public anti-poverty meetings with the likes of Tony Blair and George Bush.

This isn't the first time Bono has hypocritically celebrated the ability of the rich to evade tax with impunity. In late 2014 he faced ridicule after saying Ireland's miniscule 12.5 percent corporate tax rate “brought our country the only prosperity we've known”. As the Irish Unite union pointed out, 25 per cent of Irish people now endure social deprivation thanks to years of austerity. Meanwhile a recent “rich list” put U2's combined wealth at \$843 million.

Research and writing by Adam Adelpour

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

Uranium found in Aboriginal peoples' water

UNSAFE LEVELS of uranium, nitrates and E. Coli were found in the water supply to remote Aboriginal communities in Western Australia, according to a report tabled in May by the state's Auditor General. Regular tests found contamination in the water supply of 68 out of 84 communities examined.

One of the worst contaminated was the west Kimberley community of Jarlmadangah, where microbiological tests failed five months in a row last year.

The report said, “The community told us that by the time they get a note from a failed water test they have already been drinking it for a week or two. They routinely boil water ‘for babies and young ones’.”

Children of Ayatollahs flaunt wealth in Iran

THE CHILDREN of Iran's bloated Ayatollahs and their hangers on are flaunting their wealth like never before. The ultra-rich offspring of Iran's elite were pushed onto the front pages of the nation's newspapers after a series of fatal road accidents involving luxury cars in April.

The cars involved in the accidents were Porsches, Ferraris and Maseratis. According to *The Guardian*, the owner of the yellow Maserati killed in one accident was Mohammad Hossein Rabbani, Ayatollah Rabbani Shirazi's grandson.

The “Rich Kids of Tehran” Instagram has become a notorious testament to the big spending of Iran's 1 per cent. Young men pose next to private helicopters and show off Rolexes and gold plated phones, while young women wear elaborate gowns as they enjoy luxury mansions with vast swimming pools.

Such is life for the children of the Iranian elite who claim to represent “the poor and disinherited”.

EDITORIAL

Abbott's cuts and lies still coming: Time to hit back

ABBOTT'S RESPONSE to the stand-off that left at least 8000 Rohingya asylum seekers stranded on the high seas, without adequate food or medical supplies, was obscene.

Despite the obvious risk of drownings as a result of Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand all turning the boats back, he declared his full backing for their actions.

This obvious contempt for the lives of asylum seekers puts the lie to Abbott's claim that turnbacks are about saving lives at sea.

Abbott and Hockey claim that their budget shows a new-found fairness is just another lie. Everyone knows it is only a desperate ploy to save their jobs.

The backflips required mean their attempts to sell it have next to no credibility. A year ago Hockey was warning of a "debt and deficits disaster" and telling us the "age of entitlement is over".

Now, despite large chunks of the last budget failing to pass the Senate, he makes out that the problem is dealt with, saying "We're coming through".

And just a year ago Abbott was promoting his now ditched parental leave scheme, saying it was "an idea whose time has come". Now he and his ministers are attacking mothers who have access to employer-funded parental leave on top of the minimum wage government scheme for "double dipping" and roting.

The budget was such a transparent effort to throw out the approach of last year that some people are now speculating about an early election. But Abbott is still behind in the polls. There is nothing to indicate the budget has been well received, despite attempts by the media talk it up.

It may not be electoral poison like last year, but it still won't make people better off. A Seven News ReachTel poll conducted a few days after the budget found just 16.4 per cent thought they would be financially better off, and 53.3 per cent said they would be about the same. Both that poll and Newpoll have Labor still ahead 53 to 47 per cent in two party terms.

But to make sure Abbott stays down, we need to get back on the streets in large numbers, and build more powerful campaigns against his agenda. The failure of union leaders, Labor or The Greens to build ongoing campaigns means that the wave of



Above: The demonstrations against Abbott's agenda of cuts have been allowed to peter out

.....
Unless unions and the wider left build a stronger fightback, there is a risk that Abbott will be let off the hook

protests against the government's first budget has been allowed to peter out.

This year's budget does not have the same frontal attacks on Medicare, pensioners or universities. But there are plenty of cuts still in the budget from last year that are just starting to be felt.

Abbott's deal with WA to cease federal funding for remote Aboriginal communities will result in community closures. But they are still to happen. This means there is time for the demonstrations to continue.

Smaller cuts can continue to generate protest and opposition. For instance protesters in Tasmania confronted Joe Hockey following the budget, angry over the closure of a Launceston rehabilitation unit, the John L Grove centre.

Continuing to campaign in support of refugees, and against Abbott's scaremonger on national security, is also vital to undermining his support.

One important event in fighting Islamophobia will be the counter-rallies against the second round of anti-Muslim "Reclaim Australia" rallies.

We need to confront the racism of "Reclaim Australia" but it is the anti-Muslim racism stirred by Abbott that is encouraging the far right. To effectively fight that, we need to broaden the base of opposition to Abbott's Islamophobia, to involve trade unions, Muslim and migrant community groups in organising

events beyond the counter-rallies

Alternative

Unless unions and the wider left attempt to build a stronger fightback, there is a risk that Abbott will be let off the hook. Everyone needs to get behind the federal public sector strikes in May and June.

Bill Shorten's budget reply speech showed everything that is wrong with the approach of simply voting out Abbott at the next election.

If Labor does win we will be left with a government just as right-wing and pro-business as the Gillard and Rudd Labor governments before it. Shorten offers nothing to make people enthusiastic about voting Labor because he is committed to the same conservative approach to economic management as the Liberals.

Refugee rights activists will be converging to rally outside the Labor national conference in Melbourne at the end of July, to build the pressure to change Labor policy over refugees. As thousands of Rohingya asylum seekers drift in boats in desperate conditions off Malaysia and Indonesia, Labor has done nothing to challenge Abbott's turnback policy. The wider campaigning against Abbott's cuts also needs to outline an alternative of taxing the rich to reverse the cuts to schools and hospitals, and create jobs. We need to get Abbott out—and fight for a real alternative that puts people before profits.

By Erima Dall

Border policing kills: saving lives starts with welcoming the boats

THE MORE lives lost at sea, the shriller become the hypocritical cries of “stop the boats”. As Solidarity goes to print 6000 asylum seekers remain stranded in the Malacca straits while only hours away, the Australian navy ignores the crisis.

This comes after the devastating drownings in the Mediterranean Sea, with two boats carrying 1100 asylum seekers capsizing in one week in April.

Abbott grabbed for the political points: “I suppose we must grieve for the loss” he began, but, “The only way you can stop the death is in fact to stop the boats”.

Opposition leader Bill Shorten has pushed the same “saving lives at sea” argument about offshore processing, although he tried to give it a more humanitarian gloss: “I will not live in an intellectually dishonest world where... we have policies which drag people here to hop on unsafe boats and drown at sea” he said at his Sydney University pre-budget address.

Worrying Shorten has recently declined to answer questions about whether Labor will rule out boat turnbacks—a policy the shadow Immigration Minister Richard Marles has previously floated.

But it is the goal of stopping boats that kills—and both sides of politics know it, because they have both been responsible for it.

Search and rescue

One of the most obvious but least mentioned ways to save lives at sea is to rescue people. But rescue operations are not a priority. Indonesia lacks the resources but the EU deliberately cut their operations.

The Mediterranean drownings in April were a direct result of the rescue program *Mare Nostrum* being cut, and replaced with a dramatically reduced program *Triton*. Fabrice Leggeri, the head of Frontex, the company that operates the *Triton* patrol off Italy, recently stated bluntly, “*Triton* cannot be a search-and-rescue operation. I mean, in our operational plan, we cannot have provisions for proactive search-and-rescue action. This is not in Frontex’s mandate...”

The result? 1750 asylum seekers have drowned this year. At the same time, Greece and Spain have constructed walls to keep people out, forcing them to take a longer, more dangerous, journey via the open ocean.



There is a dark, hidden history of Australia’s border agencies letting boats sink. Around 1550 asylum seekers have died at sea, while headed for Australia, between 1998 - February 2014.

So many lives were lost so close to safety. Some headlines tell the story: “Sank about 40 nm from Christmas Island—15 dead”; “Tow back—left 300m from Roti Island—3 dead”; and yet another “Crashed on rocks at Christmas Island—50 dead”.

If anything demonstrates the calculated indifference of Australian Maritime Safety Authorities to the plight of refugees, it is the 2012 sinking of the *Kaniva*, SIEV 358.

Asylum seekers on the *Kaniva* made no less than 16 calls to the Australian Rescue Co-ordination Centre (RCC). The RCC monitored the boat for a day, a night and into the next day, but provided no assistance. When the boat sank, 102 people drowned; 110 were saved, slowly, reluctantly.

“Normal refugee patter”, “unnecessary alerts” and “forward motion under engine power” were some of phrases used to explain away the fact that 16 distress calls went unheeded, despite the boat being overloaded, and taking on water.

Avoiding providing rescue assistance is partly motivated by Australia trying to make the Indonesian rescue service, BASARNAS, take responsibility, despite knowing it is severely under-resourced.

As Tony Kevin, author of *Reluctant Rescuers*, explains: “We may assume that, had RCC Australia thought the distress calls justified, it would have launched an Australian search and rescue response. Instead, it was putting BASARNAS and other Indonesian authorities (navy, maritime police) through what amounted to a real-time training exercise. The results were lamentable.” Findings from the inquest included the basic recommendations that, if dealing with BASARNAS, instructions should be translated into the appropriate language and confirmed in Indonesian!

But the Malacca Straits crisis demonstrates, horrifyingly, what happens if every government mirrors Australia’s approach. Tough border policies are not the determining factor in whether boats come. Push factors are far stronger—persecution and war in particular, and world-wide refugee numbers are once again on the rise.

Nor is it true that the Coalition has “stopped the boats”. At least 16 have headed for Australia since the beginning of Operation Sovereign Borders. But the sickening truth is that when boats are prevented from leaving, or are turned back, this merely forces refugees to “die elsewhere”, at sea or in their country of origin.

There has never been a more crucial time for the refugee movement to raise, and fight for, the slogans: “open the borders” and “welcome the boats”. Lives depend on it.

.....
There is a dark, hidden history of Australia’s border agencies letting boats sink

‘Saving lives at sea’? Let them drown says Abbott

By Ian Rintoul

MORE THAN 200 Rohingya asylum seekers are dead, and thousands more are at risk, as asylum boats are turned back to sea between Indonesia and Malaysia.

Despite the horror, Immigration Minister Peter Dutton gave explicit approval to the turnbacks, saying “countries in the region have a sovereign right to respond to these matters as they see fit.”

The reality has been shockingly brutal. One boat finally rescued by Indonesian fishers had been sent away by the Thai navy on three occasions and twice by Malaysia. The second time they were rebuffed by Malaysian authorities, they were held at gunpoint and told that their ship would be bombed if they did not turn around.

But Tony Abbott says that “he is in no way critical” of countries trying to stop the boats, declaring, “Frankly, the only way to stop the boats is to be prepared to turn them around.”

Abbott has set the example. Under Operation Sovereign Borders, the Coalition runs a naval blockade between Australia and Indonesia, intercepts asylum boats, holds asylum seekers captive, and condemns asylum seekers to the hell-holes of Nauru and Manus Island.

The poison of Abbott’s turnback policy has spread to Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia. His encouragement of turnbacks has endangered thousands of lives.

Abbott says turning boats back save lives—it’s a lie. Turning boats back has only ever meant that asylum seekers are condemned to die somewhere else. But even when asylum seekers are obviously at risk of dying so close to Australia, Abbott won’t lift a finger to help.

Not a boat; not a plane, not a food drop, nothing.

Over 1000 asylum seekers have landed on Malaysia’s Langkawi Island. Nearly 3000 have been rescued by Indonesian fishers in Aceh.

The plight of the Rohingya, a Muslim minority in Burma, is well known. But both Labor and Liberal governments have turned a blind eye to the mass killings and ethnic cleansing by the Burmese government. The most recent phase began in 2012. Over 125,000 were driven from their homes; mosques were destroyed



Above: A boat of Rohingya asylum seekers tries to reach safety

and whole villages razed. In just one month in October 2014, 16,000 Rohingya fled.

Those attempting to flee into Bangladesh are often forced back by armed guards.

The Abbott government has compounded the persecution by cutting off any legal pathways to Australia. Refugees in Indonesia are denied resettlement in Australia and there is a de facto ban on accepting Rohingya refugees from Malaysia.

Mediterranean crisis

Abbott was also keen to offer advice to the European governments in the wake of the refugee crisis in the Mediterranean, “The only way you can stop the deaths is in fact to stop the boats,” Abbott said.

Labor’s Immigration spokesperson, Richard Marles, has been pathetic. He has made comments about Abbott not being a statesperson; but he hasn’t called for a rescue operation. And he hasn’t called for the Rohingians to be brought to Australia.

When asked about the crisis in the Mediterranean, Marles just seized the opportunity to argue that Europe need offshore processing. Stopping the boats would not work in the Mediterranean, he said, because there is no equivalent of Nauru or Manus Island. Presumably he would be happy with emerging European suggestions to set up processing centres in places like Libya, Niger, Egypt, Turkey or

Lebanon.

While Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia mounted naval blockades and pushed boats back to sea—and Australia egged them on—to its credit, the Philippines government declared its willingness to take the thousands of boat people.

It is not a practical solution—the boats would never get there—but from such a poor country, it dramatically exposed Abbott’s inhumanity.

Abbott has bragged about the amount of aid Australia gave to Indonesia when the earthquake hit Aceh in 2004. But now the lives that are at risk are those of asylum seekers, they mean nothing to him.

The brutal reality of shutting borders to asylum seekers is now being dramatically played out across South-East Asia. If that brutal reality is going to be stopped we have to argue to open the borders and rescue the Rohingya. Nothing less will do.

As *Solidarity* goes to press, news is breaking that Indonesia and Malaysia have agreed to provide temporary safe haven to the Rohingya asylum seekers on condition “the international community will take responsibility for the repatriation of the irregular migrants to their countries of origin or resettlement to third countries within ... one year”.

But don’t expect anything from Abbott. The fight to close Manus and Nauru and to resettle the Rohingya go hand in hand.

Turning boats back has only ever meant that asylum seekers are condemned to die somewhere else

Childcare changes entrench unfair market system

By Lachlan Marshall

THE LIBERALS' changes to childcare will only entrench a market approach that is expensive and has failed to provide places where they are needed.

The current neo-liberal framework in childcare is a legacy of the Howard government, which deregulated childcare and targeted funding to individual consumers. This model, glorifying "consumer choice", saw the government move away from funding service providers directly, as had been the case prior to 1997.

Childcare is almost universally acknowledged as crucial both for enabling parents, particularly mothers, to return to work, and for children's socialisation and development. More than that, it is a basic social need and a fundamental right for women.

But rather than treating it as a public good and providing free and universal access, two-thirds of childcare providers are for profit, despite government providing most of the funding.

The main problem with a free market in childcare is that it is inefficient and drives up costs. As Macquarie University academics Ben Spies-Butcher and Adam Stebbing wrote in 2010, "Current policy gives parents more money to spend on childcare without sufficiently increasing the supply of childcare places. This tends to push up the price of childcare and reduce value for money."

This is exactly what Scott Morrison's new package will do. It will remove the cap of \$7500 a year paid to families with incomes up to \$185,000, and raise the cap to \$10,000 for families earning over \$185,000.

These subsidies will only boost childcare providers' profits. While increased spending is needed, in the absence of greater supply of childcare places and tighter regulation of the industry more subsidies will only encourage providers to inflate prices, making childcare less affordable.

In addition, as researcher Eva Cox points out, "the policy fails to address non-fee-related reasons for gaps in the supply of services including few services for unprofitable age groups (the under-threes); fewer places in high-cost areas/locations; lack of flexible hours; and local centre waiting lists."

Last year the parents of 57,000 children applied for childcare places



only to be told they were not available, and there were inquires about spaces for a further 58,000 kids that were not formally applied for.

Roxanne Elliott from CareforKids.com.au, which helps parents find childcare, explains, "Results from our annual Child Care and Workforce Participation Survey reveal that many families, especially those in NSW and Victoria, struggle to find high quality child care when and where they need it".

The Productivity Commission report, which informs many of the new policies, is thoroughly imbued with market ideology, claiming that: "In most markets, parents have some capacity to choose between similar providers and there is competition."

But according to Eva Cox, "this is a naïve market model, as the supply of childcare is often inadequate and mis-distributed. As a result, there is little serious 'competition' for parental choices. Desperate parents put babies on long waiting lists in the hope of finding places before their parental leave ends."

Market failure

The risk of allowing the market free rein in such a vital sector as childcare was clearly illustrated when Australia's biggest childcare provider, ABC Learning, collapsed in 2008.

ABC Learning was the biggest childcare provider at the time, accounting for 25 per cent of childcare places. But this market failure didn't prompt the Rudd government to re-think and impose stricter regulations,

Above: Childcare funding was one of the centrepieces of Abbott and Hockey's budget

even though government subsidies comprised 40 per cent of ABC Learning revenue.

Instead the Labor government let the market decide which centres would remain open and which workers would keep their jobs.

Public services like childcare should be government run, to ensure availability and quality of service. For a start, the government should simply build more childcare centres rather than relying on the market.

As Spies-Butcher and Stebbing explain, "Funding needs to be direct. If supply is the issue, then building centres and funding them is the solution; using mechanisms like rebates and subsidies is less direct and less efficient".

For-profit childcare companies provide care on the cheap by minimising staff-child ratios and opposing requirements for higher qualifications for staff, contributing to the high staff turnover that plagues the sector. This will be made worse by measures like the nanny pilot which, unlike other childcare, isn't required to adhere to the National Quality Framework that stipulates minimum qualifications.

When ABC Learning went bust unions demanded that the government take over the childcare centres and employ properly qualified staff for better quality learning.

Government provision could ensure qualified teachers and carers are paid fairly, which would make working in childcare more attractive and minimise disruptions to the important relationships children develop with carers.

Two-thirds of childcare providers are for profit, despite government providing most of the funding

Budget smoke and mirrors, but Abbott keeps his cuts

By James Supple

TONY ABBOTT is desperately praying that this year's budget will save his skin. But the budget cuts from last year remain in place, and even his new spending on childcare relies on taking money allocated elsewhere for families and new mothers.

Abbott has maintained his fearmongering about terrorism and national security, boosting military spending. Interest rates are at an all-time low, but except for the NBN, there is no government spending on badly needed infrastructure like public transport and renewable energy that might create jobs.

The government has a major credibility problem after its first year in office. Everyone now knows their real plans. Once they get themselves out of trouble, the Liberals will dust off the stalled measures from their first budget and go back to savagely hacking away at health, education and pensions.

Some of the worst of last year's attacks have been quietly ditched for now. The plan to deny under 30s any Centrelink payment for their first six months of unemployment has been scaled down to a one month wait for under 25s. The cut to the rate of pension increases, designed to cut the payments over time, has been dumped.

But others are still there, including the \$80 billion in cuts over ten years to schools and health funding for the states. Chris Pyne's university fee deregulation plans are still on the table, despite standing almost no chance of passing the Senate.

The government has done next to nothing to put money back into health and education after last year's cuts. Cuts to Aboriginal services and welfare programs have not been reversed.

Instead of helping workers and the poor, the Liberals have instead delivered tax cuts to small business. But there is no money for climate change, a continuation of cuts to foreign aid and a raft of cuts to little known programs in health that total almost \$1 billion over five years.

Childcare con

The centre-piece of the new budget is extra funding for childcare. But behind the smoke and mirrors, there are few benefits for parents.

Working parents whose combined



Above: The budget is Abbott and Hockey's last roll of the dice

income is up to \$170,000 will all receive more funding. But this will not kick in for another two years, until 2017.

Because private operators will still be able to profiteer and there are no controls on prices, they could easily respond by pushing up fees.

Worse, the government is giving with one hand and taking with the other. There will be cuts to childcare payments for 80,000 "out-of-work" mothers.

Rather than improve benefits, the childcare spending is designed to push mothers back into the workforce.

New mothers will also lose access to the existing paid parental leave payment, introduced under Labor, if their employer funded parental leave is already more generous. Almost 50 per cent of new mothers will lose money as a result.

This has been branded "an outrageous attack on mothers because that was the plan of the scheme", by Professor Marion Baird, part of the expert panel that has just completed an assessment of the measures.

The new childcare funding also relies on cuts to Family Tax benefits from last year's budget, which the Senate has refused to pass. This would cut off payments to families once their children turn six.

Alongside cuts elsewhere, the Liberals still found more money to boost defence and the surveillance agencies.

They will get another \$1.2 billion, on top of the increases already announced in the last year. This funding boost is a political exercise to allow Abbott to keep up his terrorism scare.

The bulk of it will go to the military adventures in Iraq and Afghanistan, now involving 900 Australia troops at a cost of \$750 million this year alone. Total defence spending is up to a disgraceful \$32.1 billion for this year, of which \$6.1 billion will go on new weapons.

The other extra security spending means more money to harass the Muslim community and step up surveillance.

The government has been at pains to convince people this budget, unlike its last one, is fair. But for all the talk of tough times, big business and the rich have again been let off the hook.

Treasurer Joe Hockey's crackdown on 30 big multinationals for tax evasion is all for show. He can't even put a figure on how much money it will raise.

This budget might save Abbott from own backbench for a few more months. But it's their savage attacks on students, pensioners and universities that that define this government. If that outrage was mobilised in strikes and demonstrations, nothing could save Abbott.

.....
The government has done next to nothing to put money back into health and education after last year's cuts

Union House facing demolition as university expands corporate vision

THE UNIVERSITY of Melbourne has announced plans to demolish Union House, which currently houses the University of Melbourne Student Union (UMSU) and other student spaces and collectives. UMSU is in negotiations with the University over the final form of a proposed student precinct to replace it when leases expire in 2018. While UMSU was first informed of this move in November 2014, the student body received no official news until a forum in late April. Many students remain oblivious.

The existing site is to be redeveloped as multi-use student housing. At present, all we know is that the new precinct will house health and counselling services, a bookshop, and a pared-down Student Centre (with many services moved online or to a phone service). North Court and Union House Theatre will not fit. Where the Food Co-op, Rowden White Library or other student spaces will go is uncertain, but students have been told to prioritise, so cuts are expected.

These developments are consistent with the university's Business Improvement Programme, so far responsible for over 500 staff cuts and the impending closure of Student Centres. The plan to develop student housing reveals that the administration are more interested in milking international students for cash than providing quality facilities.

The fragmentation of student organising bodies could also be a serious blow to future student activism, which has been instrumental in defeating fee deregulation and supporting union campaigns over working conditions and casualisation. The building has a rich history, including its use to shelter draft resisters during the campaign against the Vietnam War and as an organising centre for countless student campaigns since.

While UMSU president Rachel Withers has announced that the union will "dig in our heels" if the deal is not judged acceptable, UMSU officebearers have simply accepted the plans for cuts to services so far. Campaigners from the campus Greens, Labor Left, the Environment department, Solidarity and independents have set up a campaign to Save Union House and the services and spaces we currently enjoy, which is arguing for opposition amongst the student body.

New Greens leader no break from the past



By Amy Thomas

RICHARD DI Natale's sudden ascension to The Greens' leadership appears to mean the status quo remains—but that's not what the left and the movements need.

Many in The Greens' left, including Senator Lee Rhiannon, have spoken out about the rushed, undemocratic nature of the leadership change.

But the bigger worry is that Di Natale plans to follow in the footsteps of founding leader Bob Brown and his successor Christine Milne and embrace parliamentary pragmatism.

Despite some right-wing columnists hoping otherwise, Di Natale has so far stuck to The Greens' line on Abbott and the budget, arguing that "the big end of town should pay its way".

It's policies like these, and their principled stand on issues like asylum seekers, that has built The Greens support while Labor has moved closer and closer to the Liberals.

But The Greens' exclusively parliamentary strategy has a natural conservative logic that is pulling them away from what has made them exceptional in the first place.

Di Natale told the *7:30 Report* that he's "prepared to work across party lines to get things done". Asked if he was about getting more people elected or "doing politics differently", he responded, without hesitation, "Oh, we're here to get more people elected", saying his goal was to "build on our achievements in parliament".

It was that narrow vision that produced The Greens' compromises with

the minority Gillard Labor government, and the spectacular failure of the carbon tax. Instead of campaigning for immediate investment in solar power plants and green jobs, The Greens' party room sought to find a solution amenable to parliament and business. Di Natale called the tax, "a moment when the parliament was at its best ... working across party lines ... to ensure we support action on climate change."

Negotiation and compromise with the system means accepting its limits, not challenging them.

Left alternative

Instead of defining The Greens as a left party, Di Natale has continued the pitch to win Liberal voters, saying, he wants "people who are small L liberal voters" to know "you can trust us with your vote." But the workers and unionists who still largely vote Labor are the force that can challenge the Coalition's cuts and racism and Labor's "metoosim". As we go to print, federal public service workers are stopping work, using their power to strike to demand a fair pay deal.

Labor and union leaders have so far failed to build the fight we need against the Coalition. There is a space here for The Greens. They could use the megaphone provided by parliament to fan the flames of struggles and build the movements. They could accept the affiliation of trade unions.

So far, it doesn't seem like Di Natale will pursue this approach—the left inside the party will need to make it theirs.

Instead of defining The Greens as a left party, Di Natale has continued the pitch to win Liberal voters

Shorten shows he's useless for stopping Abbott

By James Supple

LAST YEAR Bill Shorten's budget reply turned the Liberals pale, as he lashed out at Abbott's cuts and promised to block the worst attacks in the Senate. This year the Labor leader delivered a pathetic, uninspiring speech that showed why he's widely considered useless.

While Abbott avoided the scattergun attacks of the last budget, many cuts remain in place and the rich continue to get away scot free. Labor had an opportunity to spell out an alternative. It failed.

Shorten mimicked big business criticism, attacking Abbott from the right for not doing enough to cut the budget deficit. He complained that the budget "drops the ball on reform, change and fiscal sense".

Labor accepts the same conservative approach to economic management as the Liberals. They have refused to propose the kind of serious taxes on corporations and the rich necessary to generate the money to reverse cuts, fund services, build renewable energy and create jobs.

Shorten attacked Abbott for cutting \$80 billion from schools and hospitals. But he was careful not to commit to even restoring the funding if Labor were to come to power, or delivering the full schools spending recommended by the Gonski review.

Shorten complained about Abbott's failure to fund infrastructure such as public transport, affordable housing and energy.

But instead of promising the money needed to fund it, Shorten proposed appointing independent experts to assess projects.

And he reaffirmed Labor's unity ticket with Abbott on spending hundreds of millions of dollars sending troops to Iraq, a war that is deepening the humanitarian catastrophe in that country, at the cost of cuts to social services here.

Shorten is equally committed to funding Islamophobic "national security" programs and said not a word about the billions going to the military and new weapons.

Shorten offered nothing in terms of policies that could boost living standards or improve workers' lives. In fact Labor promises to make cuts itself, but tells us they will be "fair plans to improve the Budget bottom line".



Above: Shorten delivers his budget reply

At the centre of Shorten's approach is Labor's concern for managing capitalism. He was speaking with the goal of appealing to business, discussing the need to provide business greater "confidence" to invest—and reap greater profits.

Targeting business

Shorten talked up his support for helping small business, and even tried to outdo Abbott. He went so far as to propose a bigger tax cut for small business—1.5 per cent was not enough, he proposed a 5 per cent instead.

Apparently this is what Labor thinks is "the future". Some vision, that. The corporate tax rate has been cut steadily since it sat at 49 per cent in the mid-1980s to 30 per cent today.

Small business has always been a core supporter of the Liberals, but Shorten would rather chase their vote than propose measures for health and education.

Instead of proposing higher funding and more teachers for schools, Shorten went instead for technocratic tinkering to increase the focus on software coding and science in the curriculum. Why? Not because Shorten is worried about the quality of education, but because he's focused on the needs of business. He said, "Productivity is the most important catalyst for our economy."

In the aftermath of Shorten's speech the Liberals lined up to attack Labor over how it would fund its promises.

The two efforts to raise money Labor announced before the budget, repeated in Shorten's speech, inch

hesitantly in the right direction. But they are so modest that it's clear Labor isn't prepared to take on corporations and the rich.

One involves cutting back on superannuation concessions, designed to save \$14.3 billion over a decade. But there are \$15 billion every year in superannuation concessions for just the top 5 per cent of income earners—people earning over \$180,000 a year.

Labor made plenty of noise in the weeks before the budget about cracking down on multinational tax avoidance. But it has suggested changes that would raise just \$2 billion over four years. The Tax Justice Network report on the top 200 Australian-based companies alone says making them pay just the existing 30 per cent tax rate would raise \$8.4 billion every year.

Left to its own devices, Labor could be the only thing that saves Tony Abbott at the next election. And if this is the best alternative it can offer, it's clear unions and the left will need to be the real opposition to Abbott and build the movements for change.

TAX THE RICH—THE MONEY IS THERE

\$8.4 billion make Australian companies pay the full 30 per cent tax rate

\$15 billion remove super tax breaks for those earning over \$180,000

\$20 billion 1 per cent wealth tax on wealthiest 10 per cent

\$3.7 billion abolish negative gearing on housing investments

Total \$47.1 billion a year

Shorten's changes: \$1.4 billion a year

Abbott's climate inaction on display—but emissions trading no alternative

By Eliot Hoving

TONY ABBOTT'S contempt for climate change has again been on display over the efforts to lower the Renewable Energy Target (RET). The RET mandates a proportion of total energy use that must come from renewable sources such as solar panels and wind farms.

Even after Labor agreed to a lowering of the target by 20 per cent, at the last minute the Liberals insisted that burning woodchips be included as renewable energy. The Liberals had originally wanted it cut 30 per cent.

The attack on the RET has already seen investment in renewable energy decline by 90 per cent over the last year.

Meanwhile, as Tony Abbott's Direct Action climate policy is underway, it continues to be widely, and rightly, derided.

Direct Action is based on a laughable target of 5 per cent emissions reduction by 2020 relative to 2000 levels. To reach this target the government operates a tendering process where businesses compete for contracts to reduce emissions. The most cost-effective proposals are then funded out of a \$2.55 billion "Emissions Reduction Fund".

The first round in April handed out 25 per cent of the total fund to secure on paper 47.3 million tonnes of emission reductions. However this is only 17 per cent of the emission reductions needed to successfully achieve the 2020 target. This shortfall is likely to increase as the cheapest emissions reduction projects are exhausted. There is also no guarantee that proposals will achieve the emissions reductions they have pledged.

The first auction overwhelmingly funded carbon offsets. One example is avoided deforestation, where farmers agree not to clear land. This may have merit, but it is hard to tell whether it is actually additional reduction, or land that would not have been cleared anyway.

And such projects don't deal with the fundamental problem of how energy is produced.

Direct Action also establishes an emissions threshold, or "safeguard mechanism" enforced by fines, to stop increased emissions across the rest of the economy. This will be lowered over time and is due to start on 1 July 2016.



Above: Coal power stations will be a big winner from Abbott's climate policy

Although this targets large emitters and will cover 55 per cent of total emissions, it is set so as to minimise costs to polluters. The threshold for a company is set at their highest reported emissions over the period 2009-2014. Companies can apply for an adjustment to increase their threshold further.

Energy companies, the largest single source of Australia's emissions, get further leeway. Their thresholds will be calculated on an industry level not for each facility.

As Environment Victoria explained: "the only thing that this proposed mechanism safeguards is a continued free ride for polluting coal-fired power stations". To make matter worse carbon offsets will be available for polluters to cheaply buy their way out of trouble.

What's the alternative?

Direct Action is a joke. But Labor and The Greens' alternative of emissions trading is no better. Labor remains committed to the same pathetic target as Abbott, of 5 per cent emissions cuts.

Even at a higher target, emission trading means polluters will simply pass the cost of the carbon price onto consumers. This is why Abbott could paint it as an attack on living standards.

Instead of actually building the large scale renewable, Treasury predictions were that Labor's scheme would have primarily driven an expansion in gas.

As campaign group Beyond Zero Emissions (BZE) has convincingly

argued, it is already feasible to achieve 100 per cent renewable energy through concentrated solar thermal, wind and rooftop solar energy.

Tesla's recently announced household-scale battery, which for a few thousand dollars can store solar energy for use when the sun isn't shining, further demonstrates the technological possibilities.

Even AGL, one of Australia's giant energy companies, said recently it expects not be operating any coal-fired power plants by 2050.

But unless the government actually invests in large-scale renewable energy, deep emission reductions won't be possible. BZE's proposals of large-scale solar plants and high-speed rail between Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane could cut emissions drastically.

However only the government will fund such projects given the scale and cost. Hence addressing climate change requires challenging the neo-liberal logic of leaving everything to the market.

A transition to 100 per cent renewables is affordable. Renewable energy costs have fallen by 25 per cent in the last three years, and will fall further. BZE estimates the cost of high-speed rail as \$80 billion over ten years, equivalent to one year of current road spending. If we tax the polluting corporations and the rich, the money is there.

But it will require a mass movement to challenge big polluting industries and the neo-liberal political consensus.

.....
Direct Action is based on a laughable target of 5 per cent emissions reduction by 2020 relative to 2000 levels



Groomed for war

ONE OF the many myths about Australia's involvement in World War I is that when the call to battle sounded in 1914, the cream of the nation's manhood responded enthusiastically. Drove of young volunteers rushed to the battle standard, militarily naïve and innocent, unfamiliar with weapons and battle skills. Those with previous experiences of gun handling and shooting tended to come from the farms and bush, skills developed in the contexts of rural life and work.

Apart from the enthusiasm and the rush to volunteer, the rest is sheer romanticism and historical amnesia. On the contrary, in 1914 Australia was a nation that had been grooming and schooling its young males in military skills, and introducing their families to martial experiences, since 1911.

Australian military forces had been blooded in foreign wars in New Zealand against the Maori people in the 1860s, in the Sudan (1885-1886), in the Boer War (1899-1902), and in the Boxer Rebellion in China (1900-1901). These involvements had sown in British and Australian militarists and imperial strategists the desire for a better trained and more reliable Australian military force than previously available, to dovetail with, and better serve, British imperial interests.

Add to this a home-grown strand of imperialism looking to carve a niche for Australia in the Asia-Pacific region. Worth noting is that Australia's first military action in World War I was the invasion of German New Guinea (September-November 1914), resulting in the loss of six Australian lives, laying the groundwork for Australia's post-war exploitation of the

region which continued until independence in 1975.

Add too the presence in Australia of a "blood shedding" strand of nationalist thought, which looked forward to the nation being "born in blood", exemplified by an Australian poem in support of the Boer War which stated:

*A nation is never a nation
Worthy of pride or place
Till the mothers have sent their
firstborn
To look death in the field in the
face.*

Compulsory militarisation

Australian Defence Acts of 1903, 1904, and 1909 variously enabled compulsory military service for home defence. Before 1911, most importantly with the advice and assistance of the widely regarded and influential UK "military genius" Lord Kitchener, Australia was divided into a series of "army areas", a purpose built military leadership training college was established in Canberra (Duntroon), and the plans hatched to introduce universal military training.

In 1911, the year the first cohort of military officers commenced training at Duntroon, a Labor government introduced a three-tiered system of compulsory military service for boys and adults between the ages of 12-26 years old, known as "universal training". Military skills and service requirements were determined according to specified age-groups. Thus Australia became the first English-speaking nation to train its peacetime male population for war. The system continued to operate throughout World War I, and falteringly thereafter until

**In 1911,
a Labor
government
introduced a
three-tiered
system of
compulsory
military
service**

another Labor government suspended the scheme in 1929.

"Universal training" did not go down well. It met with substantial resistance, invigorating and increasing the size and activities of the small anti-war forces that had opposed Australia's colonial and post-Federation military involvements overseas.

By 1915 the compulsory training/conscription scheme had generated resistance to the extent of 34,000 prosecutions for infractions of the law, many of these parents who had failed to register their sons for participation; and 7000 people had variously served periods of incarceration in civilian and military jails for failing to comply with it. These figures, when considered in the context of Australia's small population of the time, indicate significant resistance and non-compliance.

At the cutting edge of opposition to the scheme were the parents and boys involved. Add to these, trade unionists; socialists; pacifists who opposed war on religious grounds, for example Quakers; employers for whom the scheme threatened productivity and disrupted the organisation of work; rural people for whom the scheme meant the disruption of farm labour, especially on small farms, and problems associated with seasonal work and employment.

When attempts were made in 1916 and 1917 by the Labor government of William Morris Hughes to extend the system and deploy conscripts overseas, the anti-conscription movement that mobilised and successfully prevented this extension did not suddenly materialise and begin from scratch. Anti-conscription forces were already in place, and had runs on the board.

Far from being a nation of amateur, naïve and unprepared volunteers when Australia went to war in 1914, it was a nation in which the male population had been systematically drilled in military skills by its government since 1911. And it was a nation that had been groomed for war by its ruling class since colonial times.

However, it was also a nation in which resistance to military service, in particular compulsory military service, was significantly present. The wonder is that Hughes and his advisors thought they could get away with extending conscription. But then, the Labor Party has habitually tended to attract slow learners.

By Rowan Cahill, Honorary Fellow, Faculty of Law, Humanities and the Arts, Wollongong University and co-author with Terry Irving of *Radical Sydney* (2010)

Syria between both Assad and IS's counter-revolution

By Mark Goudkamp

THE CONFLICT in Syria has left more than 220,000 dead and nine million people displaced, including three million refugees.

What began in March 2011 as peaceful pro-democracy protests inspired by the Arab Spring's demands for democracy and social justice, has become a nightmarish military quagmire. Regional powers Iran and Saudi Arabia are backing opposing sides to boost their own influence.

The regime of Bashar al-Assad has sought to convince the world of two things: that it is winning; and that supporting the Syrian army is necessary to oppose Islamic State and Jabhat Al Nusra (the local Al Qaeda affiliate).

But recently there have been renewed victories for the insurgency.

In the north, they took control of Idlib's provincial capital in March, and one month later took the strategically important city of Jisr a-Shugour. Meanwhile, the Southern Front (a coalition of 58 rebel factions affiliated with the Free Syrian Army) has gained ground in Daraa province.

Despite efforts at conscription, Assad is running out of soldiers. For example, Afghan Hazaras are being used by Iran to fight and die as cannon fodder.

There are divisions within Assad's inner-circle, with some publicly expressing anger that Iranian officials enjoy more power than they do. Ali Mamlouk, the head of Syria's National Security Bureau was recently placed under house arrest for plotting a coup. In late April, chief of political security Rustom Ghazaleh was beaten and killed.

Assad retains the backing of Hezbollah and Iran. And he still holds his core areas between the capital Damascus and the Mediterranean coast, including Homs and Lakatia.

Moreover, Assad forces continue to enjoy aerial superiority. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights has documented over **12,500 regime** air raids for 2015 so far, (including 6686 barrel bombs dropped from helicopters). As a result, 1820 civilians had been killed and a further 15,000 wounded.

This has led to calls from within the opposition for a No Fly Zone over Syria, backed recently by online campaigners Avaaz. But such calls are misguided. A No Fly Zone would not



demilitarise the conflict as it would require the US to impose it, and would allow Assad to try to position himself as an anti-imperialist.

Lesser evil?

Another thing working in the regime's favour is the rise of Islamic State (IS), which has led some on the left to support Assad as the lesser evil.

Yet despite IS's highly publicised atrocities, including beheadings, the regime has been responsible for the vast majority of civilian deaths.

It is wrong to see any qualitative difference between Assad and IS—both want to impose vicious dictatorial regimes that allow no space for democratic rights or working class organisation.

They are both forms of counter-revolution that want to crush the initial popular democratic movements inspired by the Arab Spring.

There is evidence that the rise of IS fitted in with the strategy of Assad. While Assad was busy crushing democratic, secular activists, three months after the uprising started, he liberated many Salafist and reactionary groups from prisons like Seidnaya near Damascus.

Joseph Daher, who runs the *Syria Freedom Forever* blog wrote: "The Assad regime has concluded various oil deals, first with Jabhat al-Nusra and then IS since 2013."

Until ISIS took the regime's military base in Raqqa late last year, ISIS and Assad forces rarely fought each

Above: Syrian revolutionary activists wave the flag of the opposition at a protest in Salah el-Din, Aleppo in March this year

Photo: Syria Freedom Forever blog

other directly. ISIS instead focused its energies on attacking other opposition commanders, and seizing already liberated areas such as Al Raqqa. All of this suited the interests of Assad. In the north, the Free Syrian Army and Kurdish brigades are finding common cause due to ISIS's assaults on them.

Western governments including the US are moving towards an accommodation with Assad. In 2013, the US threatened airstrikes against his regime. Just one year later, Obama started bombing IS, with the tacit support of Assad. When a US airstrike on 1 May killed 52 civilians in the village of Birmahle in eastern Aleppo province there was no condemnation from the regime.

In the past the US favoured ousting Assad. Now Secretary of State John Kerry says "we need to negotiate in the end" with him.

Despite the political impasse, most of the Syrian people want neither Assad nor ISIS. In the lead up to the fourth anniversary of the uprising in March, there were protests in cities including Aleppo, Douma, and Saqba against abuses committed by both the regime and reactionary jihadist groups. In some towns, such as Kafranbel in Idlib, weekly protests still occur supporting the aims of the revolution.

Organising such actions has become difficult, but there are still democratic forces within Syria who are trying to keep the original ideals of the revolution alive.

Syriza backsliding in Greece as EU tightens the screws

By Clare Fester

GREECE NARROWLY avoided default in May by scraping together the €750 million debt repayment due to the IMF. The European Union is tightening the screws, demanding the new radical left Syriza government capitulate to accept further austerity in exchange for another bailout.

Another large IMF repayment is due on June 5 and in July €3.5 billion more is due to the ECB. The Syriza government is starting to buckle under the pressure.

It has given the green light to a swathe of privatisations. The sell off of Piraeus, Greece's biggest port, is now going ahead despite initial promises from Syriza to block it. The Piraeus privatisation is one of the demands the EU has raised as a precondition for releasing the next bailout.

This is clearly laying the groundwork for even more concessions to the creditors' austerity agenda. Defense Minister Panos Kammenos told an economic conference in Athens that the railways could soon be privatised too. Finance Minister Varoufakis has also given the go ahead to sell off regional airports, despite this being another measure the party opposed in the past.

The government only managed to meet the last IMF repayment by raiding money from public bodies including local governments, hospitals and universities, issuing a decree in April forcing them to deposit excess funds to the Greek central bank. Once these bodies run out of money they won't be able to pay wages.

Although Syriza managed to scrape together public sector wages in April and May, they paid for this by raiding pension funds. Before its election Syriza opposed raiding public bodies to service debt repayments, but now it is implementing the very same policies.

The government also seized €300 million in EU subsidies meant to go to farmers. State daycare centres have had their budgets halved, which will mean sacking 10,000 workers and 40,000 fewer spots for children over the 2015-16 financial year.

Despite the anti-austerity rhetoric that pushed Syriza to power, their strategy so far has been to buy time from the EU and quietly continue the same cuts and privatisations that



Above: Workers at ERT stormed into the media company's offices to demand their jobs back

have impoverished working people in Greece for the past six years.

Negotiations

Greece has been locked in negotiations with its EU creditors for more than 100 days to try and reach another bailout deal of €7.2 billion, avoid defaulting on its debt repayments, and remain in the Eurozone.

An agreement was reached in February to extend the current €240 billion bailout for another four months. But the institutions are refusing to release any more money, saying the austerity measures Syriza has implemented so far aren't enough.

Signalling an attempt to appease the tensions with the EU, Syriza leader Alex Tsipras reshuffled the negotiating team and removed Finance Minister Varoufakis. His abrasiveness and anti-austerity rhetoric had become a barrier to cuddling up to the EU.

Varoufakis was replaced by Euclid Taskalotos, a Tsipras ally well liked by the creditors who has been described a "classic Marxist" who has "learned to make compromises with capitalist reality".

Syriza's so called "red lines" that it claims it will not cross during the negotiations, no more cuts to pensions and wages, have already been tested, pushed and crossed. These concessions to job cuts, squeezing public money and privatizations are all signs the Tsipras is determined to find a way to meet the EU's demands.

There is also talk of the govern-

ment holding a referendum over any agreement Tsipras does make for the bailout. This would allow Syriza to maneuver around its election promises and paper over the backdowns.

Anti-austerity movements

But the people who voted for Syriza hoping for an end to the cuts and the lay-offs show no sign of giving in.

Workers at Hellenic Petroleum have seen the results of privatisation there, after an explosion on site injured six workers. In May the entire refinery struck. The Piraeus dock-workers staged a 24-strike against privatisation this month too. Nikos Georgiou, president of the dockers' union at Piraeus port said, "We get huge solidarity from ordinary people. If a government that calls itself left continues neo-liberal policies then we will resist it."

ERT, the state broadcaster that was run under worker's control at the height of the anti-austerity campaign, still hasn't reinstated everyone who was sacked. The government has agreed to reopen it but said workers would be reinstated gradually, in alphabetical order. But the union decided this wasn't quick enough, and marched on the ERT offices to implement the decision immediately.

Hospital workers are holding a national strike demanding an end to understaffing as a result of austerity.

It is this kind of workers' activity on a mass scale that force an end to the austerity Syriza is prosecuting and pose an alternative.

.....
Hospital workers are holding a national strike demanding an end to understaffing as a result of austerity

British Labour's compromises with austerity hand Tories power

By Danny Hardiman

THE UK is set for further austerity and anti-immigrant racism following the re-election of David Cameron's Conservative government. The result is a disaster for the Labour Party, which did only marginally better than the dismal 29 per cent they achieved last time—and there is a lesson in this for Bill Shorten and Labor here.

Some within British Labour have blamed the result on leader Ed Miliband being too left-wing. This is absurd—Labour failed because it was too right-wing and could not convince anyone it would end austerity.

Its occasional promises to increase taxes on the rich sat aside constant promises of “iron discipline” on government spending “not a penny more” of borrowing, and “cuts in the deficit every year”.

The proof of this is Scotland, where the Scottish National Party's (SNP) vote surged as a result of its strident campaign against austerity. In Scotland, a Labour stronghold for half a century, the party was reduced to just one MP.

Bill Shorten should take note. Labor's refusal to offer a clear alternative to cuts and spending restraint gives working class people no reason to vote for it. The outcome here can easily be a victory for the Tories, as it was in the UK.

SNP surge

The SNP under leader Nicola Sturgeon won 56 seats, from six the election before. The SNP argued against spending cuts, for protecting the National Health Service and against renewal of the nuclear weapons program Trident. This saw Sturgeon become popular not only in Scotland but south of the border too. Following a TV debate that saw her openly articulate an anti-austerity message the question “Can I vote for the SNP in England?” became the second most searched question that night on Google.

The roots of the SNP's success lies in the Independence Campaign in 2014, which was narrowly defeated 55-45. The campaign was marked not only by anti-Tory rhetoric but by a commitment to an anti-austerity, social democratic Scotland.

Labour however sided with the Tories as part of the establishment campaign to oppose independence. Since the referendum SNP member-



Above: Anti-austerity protests hit the streets again just days after the election

ship has surged to over 100,000, and the party will now be under enormous pressure to deliver on its left-wing rhetoric, especially in the Scottish parliament and councils it controls in Scotland. The party has shown itself willing to make cuts in the past.

The biggest loser were the Liberal Democrats, who collapsed from 23 per cent to 7.7 per cent, leaving the party with just eight seats. Their strategy of being “kingmakers” within a deeply unpopular establishment, and joining a coalition government to help implement austerity alongside the Tories, has been severely punished.

The Tories' five year austerity program has already cost hundreds of thousands of public sector jobs, cuts to welfare and services and an increase in student fees.

However, this is hardly a “Tory surge”. They have failed to overturn the long-term decline in Tory support, increasing their support by only 0.8 per cent since last election, been vanquished in Scotland and many parts of the North-West and inherit a slowing economy riddled with poor wage growth and increasing inequality. The Tories will now be forced into a referendum on British membership of the European Union as a concession to both the racist and xenophobic UK Independence Party (UKIP) and their own Euro-sceptic right-wing.

It was very pleasing to see UKIP

leader Nigel Farage fail to win a seat in parliament in Thanet South. But UKIP managed four million votes across the country and 12.6 per cent of the vote, coming second in as many as 118 seats.

This means they have managed to consolidate not only the existing far-right, but taken votes away from both major parties and the Liberal Democrats.

Though Farage losing will be a blow to his legitimacy this is a worrying sign. As austerity continues to erode living standards anti-racists will need to argue that the blame lies with the rich and powerful rather than immigrants.

On the left the Greens retained their seat in Brighton and have seen reasonable results in other electorates. Socialists running as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition and Left Unity achieved only modest results, but used their campaigns to strength grassroots resistance. In Belfast West, Gerry Caroll of People Before Profit won almost 20 per cent of the vote.

A wave of anger on the streets against the new government has already begun, with 2000 marching on Downing Street two days after the election, and further anti-austerity marches planned. With the Tories set on further cuts and austerity, there are plenty of reasons to keep fighting.

Bill Shorten should take note. Labor's refusal to offer an alternative to cuts gives working class people no reason to vote for it

RELATING TO THE CRISIS OF THE MAINSTREAM POPULISM, ANTI-POLITICS AND THE LEFT

Anti-political movements and new left parties like Podemos and Syriza are only inconsistent opponents of the system, writes **James Supple**

MAINSTREAM POLITICS is in crisis. Tony Abbott's government had faltered just as quickly as Rudd and Gillard's Labor governments before it. Although he survived a leadership spill in February, he is bound to face another challenge if his popularity does not recover following the budget.

Both major parties are flailing in the face of their inability to win popular support. Populist parties are sweeping elections in Europe and across the developed world.

Elections last year to the European parliament saw the fascist National Front top the poll in France, as well as the far right People's Party in Denmark and UKIP in Britain. Left party Syriza has taken government in Greece, and Podemos in Spain is a serious challenger in elections scheduled for the end of this year. Figures like Russell Brand have captured the popular mood by saying "I regard politicians as frauds and liars" and calling for revolution.

All of them rail against the political establishment, now widely seen as corrupt and out of touch with ordinary people.

The same phenomenon has also been obvious in Australia, with the disillusionment with Labor and Liberal feeding the populist antics of Clive Palmer, while The Greens have established themselves as a political force on Labor's left.

Trust in politicians and the political system have fallen to very low levels. Just 34 per cent believe "people in government can be trusted" according to the Australian Election Survey compiled by ANU academics after the 2013 election. Another ANU poll last year showed only 6 per cent of people expressed "a great deal of confidence" in federal parliament. Even the banks were more trusted. At the same time the general level of satisfaction with democracy remains high, at 72 per cent.

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A huge gap has opened up between popular attitudes and the policies supported by the political mainstream

The support for the two major parties is in long-term decline. The number of "rusted on" voters who say they have always voted for the same party has fallen from 63 per cent in 1987 to 46 per cent 2013, according to the same ANU poll. Labor has been hit particularly hard, with lifetime Labor voters falling from 32 per cent of people in 1969 to 24 per cent.

An increasing number of people don't vote at all. This is particularly obvious in countries where voting is voluntary. But even in Australia, the combined total of those who voted informal and didn't register to vote for the 2013 federal election was 20 per cent, one of the highest figures on record.

This fact that less people can be relied on to vote consistently for one party means the number of people willing to switch their vote between elections or to vote for new parties has grown. The result is a growing number of one term governments, and what commentators like to call "electoral volatility".

Peter Mair, in his book *Ruling the void*, points to a wealth of data showing that this is consistent across Western Europe. He argues that, "for the first time in postwar political history, the political class itself has now become a matter of contention" across a large number of democratic countries.

Neo-liberalism

The reason for this is not hard to find. Since the end of the post-war boom in the mid-1970s the parties of government have all implemented neo-liberal policies, cutting back on government spending on social services and attacking unions and workers' rights. There has been less room for major reforms that improve people's standard of living.

Instead there has been a slow erosion in workers' living standards and

an increase in job insecurity, as business has demanded more "flexible" hours, forcing people to work longer hours and on weekends.

This has seen a huge gap open up between popular attitudes and the policies supported by the political mainstream, in Australia as much as in Europe.

A look at some results from recent Essential polls demonstrates this.

Just 22 per cent think privatisation is a good idea, yet there is a bipartisan commitment to it. Only 12 per cent supported cuts to services to balance the budget, yet 68 per cent would back higher corporate tax. But there is a consensus between Labor and Liberal about the need for budget austerity of some form, rather than taxing the rich. Even more tax on mining companies gets the backing of 62 per cent of people.

A major study by social research company Ipsos Mackay in 2011, Being Australian, found that people's, "big worries were about what you might call economic justice", according to one of the research team.

The *Sydney Morning Herald* summed up the report's conclusions as showing that Australians, "generally embrace a social democratic world view, at least on the economy, the workplace and public services". This echoes the findings of previous Social Attitudes surveys carried out by academics.

The political consensus amongst Labor and Liberal over the underlying policies needed to manage the economy means there is very little choice between the two major parties. As a result many people have come to see them as both part of a single political elite, and the credibility of the political system to serve the interests of the majority of people has been eroded.

This has caused the most acute problems for Labor, given it historically was more strongly associated with

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the idea of using the state to improve people's lives and that its support base has been among the unions and the working class.

The decline in union membership and a much lower level of strikes and industrial action have eroded the bedrock of Labor's support.

Historically, voting Labor has been an expression of working class consciousness and a desire to reject at least some elements of capitalism. In the past union membership provided a base of activists able to shape public opinion independently of the ideas transmitted by the mainstream media. But union decline means their ability to do this is much weaker today.

Labor MPs have become much more out of touch with popular attitudes. This is reinforced by the decline in its mass membership, so that today's MPs are almost exclusively career apparatchiks, who work their way through jobs in a union or party office into parliament. Their links and exposure to ordinary working class communities and attitudes are far weaker than in the past.

Labor's shift to the right has alienated a swathe of its former supporters. As John Rees wrote about British Labour back in 2001, "In many ways working class reformist consciousness has remained remarkably consistent since the 1970s. But mainstream reformism can no longer deliver these aspirations. As a result 'reformist' consciousness now finds itself confronted with a crisis of political representation."

This same process is also eroding the support base of the mainstream right-wing parties.

Pauline Hanson's short-lived electoral success with One Nation came largely at the expense of the Coalition. One Nation's racism allowed Hanson to tap into the same vein of opposition to economic rationalism and privatisation that has fed more recent populists like Bob Katter.

Similarly in Britain, UKIP draws a significant amount of its support from former Tory voters who now feel no one in the political mainstream represents them. As Andy Jones' analysis in *International Socialism* shows, "polling figures consistently show that it is the Tories' support that is affected to a greater degree than Labour's".

Anti-politics?

One popular way of describing this political disengagement and dissatisfaction is to talk of an anti-political mood. Some of the social movements,

as well as new electoral parties, fired by the disgust at political parties and the political system, are driven by a desire to reject "politics" altogether.

The classic example of this was the 15M movement in Spain in 2011, where hundreds of thousands of people took over city squares demanding "real democracy now" instead of a system run by the politicians and the bankers. In the early days the rejection of politics and organisation meant even left-wing parties' newspapers and union flags were banned from the squares.

There is a healthy element in this kind of disgust at mainstream politics. And socialists need to engage with these movements in a constructive and patient fashion. But it is a mistake for social movements to ignore theory or political strategy.

The direction taken by the new left parties that have emerged in Spain and Greece as a product of movements against austerity show why.

In both cases the impasse reached by the social movements and strikes, where despite their scale they have been unable so far to inflict decisive defeats on the austerity agenda, have fed the rise of left reformist responses that pose winning power through parliament as the solution.

Podemos is the clearest case where a left-wing party has arisen as a result of a social movement and built its support as a challenge to the existing political elite, and its corruption and failure to stand up for ordinary people. It has even adopted forms of organising, like its local circles, that echo the mass assemblies (but alas not the democracy) of the 15M movement.

But electoral success has led to a growing focus on taking government as its aim. Podemos's leadership, centred around media star Pablo Iglesias, have moved to moderate the party's demands in order to present themselves as "responsible" enough to take power. In doing so Podemos is following the path taken by Syriza in Greece, which is now engaged in a process of "renegotiating" the debt memorandum with the EU rather than tearing it up.

Reformism

But the disillusionment with mainstream politics does not simply feed "anti-political" responses. Because it is a product of opposition to neo-liberalism, parties that offer hopes of a break with this agenda can also benefit.

The disillusionment with mainstream politics does not only feed "anti-political" responses

The Greens in Australia have risen since 2001 to occupy a space to the left of Labor, with a consolidated support base of just over 10 per cent. Their success has been partly based on providing a more consistent, principled alternative to the major parties. But it has also relied on a clear stance on specific political issues: refugees, the Iraq war and climate change for instance.

In the case of Syriza in Greece it was precisely its call for a "government of the left" to bring an end to the austerity measures that secured its rapid rise in the polls. It did not simply stand against the existing political system but won support on the basis that if it took power it could provide a solution.

As Alex Callinicos has pointed out, this same mood of disgust with the political mainstream fed into the powerful movement for a yes vote in last year's Scottish independence referendum. The campaign was fired by a belief that independence could lead to a break with neo-liberal policies and the imposition of austerity from London.

What these examples show is that the mood of disillusionment with the political system is not coherently anti-capitalist or anti-system, and can be drawn behind left reformist political parties or movements.

This is because the mood is not simply "anti-political" but is driven by disillusionment with neo-liberal policies.

The rise of parties like Syriza and The Greens in Australia show something else important about the so-called "anti-political" mood.

The vast bulk of people breaking in disgust with the mainstream left-wing parties, like Labor in Australia, remain reformist.

That is, they continue to believe that change can come through reforms to the existing parliamentary system, for instance through the election of Greens or new left governments to power.

Although they are disgusted at the political mainstream they are overwhelmingly not moving directly towards a revolutionary socialist worldview. For this to happen, workers need to move into struggle outside parliament on a mass scale, so that they can begin to see their own struggles and forms of working class power as an alternative.

Anti-politics in practice

Supposedly "anti-political" parties

that are focused on winning seats in parliament are bound to disappoint their supporters. The closer they get to power, the more the new reformist parties come to resemble the old parties they replace.

We have already seen The Greens in Australia suffer as a result of the experience of minority government with Labor after 2011. The process saw them drawn into defending an indefensible government and emphasizing their willingness to be “responsible” parliamentary players just like the major parties.

Even in Spain and Greece where the level of extra-parliamentary struggle in recent years has been much higher, the parties that have been the immediate beneficiaries, Podemos and Syriza, have moved away from their earlier radicalism.

Spanish socialist Andy Durgan has written that for Podemos:

“with the party’s spectacular growth, with now over 300,000 supporters subscribed on line, and prospects of electoral success, it has begun to defend more moderate policies. Gone are the promises of nationalisation of key sectors of the economy, retirement at 60, a universal wage for all citizens or the cancellation of the debt.”

Syriza in Greece has made increasing compromises with the austerity policies demanded by the European Union since its election in January.

This shows that the old argument about whether change can come through parliament or whether struggles outside it are necessary to change society remains relevant.

Forming government through the existing parliamentary institutions exposes any left-wing party to immense pressures to compromise with big business and the state.

Even when a left government controls parliament, it does not have control over the economy, which remains in the hands of a small, wealthy elite.

Big business will resist efforts to take back the wealth they have plundered to create jobs or expand health and welfare services. So far all the indications are that parties like Syriza and Podemos are willing to compromise.

Socialists insist that it is only by building the power of mass movements and the working class outside parliament that society can be fundamentally changed.

But electoral parties like Syriza



Above: In just over a year Podemos has gone from its formation to being a potential challenger for government in Spain

.....
The closer they get to power, the more the new reformist parties come to resemble the old parties they replace

and Podemos have worked to frustrate this. The focus on winning power through parliamentary elections has gone along with undermining and winding down the struggle outside parliament. As Spanish socialist Luke Stobart has written, Podemos now treats the mass movement in the squares in the Spanish state as, “belonging to a past phase... now followed by a mainly institutional phase”.

Syriza has moved to undermine struggles seen as damaging to its electoral chances, like the teachers strike in 2013, and will hardly be encouraging workers to continue fighting austerity policies as it now implements them.

Without a focus on building the class struggle, even populist left-wing parties that benefit from the anti-political mood are ultimately going nowhere. It is all too easy for them to be re-absorbed into the political system and embrace the compromises that they once rejected.

But it is in the struggles of workers, students and the oppressed that the hope for a real alternative lies. Trying to work within the existing state institutions, and accepting the reality of control of the economy by the 1 per

cent, is a dead end.

The fight against cutbacks and austerity can only be solved by increasing the level of strikes, mass protests and struggle from below.

Workers could seize control of the wealth in society by taking the factories and offices out of control of the bosses and the rich and beginning to run society themselves. This would require a revolution to break the power of the state institutions that defend the power of the rich. Such a solution to the crisis of capitalism has been posed again and again at highpoints of struggle.

For this to happen, revolutionary socialist groups need to constructively engage to win an argument for building a political alternative for fundamental change based on democracy from below—in the squares, but most importantly in the factories and workplaces.

The widespread disillusionment and disgust with the mainstream of politics is a good start. But to bring about a real challenge to capitalism and inequality, it needs to develop into the mass workers’ and social movements that alone have the power to change the world.

FROM THE NT INTERVENTION TO WA: ASSIMILATION AND THE PUSH TO CLOSE COMMUNITIES

Paddy Gibson looks at the renewed push to close remote Aboriginal communities

On 12 May, Four Corners aired a disgraceful hatchet job on remote Aboriginal communities in WA. It was a very useful piece of propaganda for the Western Australian government, which is currently moving to close communities down.

The program was full of government officials making lurid allegations, unchallenged by the reporter, of rampant child sexual abuse, precisely the same racist smear campaign that was launched just prior to the Northern Territory Intervention in 2007.

WA Police Commissioner Karl O’Callaghan said, “knowing what I know, it’s very difficult to sleep at night knowing that we cannot protect those children in any effective way.”

Premier Colin Barnett was shown speaking in parliament about 38 reported cases of the STI gonorrhoea in minors, disingenuously ignoring the fact, pointed out by remote health workers, that most such cases result from the consensual sexual activity of young teens.

But the actual facts, or the interests of the children, mean nothing to these officials.

Forcing young children and their families from remote areas into homelessness on the fringes of regional centres such as Wyndham or Broome is a funny kind of “protection”.

In the case of the NT Intervention in 2007, ABC current affairs program *Lateline* provided a similar platform for Minister Mal Brough to declare that “pedophile rings” were active in every community in the NT.

For the opening phase of the Intervention, this allegation worked to isolate the communities, scaring off many progressive organisations from coming out in clear condemnation of the policy.

But in 2009, the Australian Crime Commission confirmed after extensive investigation that not a single pedophile ring had been found in any

NT community.

From the NT Intervention to community closures

The Howard government fought hard to build a political consensus around the alleged “failure” of self-determination in Aboriginal affairs, and the need to return to policies of assimilation—including forcing migration from remote communities. This assimilation drive serves an important function for the ruling class in Australia.

Firstly, it pathologises Aboriginal people and culture, shifting the blame for the very real social problems that do exist in many communities, a result of ongoing colonial oppression and criminal neglect by government, onto its victims. Aboriginal people are constantly framed as a “problem to be managed”, rather than a proud people with rights to the provision of basic services like other Australian citizens, and particular rights to self-determination, land and compensation for the genocidal process unleashed by British invasion.

Secondly, the brand of assimilation encouraged by Howard has a hard neo-liberal economic edge. The communities are framed as “economically unviable”, and embracing the market is promoted as a panacea for social ills. Finally, the continued existence of Aboriginal people serves as a constant reminder that the capitalist system imposed on Australia is based on theft and genocide. Breaking up forms of collective Aboriginal life is an attempt to bury this reality, and stop the constant challenges to the legitimacy of the system that come from Aboriginal people.

Announcing the NT Intervention in 2007, Howard declared “Aboriginal people have no place outside of the Australian mainstream”. Previous Aboriginal Affairs Minister Amanda Vanstone had already floated the prospect of closing remote communities, disgracefully branding them “museum pieces”.

The Howard government fought to build a political consensus around the need to return to policies of assimilation

The NT Intervention poured hundreds of millions of dollars into the NT to build new bureaucracies of control. But the money available to Aboriginal people trying to live on their lands evaporated, almost overnight. The national Community Development Employment Program (CDEP)—which employed 7500 people across NT Aboriginal communities in a multitude of services from essential municipal works to schools, was shut down. Most of these people were simply put on the dole and subjected to “income management”.

The NT Government was simultaneously implementing reforms which saw around 50 local Aboriginal Community Government Councils disbanded in favour of a handful of “mega-Shires”. Many of the productive assets that communities relied on that were attached to the CDEP or the local council were simply confiscated, including earth-moving equipment, road graders, community buses and vehicles—essential equipment required for community life in remote areas.

While the Intervention was the main pretext for introducing this policy, it hit hard Australia wide. Almost 40,000 Aboriginal people had been employed on CDEP before its closure. Rene Adams, head of the Toomelah Aboriginal Co-op in North West NSW told *Tracker* magazine in 2012, “all people who were on CDEP are basically unemployed now... Mental health issues and suicides have increased. There’s more drugs, more violence, more alcohol. It’s heart breaking.”

The Intervention is an apartheid-style regime where Aboriginal lives are brought directly under the control of government, as they were for much of the 20th Century.

Under the “Stronger Futures” policy, brought in by Labor in 2012 to continue the Intervention, Aboriginal people remain subject to draconian controls through “income management” and extreme, racialised police powers.

Prison numbers have exploded.

Special “child protection” squads focussed on Aboriginal communities are removing children at historic rates. Since 2007 there has been more than a five-fold increase in reported incidents of attempted suicide and self-harm, while rates of hospitalisation for domestic violence keep increasing.

Starving communities

In December 2007, under the new Labor government, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) signed a “National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Services”, which sounded the death-knell for Commonwealth support for remote communities.

It established the category of “priority communities”, that is, “larger and more economically sustainable communities where secure land tenure exists”. This amounted to just 35 communities, out of many hundreds across the country. It compels governments to “avoid expectations of major investment in service provision” outside these communities and encourages “facilitating voluntary mobility by individuals and families to areas where better education and job opportunities exist”.

Aboriginal people everywhere have been sent a clear message: there is no hope for a better life in their community—they must leave their land in order to find work and housing.

The Commonwealth planned to withdraw entirely from providing funding for the provision of essential services such as water and power in remote Aboriginal communities. Labor Minister Jenny Macklin continued to make the annual, meagre payments to state and NT governments to keep the lights and taps on—but precious little else.

Now the Abbott government, as part of their 2014 and 2015 budgets, have made lump sum payments, including \$90 million for WA and \$150 million for the NT, that would keep services going for a few years and pledged that all the funding will stop after this. While only Barnett in WA has openly said this will mean communities close, all Aboriginal communities are vulnerable without ongoing Commonwealth funding.

Just providing water and power however, is no way to keep a community functioning. A petition from the Yalata community in South Australia of more than 300 people estimates that the Community Council now has only 10 per cent of the funding needed to operate:

“The Community Council provides municipal services, manages the



Above: Protesting the plans for community closures in WA

power station and water supply, women’s services, community landscaping, youth work and training, mail collection, an internet centre, community administration, night patrol, building crew, land management and run the community store. The only funding allocated under the Indigenous Advancement Strategy (current budget) was a small amount for an after school kids club and night patrol.”

Thousands of people across Australia have taken to the streets to demonstrate against the WA community closures, in the largest and most militant wave of Aboriginal rights protests for some time.

As veteran Aboriginal activist Gary Foley told more than 10,000 protestors in Melbourne however, “there are a multitude of issues”. Foley cited the ever growing mass incarceration of Aboriginal people. Protests across the country have heard speakers rail against the half a billion dollar cut from vital Aboriginal programs in the last budget. The attacks on Aboriginal people are just as real in the city as the bush, with attempts to take over the historic Block in Redfern for corporate development, and community controlled organisations being defunded and mass child removal alongside the farce of “constitutional recognition”.

In response to the protests, Barnett has softened his rhetoric. Whereas he was previously threatening the imminent closure of 150 communities, he now claims there is “no hit list”, and that “extensive consultation” will be undertaken before any communities are closed. Minister Collier called desperately for “an end to the national protests”, giving guarantees that any

closures would be by “choice”. Both men maintain however, that there are currently “too many” communities.

The truth is that remote communities have been under attack for many years even before this announcement, with places like Oombulgurri and Coonana in WA closed in the last two years and thousands more Aboriginal people leaving their lands right across Australia as services and job opportunities are withdrawn.

The 2015 budget did nothing to restore funding, and in fact intensified the push for people to leave their lands. Funding ear-marked for remote Indigenous housing has been reallocated to build houses in towns for people relocating for work. Millions of dollars will go on subsidies to big corporations to employ Indigenous people (mostly in non-permanent positions), while the only “employment” in the bush is the draconian 25 hour work-for-the-dole.

Elite boarding schools are receiving millions more to take remote Aboriginal kids, while the NT government is moving to close down remote high-schools and some primary schools.

It took mass mobilisation and the militant black politics of the late 1960s and 1970s to turn back assimilation and put self-determination and liberation on the agenda. The campaign against the NT Intervention played an important role in winning the battle of public opinion and discrediting the Intervention. But it never built up the social power required to actual defeat the policy. The current protests against community closures are the best chance in many years to begin to turn this situation around.

.....
Aboriginal people have been sent a clear message: they must leave their land in order to find work and housing

KARL MARX AND THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL

Christian Høgsbjerg shows how Karl Marx made a vital contribution to found the first international workers' organisation and how he fought to ensure its militant trajectory.

ON 28 September 1864, just over 150 years ago, a mass meeting was held in central London to launch a new organisation, the “International Working Men’s Association” (IWMA). Composed of mainly trade unionists from London and Paris, it aimed to set up a political organisation that would aspire to forge a resistance to capital that would be as global as capitalism itself.

The mainly English and French militants had come together in London firstly to rally solidarity with the various international liberation struggles underway, including that for Polish independence, Italian unification and support for the North against the slave-owning South in the American Civil War.

Their second reason for forming such an organisation was because in a recent economic downturn attempts had been made by employers to play English and French workers off against each other through the use of immigrant labour to try and break strikes.

Trade unionists on both sides of the Channel wanted to counter this blatant “divide and rule” strategy.

Such a manifestation of international solidarity might not look particularly impressive from our 21st century perspective, where many socialists and trade unionists have the potential to send messages of solidarity to the other side of the world in an instant. But in 1864 the formation of the IWMA signified something genuinely new.

It also reflected a growth in confidence among the European workers’ movement in the 1860s, with a slowly rising level of class struggle, and those in attendance represented small but significant real forces in Britain and France as well as Italy.

Their politics, inevitably, as in any real movement, ranged widely. Among the English supporters of the IWMA there were quite respectable and moderate trade union leaders, followers of the socialist Robert Owen (who opposed strikes) and former Chartists

of varying vintage. The Italians present tended to be more revolutionary in their politics, but were essentially nationalists and partisans of Giuseppe Mazzini. Like the French followers of the anarchist Proudhon who were also present, Mazzini’s followers were not particularly sympathetic to the idea of class struggle.

Others looked to the peaceful utopian socialist visionaries Fourier and Cabet, while the supporters of the veteran French revolutionary August Blanqui equated revolution with simply fighting on the barricades.

Theory and practice

Yet remarkably it was Karl Marx, a marginal German émigré, who was at the time deeply engaged with serious research for what would become the first volume of his magnum opus, *Capital*, who would become the guiding spirit of this new organisation.

At the IWMA launch it was decided to elect a 34-strong provisional organising committee, later known as the general council, and Marx became a representative of Germany.

There is a still popular myth that Marx was primarily simply a great thinker and philosopher who wrote great analytical works such as *Capital* without ever leaving archives and libraries. Yet as his lifelong collaborator Engels noted, Marx was “before all else a revolutionist” who had in the past like Engels been a leading member of the Communist League during the 1848-50 revolution in Germany.

When Marx now saw what he called “real workers’ leaders” moving towards the idea of international organisation, he threw himself into political activity.

Marx’s research and discoveries in the process of writing *Capital*, for example his understanding of the historic and political significance of the struggle waged over the length of the working day, strengthened his work as an IWMA leader. Marx’s *Capital* in turn was shaped by his activism and was greatly appreciated by IWMA

.....
Remarkably it was Karl Marx who would become the guiding spirit of this new organisation.

members when the first volume was published in 1867. The 1868 IWMA congress in Brussels passed a resolution noting that “Karl Marx has the inestimable merit of being the first economist to have subjected capital to a scientific analysis”.

As August Nimtz demonstrates in his book *Marx and Engels: Their Contribution to the Democratic Breakthrough*, by this time Marx had emerged as “the central force in the International Working Men’s Association—the first truly international proletarian organisation”, which grew to have representatives in the United States and virtually every West European country, as well as the French colonies of Algeria and Guadeloupe.

In 1864 Marx volunteered to help draft the rules and guiding principles of the IWMA in order to try and stamp it with what Hal Draper has called his revolutionary democratic ideas of “socialism from below”.

The important new lesson that Marx and Engels had distilled from their experience of revolution and counter-revolution in Europe during 1848-51 was the necessity of building independent working class political organisation.

Yet Marx also understood that the prevailing mood of European workers in 1864 was very far from the heady days of 1848. As Marx drafted the IWMA’s “Inaugural Address”, he had to, as he explained to Engels, “frame the thing so that our view should appear in a form that would make it acceptable to the present outlook of the workers’ movement... It will take time before the revival of the movement allows the old boldness of language to be used.”

For example, Marx wrote “the lords of land and the lords of capital will always use their political privileges for the defence and perpetuation of their economic monopolies...to conquer political power has therefore become the great duty of the working classes”.

As David Fernbach has noted,

Marx's talk of the need for workers "to conquer political power" hinted at revolutionary politics, but was nonetheless "ambiguous enough, and the majority of the International's English supporters undoubtedly interpreted it simply as winning the suffrage", the struggle for the workers' vote. Marx happily reported that his draft Inaugural Address was "adopted with great enthusiasm".

Marx fittingly ended the Inaugural Address by praising recent concrete examples of workers' internationalism, including "the heroic resistance" by "the working classes of England" to the "criminal folly" of their rulers whose natural sympathies leant towards intervening on the side of the slave-owning South during the American Civil War.

Despite the fact that Lancashire cotton textile workers might have materially benefited in the short term from lining up behind the cotton textile "lords of capital" on this question, instead of supporting British imperialism they waged a tremendous mass agitation in support of the North.

Marx stressed the importance of workers challenging the "criminal designs" of their own capitalist class, their "playing upon national prejudices, and squandering in piratical wars the people's blood and treasure".

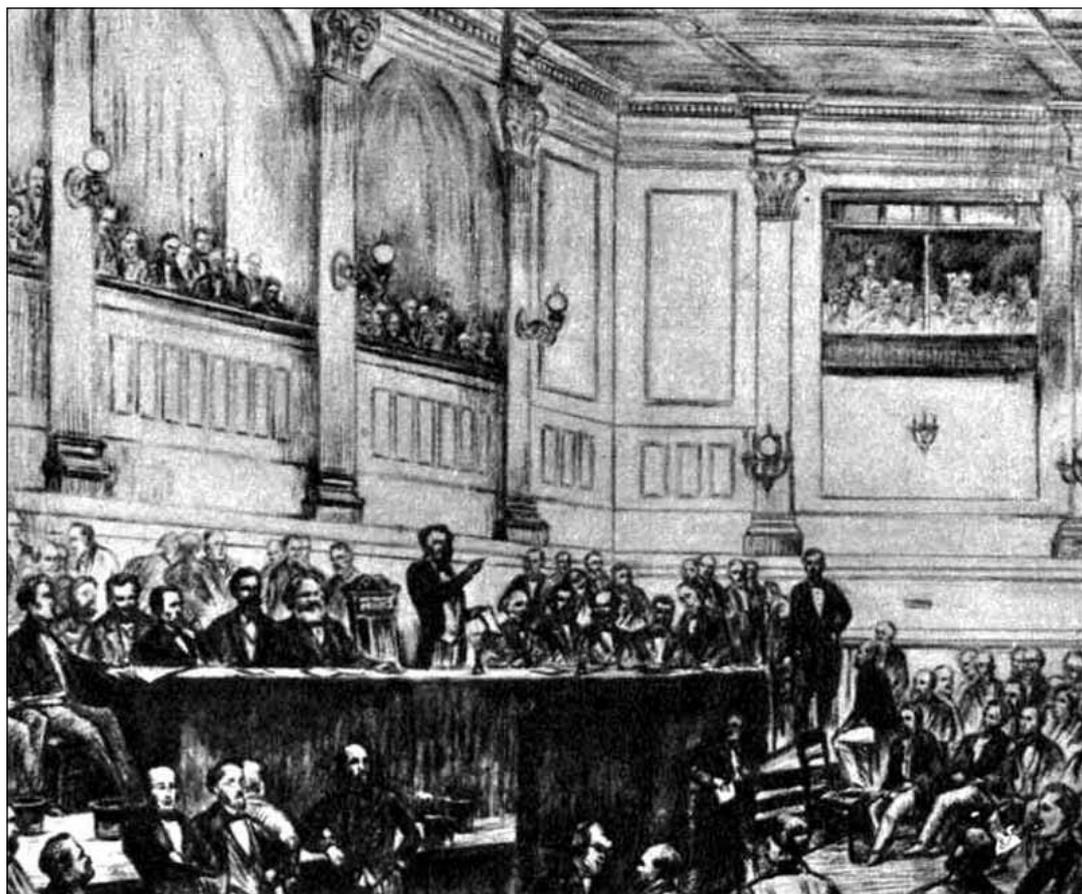
Marx helped ensure the IWMA Provisional Rules remained flexible structurally to allow it to be open to the broadest layers of workers possible rather than—as Mazzini's supporters wished—a detailed 40 rule programme.

Challenging the Proudhonist current, Marx supported the involvement of women. In June 1867 Harriet Law was voted onto the general council and from this point on all addresses and declarations of the IWMA written by Marx no longer addressed "working men" but also "working women". As Marx wrote to a German comrade, "great social revolutions are impossible without the feminine ferment."

Internationalism

Above all, as Marx later recalled, "the International was founded in order to replace the socialist or semi-socialist sects by a real organisation of the working class for struggle".

Under his leadership, as well as passing resolutions supporting trade unions, the right to strike, the eight-hour day, and so on, the IWMA delivered meaningful and effective solidarity in practice to striking workers including Paris bronze workers, Geneva building workers and Belgian



Above: The founding meeting of the International in 1864

coal miners.

When tailors went on strike in Edinburgh and London in 1866, the IWMA were able to prevent their masters bringing in strike-breakers from Europe and Germany. Without Marx's leadership it is almost unthinkable that the IWMA would have developed in such a militant direction, making the impact it did, and going down in history as "the First International".

As John Molyneux observed in *Marxism and the Party*, the IWMA "was undoubtedly the most important practical political work of Marx's life" and "it established the tradition of internationalism and of international organisation at the heart of the working class socialist movement".

In the very beginning of the preamble to the Provisional Rules, Marx boldly stated his revolutionary democratic vision of how socialism would be achieved: "The emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working classes themselves." Marx's stress on workers' self-emancipation was an explicit challenge to the elitist thinking then prevailing among many of the other socialist currents involved in the IWMA.

These ranged from the "respectable" English trade union leaders who were open to the temptations of getting themselves elected to parliament as

part of Gladstone's "Lib-Lab" programme, to the more radical followers of Blanqui who looked back to the conspiratorial methods of the bourgeois Jacobins of the French Revolution.

But the idea of "workers' self-emancipation" remained somewhat abstract until in 1871 the workers of Paris rose in the world's first workers' revolution, forming the Paris Commune.

Though it lasted just two months before being bloodily crushed, the Commune, as Marx noted in *The Civil War in France* saw "the proletariat for the first time [hold] political power... the political form at last discovered under which to work out the economic emancipation of labour".

The slander heaped upon IWMA activists in Britain such as Marx who dared to stand in solidarity with the heroic Communards led English trade union leaders to break and run for cover, fatally weakening the organisation, which was ultimately wound up in 1876.

Yet Marx's revolutionary socialist politics, which he had fought for within the IWMA, stood utterly vindicated by the workers of Paris who had "stormed heaven", and in the Commune made "a new point of departure of world-historic importance".

Socialist Review UK

PUBLIC SERVANTS STRIKE AGAINST ABBOTT'S CUTS

PUBLIC SERVANTS are staging one-hour rolling strikes in a dozen agencies this month, as their union, the CPSU, ramps up what it says is the largest campaign of industrial action in 30 years.

Tax workers began the action with a one-hour stoppage on budget day, following by stoppages in Human Services, the Bureau of Meteorology, Agriculture, Defence, Veterans Affairs and Employment.

In the last year the Abbott government has slashed 11,000 jobs from the public sector. While some agencies have already been negotiating for a year, the government will offer no more than pay rises of between 0 and 1 per cent. It is also demanding deep cuts to conditions including an increase to working hours and loss of allowances.

The public service is also facing ongoing cost cuts, with an effective cut to public service funding of just under 1 per cent in the budget.

One striking Centrelink worker in Sydney told *Solidarity*, "Pay is the biggest issue for me. We deal with a difficult working environment and we deserve to be compensated.

"Cashing out sick leave is also an issue. It means they can come back next time and if people have cashed out days, they can say you don't need 18."

Within a month about 75 per cent of the 160,000 federal public servants will have joined the campaign, after industrial action ballots in Customs and Immigration are finalised.

CPSU membership is growing. While in many areas membership remains at around 30 per cent, in the last year the campaign in Human Services has seen that increase to 50 per cent. The union has signed up 10,000 new members since the start of the campaign.

Workers in the Department of Human Services and Veterans Affairs have been taking low levels of action for six months. Other departments are catching up following ballots that are necessary to take legal industrial action.

In early May the CPSU's Governing Council decided on a plan of escalating actions through to July.

Following the one-hour stoppages in May, there will be Commonwealth public sector-wide mass meetings in



June, with each capital city and major regional centre meeting on a different day. In Victoria, there will be two meetings, in central Melbourne and Geelong, with members bussed in to attend.

The mass meetings will be a major test for the union. Every delegate and activist must help to mobilise the members. If they are a success they will build members' confidence to step up the campaign. This is a rare opportunity to build the union and larger networks of activists within it.

Community campaign

In July CPSU members will organise mass distribution of leaflets to build public opposition to the Abbott's government war on public services. Public sector agencies will be distributing statements explaining why they are taking industrial action, and asking for support from the public.

This is modelled on the ambulance drivers' campaign in Victoria, who covered ambulances with slogans protesting government funding cuts, as the key to winning the dispute.

The union's strategy is to change government policy on bargaining through public pressure. Looming on

Above: CPSU members in tax stage a one-hour stopwork
Photo: CPSU

the horizon is the next federal election. The CPSU is tied to the ACTU campaign aimed at voting out Abbott through a community campaign in marginal seats.

But the union cannot rely on electing a Labor government to defend our conditions and pay.

Labor under Kevin Rudd and Julia Gillard imposed "efficiency dividends" that resulted in thousands of job losses in the public sector and had already put in place plans for another 14,500 job cuts over four years before Abbott took power.

There is a huge potential power in the union's hands. If the whole public service, even only union members, struck for a day it would have a huge impact. This would mean disruption to services that collect revenue like the Tax Office, as well as Human Services (including Centrelink, Medicare and Child Support), Customs, Immigration and the Bureau of Meteorology among others.

If the government continues their intransigence, the union has no choice but to increase the pressure. It's time to strike back.

By a CPSU Section Councillor, Melbourne

The union has signed up 10,000 new members since the start of the campaign