

# Solidarity

Issue No. 69 / July-August 2014

\$3/\$5

Abbott's budget in tatters

Step up the fight

to stop the cuts



## REFUGEES

Morrison's Sri Lanka boats outrage

## CLIVE PALMER

The populist plutocrat

## BUDGET

Where next after bust the budget rallies?



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- > **Cutback? Fightback! Beating Abbott's austerity**
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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](http://www.solidarity.net.au/about-us) for more information on what we stand for.

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## Things they say

**There are laws in place. What we need to do is make sure that the existing laws are enforced and Labor has zero tolerance for anyone breaking the law.**

Bill Shorten really shows his loyalty to the union movement with comments on the union Royal Commission

**Not all of them will be popular, and some may lose us votes**

Chris Bowen on Labor's future budget plans

**They are all God's children as far as I'm concerned**

Eric Abetz shows his condescension for the new cross-bench Senators

**I didn't become a billionaire by listening to advisers tell me how to do it who don't earn half as much**

Clive Palmer rejects claims he should have consulted with the National Seniors group before passing Abbott's financial services reforms

**They're our servants, sorry, they're our masters, we're their servants and we are working for them every single day**

Queensland Premier Campbell Newman in a recent Freudian slip

**It has been his gift to our nation**

Tony Abbott on Rupert Murdoch's *The Australian* newspaper

**That's cheap!**

A chorus of British conservative Tory MPs after hearing that a bottle of champagne signed by Margaret Thatcher sold for 45,000 pounds

**They are all enemy combatants, and their blood shall be on all their heads. Now this also includes the mothers of the martyrs, who send them to hell with flowers and kisses. They should follow their sons, nothing would be more just. They should go, as should the physical homes in which they raised the snakes. Otherwise, more little snakes will be raised there.**

Israeli lawmaker Ayelet Shaked calls for the murder of all Palestinians. It received 5000 likes on Facebook

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# INSIDE THE \$YSTEM

## Coal company pockets billions but pays no tax

GLENCORE COAL has been exposed for paying almost no tax in the past three years, despite income of \$15 billion in Australia.

The company devised a tax avoidance scheme where it paid itself “loans” to its Australia operations from its overseas arms. Then it charged itself an inflated interest bill of 9 per cent. This was then claimed as a cost in order to reduce its tax bill.

The company, formerly known as Xstrata coal, is the third largest resources company in Australia after BHP and Rio Tinto. It has its registered office in Jersey, an island tax haven in the English channel, and its head office in Switzerland.

The news comes just as Tony Abbott is preparing to slash corporate tax further by scrapping the mining tax and reducing the corporate tax rate. Because clearly big business is overtaxed.

## Report shows inequality soaring

AUSTRALIA'S SEVEN richest people hold more wealth than the poorest 1.73 million households, a new report by the Australia Institute has found. Those seven people held \$56 billion between them. The top 20 per cent of the population have 71 times the wealth of the lowest 20 per cent.

In recent years government inequality has increased significantly due to changes reducing the redistribution through the tax system, for instance by reducing the highest income tax rate.

In the past eight years \$170 billion was handed back in tax cuts, with 42 per cent of the benefits going to just the top 10 per cent of earners, a greater share than the bottom 80 per cent of income earners.

The authors write that, “the top marginal personal income tax rate in the Menzies years was never below 67 per cent”, whereas today it sits at 47 per cent, or temporarily 49 per cent after Abbott's recent budget. The rich are getting away with murder.

## Corporations the real winners at the World Cup



SPORTSWEAR GIANT Adidas has been revealed as the real winner of the World Cup. It declared victory over rival Nike, its chief executive boasting “Adidas will be the most visible brand by far in the World Cup final”.

Its logo adorned balls used in the games, sideboards at the stadiums, as well as the jerseys of all the players in the final. Both teams, Germany and Argentina, have Adidas as their official sponsor, and Adidas was also an official sponsor of the event as a whole.

The company says it expects to generate \$2.7 billion revenue from its soccer operations this year. This could see it edge out Nike, which made \$2.3 billion from its “global football division” last year.

FIFA, the organisation behind the World Cup, also profited handsomely with \$1.6 billion in sponsorship fees for the event. It took money from an enormous list of corporations, including six “partners” who paid between \$22 and \$44 million each for the privilege: Adidas, Coca-Cola, Emirates Airlines, Hyundai/Kia, Sony and Visa.

These huge sums of money have led to corruption in FIFA over the decision to host the 2022 World Cup in Qatar. The International Trade Union Confederation estimates 4000 workers will be killed in construction and other industries as the country prepares.

## Kiribati looking for land as islands disappear

THE ISLAND nation of Kiribati has bought a forest plantation in Fiji for \$8.8 million, as a place to move its population as its islands disappear underwater. The 20-square-kilometre patch of forest is located on the Fijian island of Vanau Levu.

The seas around Kiribati's 32 atolls are rising by 1.2 centimetres a year due to climate change. The rate is higher than on other areas of the globe thanks to ocean currents.

Experts say that by the end of the century Kiribati will be completely submerged—forcing its 100,000 inhabitants to move.

Research and writing by Adam Adelpour

Send suggestions for INSIDE THE SYSTEM to [solidarity@solidarity.net.au](mailto:solidarity@solidarity.net.au)

## Australia on global arms spending spree

AUSTRALIA HAS always been a nasty militarist bully. And the government is shelling out the cash to pay for it, with Australia now the biggest single customer of US arms manufacturers and the seventh-largest importer of military equipment in the world.

Australia buys 10 per cent of all US weapons exports. The figures come from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), which measures the arms trade averaged over five years to exclude the impact of large purchases in any single year.

Aside from major US purchases like the multi-billion dollar Joint Strike Fighter, Australia has also purchased combat helicopters from France, armoured personnel carriers from Germany, radar systems from Sweden, Howitzer artillery from Britain, and air-refuelling tanker aircraft from Spain.

Some of this is simply “modernising” and updating existing equipment. But Australia's military budget has also been expanding, even as Abbott puts an axe through services and welfare spending.

Foreign Minister Julie Bishop couldn't have made it much clearer why. As she told us recently, “China does not respect weakness”.



# EDITORIAL

## Keep pushing for strike action as unions start to move

THE FIGHT to “bust the budget” took a step forward on 6 July, with the first day of action called by the unions. Up to 20,000 marched around the country.

The opening of the new Senate has shown the difficulties Tony Abbott faces. By now most budgets are well and truly bedded down. But Abbott has barely succeeded in getting any of the more unpopular measures in his budget through.

Clive Palmer even managed to turn the vote on scrapping the carbon tax into a nightmare for Abbott. It took the government almost the whole two week sitting of the Senate to get the bill through, as it dealt with all the amendments and changes Palmer demanded.

The government has had one major win on its budget—courtesy of Labor and The Greens. Both parties agreed to wave through the major Appropriations Bills. They passed the Senate on 30 June.

Clive Palmer and Andrew Wilkie were the only lower house MPs to vote against them. These bills contained the cuts to the ABC and SBS, the CSIRO, Aboriginal health and legal services, the sacking of 16,500 public servants and the cut to the pension indexation rate.

Greens leader Christine Milne justified the failure to block supply by saying this would “cause whole of government shutdown” through ending the government’s ability to pay public servants. This would halt the delivery of some government services. But strikes halt the delivery of services too. This does not make it unpopular.

Many of the government’s other hated changes require their own separate legislation, which can still be blocked.

A number of them look finished, like the \$7 GP co-payment. But it’s crucial the Senate is not left to its own devices in deciding what to support. Palmer was willing to waive Abbott’s financial advice changes through the Senate, in a win for the big banks. He has also been inconsistent on opposition to university fees. Just months ago he thought a GP co-payment was worth considering.

The government is already looking to make compromises to get its budget attacks through. It hopes to enlist the doctors’ peak body the AMA to support a modified version of the GP co-payment, with Abbott inviting the head of the AMA to a private



**Above: Over 10,000 rallied on Melbourne on 6 July as part of the union day of action**

discussion on the plan. The AMA has said it is not against a co-payment in principle, with many GPs already charging their own fees, but has concerns about the implications for pensioners and the unemployed.

Treasurer Joe Hockey has also said the government would look for other ways to make cuts if the Senate keep blocking budget changes. We need an ongoing campaign against the budget to fight any cuts the Senate can’t block and reject any compromises on issues like Medicare, university fees and cutting welfare.

### Step up the campaign

So far the union campaign has not measured up to the level of anger at the budget. During the Your Rights at Work campaign against the Howard government, there were mass stopwork rallies tens of thousands strong—200,000 attended the largest rally in Melbourne.

The stopwork rally held in Melbourne on 12 June has been the largest demonstration against the budget to date with 20,000 people.

In an encouraging sign, the ACTU has now set a date for delegates meetings across the country on 18 September and a day of action on Thursday 23 October. We need to push for the day of action to involve serious stopwork rallies. Union activists in Melbourne and Sydney have organised open letters to Victorian Trades Hall

and Unions NSW to push for strike action. We also need motions moved in union and workplace meetings.

There also needs to be a serious union mobilisation for the 31 August rallies organised by March Australia. Both March in March and March in May drew tens of thousands across the country—but on both occasions the majority of unions did nothing to promote them or get members along. August 31 can’t be another missed opportunity.

Large, angry student rallies against fee increases on the NUS day of action on 20 August will also put pressure on the unions to call more action themselves.

The senior union officials aren’t willing to lead a campaign to actually stop Abbott’s budget before it is implemented. Whatever cuts Abbott gets away with, whether to jobs in the public sector or hospitals and schools funding, will cause immense damage over the next three years. But most union leaders are simply focused on campaigning to vote Abbott out in two and a half year’s time.

At the delegates meeting held in Sydney in June, Unions NSW shut down a debate about industrial action. But it was clear there was significant support for it. Union activists need to prepare to make the most of the September delegates meetings to strengthen the push for strike action, and demand the kind of fightback that could bury Abbott.

.....  
**It’s crucial the Senate is not left to its own devices in deciding what to support**

# Welfare review signals more attacks on disabled and poor

By Daisy Livesy

ABBOTT WASN'T satisfied with the welfare cuts meted out in the Budget. The interim report of the government's welfare review signals that more cuts and changes to welfare are on the cards.

The report is an ominous preview of the government's agenda for a reduced welfare safety net, based on restricting access to welfare, pushing people with disabilities onto lower Newstart payments, and extending income management to unemployed youth.

The review was commissioned by the Minister for Social Services Kevin Andrews, and led by former Mission Australia CEO Patrick McClure. McClure's last review into welfare for the Howard government in 2000 helped entrench and expand work-for-the-dole.

His new report is a perfect complement to the brutal cuts to welfare and social services in the Budget. It recommends a drastic slimming down of the welfare system, currently made up of 20 benefit categories and 55 allowances, into just four main payments with additional payment "top-ups" where necessary.

The four main categories will include a "working age" payment, disability, child and age pension payments. This merging of payment categories will mean people are put on the lowest rate of payment and then made to jump through hoops to prove their eligibility for higher payments. People with real disadvantage and special needs will have to contend with an unwieldy bureaucracy in order to access the appropriate benefit.

This attempt to further reduce welfare spending comes on the back of indexation changes proposed in the Budget that will lower payments. The government has proposed to tie increases in Age and Disability Support Pension (DSP) as well as carer payments to the lower Consumer Price Index instead of average male earnings. If passed, this will reduce these payments by \$80 per week within ten years.

The McClure report also makes the offensive recommendation that only people with "permanent" disabilities should be eligible for the DSP. Those DSP recipients whose disability is deemed semi-permanent or episodic would be moved onto the lower



**Above: Social Services Minister Kevin Andrews is looking for further ways to cut welfare**

Newstart payment, \$166 a week less. McClure has suggested that it will be people with mental illnesses who are shifted onto Newstart first.

This recommendation is in line with the government's scare campaign about welfare "dependency". People on welfare are routinely demonised as undeserving "dole bludgers", with the aim of whipping up resentment towards them to distract from the real causes of social inequality and disadvantage. "Disabling Rorters", the Sunday Telegraph's headline on the release of McClure's report, was typical.

The implication is that those on the DSP could work, but choose not to. This trivialises their disabilities, including the seriousness of the impact that mental health issues and periodic illness can have on a person's ability to work.

It also ignores the severe discrimination that people with disabilities face when applying for jobs, as well as the lack of jobs on offer in the first place. The National Employment Services Association says that there are currently ten unemployed people for every job available. This puts paid the idea that unemployment is the choice of those on Newstart or the DSP.

McClure's recommendations come on top of Budget changes requiring the disabilities of recipients under 35 to be reassessed for their potential transfer onto Newstart. This would condemn many people with disabilities to a life of greater hardship and poverty.

The Newstart payment is just \$255 per week, putting it well below

the poverty line. Even groups like the Business Council of Australia and the OECD have called for an increase.

## Income management

The McClure report also hints at the introduction of new paternalistic measures to control the behaviour and spending of welfare recipients. These would add to the already extensive job search and training requirements on the unemployed. The report suggests making parenting support payments conditional on requirements such as health checks or school enrolment, as well as extending Income Management to unemployed youth.

Income Management involves controlling where welfare recipients spend up to 70 per cent of their payments, through forcing them to use a BasicsCard that can only be spent on approved items at certain stores.

So far Income Management has been targeted mainly at Aboriginal people under the NT Intervention. Those forced to use a BasicsCard have been stigmatised as incapable of managing their own money. Despite costing the government \$1 billion, all independent reports show that Income Management has failed to improve social or health outcomes.

Even mining magnate Andrew Forrest's recent indigenous policy review criticised the cost and stigma of Income Management.

McClure's report provides a framework for the government to plough ahead with attacking welfare. We have to oppose this agenda as part of the fightback against the Budget and demand that it is never passed into law.

.....  
**Those recipients whose disability is deemed semi-permanent or episodic would be moved onto the lower Newstart payment**

# Bust the Budget rallies can mark the beginning of the fightback we need

By James Supple

UP TO 20,000 marched across the country on Sunday 6 July to bust Abbott's budget, as part of a national coordinated union day of protest.

The largest rallies were in Melbourne, with around 10,000 people, and Sydney where 5000 marched. Sydney's Town Hall square was packed with people, making it almost impossible to move. Speakers led the crowd in chants of "Hands off Medicare" and "Bust this budget".

Demonstrations were held as far afield as Newcastle, Canberra, Darwin and Perth.

Speaking at the Sydney rally, ACTU Secretary Dave Oliver said, "this budget is...sending our country down the same path to where the United States is today...they have a country that is divided by a nation of haves and have-nots."

It's clear the union campaign needs to be stepped up to cause the kind of political crisis that could force the Senate to block Abbott's budget, and force him to resign or call another election.

Waiting to vote Abbott out in three years' time is not enough. By then immense damage will already be done to schools, hospitals, Medicare and welfare.

While the rallies were a welcome



Above: Part of Sydney's 5000-strong Bust the Budget rally

first step, it was not the kind of all-out union mobilisation that is possible. At the Sydney rally many unions had only small organised contingents.

Unions NSW Secretary Mark Lennon pointed out that this is the most hated budget in 30 years. The continuing raw anger against the budget two months on is almost unprecedented. So far leaders have not been unwilling to lead a fight that matches the scale of people's anger at Abbott.

At the height of the Your Rights at Work campaign under Howard, unions mobilised 200,000 people in Melbourne and tens of thousands around the country for a weekday demonstration. This could happen again if the unions were willing to pull out all stops.

Melbourne's stopwork rally on 12 June was larger than the weekend demonstration on 6 July, because it was boosted by thousands of construction and manufacturing workers who walked off the job.

More importantly, the day of strike action hit the profits of the people behind Abbott's budget—the big business barons who wrote his Commission of Audit and have been calling for cuts since the government was elected.

Speaking at the Sydney rally, ACTU secretary Dave Oliver said the protests were "only the beginning of the fight back against the budget".

Pressure on the unions will be needed to make sure that fight escalated into larger demonstrations and stopwork action that Abbott and the new Senate can't ignore.

## Union activists start budget strike action push

AROUND 200 unionists have signed an open letter urging Unions NSW to convene a one-day stopwork rally against the Abbott budget. The signatories including delegates from the CFMEU, NTEU, CPSU, the Teachers Federation and a number of PSA central councillors.

Meetings of National Union of Workers members at Newspoll and Millward Brown call centres in Sydney also passed the motion.

One NUW member at Newpoll told *Solidarity*, "Our meeting was 30-40 strong, with standing room only. It came after we had workplace contingents at both March in March and March in May, and began building the bust the budget rally two weeks in advance.

"There was no problem finding a

second and the motion was passed unanimously.

"Abbott's proposed deregulation of university fees and cuts to higher education will directly impact the bulk of casual call centre workers who often work casual hours to make ends meet while studying.

"Liberal government plans to force unemployed young people off Newstart and Youth Allowance for six months at a time will deepen the precariousness of casual work—dismantling any social safety net to protect workers when work comes to an abrupt end."

Pressure has been building from a number of sources. The CFMEU construction division's monthly delegates meeting also passed a motion calling for Unions NSW to initiate an indus-

### Meetings of NUW members in call centres in Sydney passed the motion for a one-day stopwork

trial campaign to fight the budget.

Paul McAleer told a budget fightback meeting in Sydney that the strength of the response to the budget through actions like March in March has already encouraged a greater union response, for instance, "The march in August is now being discussed at Unions NSW as part of the strategy to fight the budget.

"The more politically left unions are discussing these issues at Unions NSW and want a more significant industrial, political and social campaign against this budget", he added.

With the unions set to call delegates meetings in September and a day of action on a weekday, Thursday 23 October, the more pressure there is to turn this into a serious stopwork rally the better.

By Lucy Honan

# Bendigo stands up to Islamophobia

ISLAMOPHOBES ARE trying to stir up anti-Muslim hatred in Bendigo, but local anti-racists won't have it. Since plans for a Bendigo mosque were announced in January, church groups, the Muslim community, Labor and Greens representatives, artists and residents have met a Stop the Mosque in Bendigo hate campaign with a strong, united message of support for the mosque and for Muslims.

The secretive hate group has been campaigning since January to block planning rights for a local mosque. So far though they are on the back-foot, with Bendigo Council voting in June to support the mosque, with two against and seven in favour.

After racists mobilised for June's council meeting, shouting down councillors, many locals took to Facebook to express their horror and embarrassment about the racist protest. Local Elise Snashall-Woodhams organised a Diversity Rally at Bendigo Town Hall the following Friday night.

Cowardly Islamophobes anonymously tied black balloons to the homes of prominent supporters of the mosque.

But the anti-racist coalition countered them, encouraging people to pop the balloons; as the organisers of the Support the Mosque in Bendigo facebook group said, "If we leave them [black balloons] up, it tells everyone that we don't care. If we take action, it sends out a message that we don't agree with the lies being spread by the people who are putting these balloons up. If you were a Muslim in Bendigo, what would you rather see?"

Not only did the group encourage people to take down the hate balloons, they responded with an campaign of coloured balloons across Bendigo with tags saying "racism has no place in Bendigo".

A change.org petition supporting the mosque has collected nearly 2500 signatures so far. Bendigo Bank closed the account of Stop the Mosque in Bendigo group in April.

## Bankrolled

The mosque's supporters have rejected the idea that racism is part of the true nature of Bendigo. And as it turns out, Islamophobic organisation Restore Australia is bank rolling the anti-mosque campaign. Restore Australia is headed by former One Nation candidate, Queenslander Mike Holt, and Charles Mollison, also a Queenslander and former Army Lieu-



**Above: Anti-racists in Bendigo have organised to counter an Islamophobic anti-mosque campaign**

tenant Colonel.

Far right organisation The Q Society (named after the rich Melbourne suburb where the group held their inaugural meeting, Kew) have joined in too. They held secret meetings and sent "educators" to Bendigo to coach locals in bigotry. The majority of written objections to the mosque came from outside of Bendigo, and Online Hate Prevention Institute's analysis of supporters of the "Stop the Mosque" Facebook page showed only 3 per

cent came from Bendigo. The mosque may now face a court challenge.

Days after the racist protest in Bendigo, Tony Abbott joined the hysteria about Australian jihadis, linking them to refugees: "We have for the last six months stopped illegal boats arriving in Australia and we are determined to be just as tough in stopping jihadists arriving in Australia". We can all take a lead from the Bendigo anti-racists to stand up to racism and bigotry.

.....  
**Islamophobic organisation Restore Australia, headed by a former One Nation candidate, is bank rolling the anti-mosque campaign**

## No excuses for job and mail servi

NINE HUNDRED jobs are going at Australia Post amid speculation letter delivery services could be reduced to three days a week by the end of the year.

The company says that letter volumes are facing drastic decline as a result of email and online communication. Last year its letters division lost \$218 million.

CEO Ahmed Fahour claims that, "Without change and reform to letter services, we do not have the ability to absorb this loss".

But the growth in online shopping has seen parcel deliveries soar. Currently, online shopping accounts for three quarters of parcel deliveries and 45 per cent of Australia Post's total revenue, more than offsetting

the losses on letters.

Talk of a financial crisis at Australia Post is massively overblown. Last year it made \$312 million profit, up from \$261 million in 2009, allowing it to pay the government a dividend of \$244 million, as well as taxes of \$447 million.

"This is not a company in crisis" Communication Workers Union Assistant National Secretary Martin O'Nea explains. "There were more than 4.5 billion letters delivered last year. That is around 87 million letters a week or 17 million letters a day".

In 1989 the Hawke ALP Government corporatised Australia Post, forcing it to operate like a company. However it retains a Community Service Obligation, requiring it to

# Redfern Tent Embassy fights to save The Block

By James Supple

ABORIGINAL ACTIVISTS in Redfern have scored an initial victory, with plans to begin further bulldozing at The Block held off. The newly-established Redfern Aboriginal Tent Embassy has been camped on the site since the middle of June, opposing a major new commercial redevelopment.

“We’re looking to maintain our presence here, and resist any efforts to turn any soil over if it isn’t for housing for Aboriginal people”, Aboriginal activist Jenny Munro told *Solidarity*. “Low cost housing for Aboriginal families should come first, not last”.

One hundred and five protesters gathered early in the morning of Monday 7 July, the day work at the site was scheduled to begin. But the demolition teams never turned up.

**Local community abandoned**  
Housing in The Block was purchased for Aboriginal people in 1973 with money granted by the Whitlam government. The area had already housed the inner city Aboriginal community for 60 years, but developers were trying to buy up homes in the area and force them out.

Now the Aboriginal Housing Company that was entrusted with the properties has turned on the local community. It plans a major commer-



**Above: A Tent Embassy has been set up on The Block to fight the redevelopment**

cial redevelopment on the land that would effectively exclude Aboriginal people. Much of The Block has already been bulldozed.

The development includes commercial housing and retail properties, but there is no guarantee of any low cost housing for Aboriginal people.

The redevelopment plans make provision for 62 low cost houses, but they will only be built if the state or federal governments agree to put up the money. Neither have any intention of doing so.

The ABC’s *Lateline* program

quoted a source from the former NSW Labor government who, disgracefully, said that, “money had been withheld from the Aboriginal Housing Company because of concerns that re-building affordable homes in The Block would create a new urban slum with major crime and drug problems.

“The source said that 62 dwellings for Aboriginal tenants was far too many and that the area would work better with art galleries, cafes and a weekend market.”

The Aboriginal Housing Company, headed by Mick Mundine, argues that money made on the commercial redevelopment could later be used to fund low cost housing.

But according to Jenny Munro, “our community is being dispossessed by Aboriginal people who think that they own all of this [The Block]. It was created by the community for Aboriginal people in the inner city and they have moved away from that mandate.”

The Tent Embassy protest has received support from a number of veterans of the 1972 Tent Embassy protests in Canberra.

The Tent Embassy at Redfern is standing strong, but it is expected the bulldozers will turn up soon. They are urging everyone to come down and help “blockade The Block” when they arrive.

Look up “Blockade for the Block” on Facebook for updates

## ce cuts at Australia Post

provide letter services at a single Australia-wide price, deliver to 98 per cent of all addresses five days a week, and maintain 4000 post offices (2500 in rural and remote areas).

After a request from CEO Ahmed Fahour, the government is considering weakening these obligations.

But regular mail delivery is a public service which should be guaranteed by government—not made subject to profitability.

Loss of services will inevitably mean more job cuts. The recently announced loss of 900 jobs comes on top of losses last year and the transfer of 1000 people onto temporary contracts.

Despite this, Australia Post CEO Ahmed Fahour takes \$4.75 million a year. This is almost twice as much

as his UK equivalent, and eight times his US equivalent. It is 115 times the average postal delivery worker.

Any transition to online mail and services should be managed so that service quality does not decline. Instead of job losses, this could involve retraining, redeploying and expanding staff to assist the move to online services.

In May the government ruled out privatising Australia Post, but the Commission of Audit and the budget have laid the groundwork for future sell-offs.

So far the CWU has only weakly opposed the job cuts by demanding consultation. A serious union fightback will be necessary to stop job losses.

**Eliot Hoving**

# Peace in Sri Lanka—another Abbott lie

By Ian Rintoul

TONY ABBOTT has declared Sri Lanka “a society at peace”. Former Labor Foreign Affairs Minister Bob Carr also shamefully sided with Scott Morrison, claiming that Sri Lanka asylum seekers are “economic migrants”. But the truth is very different.

Graeme McGregor, the *Refugee Campaign Coordinator for Amnesty International Australia*, says, “Amnesty International and the Human Rights Law Centre have long documented the human rights abuses widely committed by the Sri Lankan authorities...Despite the end of the 2009 conflict, the Sri Lankan Government has systematically and violently cracked down on its critics.

“Sri Lankan asylum seekers have faced torture upon return to Sri Lanka from countries such as the UK. Torture has been reported in rehabilitation camps...and also in the context of civil policing. All ethnic groups in Sri Lanka continue to face risks of torture in police custody, including sexual violence...In several known cases, Tamils who have been returned to Sri Lanka have faced arbitrary arrest and detention.”

McGregor added, “...there is no way for a Sri Lankan to flee persecution without leaving their country.”

## Journalists are killed and disappear

At least 15 media workers have been killed since 2006 and more than 80 journalists have gone into exile since 2005.

According to the Committee to Protect Journalists Sri Lanka ranks fourth, after Iraq, Somalia and the Philippines in the list of countries where journalists’ murders are most likely to go unpunished.

One journalist, Prageeth Eknaligoda, disappeared in 2010, having been previously abducted once before by a white van in August 2009. He had been investigating the use of chemical weapons by the Sri Lankan army.

In 2011, the office of Lanka-e-News, the website he worked for, was destroyed in an arson attack. The website’s editor, Sandaruwan Senadheera, now lives in exile after repeated death threats forced him to leave the country.

In April 2014, Sivagnanam Selvatheepan, a journalist for the



**Above: Campaigning for a Sri Lankan journalist and cartoonist who has disappeared**

Jaffna-based *Yarl Thinakk ural*, and the Colombo-based Tamil daily *Veerakesari* was viciously attacked by four masked men. Selvatheepan was hospitalised with head injuries and a broken leg.

On Sunday 5 July, the Sri Lankan Ministry of Defence banned non-governmental organisations (NGOs) from holding press conferences, issuing press releases, or running workshops or training sessions. The Secretary of Defence is Gotabaya Rajapaksa, the brother of President Mahinda Rajapaksa.

## Military occupation and reign of terror

The International Crisis Group (ICG)

reports that the Sri Lankan military is conducting a “campaign of terror and intimidation campaign in the north [of Sri Lanka].” In just one month, between March and April this year, more than 60 people were detained under the draconian Prevention of Terrorism Act.

In April this year, the Sri Lankan military claimed to have killed four alleged “LTTE leaders”, although they provided no evidence of their allegations. The military claimed the four “were shot dead when they tried to escape”.

The 2012 ICG Sri Lanka recorded, “a deepening militarisation of the Northern Province, and that the Tamil-majority north remains under de facto military occupation, with all important policies set by Sinhala officials in Colombo.”

Sixteen of the 19 divisions of the Sri Lankan army were deployed in the majority Tamil areas in the north.

Since the end of the civil war in 2009, the military and the government have embarked on a program of systematic “Sinhalaisation” of the north, settling ethnic majority Sinhalese into formerly Tamil areas.

The Tamil-speaking north is now covered with Sinhala sign-posting, streets renamed in Sinhala, monuments to Sinhala war heroes, and even a war museum and battlefields that are open only to Sinhalese. Sinhala fishermen and businessmen are regularly given advantages over Tamils.

On 5 July 2014, a Tamil protest against Sri Lanka military land grabs in the Kilinochichi area was broken up by the Sri Lankan police.

## Five months after Reza’s killing—danger signs on Manus Island

MEANWHILE ON Manus Island, there are ominous signs that Transfield and the Immigration Department are actively preparing to re-introduce local PNG staff into the detention centre.

On Monday 14 July, after a routine discussion between asylum seekers’ representatives in Mike Compound and Transfield over access to phones and the use of the internet, the two representatives were taken out of the compound by

Wilson Security guards.

Other asylum seekers were told, “They aren’t coming back.” They have not been seen since. Both are eye-witnesses to 17 February attack and to the murder of Reza Berati. There are serious concerns that PNG police involved in the February attack will have access to them; putting their lives in danger.

No local staff have worked inside the detention centre since Reza’s killing.

# Morrison's refugee bashing is all at sea

By Ian Rintoul

AS *SOLIDARITY* goes to press, the whereabouts of 153 Tamil asylum seekers is still unknown—except that they are on a Customs ship in the custody of the Australian government, probably still on the high seas in the Indian Ocean.

After days of Scott Morrison and Tony Abbott insisting they would reveal nothing about the fate of the 153 Tamils, action in the High Court blew a massive hole in the secrecy that Scott Morrison has farcically used to surround so-called “on-water matters”.

Operation Sovereign Borders also suffered a major blow when the government quickly backed down and gave an undertaking that there would be no move to remove the asylum seekers to Sri Lanka without giving the asylum seekers' lawyers 72 hours notice.

The government also admitted that they had intercepted the boat outside Australia's migration zone and that the 153 asylum seekers were still outside the migration zone.

However, the government insisted that it did have the right (under the Maritime Powers Act 2013) to intercept the boat and to take the passengers anywhere it liked, except Sri Lanka.

But the 153 cannot be taken to Nauru or Manus Island. Because the asylum seekers have not entered the migration zone, they are not (yet) “offshore entry persons” and therefore they are not subject to the government's offshore processing regime.

## Morrison's desperation

Abbott and Morrison are desperate to prevent any boat successfully arriving in Australia, so the government can continue its boast that it has stopped the boats.

Nothing else could so graphically illustrate Abbott's willingness to use asylum seekers as a political football and to subordinate human rights to his own domestic political agenda. That agenda has driven the government to ever more loudly proclaim its valued friendship with the bloody Sri Lankan regime of Mahinda Rajapaksa.

The willingness of the Abbott government to violate human rights drew international attention when the



**Above: A snap rally against the handover of asylum boats to Sri Lanka in Sydney**

government returned 41 Sri Lankan asylum seekers at the same time as it took the boat of 153 into custody.

The 41 had been subjected to enhanced screening interviews by satellite phone on the deck of the Triton. On the basis of such orchestrated interviews, 40 of the 41 were denied the right to make any protection claim and all were returned to Sri Lanka. The four Tamils who had been on board were beaten by the Sri Lankan navy on return and five others remain in prison.

However, some of the returned asylum seekers have since told *Solidarity* that they always intended to travel to New Zealand and never asked Australia for assistance for the boat, nor for protection. In fact, Australian navy officers had taken over their boat and taken them into Australia's migration zone.

Both asylum boats were essentially hijacked on the high seas.

The High Court case will now deal with the question of exactly what powers the Maritime Powers Act gives to the government to capture and hold asylum seekers on the high seas—a process that could take weeks or even months.

## Abuses

Meanwhile 153 asylum seekers are being held in limbo on an Australian

Customs ship.

Like Reza Berati's killing on Manus Island, this episode has revealed something of the scale of human rights abuses the government is willing to inflict on people who need asylum.

Scott Morrison and Labor's Bob Carr may claim all the boat arrivals are economic refugees, but the thousands of Tamils who have already been granted refugee visas show that Tamils are facing very real persecution in Sri Lanka.

It has opened up another crack in the facade of Operation Sovereign Borders. It can be a real blow to a government that is already on the slide and which increasingly resorts to playing the “refugee card” to maintain any electoral popularity.

Snap protests calling for Morrison to “bring back the boat” have been well attended. The campaign will need to make sure that the boat is not forgotten, nor wait for the High Court to decide the fate of the 153 asylum seekers imprisoned on the Oceanic Protector.

Major contingents for the anti-Abbott “March in August” protests can keep the pressure on and maintain the momentum of the refugee campaign. Melbourne and Sydney have plans for major refugee rallies in September and October respectively.

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**Both asylum boats were essentially hijacked on the high seas**

## Ian Thorpe's battle a window into society's homophobia



By James Supple

SWIMMING CHAMPION Ian Thorpe's decision to come out has exposed how ingrained homophobia is in Australia. This is nowhere more the case than among politicians, both Liberals like Tony Abbott as well as the former Labor government, whose opposition to same-sex marriage has sanctioned homophobia.

Thorpe revealed he had grappled with coming out since the 2000 Olympics, saying, "part of me didn't know if Australia wanted its champion to be gay". Thorpe also worried that com-

**Above: Thorpe has revealed he agonised for years about whether to come out**

ing out would affect his sponsorship income.

Dee Madigan, head of the advertising agency Madigan Communications, admitted that, "in 2000 ... most big companies would not touch a gay athlete".

Thorpe was also unable to come out to family and friends until two weeks before the interview. The decision had clearly tortured him, with Thorpe commenting, "I've held this as such weight and there's so much pain in this, and the discussion".

In the days following the news, the extent of homophobia in sport was underlined by stories from football

players and the homophobic comment from AFL commentator Brian Taylor, who referred to a player as a "big poofter".

As many as 85 per cent of gay, lesbian and bisexual people in a recent survey said they had seen or been victims of homophobia in sport.

The problem goes much deeper. Ian Thorpe is not only an Olympic champion, but the winner of the most Olympic medals for Australia ever. That the decision so difficult for him speaks volumes about the oppression of other gays and lesbians.

According to a National LGBTI Health Alliance 2003 survey, 85 per cent of gay men and lesbians have "experienced one or more forms of homophobic abuse, harassment or violence ... over their lifetime". Sadly, 60 per cent of those surveyed had modified their behavior every day to avoid these experiences.

But it's also clear attitudes are shifting. Even since 2000 homophobic attitudes have eroded.

The latest survey on same-sex marriage, by Crosby Textor polling, found that 77 per cent of Australians now support the change, indicating a steady increase. This also underlines how out of touch politicians clinging to their defense of "traditional marriage" are. Same-sex marriage would be a blow against the homophobia that continues to blight society.

## NSW Teachers' Federation wants to squander the fight

THE 2014 Annual Conference of the New South Wales Teachers Federation fell only days before the Unions NSW Bust the Budget rally, and amid a wave of anger against Abbott's budget.

But the Federation remains narrowly focused on campaigning for the "Gonski" schools funding increases.

The review headed by David Gonski in 2012 recommended major funding increases found to address inequality in the schools system.

Abbott has scrapped the bulk of the funding increases. Labor set the ground work for this. Rudd and Gillard promised to phase in the funding over six years, leaving the biggest increases to occur only in the last two years, 2018 and 2019. This was so far into the future that Labor did not actually have to budget for it. The Liberals simply refused to fund the final two

years of spending.

Now, education unions are set to follow a marginal seats campaign designed to get Abbott voted out at the next election. In NSW the Federation is targeting nine Coalition seats. The conference even agreed a new organiser based in each of the seats, at a cost of around \$2 million.

This is a repeat of the union Your Rights at Work marginal seats strategy. This got rid of John Howard but failed to put any pressure on Labor to deliver change.

The Federation's leaders are dismissive of the kind of action that could not only stop the bulk of Abbott's cuts, but also put the union in a stronger position to force Labor to deliver. Involvement in the March Australia demonstrations was dismissed as a "one off"—despite the potential for building an ongoing movement against Abbott's cuts.

Even joint union events like the Bust the Budget rally are regarded with some degree of sectional derision.

The union has also moved away from fighting over industrial issues, like reducing teachers' workloads. Action is now ruled out for fear of exposing the union to fines in the Industrial Relations Commission. Yet in the past the union has repeatedly had to defy Commission orders to fight for pay and conditions. Fines imposed have never been a mere percentage point of Federation's budget.

Federation needs to be part of the broader campaign against Abbott's budget. A marginal seats strategy to advance a single issue undermines the potential that campaign.

**John Morris,**  
President, Canterbury-Bankstown Teachers Association

By Vivian Honan

JOKO WIDODO (Jokowi) has claimed victory over former general Prabowo Subianto in a closely fought presidential election in Indonesian. However, Jokowi is expected to continue favouring big business and investors at the expense of ordinary people.

While both presidential candidates are claiming victory in the 9 July election, reliable quick count surveys have Jokowi and his running mate Jusuf Kalla won by about 4 per cent. Official results will be announced on 22 July.

Much of the left got caught up in supporting Jokowi, fearing that victory for Prabowo, an ex-general from the Suharto years, would mean a return to dictatorship.

Some claimed Jokowi was the more progressive candidate, citing limited reforms during his time as Governor of Jakarta. However, big business expects him to continue the favours it receives from government.

Investors both internationally and within Indonesia are excited by the prospect of a Jokowi government. Jokowi plans to build ten new industrial areas throughout Indonesia and will open the country further to investment.

Wages in Indonesia remain among the lowest in Southeast Asia, with many workers actually paid below the minimum wage. The recent conversion of agricultural areas into industrial zones has seen peasants aggressively stripped of their land with little compensation. This will continue as industry expands.

Jokowi, known as the father of low wages for his policies as Governor of Jakarta, will not significantly change the situation for workers and peasants in Indonesia. He has promised nothing to workers, beyond implementing some modest housing plans that were already the policy of the previous government. He has no plans to end the system of outsourcing and temporary contracts that leads to underpayment and uncertainty for workers.

Jokowi will also continue to use the police and army to repress workers fighting for better conditions. During his time as Governor of Jakarta tear gas and water cannons were used to break up peaceful strikes and protests.

While Jokowi himself does not have a military background, he received the backing of 35 generals, five of whom have also been accused of human rights abuses. Many West

## Indonesia rejects former general, but new president won't bring change



Papuans boycotted the elections altogether, with neither candidate supporting their demands for independence.

### Prabowo's dirty campaign

Several months ago Jokowi held a lead of almost 40 per cent over Prabowo. This whittled down to the point where the two candidates were almost even.

Prabowo and running mate Hatta Rajasa ran an expensive and dirty campaign. Prabowo owns more than \$140 million and has assets in 26 companies, particularly in mining and agriculture. He also has ties to the family of former dictator Suharto, who amassed great wealth during his 32 years in power. Prabowo's brother is also a billionaire and helped pay for his campaign. Two other Prabowo supporters own five of the television stations, with about 44 per cent of the country's viewers.

Prabowo was willing to promise anything to win votes. He made speeches promising to crack down on corruption, claimed he would defend pluralism and the rights of minority groups, and made a pact with the major union FSPMI pledging ten policies to improve workers' lives.

Yet several members of Prabowo's coalition are themselves embroiled in corruption cases. He won the support of hard line Islamic groups who attacked religious pluralism during the campaign. Earlier this year workers at a company Prabowo majority owns were still fighting for five months of

**Above: Jokowi and Prabowo square off in an election debate**

unpaid wages.

There is no doubt Prabowo's many promises increased his vote. In a country riddled with corruption and poverty, many people were willing to listen to someone promising to be "firm" in tackling them.

Furthermore, Prabowo used nationalism, racism and other ugly tactics. A black campaign against Jokowi labelled him as Christian and Chinese. Both are minority groups in Indonesia, with Chinese Indonesians particularly used as scapegoats in times of crisis.

Despite all this, Jokowi held his lead. One major reason was Prabowo's alleged human rights abuses, particularly involvement in mass killings in East Timor and the kidnapping of anti-Suharto activists in 1998.

Prabowo's refusal to accept the initial counts has sparked fears he may try to tamper with the vote counting. The democratic process must be defended against any attempts Prabowo may make to overturn the result.

But the left should have no illusions or false hopes in a Jokowi government. He will not significantly cut down on or overcome issues of corruption, poverty or human rights abuses of his own accord.

Real change in Indonesia can only come from below. The workers' movement has grown strongly in the last few years. As it continues to strengthen, it can offer a genuine alternative to the generals and businessmen that currently run the country.

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**Investors internationally and within Indonesia are excited by the prospect of a Jokowi government**

## South African miners make history, metalworkers hot on their heels

By Lucy Honan

AFTER A five month long strike, South African platinum miners are celebrating a momentous victory. Not only did the workers extract a sizeable pay rise from mining bosses; they have demonstrated workers' extraordinary political power to shake South African capitalism.

Lead by AMCU (the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union) the 70,000 platinum mine workers shut down shafts in January. The entire South African economy shrank by 0.6 per cent in the first quarter, widely blamed on the strike. The bosses had stockpiles of platinum to see them through a few months without a workforce. But the fierce determination of the strikers, assisted by solidarity from within South Africa and internationally meant the workers outlasted the stockpiles. In late June the employers had to offer 20 per cent increases in the first year for the lowest paid workers, the highest increase ever achieved. In the following two years these salaries will go up by another 10 per cent per annum.

The victory is a shot in the arm for the entire South African working class, and the metal workers, represented by the union NUMSA, have now opened an even bigger front in the battle.

On 5 June, 220,000 metal workers across the country went out on indefinite strike for a 12 per cent wage increase across the board, an increase to housing allowance and the scrapping of labour brokers.

The striking workers are facing down legal threats and mass dismissals. Bosses are complaining that they can't afford the wage rise—but as every South African knows, platinum workers stood up to the same threats.

For now the momentum is with the workers who want to settle accounts with the ruling class running South Africa since the end of apartheid. It was the brutal repression of the ruling African National Congress (ANC), with the massacre of 34 striking miners at Marikana two years ago, that has sparked the upturn in workers' struggle.

The ANC has spent the last 20 years using its anti-apartheid credentials and the unions it controls to restrain the (mostly black) working class, stalling on the promises of freedom from repression and poverty that the struggle against apartheid birthed. It pitted itself against the platinum



**Above: Striking platinum miners, fighting for 12,500 rand a month wage**

strikers, pathetically suggesting the workers were puppets of white foreigners. The muscle of the anti-apartheid struggle was always the indus-

trial force of the black working class. With workers on the rise, the ANC and the ruling class they represent are now on the back foot.

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**The victory is a shot in the arm for the entire South African working class, and the metal workers have now opened an even bigger front**

### Abbott and US approve Egypt's crackdown

PRESIDENT ABDEL Fattah el-Sisi's military regime continues its ruthless crackdown on all opposition within Egypt. Since June 2013, thousands of Egyptians have been rounded up and jailed, many held without charge in Egypt's notorious prisons where they can face torture and mistreatment.

Yet last month the US gave the military regime its seal of approval when Secretary of State John Kerry announced the release of \$575 million in US military aid to Egypt.

On 23 June six Al Jazeera journalists, including Australian Peter Greste, were handed seven to ten year jail sentences for "broadcasting false information to defame and destabilize Egypt" and for supporting the now criminalized Muslim Brotherhood. Since the ousting of Muslim Brotherhood President Morsi, six journalists have been killed and over 65 detained, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists.

While the Australian government expressed its dismay at Greste's sentence, Tony Abbott revealed in June that he had also personally "congratulated" el-Sisi "on the work that the new Government of Egypt had done to crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood". He added, "I think that the new

President of Egypt will do whatever he reasonably can to ensure that we have peace and security in Egypt".

An Amnesty International report released in January of this year showed that the Egyptian government had "routinely used excessive and unnecessary lethal force to disperse demonstrations, a practice that has resulted in the deaths of hundreds of protesters and bystanders, as well as in some cases journalists and other media workers."

Egypt's prisons are increasingly filled with people who have protested against the military regime. One new report puts the number of political prisoners at 40,000—many of them supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood. In total 683 Muslim Brotherhood supporters have been sentenced to death.

As Egyptian Revolutionary Socialist, Wassim Wagdy writes, "The army is pushing counter revolution, though not always directly. It has murdered and jailed members of the Muslim Brotherhood and has gone on to arrest some of the activists of the left who are symbols of the revolution. It has used a shoot to kill policy on university campuses". But it's now clear this murderous crackdown has the support and backing of the West.  
**Matt Meagher**

# Revolution, not 'peace process' talks, can free Palestine

MILLIONS OF people across the globe are rightly furious at Israel's latest attacks on Gaza. They want to see an end to the killing.

One common sense solution is to create a Palestinian state alongside the Israeli one. But in reality as long as Israel exists there will be oppression and war.

The Israeli state was created in 1948 on what was then Palestine by forcing over 750,000 Palestinians from their homes. It is a state built on racism—set up as a state for Jewish people.

Israel became one of the greatest military powers in the world because of Western backing. Western rulers use Israel as a “watchdog” in the Middle East to police other regimes and promote Western interests.

Israel isn't there as a refuge for ordinary Jewish people. It is there to further Western imperialism.

Its short history is littered with bloody wars and attacks on its neighbours. And it can only exist by denying the rights of Palestinians.

There have been decades of attempts to negotiate with this bloody imperialist state. The US, which supports Israel, has backed up the so-called “peace process”.

But talks allegedly aimed at securing a peaceful two-state solution have failed because Israel does not want to make any concessions.

## Refugees

Palestinian representatives have even offered to limit the right of return for Palestinian refugees—something they have no mandate to do.

Yet even this wasn't enough for Israel to agree a settlement because it doesn't want one.

It wants to keep the talks going while it steals more Palestinian land.

Many of those looking to a two-state solution genuinely want an end to the bloodshed in Palestine. But it is a dead end.

The only solution is to create a single state where Jews and Arabs can live alongside each other in peace and equality.

Only this can give all Palestinians the right of return.

This isn't a pipe dream made impossible by entrenched sectarian division. Jewish people and Palestinians have lived side by side in the past.

But how can a single state come about in the face of the awesome pow-



**Above: Solidarity rallies with Gaza have been held worldwide**

er of Israel and its Western backers?

The defiance of the Palestinians has been inspiring. But under siege and with very little military or economic power they can't beat Israel on their own.

But the recent Arab revolutions showed that there is a force with the power to push imperialist regimes

back.

Egypt's large working class played the critical role in bringing down hated dictator Hosni Mubarak in 2011.

A revolution across the whole region can break the hold of imperialism—and win liberation for Palestine. **Socialist Worker UK**

## Israeli terror state stirs up violent racism

THE DISCOVERY of the bodies of three kidnapped Israeli teenagers was Israel's justification for beginning the bombing.

Israel's government has blamed the deaths on Hamas, but nobody has been charged and Hamas has not claimed responsibility. Hundreds of activists arrested during the search for the teenagers, including nearly all of Hamas' West Bank leaders, have not been released.

But if anything the reaction has exposed the brutal racism behind Zionism.

In a statement after the bodies were discovered, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu quoted a famous Hebrew poem, “Revenge for the blood of a little child has yet to be devised by Satan.”

Three Israelis have now been charged for a revenge attack on Palestinian boy Mohamed Abu Khdeir,

who was kidnapped and burnt alive.

In the Israeli town of Sderot, bordering on Gaza, Israelis set up a vantage point to watch and cheer on the bombs dropping on Gaza while they ate popcorn.

A Facebook page calling for revenge gathered 40,000 fans. The night before Mohamed's body was found, right-wing Israelis marched through Jerusalem shouting “death to Arabs!” and assaulting Arab workers.

Protests in Israeli Arab communities in response to Mohamed's death were met with the “tear gas, stun grenades and rubber-coated bullets”, according to the *Miami Herald*.

This is the end result of establishing Israel as a racially exclusive state based on the colonial dispossession of the Palestinians. Its continued existence relies on terror.

**Amy Thomas**

# THE POPULIST PLUTOCRAT INSIDE THE RISE OF CLIVE PALMER

As the Palmer United Party takes centre stage in the Senate, **James Supple** and **Adam Adelpour** look at what's behind Clive Palmer's games

CLIVE PALMER'S circus is in full swing, with the Palmer United Party (PUP) taking up a key position of power in the new Senate.

In its first outing at the polls in last year's federal election, the Palmer party grabbed over 11 per cent of the vote in Queensland and 6 per cent nationally.

Clive Palmer, owner of a multi-billion dollar business empire, is an unlikely populist. He has made a name for himself with wild claims and announcements that have grabbed media headlines. Prior to the election he even declared that Rupert Murdoch's ex-wife Wendi Deng was a Chinese spy. His pet projects include the Palmsaurus dinosaur park in Queensland and a full size working replica of the Titanic.

But he has also shown himself to be a canny political operator. Palmer is no political novice, serving as Queensland National Party campaign director during arch-conservative Joh Bjelke Peterson's 1983 state election win and as media spokesman in its successful 1986 election campaign.

Palmer's climate change announcement in late June managed to both please those who wanted the carbon tax gone, as well as wedge Abbott and position himself as a climate hero. Palmer has promised to maintain climate programs including the Renewable Energy Target, the Clean Energy Finance Corporation and the Climate Change Authority, as well as support an Emissions Trading Scheme if Australia's key trading partners go the same way. Palmer, a self-declared climate change sceptic, even managed to convince Al Gore to help spruik the announcement, with Gore labelling it an "extraordinary moment".

Tony Abbott now needs the support of the three Palmer United Party Senators to pass any legislation that both Labor and The Greens oppose.

Palmer has also boosted his Senate numbers further through an alliance with the Motoring Party's Ricky Muir.

This raises some questions—how did a billionaire, whose main interest is in his own profiteering, succeed in winning any political support? What's the real agenda behind his populist bid for influence?

## Populist politics

Clive Palmer's personal fortune has allowed the PUP to spend big on political advertising. In the WA Senate election re-run in March Palmer more than doubled the spending on TV ads of The Greens, Labor and the Liberals combined. He poured around \$3 million into his federal election campaign.

But advertising alone does not explain political success. Palmer uses populism to appeal to the disgust with mainstream politics, declaring that, "politicians don't care about you, your family or your future. All they care about it getting re-elected". He presents himself as speaking up for all those who feel ignored by a self-serving political establishment.

Disenchantment with the political system has grown as a result of the bipartisan commitment to neo-liberal policies of cuts, privatisation, outsourcing, commercialisation and deregulation that have eroded living standards. The loss of support has been most acute for Labor, with its traditional support base among workers and the poor.

Labor's embrace of neo-liberalism after the Hawke government came to power in 1983 has turned many former working class Labor voters against the party. In 1983, 65 per cent of manual workers voted for the ALP, but by the time they were voted out in 1996 the figure had fallen to 44 per cent and the party had lost 10,000 members.

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## Underneath the populism is a traditional, right-wing, pro-business Liberal philosophy

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The Hawke and Keating Labor governments cut wages and undermined union power through the Accord, with the wages share of the economy declining from 61.5 to 55 per cent. And at the same time the company tax rate was slashed from 49 per cent to 36 per cent, as the average CEO pay ballooned to what it is now—100 times that of the average worker.

The Rudd and Gillard governments continued this legacy through cutbacks to single parents' payments and universities as well as Work-Choices lite.

Palmer talks up the kind of government spending that Labor and the Liberals have long abandoned. At the federal election he promised to hand back an extra \$2500 a year to every person by cutting income tax, said there should be a boost to the pension and an extra \$80 billion put into health. Palmer has repeatedly talked up the need for increased government spending to stimulate the economy.

He has dismissed Treasurer Joe Hockey's debt crisis as a "fairy tale" and accused him of serving up a "brutal budget built on a lie". Palmer outdid both Labor and The Greens by being one of only two lower house MPs to vote against the budget appropriation bills, indicating he would be prepared to block supply.

He has given every indication he wants to make life difficult for Tony Abbott. Clive has pledged to oppose many budget measures, including the \$7 Medicare co-payment.

But one thing is for certain Clive will be looking after himself. Palmer argues for lower taxation across the board, including lower company tax and has already voted to end the mining tax.

Palmer has also shown a capacity to change his mind from day to day, whether over climate policy or



**Above: The man of the people emerges from his private jet**

university fee deregulation, which he said he would support until reversing his position days later.

Palmer won big votes at the federal election in a number of areas hit hard by poverty and job losses. Tasmanian PUP Senator Jaquie Lambie won her highest vote, of around 10 per cent, in the North West of Tasmania.

This is an area where pulp and paper mills that once employed thousands in small towns like Burnie and Devonport have shut down. Caterpillar, who make mining machinery, cut 400 jobs and shut down manufacturing that supported 4000 households in the area in 2013. These areas are facing 10 per cent unemployment.

When Caterpillar shut down, Centrelink had to send people up to the factory three weeks in advance to start processing them. Centrelink would have been overrun by the hundreds made jobless otherwise.

Sadly, the failure of either Labor or the Liberals to save jobs, and the failure of The Greens nationally to take up working class issues has created fertile ground for a right-wing politician like Clive Palmer to fill the space with populist promises.

### Inside the PUP

Until he formed PUP Palmer was an important figure in the LNP in Queensland. He was made a life member of the Queensland National Party in 1992 and donated \$850,000 in his last full year as a member.

But Palmer fell out with Queensland's Campbell Newman government after it won power in 2012. He was angered by decisions—tellingly, including a tax increase on coal mining in Newman's first budget, and the refusal to give Palmer preferential treatment for business deals in property on the Sunshine Coast and a new rail corridor development in the coal-rich Galilee basin.

Palmer was almost expelled from the LNP after a series of strident attacks on Newman's government after this.

Underneath Palmer's populism is a traditional, right-wing, pro-business Liberal philosophy. PUP's policy program has whole sections literally copy and pasted from the Liberals' program. PUP says it stands for "the creation of wealth and in competitive enterprise", "reducing taxation" and "the family". His populism has a decidedly nationalist tinge, as he constantly talks of the need to "work together for the benefit of our country" and declares "we're all Australians".

Palmer's whole history has been of using politics and political connections to serve his business interests. In the 1980s he used his links to the National Party to have local council decisions overturned so he could push through townhouse developments.

In many ways the PUP is an extension of Clive's business empire. Many PUP candidates are managers of various Palmer businesses. Dio Wang, its Senator for Western Australia, was

managing director of Palmer's Australasian Resources before his election. Other PUP candidates have included Ian Ferguson (Managing director of Queensland Nickel), Clive Mensink (a senior executive at Mineralogy) and Bill Schoch (manager of Palmer's Cooloolum Resort).

A number of other PUP candidates are right-wing independents who have hitched themselves to Palmer to fund their election campaigns. Jacqui Lambie, the new PUP Senator for Tasmania, ran for pre-selection for the Liberals before selling her house to run as an independent. Explaining why she joined the Palmer Party Lambie told the media, "To be honest I was running out of money".

The PUP is structured to serve Clive's personal ends. Its constitution is completely un-democratic and effectively gives him the right to make all important decisions on policy. He has chosen his Senators, in the hope they will be easy to line up behind whatever backroom deals or policy turns benefit himself.

Clive has not invested millions in his new political party simply for amusement's sake. At some point he will look to secure a payout for his companies through his newfound power. He own business practices give an indication of his real attitude towards workers and class issues. He has sacked over 400 staff at the Cooloolum Resort since buying it in 2011. His company Queensland Nickel has set up its own stevedoring company to drive down wages and conditions on the waterfront, and is refusing to offer workers any pay rise this year.

There is an enormous contradiction between the billionaire's personal business interests and his rhetoric about fighting for the little guy. Despite his bluster, Palmer is no real friend of working class people. He is a self-interested and unscrupulous mining baron in it for his own gain. If Clive frustrates Abbott's budget cuts, it is no bad thing. But his ability to channel discontent is due to Labor's failure but also that of The Greens, whose role in minority government with Labor led them to compromise with the parliamentary game that so many people despise.

Clive's support needs to be undercut from the left. A rise in class struggle, with workers across the country on strike against Abbott, is not going to be welcomed by a mining boss like Clive Palmer. This kind of fightback would give people a real outlet for their anger and expose Palmer for what he really is.

# PACIFIC PLUNDER: AUSTRALIA'S WWI GRAB FOR COLONIES

**Tom Orsag** looks at Australia's seizure of German Pacific colonies during WWI and how this motivated Australian involvement in the war

DESPITE THE nationalist focus on deaths at Gallipoli in 1915 as part of Anzac commemorations, Australia's first casualties in WWI came in the South Pacific.

Six Australian soldiers died in September 1914 fighting near Rabaul in New Guinea, along with German troops and 33 New Guineans on the German side.

Australia's rulers were quick to seize what Pacific territory they could when war broke out in the hope of holding onto it at the end of the war.

The Australian ruling class had coveted a Pacific empire since the 1870s and 1880s, as the emerging Australian ruling class began to realise that it had distinct interests. Although under the umbrella of the British empire, it would have to push Britain into looking after Australia's interests in the south Pacific.

Australia was emerging as a regional sub-imperial power.

Today many people view WWI as a historical accident, while others claim it was a legitimate war against German aggression, fought for the rights of small countries like "plucky little Belgium". In reality it was a clash between European powers competing to carve up the world into rival colonial empires.

Australia and New Zealand were no different. Their plan to seize German Pacific islands was already drawn up prior to 1914.

Their interest in the colonies was primarily strategic, as part of excluding rival imperial powers. The money to be made from them by Australian traders like Burns Philp and W.R. Carpenter was an added bonus.

Plans were drawn up in October 1912 to seize German colonies in New Guinea, Samoa and other smaller Pacific islands including Nauru.

This harked back to an 1896 Australian Inter-Colonial Military Committee recommendation that, "Instead of thinking in terms of the continent and Tasmania...the defence region of Australia be extended to include New

Zealand, New Caledonia, the New Hebrides [Vanuatu], New Guinea and portions of Borneo and Java [Indonesia's main island]."

NZ Defence Minister Allen approved plans drawn up by NZ's military commander, Major-General Godley. One month later they were passed onto Australia's military commander Brigadier-General Gordon, at a joint conference in Melbourne.

Allen then went to London and obtained the approval of the British War Office.

Germany's colonies in the Pacific were totally unprepared for the outbreak of war. Apart from being thinly defended, they could not hold out long because they were totally dependent on Australia, New Zealand and East Asia for food supplies.

Australia assembled the most powerful naval force in the region, an Australian Naval and Military Expeditionary Force of over 1500 men.

The first Australian troop landings took place in September 1914 in New Guinea. The Germans surrendered within days. New Zealand captured Samoa and Australia captured Nauru by early November.

After driving out Germany, their other concern was to limit Japanese expansion into the area.

Japan, as Britain's ally, seized German colonies north of the Equator—the Carolinas, the Marianas (except Guam), the Marshall Islands and Palau.

Australia didn't like this. But it had to bend to Britain's insistence that Japan as an ally deserved the colonies.

## Australia's Pacific Monroe Doctrine

Australia had what it wanted south of the Equator, including phosphate rich Nauru, the "prize of the Pacific", which Treasurer William A. Watt coveted for Australian agribusiness's future, as what "the productivity of our continent absolutely depends on."

As academic Nancy Viviani

## Australia and New Zealand's plan to seize German Pacific islands was already drawn up prior to 1914

wrote, "Many Australian colonists on the eastern seaboard looked to New Guinea as their natural dependency, economically, politically and strategically, and regarded the Western Pacific as their natural sphere of influence."

Queensland seized south-eastern New Guinea on behalf of Britain in 1883, worried that imperial rivals Germany and the Netherlands might stake a claim over the island.

The Melbourne Age summed up Australia's sub-imperialist designs in May 1883, "It is at least as important to Australia that New Guinea should be annexed as it was that New Zealand should be secured. The unappropriated parts of the world are rapidly being seized upon...England can afford to disregard the extension of French colonies in distant areas [but] our security is at stake.

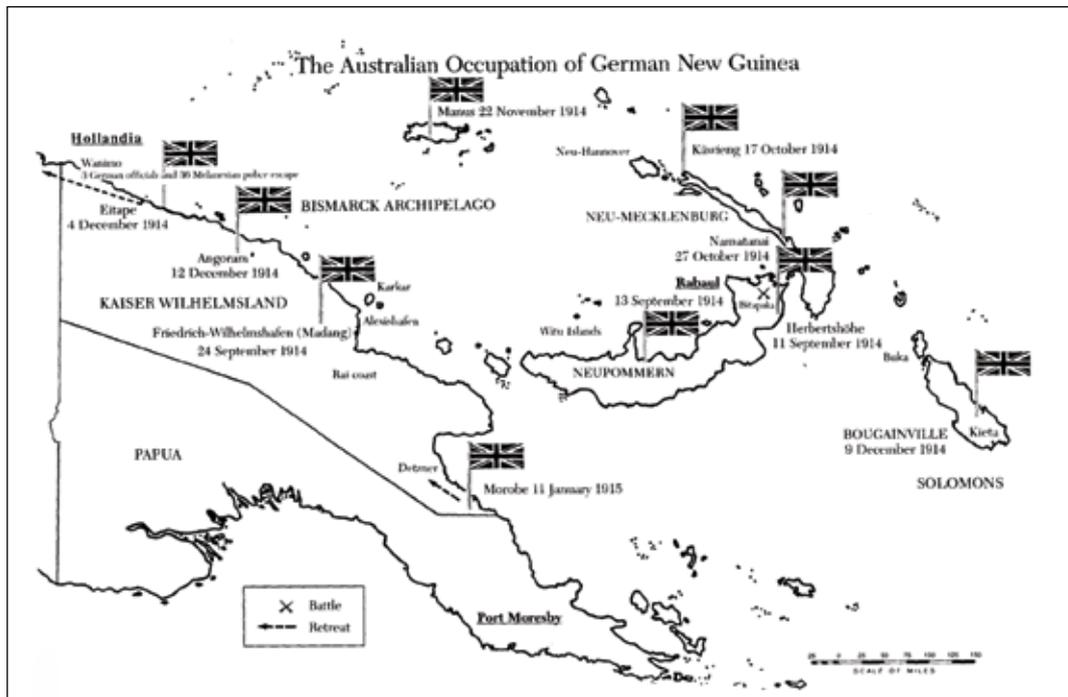
"Sooner or later it must come to something like a Monroe Doctrine for Australia; and we shall have to intimate unmistakably that no foreign annexations will be permitted in countries south of the [equatorial] line."

The French designs on the New Hebrides (Vanuatu) in 1883 sent the now wealthier and more secure Australian colonies into a frenzy about a "foreign power" in the South Pacific, even though France had already occupied New Caledonia from 1853.

Australia's political rulers had always had obsessive fears of Britain's imperial rivals. Firstly it was France, dating back to the Napoleonic era. Then Russia after the Crimean War in 1853. Then Germany, as it emerged as the key rival in the 1880s.

When France wanted control over the New Hebrides, the Australian colonies united in one voice in public meetings in 1886 over the "New Hebrides crisis" and lobbied Britain at the Imperial Colonial Conference in 1887 to forestall France's ambitions.

James Service, Premier of Victoria, was reported as telling the British at the Conference that, "It was Britain's duty to dominate the Pacific, and particularly those islands which were



of concern to Australia.”

Historian Jude McCullough wrote that, “As they began feeling themselves more and more a distinct political entity, the presence of the French in the western Pacific began to assume vaguely sinister aspects in a strategic sense.”

Joint Anglo-French rule in the New Hebrides was the compromise forced on the French by the Australian colonies.

At the Federal Convention of 1891, Henry Parkes, so-called founding father of Australia, revealed what the project of united Australia meant when he said, “Australia ought to be the mistress of the Southern Seas. The trade, the commerce...of these groups of rich islands ought to centre in our ports; and with these advantages, we ought to hold mastery of the hemisphere.”

In 1894, Victoria supported New Zealand’s demand that Britain annex Samoa, calling it the “manifest destiny of Australasia to be the controlling power in the Southern Pacific.”

### Japan

By the 1890s, Australia’s designs in the Pacific meant that Japan came to be seen as a threat. That year Japan successfully invaded the Chinese island of Formosa (Taiwan).

That fear turned to paranoia with Russia’s naval defeat in May 1905 in Battle of Tsushima, in Russo-Japanese war of 1904-5.

Sir Edward Hutton, General Officer Commanding the Military

**Above: Australian territorial seizures from Germany in WWI**

Forces, opined, “It is impossible to view the military situation in Australia...without grave misgivings. The victories of Japanese arms within the last four months have astounded the whole civilised world.”

Hysteria reigned when Japan annexed Korea in May 1910. Australian journalists ludicrously asked the new Japanese consul-general, on his arrival in Sydney in October, about the likelihood of a Japanese attack on Australia. This despite Britain and Japan renewing and extending an alliance treaty in 1905!

Australia and New Zealand’s fear of Japan and misgivings about Britain withdrawing from the Pacific set into motion the armament of Australia as “militarily the strongest of the British Dominions.”

Between 1902-03 and 1913-14, Australian defence spending increased more than six-fold, from £750,000 to over £4.7 million. In the last national budget before the war, defence spending accounted for almost 31 per cent of total government spending.

This was a higher percentage than in any other British Dominion. And more in both absolute and per capita terms than was spent by a comparable European country, such as the Netherlands.

Having taken possession of the German colonies, Australia and New Zealand were determined to keep control of them.

PM Billy Hughes had to insist on this at the Peace Conference in 1919

in Versailles, at the club of imperial powers.

In the lead-up, Hughes gave lectures at the Savoy Hotel in New York in May 1918 and the Pilgrim Club, London in July 1918.

Hughes said, “If Australian is to continue a free Commonwealth she must have guarantees against future aggression. This involves the Australian Monroe Doctrine in the South Pacific...We are committed by inexorable circumstances to the doctrine of ‘Hands off the Pacific’.”

Australia was granted a Class C Mandate under the League of Nations (forerunner to the UN) giving it control of Germany’s former South Pacific colonies.

The added bonus was that Australian law became pre-eminent in its colonies, meaning the White Australia policy could be enforced there. This closed them to outside investment, commerce or immigration—such as from Japan.

The new administrators of Australian-mandated New Guinea and New Zealand-mandated Samoa were all military men. One of the first orders was that the flogging for breaches of labour discipline be increased. Munro Ferguson, Australia’s Governor-General, said, “It was essential that the native should be made to respect and fear his white master.”

The Australian ruling class’s own interests in the Pacific drove their decision to send troops to the battlefields of Europe and the Middle East too.

Major E.L. Piesse, Director of Intelligence in the PM’s Department during the war, wrote that PM Billy Hughes, “had in mind not only the war in Europe but...Japan.”

Piesse recalled that when Hughes addressed a secret sitting of both Houses of Parliament he told them, “Japan would challenge the White Australia Policy after the war, that Australia would then need the help of the rest of the Empire, and that if she wished to be sure of getting it she must now throw her full strength into the war in Europe.”

The desire to tie the country to a larger power continues today in Australia’s alliance with the US. And the desire to dominate the local region continues too, in the Australian government’s attitude to East Timor, Fiji, Nauru, PNG, the Solomon Islands and Tonga.

This imperialist game has only ever served the interests of Australia’s rich and powerful.

# DO REVOLUTIONS ALWAYS FAIL?

The counter-revolution in Egypt, together with the confused outcome of the upheavals in Ukraine, has revived the old argument that real popular power is impossible. **John Molyneux** explains why this is wrong.

THE STATE of the world—with climate change, poverty, wars, racism and much else—is such that it is not easy for our rulers to persuade people that everything is alright. But they don't need to. All they need to do is persuade people that there is nothing they can do about it.

This is why, when it comes to justifying capitalism, inequality and war, the mantra of: "But you can't change human nature" has always been popular with the powerful and drummed into the heads of ordinary people.

Linked to the human nature argument is the idea that revolutions always end in failure. They are tied together by the conviction that they fail because ordinary people are incapable of running society. Popular power is always going to be an illusion.

Thus, although George Orwell was a socialist, his book *Animal Farm* has always been popular with the establishment because it suggests that the degeneration of the Russian Revolution into dictatorship was inevitable owing to the lack of intelligence of the animals who represent the working class.

Every time a revolution is defeated the doom merchants put forward this argument.

The current situation, with the difficult circumstances that have developed in Egypt and the right wing nature of the forces that drove the overthrow of the regime in Ukraine, lends itself to this kind of thinking. Thus Simon Jenkins in the *Guardian* recently argued, "Maidan, Ukraine..., Tahrir, Egypt..., the square symbolises failure not hope."

It is easy to produce a list of revolutions and uprisings that failed—the Peasants' Revolt of 1381, the Peasant War in Germany of 1525, the Paris Commune in 1871, the Spanish Revolution of 1936 and so on. However, as a historical generalisation the idea that all revolutions fail is false.

Many of today's main democratic capitalist regimes are the product of successful revolutions. The most obvious examples are the Dutch Revolt against the Spanish Empire in the 16th century which laid the foundations for the Netherlands; the English Revolution of 1642-49 which broke the power of monarchy and the feudal aristocracy and opened the door to parliamentary rule; the French Revolution of 1789-94, which removed the head of Louis XVI, broke the power of the French aristocracy and ended feudalism in France; and the American Revolution of 1775, which paved the way for the development of the United States as the world's leading capitalist nation.

The contemporary bourgeoisie, that is the capitalist classes who dominate today, are embarrassed about their revolutionary origins and try as much as possible to conceal them. The English Revolution becomes the English Civil War and not a revolution at all. Moreover, the conservative English bourgeoisie more or less sympathise with the "gay cavaliers" of deposed Charles I against the grim "puritans" of Oliver Cromwell who in fact laid the basis for their rule.

Similarly, the tendency of historians has been to denigrate the French Revolution and depict it as descending into an orgy of violence, with the guillotine and "the Terror" of 1793-4.

But none of these efforts at revisionism can conceal the fact that these were real revolutions involving the mobilisation of large masses of ordinary people, the forcible overthrow of the existing regime and, crucially, the transfer of power from one social class (the feudal aristocracy) to another (the bourgeoisie) in such a way as to lead to the creation of a whole new social and economic order.

Moreover, all of these revolutions

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**Many of today's main democratic capitalist regimes are the product of successful revolutions**

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were, in their own terms, spectacularly successful. The Dutch Revolution made the Dutch Republic the most successful economy in Europe between 1600 and 1660. It also made it outstandingly democratic, liberal and progressive by the standards of the day—a haven for rebels, thinkers and artists such as the Leveller John Lilburne, the philosophers Descartes and Spinoza, and the painter Rembrandt.

In England the Stuart monarchy was restored with Charles II in 1660 but he came back on quite different terms from those his father tried to maintain. Parliament had defeated the king and never again was Britain ruled by an absolute monarchy. The consolidation of parliamentary and bourgeois rule was easily achieved in the "Glorious Revolution" of 1688-89 and Britain became the country of the Industrial Revolution and the dominant capitalist power in the 19th century.

The French Revolution not only turned France into a modern capitalist country and made Paris the political and cultural "capital of the 19th century" but, more than any other event, gave rise to modern democracy and political philosophy with its concepts of liberty and human rights and then socialism.

The 20th century saw a multitude of national revolutions which destroyed colonial rule and established national independence.

These range from the Irish Revolution which began in 1916 and culminated in 1920-21, to the Egyptian Revolution of 1919, the Chinese Revolution of 1949, the Cuban Revolution of 1959, the Algerian Revolution against the French in 1954-62, the revolutions against Portuguese rule in Angola, Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique and many others.

So how is it, after this abundant experience of successful revolutions,



**Above: Since mid-2013 protests in Egypt have faced ferocious repression from a new military government**

that the claim that they always fail has the resonance it does? The answer is that none of these revolutions have yet produced a society of equality and freedom as almost all of them claimed they would.

### **Bourgeois revolution**

We need to be clear about the difference between the bourgeois revolutions of the past and the workers' revolution we are talking about today. The bourgeois revolutions were both progressive and successful but they could not introduce economic equality or a classless society.

They adopted the rhetoric of "equal rights" to mobilise popular support but in reality were led by, and transferred state power to, a class—the capitalists—which was by its nature an exploiting class and which could not exist without a working class beneath it.

They could not go beyond achieving formal, constitutional democracy with, at the very best, equal legal rights for all (in practice, of course, they generally didn't even achieve that).

The same applies to the various anti-colonial and nationalist revolutions. For historical reasons these revolutions often adopted more radical language than the bourgeois revolutions, frequently calling themselves communist or Marxist—the Chinese

and the Cuban Revolutions being the most important examples.

But in so far as these revolutions remained under middle class and not working class leadership, they could do no more than establish independent state capitalist regimes which would not only be class societies but would also be subject to all the distorting pressures of the world market.

Here a word needs to be said about the peasantry. Ever since the development from hunting and gathering to agriculture 5000 or more years ago, the large majority of the world's population have been peasants.

Inevitably, many and, in some cases, most of "the people" participating in revolutions have been peasants.

This was the case with Pancho Villa's and Emiliano Zapata's armies in the Mexican Revolution, with Mao's Red Army in the Chinese Revolution and Fidel Castro's guerrilla band in Cuba.

But there is a huge difficulty with the peasantry as a revolutionary force: they can fight ferociously against the old order, against the landlords and the colonialists, but they cannot take control of the new society that emerges if the revolution succeeds. This is nothing to do with lack of ability or intelligence and everything to do with their conditions of life.

Power in any society depends,

ultimately, on control of the forces of production, and in modern society the decisive forces of production are located in cities.

Peasants are based in the countryside. After taking part in any revolution the peasants eventually have to return home to the countryside leaving someone else to run the cities and therefore the society.

The working class, those who live by the sale of their labour power, are different. Unlike peasants they are concentrated in large workplaces—whether it's factories or call centres, shipyards or council offices—and large towns, where the real power in society is located.

As capitalism has spread around the globe the working class has dramatically increased in size to where it makes up a majority of the world's populations.

Without the working class not a car or computer is assembled, not a shop or supermarket is staffed, not an office or school opens and no bus, train or plane moves.

This gives the working class immense potential power—power not only to defeat capitalism but also to construct and rule the society that comes after and to do so democratically.

The working class is the first oppressed class in history that has the ability to run society without exploit-

## FEATURES

ing or oppressing others.

But can the working class maintain democratic control over its own leaders—won't a new set of privileged oppressors inevitably rise from its ranks to take over?

Posing this question raises the issue of human nature and also brings up the fate of the Russian Revolution and its transformation into dictatorship.

It is commonly said that human nature, being greedy and self-interested, makes real equality impossible. But this is false because human nature is not fixed. It changes and develops as circumstances change.

We know from the fact that hunters and gatherers lived in democratic and egalitarian societies for tens of thousands of years before classes emerged that there is not some innate obstacle to equality lodged in human nature.

### Russian Revolution

We have to recognise that the degeneration of the Russian Revolution into tyranny is one of the main reasons why many people think revolutions are destined to fail. It was, after all, the greatest revolution of the 20th century and the only one in which the working class succeeded in taking power. It is inevitably seen as a test case.

However, the material conditions in which the revolution found itself in the years following 1917 were so grievous that its degeneration was almost inevitable.

Before the revolution Russia was the most economically backward major power in Europe—the overwhelming majority of its population were peasants, with the working class making up less than 10 per cent. Its economy was damaged by the First World War and then utterly devastated by the Civil War. By 1921 industrial production had fallen to 31 per cent of its 1913 level and large-scale production to only 21 per cent. This economic collapse was compounded by serious outbreaks of famine, typhus and cholera.

The social effect of this was to destroy the urban working class who had made the revolution and established workers' power in 1917. The working class had, as Lenin said at the time, "become declassed, ie dislodged from its class groove, and ceased to exist as a proletariat". Physically and politically exhausted it lost the ability to control its own government and the officials of its

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### The degeneration of the Russian Revolution into tyranny is one of the main reasons people think revolutions are destined to fail

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own state.

In these circumstances it was unavoidable that the officials of the state and the party, sincere Communists or not, would develop into an unaccountable and privileged bureaucracy and that their consciousness would change accordingly. The dictatorship of (or by) the proletariat that Marx and Lenin had envisaged would become, and did become, a dictatorship over the proletariat.

Was there any way out of this impasse? Yes, but only if the revolution could be spread to other more economically developed countries which would have enabled aid to be sent to the enfeebled Russian workers.

This nearly happened: the revolution did spread to Germany and Italy (as well as elsewhere) and it came very close to being victorious. But their defeat, mainly for lack of revolutionary leadership, left the Russian Revolution isolated and sealed its fate.

Once we grasp the material conditions that caused the failure of the Russian Revolution it is clear that these send a message of hope, not despair, for revolution today.

There is now no major country where the productive forces are not more developed, and the working class far stronger, than it was in Russia in 1917.

The world is far more internationally integrated than it was at that time, so once a breakthrough is made in one country spreading the revolution internationally will be much easier than it was in 1917-23.

### Failure of the squares?

Having answered the general historical argument against revolution we can return to the specific argument about the failure of the squares (Tiananmen, Tahrir, Puerto del Sol, Taksim, Maidan, etc) to produce new and better societies—which is the argument put by Simon Jenkins and others.

Jenkins says that crowds in squares have become "icons of modern revolutionary politics" and recognises their inspirational power. But he claims that "crowds destroy but seldom build".

He writes, "A crowd can blow the fuse of a weakened regime and plunge the state into darkness. It seldom turns on the light of democracy. Any upheaval can offer the hope of better times. But history is always a sceptic."

But Jenkins makes two basic

mistakes. First he treats all crowds in squares as the same phenomenon, rather than looking at the specific class composition, political aims and dominant ideology of each. He doesn't attempt to distinguish between a middle class crowd and a working class crowd, a reactionary crowd and a radical crowd and so on.

Second, because crowds in certain squares have come to symbolise revolutionary movements Jenkins identifies the square with the revolution as a whole, failing to consider its other elements or the wider social forces involved.

It is like reducing the French Revolution to the storming of the Bastille or the Russian Revolution to the march on the Winter Palace.

This is wrong in relation to all the recent upheavals but especially so in the case of the Egyptian Revolution because although the media focused almost exclusively on Tahrir, there were major struggles and mobilisations across the country, particularly in Alexandria and Suez, and because it was the combination of the masses on the streets with rapidly spreading strikes and workplace occupations that was decisive in forcing the fall of dictator Hosni Mubarak.

Consequently Jenkins, and others who would write of revolutions as doomed to fail are drawing the wrong conclusion from the struggles. While it is true that a movement that does not go beyond simply occupying public spaces is unlikely to succeed, it is quite false to imagine that such mass mobilisations cannot go beyond such limitations.

Indeed the correct conclusion is that mass mobilisation on the streets is an absolutely necessary step in any revolutionary process but we also need mass strikes and occupations of workplaces, because it is at the point of production that capital is most vulnerable and working class power is concentrated.

In addition we need revolutionary socialist leadership, because without revolutionary politics any mass movement can be misled, misdirected and betrayed.

If these elements can be brought together the potential of the global working class to defeat capitalism and build an international socialist society is now greater than it has ever been in history.

**Socialist Review UK**

# Once again on social media and social movements

By Amy Thomas

DAVID GLANZ'S article in *Solidarity's* last issue, "Protest 2.0? Social media and the streets" is a useful contribution on the strengths and limitations of social media.

David writes that it's a mistake "to assume that social media can substitute for the more humdrum processes involved in building movements." That's absolutely right, but I think this can be taken a step further—social media cannot substitute *at all* for the political activity that a movement needs to grow, develop and ultimately, win.

## Democracy

One of the main reasons social media can't substitute is that it's not democratic. Those who create a Facebook event or a page—probably the most common way for activists to promote activities these days—have already made the decisions, unless they are directed by a democratic committee that meets and collectively determines the event and its politics.

An example of a group exclusively organising on Facebook this way is the recent March Australia protests that started with March in March. These protests have tapped into the rage felt about Abbott's conservative social agenda and his budget cuts and have drawn tens of thousands to the rallies.

But the model of organisation ignores coalition-building and political debate, and gives a small group of people the political control over the Marches' message.

This is also how more conservative organisations like GetUp! control the political space, by controlling the event, while the real decision-making remains the privilege of a select few.

It is an essentially elitist model, not one that grassroots activists should replicate. Participants are regarded as little more than a stage army.

But many have attempted to copy the viral quality of the Marches, thinking that by simply declaring events online they can brand the events and that somehow they will magically take off. Recently Socialist Alternative sought to copy the undemocratic method, to (ultimately unsuccessfully) declare their own Bust the Budget rallies on Facebook, apparently unconcerned to engage with the unions and



**Above: The March in March protests captured the mood against Abbott, but have set some bad examples for how to organise**

the myriad of other groups organising against the Budget.

## Radicalisation

To do anything beyond just "mobilising" people to attend a rally requires political discussion and debate about the movement's political direction. Facebook can be useful for mobilising for protests and events, but it is not a way to build a sustained movement. That requires ongoing organisation, democratic meetings and the interaction of ideas and practice.

Movements and individual activists develop their ideas about the way forward by putting different ideas to the test through collective, practical experience. In open, democratic spaces, trust and common experience can really develop.

## Shortcuts

Attempts to organise via social media do not usually "go viral". In fact all activists know that protests and events promoted exclusively via the internet, generally, do not go much further than mobilising already existing networks. As John Sinha writes in "#Leninism" (*International Socialism Journal* 143), "The reach of social media is confined to one's own political and social circles but the objective of many activists is to break out of such circles."

Those networks that do mobilise exist because of real life activity or relationships that put them into contact with left groups, unions or activist

groups. To build and mobilise, you need to build those networks in the real world. It cannot be achieved online.

Take the Facebook attempt to call a "general strike" on 24 June, also an attempt to mimic the success of the Marches. The well-meaning hope of organisers seemed to be, again, that putting it online would make magic happen.

But you simply cannot declare a strike without mobilising existing unions, or building rank and file networks to be effective enough to call such an action. A successful strike is only possible through collective decision-making, because its success depends on solidarity and winning majorities in workplace votes.

Social media is another communication tool for getting the word out. It has, positively, created the prospect of much more up-to-date communication with more people at once than is possible with any other technology. Right now activists in Gaza are using it to get out the real, horrific story of Israel's bombardment.

Facebook, Twitter and so on can be usefully used to promote actions and events, and circulate articles and documents. This is not about rejecting social media, or not appreciating its positives. But the left should reject the idea that it can be a substitute for organisation in the real world. Attempts to use it that way can only stifle the organic work needed to build living movements.

# ISRAELI TERROR AIMS TO STRANGLE GAZA

By Amy Thomas

AFTER SLAUGHTERING nearly 200 Palestinians and leaving another 1000 injured so far in its latest bombing campaign, Israel has tried to pressure the Hamas government in Gaza into a ceasefire completely on Israel's terms.

It would simply restore the 2012 ceasefire terms requiring an end to the blockade and periodic Israeli incursions of Gaza, which Israel never respected. Hamas has also called for the re-release of Palestinian prisoners released in 2011 as part of a prisoner exchange deal, but rearrested in the last month.

The bombing, Israel's third major offensive since Hamas was elected in 2006, looked set to continue as *Solidarity* goes to press.

The indiscriminate killing has brought devastation in Gaza. According to Dr Mona Qasim El-Farra, a physician in a Gaza hospital, "At least 70 percent of those killed are civilians." Israel bombed a charity housing disabled people, killing two and injuring five others. Some 22 members of the same family were killed when a bomb struck their home.

## Strangling Gaza

The background to Israel's offensive is a unity agreement between the Hamas government in Gaza and the Fatah government in West Bank. Israel immediately cancelled peace talks after learning of the agreement.

Hamas was elected in 2006 on the back of disillusionment with Fatah's collaboration with Israel. Since then Israel has maintained a blockade choking the supply of basic goods to Gaza. Electricity is sometimes unavailable for 16 hours in a day, effecting essential services such as health, water, sanitation and schooling.

The latest campaign is part of Israel's attempt to strangle Gaza and Hamas. They have found a willing partner in Egypt's military regime, who backed their ceasefire proposal, as did the Arab League.

Egypt has closed the Rafah crossing into Gaza and recently bombed supply tunnels. A shortage of medical supplies



Above: One of the many homes destroyed in Israel's bombing campaign

has grown even more severe, with doctors prevented from crossing from Egypt into Gaza. According to the World Health Organisation, 30 per cent of essential drugs and half the disposable medical supplies were out of stock in Gaza *before* the bombing began.

Egypt and the Arab League's support for the ceasefire only gave Israel cover to continue their killing. As one Gaza commentator, Adnan Abu Amer, told the ABC, "Egypt stood by Israel's side, as if it was trying to punish Hamas and give Israel some time to pursue its military campaign."

Israel continues to threaten a ground invasion and has mobilised tens of thousands of reserve troops.

## Zionist vision

Israel's ultimate aim is the complete destruction of historic Palestine. Israel is a state built on racist exclusion, backed first by the British and now by the US, who now provide Israel with \$3.3 billion in aid each year.

As Israeli dissident Ilan Pappé has written, Israel's vision, "is of an Israel stretching over almost the whole of historic Palestine where millions of Palestinians still live."

Israel has long used the peace talks with Fatah as a fig leaf to extend their occupation of Palestine. Israeli settlements have grown exponentially

over the last eight years, with Palestinians now confined to 22 fragmented areas of historic Palestine, divided by the apartheid wall in the West Bank, and subject to checkpoints and daily harassment by Israeli authorities.

Resistance to the occupation inside Gaza has provided some hope after Fatah's collusion with Israel—so Israel's aim is to destroy it. Arab leaders, concerned for the stability of their own regimes, have remained silent over the slaughter in Gaza, or worse.

But Israel's bombing has reignited the movement of international solidarity with the Palestinians—with protests stretching from El Salvador and Venezuela to New York, Tokyo, London, Delhi, Cape Town and scores of other cities—as well as here in Australia.

Protesters in Egypt defied the military regime's ban on protest to take to the streets in solidarity with Gaza, demanding the reopening of the Rafah crossing and the expulsion of the Israeli ambassador. During the Egyptian revolution a mass demonstration destroyed the Israeli Embassy. It still hasn't been reopened.

Under siege and with little economic power, the Palestinians need international solidarity. The recent Arab revolutions have shown there is a force with the power to push Israel back and stop their cycle of terror.

Resistance to the occupation inside Gaza has provided some hope after Fatah's collusion with Israel