

# Solidarity

Issue No. 71 / September-October 2014

\$3/\$5

# No to Islamophobia No to war



## ALERT WARNING SYSTEM

### EXTREME

- Joins new invasion of Iraq
- Announces racist anti-terror laws

### ELEVATED

- Launches horror budget attacking Medicare, students, unemployed and pensioners

### SEVERE

- Turns back refugee boats and allows murder on Manus Island

### HIGH

- Does nothing while Holden workers lose their jobs
- Slashes climate programs

### MEDIUM

- Supports court challenge to ACT marriage equality

# ABBOTT IS THE REAL THREAT

## CLIMATE

Stop Abbott's climate vandalism - the fight for renewable energy

## MEDICARE

1976 Medicare general strike: when the unions fought for healthcare

## PALESTINE

Israeli academic: 'We must boycott Israel'



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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.

## SOLIDARITY MEETINGS AND BRANCHES

### Sydney

**Breadlines and battlelines: How workers fought back in the Great Depression**  
6.30pm Thursday 25 September

**Hidden history: Iraq's 1958 revolution**  
6.30pm Thursday 2 October

Sydney Solidarity meets 6.30pm every Thursday at Brown St Hall, Brown St, Newtown  
For more information contact: Jean on 0449 646 593  
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## Things they say

**We've got a disconnect between the business sector and consumers. Consumer sentiment has been hit by the Budget but businesses are pretty optimistic.**

Stephen Koukoulas, D & B economic adviser, is perplexed by the different responses to the Abbott Budget

**They want the freedom to be elite institutions, not mass market education factories.**

Education Minister Chris Pyne on the gift he wants to give Group of Eight universities

**You can't put a price on doing what is right.**

Treasurer Joe Hockey justifies spending hundreds of millions on a new war in Iraq

**It's not for us to have a go at penalty rates. It's for business and business organisations to do that.**

PM Tony Abbott tells the *Financial Review* he's got nothing against an attack on penalty rates

**One of the worst things I think you can do is make your kids too rich. Pick up the paper today and you can see this issue anywhere.**

Neil Balnaves, chair of Balnaves Foundation touches on one of the great welfare issues of the 21st Century, speaking at the Philanthropy Australia conference.

**Scottish poll reflects world-wide disillusion with political leaders and old establishments leaving openings for libertarians and far left**

Rupert Murdoch on the support for Scottish independence

**This is green imperialism telling us what to do**

Whitehaven Coal boss Paul Flynn on campaigns calling for people to divest from fossil fuels

**Very serious global threat. We are determined to be part of the solution to this problem and not perpetrators of it.**

Harry Kenyon-Slaney, head of energy at Rio Tinto, on global warming

**It's hard to overstate the futility of this position or it's impossibility.**

Except when it comes to calls for an end to coal exports

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# INSIDE THE \$YSTEM

## Be alarmed—AFP leave a bomb at Sydney Airport

THE AUSTRALIAN Federal Police (AFP) has been forced to issue an apology on their website after accidentally leaving a bomb at Sydney Airport after a dog training exercise.

The 230 grams of plastic explosive was hidden in an unclaimed suitcase. The bomb was only found after a woman whose suitcase was damaged was issued with a replacement at the airport in August. She discovered the explosives after actually taking them home to Cessnock and handed them in to her local police station early this month. AFP Sydney Airport Commander Wayne Buchhorn has reassured the public that the bomb wasn't "live" and that the incident will be investigated.

## Get out of jail free card for rich drunk drivers



NEW FIGURES from the Australian Bureau of Statistics show that rich, white people from Sydney's northern suburbs are escaping jail for drink driving, while rural drink drivers and many others are ending up in jail.

Fifty per cent of people caught drink driving in Moree were locked up, while none of the 124 people in Northern Sydney convicted of the same offence ended up doing time. In June, Jodi Meares, former model, singer and ex-wife of billionaire James Packer, flipped her Range Rover while three times over the legal blood alcohol limit. Despite being on her sixth driving suspension when she rolled her car in Bellevue Hill, and despite the offence carrying a maximum penalty of 18 months jail, she escaped with an \$1100 fine.

Contrast this with the experience of Stanley Allen Lord Jr, an Aboriginal man. He died in a Sydney Hospital recently after falling ill while doing time for driving while disqualified.

## Poll shows disillusion with official politics

DISCONTENT WITH the Australian political system is growing, according to this year's Lowy poll. Less than half of 18-29 year olds, and only 60 per cent of the general population, agreed that "democracy is preferable to any other kind of government". Of those that disagreed, 76 per cent said that our democracy only serves the interests of a few and not the majority of society, while 74 per cent said there was no real difference between political parties. These were the two most popular justifications for people's disenchantment with democracy.

## NSW police remove Aboriginal children at gunpoint

FOOTAGE PROVIDED to National Indigenous TV on SBS shows police in riot gear raiding a home in Moree to remove several children from one family earlier this year. The 6:30am raid saw police and Department of Family and Community Services burst into the home, round up the parents at gunpoint, handcuff them and remove the kids due to "safety concerns". The children were aged between one and 13. They were temporarily placed in foster care, but no charges were laid and they are now back with their parents. Would this ever happen to a non-Aboriginal family?

Research and writing by Adam Adelpour

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

## PM for Indigenous Affairs axes Indigenous tutoring program

THE ABBOTT government has axed a program to help undergraduate Indigenous students with their studies. The Indigenous Tuition Assistance Scheme has been running for two decades.

The scheme will be dissolved and funding made accessible only through competitive grants, rather than allocated to universities in line with Indigenous enrolments. The funding was used for 1-to-1 tuition programs that could potentially disappear completely from some universities, leaving Indigenous students to without the necessary support to complete their studies.

## Government funds Israeli fortifications for Sydney school

ISRAELI EXPERTISE has been used to construct a concrete and steel bomb proof wall at the Yeshiva Centre in Bondi, Sydney.

The ultra-Orthodox Jewish centre encompassing a school and Synagogue erected the wall with private donations and \$519,000 in government money granted under Labor's Secure Schools program. It is designed to survive the explosive impact of a car bomb, despite being constructed in response only to verbal threats made against students. Director Rabbi Dovid Slavin said, "The expertise which was needed for the wall wasn't found in Australia, we went to Israel".

## Sex industry workers excluded from welfare benefit

ABBOTT'S CHANGES to the welfare system introduced on 1 July claim to offer "incentives" for people to stay in paid employment. These include a "job commitment bonus" of up to \$6500 for those that are employed for at least 12 months after being on welfare for at least the same period. Certain categories of work are excluded from the incentive however—including work that "involves nudity or the sex industry".

## Muslim banned from speaking at Sydney Uni

UTHMAN BADAR, a representative of Islamist organisation Hizb ut-Tahrir, was prevented from speaking on campus by the Sydney Uni Vice-Chancellor on 11 September. Invited to speak as part by Sydney University Muslim Students' Association, he was denied a platform when the University bowed to demands from *The Daily Telegraph*.

Badar was controversially dumped from the Festival of Dangerous Ideas program this year over his scheduled talk "Honour killings are morally justified". But he says the title was not his idea and he believes "Islam does not condone any form of abuse or violence towards women." Hizb ut-Tahrir is a propaganda organisation that advocates an Islamic state, an aim no one on the left can support. It has often been the target of Islamophobic hysteria but says it does not advocate violence.

In contrast, former PM John Howard was allowed to speak freely on campus on 14 August this year. Howard hasn't just talked about killing, but participated in it on a massive scale. Under his government Australian troops joined the illegal war in Iraq that killed up to a million people. But the logic of Islamophobia, accepted by Sydney Uni's administration, judges Badar guilty and Howard innocent.

# EDITORIAL

## Stand up to Abbott's Islamophobic terror scare

IT DIDN'T take long for the Islamophobia behind Abbott's new terror scare to have its effect.

On Friday 12 September, on the advice of ASIO, Australia's terror alert level was raised from medium to high, rating the risk of an attack as "likely". Yet, both ASIO and Prime Minister Tony Abbott said there was "no specific intelligence" of a plot to mount a terrorist attack.

Less than a week later, more than 800 federal and state police launched dawn raids arresting 15 people. But only one person has been charged with preparing an attack, and police have been monitoring him for months. The media has been full of dire threats of beheadings, but the court documents say there was no mention of beheading in the single phone call that supposedly triggered the raids.

Outgoing ASIO Director-General David Irvine, who signed off on the increased terror alert level, said at the time he was concerned that the threat could include a bombing similar to the 2002 Bali bombing.

Yet the only person found with bomb-making materials in recent weeks, along with maps of Sydney, was an Australian using fake navy ID to rent a property in Brisbane.

The Islamophobia behind the raids quickly came into the open. One of those raided but not arrested reported being called a "piece of shit" and punched in the face, while another officer said, "Just don't make him bleed."

Only two days after the government announced the increase in the terror rating, anti-Muslim leaflets were thrown into the grounds of a Brisbane mosque at Logan.

Later that week, the Gold Coast Council ignored its own building committee's approval and rejected an application to build a mosque.

Two councillors received death threats because of their support for the mosque, but there was little media about these threats from anti-Muslim extremists.

The raids come on the eve of new anti-terror laws that reverse the onus of proof and give unprecedented powers to ASIO including impunity to torture.

Abbott's "Team Australia" is all about fostering Islamophobia while he goes to war in Iraq and wages war on jobs, health and education at home.

The government has fallen over itself in its rush to join military opera-



**Above: Despite 15 arrests in terror raids only one person was charged with terrorism offences**

tions in Iraq. Well before it received any request for Australian military help, the government was declaring its willingness to be involved to anyone who would listen.

Bill Shorten has gone along with Abbott's rhetoric, and his desire to join US bombing in Iraq, declaring that "national security is—and always will be—above politics" and that "the Prime

Minister and I are partners". Shorten even silenced Labor Senator Sue Lines when she dared to suggest that Abbott was "scaremongering" in order to distract attention from the budget.

If the unions, Labor and The Greens do not make the most of Abbott's misery, and fight his terrorism scare, there is the danger that he can rebuild his support.

### No relief for Abbott on budget nightmare

THERE REMAINS every opportunity to throttle Abbott. The recent return to parliament brought him no relief, with none of the contentious budget measures yet passed. The government has now decided to pretend the failure to pass large swathes of its budget is no real problem, while resorting to threats and blackmail to get bits of it through.

Abbott declared that, "About 50 per cent of our budget savings have already passed smoothly through the Parliament." But then Chris Pyne threatened to cut university research funding instead if the Senate failed to back his planned increase to university fees. "If the budget stays weak that means higher taxes, that comes out of your pockets", Abbott said.

They have let slip that they might bundle up a range of new cuts in budget Appropriations Bills, the last lot of which Labor and The Greens agreed to pass earlier this year.

Clive Palmer's pledge to oppose cuts has proven far less firm than he claimed. Palmer said he would never scrap the School Kids Bonus or the

Low Income Super scheme. But in the end he agreed to their phasing out, by the end of December 2016 and mid-2017, as part of the deal to scrap the mining tax. In a surprise to no one, the mining billionaire was happy to put his profits, and his desire to pay less tax, ahead of families and low paid workers.

Fighting to make sure Abbott doesn't get his way over the budget remains vital. It is still not out of the question that he could stitch up a deal to get attacks like a modified GP co-payment or university fee deregulation through. And if he fails, there are likely to be further cuts on the table in next year's budget.

So far the unions have been unwilling to build a mass campaign of rallies and stopwork action like the Your Rights at Work campaign under Howard. This underscores the need to get organised and build up the campaigns to Save Medicare and against university fee increases, and put pressure on the unions to organise a campaign that can hit the government where it hurts.

.....  
**Abbott is fostering Islamophobia while he goes to war in Iraq and wages war on jobs, health and education at home**

# Don't wind down the fight against Abbott's budget

By James Supple

TONY ABBOTT has signally failed to win support for his budget—either from the public or from the Senate. One year into its term in office, Abbott's government has now defined itself as unfair and untrustworthy.

There remains serious doubt on whether Abbott can get key measures like the \$7 GP fee, university fee deregulation, cutting under 30s off unemployment benefits or increasing the pension age, through the Senate.

The budget measures have not yet been knocked out, with negotiations behind the scenes with Clive Palmer and the other Senators continuing.

Yet far too many of Abbott's opponents seem prepared to let the fight against the budget peter out. March in August, the latest round of budget rallies, was a success with around 3000 demonstrating in Sydney and 5000 in Melbourne. But numbers were clearly down on the March in May or the Bust the Budget rallies. The student National Day of Action at the end of August, too, was far smaller than the immediate post-budget rally.

Some people perhaps complacently believe that the Senate will do the work for us—and hope that Clive Palmer's opposition to Abbott's key budget measures holds up. However Palmer's voting record since he took possession of the balance of power in the Senate suggests that he is willing to compromise and strike deals.

But the main reason for the shape of the anti-budget campaign is that the key voices opposing the budget have not put forward a strategy for stopping Abbott from passing his attacks into law. They are content to wait until the next election in the hope of voting Abbott out.

The March Australia rallies have been a fantastic expression of the scale of anger that exists against Abbott's government.

But March in August was simply built around the slogan "rally for a better government", without any argument as to how this could be achieved. This means it dovetailed with the arguments of Labor and The Greens, who say that we have to wait until the next election to vote Abbott out. But by then some of Abbott's worst budget attacks could already be in place. And we can't rely on a future Labor government to reverse them.

Labor never reversed the bulk of



Above: Sydney's March in August rally

WorkChoices, let alone John Howard's earlier anti-union laws. Labor never reversed the cuts to corporate tax that have reduced the government's ability to pay for services. And it brought back his anti-refugee policies.

## Union response

The ACTU has focused on organising an email campaign to lobby Senators, with the implication that this is the only way we can hope to stop Abbott's attacks.

After calling one weekend of "Bust the Budget" rallies nationwide, the unions have backed away from organising demonstrations against Abbott. There were only a handful of unions that made any serious effort to get members to the March in August rallies. The ACTU has called off a national day of action against the budget planned for 23 October.

Unions in Victoria, NSW and Queensland have shifted their focus from the budget to the state elections due in November and March respectively. There is no reason that the state elections should mean mobilising against Abbott's budget is a distraction. There is a clear link between Abbott's cuts to hospitals and schools, and his push for privatisation at a state level, and the state Liberal governments helping to carry this out. But because the union peak bodies are

focused on electoral work door knocking and targeting marginal electorates, they can't see this.

To increase the pressure on Abbott we need a much stronger grassroots campaign. In 2005 the unions brought out half a million people nation-wide in stopwork rallies and protests against John Howard's WorkChoices—far larger numbers than in any of the anti-Abbott actions so far. This kind of action would give the budget campaign real momentum.

All-out mass demonstrations and serious union strike action against the budget now could increase the political crisis for Abbott through costing big business millions in lost profits.

A major campaign could put serious pressure on the whole Senate, including Labor and The Greens, to refuse to pass any more of Abbott's attacks. The calls to "block the budget" completely need to be revived—and to grow stronger as Abbott's next budget approaches. The inability to get its agenda through could create an impasse for the government big enough to force Abbott to resign, or to call a new election.

We need to use whatever opportunities exist—from the campaign to Save Medicare, to union delegates meetings and conferences—to keep up the fight and build pressure for action on union leaders, Labor and The Greens.

.....  
**The key voices opposing the budget have not put forward a strategy for stopping Abbott from passing his attacks into law**

# Unpopular Abbott opts for war and terror scare

By James Supple

ABBOTT SEIZED on the anti-terror raids on 18 September to declare that Australia was at “serious risk from a terrorist attack”.

The government is trying to find a way out of its budget nightmare by beating up a terrorism scare campaign.

Abbott has talked in lurid terms about the growth of ISIS (IS), now calling itself the Islamic State, labeling them “murderous hordes”, “pure evil” and a “death cult”, even claiming they are worse than the Nazis and the Stalinist dictatorships of the twentieth century.

The government has sought to link the group to the potential for terrorist attacks in Australia, claiming those who return to Australia after fighting in Syria or Iraq pose a threat.

Yet even according to the outgoing head of ASIO, David Irvine, who has backed Abbott to the hilt, there are only around 20 people in Australia who have returned from fighting in Syria or Iraq.

Revealing the nonsense behind the claim this poses some kind of unprecedented threat, Foreign Minister Julie Bishop admitted there were actually 25 people who returned to Australia in the past after fighting in Afghanistan.

ASIO has raised the terror alert to high—meaning they judge a terror attack “likely”. This alert rating has been moved higher than it has ever been—even after the Bali bombings or the London bombings.

There has not been a single terrorist attack carried out in Australia since 9/11.

The government has also committed Australian troops and \$500 million dollars to a new attack on Iraq targeting IS.

Ridiculously, Abbott claims it’s not a new war—“What I’m talking about is Australia’s readiness to engage in combat operations inside Iraq.”

The mainstream media has played along. The Murdoch press, including *The Australian* and tabloids *The Daily Telegraph* and *Herald-Sun* have splashed inflammatory images and headlines across their front pages day after day.

*The Daily Telegraph* even ran with the headline “Bomb them to



hell” in support of bombing Iraq.

## Islamophobia

The government’s new anti-terror laws target and scapegoat the entire Muslim community. There is much anger at the government’s new power to charge people simply because they have travelled to “designated areas”, to include at least Syria and Iraq, unless they can prove they were not involved in terrorism. As lawyer Greg Barns put it, this means, “every Australian who travels to Lebanon, Egypt, Syria, Iraq or Iran to see elderly relatives or to attend a family wedding is liable to interrogation.”

Since the beginning of the “war on terror” in 2001, we’ve seen a wave of racism against Muslims.

The ten year invasion and occupation of Iraq killed upwards of one million Iraqis and tore the society apart. Terrorist attacks and the growth of groups like IS are a product of Western wars and imperialism. Western leaders can’t admit that so instead they blame terrorism simply on an “evil ideology”.

Tony Abbott has echoed the language of many other world leaders in declaring, “They don’t hate us for what we do; but for who we are and for how we live.”

The clear implication in the language condemning this “extremist” Islamic ideology is that Islam itself is part of the problem and that the entire Muslim community is at fault. The notion that the Muslim world as

**Above: Despite “no specific intelligence of particular plots” the terror alert rating was raised higher than it has ever been**

a whole is somehow backward and doesn’t share so-called democratic values has become widespread.

Despite his claims that his anti-terrorist measures were “not directed against any particular community or religion” it has been Islamic community leaders called to special meetings with Abbott on how to combat it and then paraded in the media.

Abbott’s declaration that, “you don’t migrate to this country unless you want to join our team” labelled the entire Muslim community as outsiders who have to prove their right to be here.

Within the Muslim community there is significant opposition to what the government is doing. Silma Ithram, a respected community leader in Sydney, accused Abbott of “doing very well at being divisive”.

Over 90 individuals and groups including a range of sheiks and most of the country’s Muslim student associations signed a sharply worded open letter denouncing the government for introducing, “laws [that] clearly target Muslims and...do so unjustly” and exaggerating a “trumped up ‘threat’ from ‘radicalised’ Muslims returning from Iraq or Syria.”

We need to stand with the Muslim community against Abbott’s racism. His national security scare is designed to distract attention from the real enemy within—a government that is attacking students, pensioners, workers and the unemployed with its savage budget.

.....  
**Abbott’s declaration that, “you don’t migrate to this country unless you want to join our team” labelled the entire Muslim community as outsiders**

# Private GP visits trial—Americanisation by stealth

By Jean Parker

SINCE NOVEMBER 2013 Australia's largest private health insurer, Medibank Private, has been operating a "trial" allowing its members to get priority deluxe GP services at six clinics in Queensland. With over 30,000 consultations already completed, the scheme represents the introduction of a US-style two-tiered primary healthcare system by stealth.

The expansion of private insurers into GP clinics is only one part of the Abbott government's agenda to privatise the heart of Australia's healthcare system. Greens Senator Richard Di Natale has proposed legislation to ban the Medibank Private scheme. This should be supported as part of the fight against the GP co-payment, the sell-off of Medicare processing systems, and the building of new private hospitals such as the proposed Frenchs Forest hospital in Sydney's north.

Current legislation bans private health insurers from funding GP consultations and other services covered by Medicare. But by offering priority same-day appointments, after-hours home visits and free consultations in return for funding clinics' administrative costs, Medibank Private have squeezed through a legislative loophole. They have announced plans to roll this model out across the country in November. This expansion, a month before the company is set to be sold off, is aimed at increasing the worth of the company.

Health Minister Peter Dutton has given tacit approval for the trial and is clearly lining up to push private health insurance into the primary care sector.

Health economists such as Jeff Richardson, of the Centre for Health Economics at Monash University, have shown that private health insurance involvement in general practice would lead to price explosions.

The Australian Dental Association backed this up in their evidence to last month's Senate inquiry into the trial, showing how costs have risen drastically in dental care since private health insurers have had a role in deciding which dentists patients could see and what treatments they could get. If private insurers are allowed into GP services we could end up with the exclusion of the uninsured from primary care.

Private health insurers are claiming their plan will encourage GP visits



**Above: Medibank Private, the country's largest private health insurer, is looking to increase its profits by targeting GP visits**

reducing the chronic disease and hospitalisations that are so costly in the long run. Funnily enough, this is the reason the public health sector is opposed to the GP co-payment, which aims to use price signals to *decrease* GP access.

Increasing access to primary care

will be achieved by keeping private profiteers out of it and extending Medicare's coverage to services that are now hugely expensive, such as prescription medication and specialist visits. Australia already has the highest out-of-pocket health expenses of any OECD country except the US.

## AMA co-payment compromise a sick joke

A GP CO-PAYMENT compromise plan by the Australian Medical Association has rightly been slammed by leading welfare and healthcare organisations. Under the plan, released in August, a minimum \$6.15 co-payment would apply to all patients with an exemption for concession card holders and people under 16.

"The AMA, like the government, talks about sending a 'price signal', but out of pocket costs are already far too high and the introduction of co-payments will only shift further cost burden on to individual patients ... This will only turn people away from seeing a doctor and they will head to already crowded hospital EDs, or worse still put off being treated altogether," said Lee Thomas of the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation. The CEO of the Australian Council of Social Services also denounced the proposal.

Rather than put the interests of patients and health first, the AMA has chosen to prioritise doctors' financial interests. The plan supports a user-pays vision for health care with no protection against the co-payment rising in the future.

It wants to reduce the rate of bulk-billing because bulk-billing

sets a government enforced limit on the price of GP consultations. Currently doctors that choose to bulk-bill do so without any money or billing transactions taking place. They are paid directly by the government (capped at \$36.30 per consultation). There is an incentive to bulk-bill because it means avoiding costs associated with administering payments. But under the AMA plan all medical practices that bulk-bill will be forced to administer billing of the co-payment. Any co-payment removes the incentive for doctors to bulk-bill and ends the efficiency of a scheme that does not require any money transaction. This would open the door to higher fees and the privatisation of GP consultations.

The AMA's compromise plan has helped Abbott try to revive a proposal that should be dead by now. While the government doesn't appear to have the numbers to push their current plan through the Senate, a negotiated deal may give it new life. Abbott has rejected the AMA's plan, but both he and Health Minister Peter Dutton have indicated that there is still plenty of time to continue negotiating.

**Matt Meagher**

# Answer to Liberals' 457 changes is solidarity with migrant workers

By Feiyi Zhang

NOT SURPRISINGLY, the Coalition's "independent" inquiry into 457 visas has recommended a number of changes all designed to make it easier for bosses to work the 457 system.

The government has already lifted the cap introduced by Labor in 2013, so employers will again be able to hire an unlimited number of 457 workers regardless of the numbers they regularly applied for.

The inquiry's recommendations include relaxing English language requirements and removing any requirement for local labour market testing to advertise amongst local workers for six months before employing migrant workers.

Local market testing has never actually been systematic in any case—Immigration Department statistics say that market testing only applied to a third of 457 visas issued. In 2013, over half of the 457 visas were granted to migrant workers and others already in Australia.

The government would like maximum deregulation to let employers pick and choose who they employ on the most favourable terms for themselves. It is already too easy for 457 workers to be exploited because they face deportation if they lose their sponsored job.

The answer to the threat of exploitation is to welcome 457 visa workers into the unions; to fight attempts to divide local and migrant workers; to fight for permanent residency for migrant workers and defend all workers' conditions with stronger union organisation.

## Nationalist response

The only recommendation accepted so far by Immigration Minister Scott Morrison is to relax the English language requirements.

But already we are seeing responses from the trade unions, and Labor politicians that repeat the mistakes of the past, portraying the issue in nationalist terms about prioritising local workers over migrant workers.

ACTU president Ged Kearney and shadow Minister Richard Marles have both opposed lowering English language levels for 457s. But there is a thinly veiled racism behind the argument. Richard Marles argued that plans to reduce English language requirements could harm workplace safety and leave overseas workers "at risk of



being exploited by dodgy employers" calling it "extremely alarming".

Ged Kearney has even suggested that 457 workers could be safety risks, saying, "If workers can't read safety standards and procedures then their lives and their colleague's lives are being put at risk."

But the answer to fighting exploitation is not to keep migrant workers out or to pitch local and migrant workers against each other. If there are safety risks at work it is because greedy bosses cut corners, not because of English standards.

The Australian manufacturing industry was built with hundreds of thousands of workers who migrated here without English. The unions need to insist that health and safety rules are translated into different languages; that there are English language lessons available and that both foreign and local workers are properly trained (with translators as needed) on the job.

These changes come on top of a proposal to grant some areas new designated area migration agreements (DAMA). These would apply in specific areas with labour shortages like Darwin where the Ichthys gas project is pulling labour from local businesses. Employers would be allowed to pay workers on 457 visas 10 per cent below the current minimum allowable wage of \$53,900.

Another provision allows an employer to apply to pay a migrant worker less than the person who

**Above: Labour shortages caused by projects like the Ichthys LNG plant near Darwin are the excuse for one set of 457 visa changes**

vacated a job, although not below the award wage. Clearly, this could leave migrant workers being paid significantly less than the going rate.

The answer to Abbott and the bosses "divide and rule" tactics is a united fight for the same conditions to apply for all. Organising 457 workers is possible. Last year a group of Korean 457 workers at K.P. Painting Pty Ltd were underpaid by hundreds of dollars per week, forced to work unpaid overtime and denied other legal entitlements. The workers walked off the job with the support of the CFMEU and shut down their building site for a day. They forced their employer to pay proper wages and end unpaid overtime.

Demands at recent union protests of "stop 457 visas" and "Aussie jobs for Aussie workers" only serve to alienate and isolate migrant workers. Twenty-seven per cent of the Australian population was born overseas. We can't build strong unions with a campaign that alienates such a large part of the workforce.

Nationalist slogans play into the bosses' hands. It is Abbott and the bosses who are causing job losses, not migrant workers—the Queensland government has cut 5000 health workers' jobs since 2012, Australia Post is cutting 900 jobs and Arnott's in South Australia has recently cut 120 jobs.

Winning the argument to welcome 457 and migrant workers is critical to rebuilding unions with the power to fight Abbott and the bosses' agenda.

**The answer to fighting exploitation is not to keep migrant workers out or to pitch local and migrant workers against each other**

# Morrison holds asylum seekers hostage to TPVs

By Ian Rintoul

THE CRACKS in Morrison's offshore processing regime are growing wider, as the Immigration Minister pushes harder for the re-introduction of Temporary Protection Visas (TPVs).

In mid-August, on the eve of meeting Clive Palmer to seek his support for introducing TPVs, Morrison declared that he would release children from mainland detention. Palmer has constantly raised objections to keeping children in detention.

But Morrison's announcement meant little—most children on the mainland are not in detention centres but in "community detention", living with their families in suburban houses designated to be "places of detention."

It clearly didn't impress Clive either. Less than two weeks later, Morrison proposed that in return for agreeing to TPVs, he would also release the children on Christmas Island and, wait for it, begin processing the tens of thousands of asylum seekers who have been left in limbo on bridging visas in the community. And he would process those in detention who arrived after 19 July 2013 and therefore earmarked for Nauru and Manus Island.

Although it meant nothing for those already on Nauru and Manus, it was a dramatic step. After insisting that no one who arrived after 19 July would ever be settled in Australia, Morrison has backflipped and has now put resettlement in Australia on the table: on temporary visas—for now.

It is one indication of the pressure that is building on the detention regime. The promising thing is that the central elements of the refugee campaign have soundly rejected Morrison's blackmail. It is simply no step forward to swap one form of insecurity for another.

That stance has since been backed up by the High Court decision that ruled that Morrison's clever bureaucratic manoeuvre, of issuing safe haven visas to force refugees to accept temporary visas, was invalid. If, as seems likely, Parliament rejects TPVs, it will be a major blow to Morrison.

The contradictions in offshore processing are placing the whole detention regime under pressure. Manus Island has been open over a year. In that time 41 asylum seekers have been determined to be refugees, but none have been released. The PNG Minister has the final say and there are still no



**Above: A protest in Afghanistan against plans for temporary visas**

resettlement arrangements in place. Meanwhile, no asylum seekers have been transferred to Manus since Reza Barati was killed.

Nauru has said that it will not allow permanent resettlement. A limited number has been released from detention, but that seems to have stalled. The single men found to be refugees are living in Fly Camp in conditions as bad as detention—without enough clean water, food, work or "enough money for soap or toothpaste, or make phone calls".

The prospect of using Cambodia to voluntarily resettle refugees from Nauru also seems to have run into problems. A delegation from the Immigration Department has been in Cambodia for a month but seems no

closer to finalising anything.

Despite the on-going atrocities of the detention regime, Morrison's concessions show that the campaign is making ground. Hamid's death has galvanised more opposition to offshore processing.

The Human Rights Commission inquiry into children in detention will report before the end of the year. It is set to raise even more concern about the detention regime. On 14 and 15 October, the High Court will be considering the legality of the kidnapping of the 157 Tamils on the high seas. It is no time to make concessions—we can win permanent visas and bring the end of detention, on, and off shore, that much closer.

## Stop the deportations to danger

THERE IS a huge well of nastiness in the Immigration Department. Since the first forced deportation of an asylum seeker to Afghanistan on 26 August, the immigration department has re-detained 14 asylum seekers with a view to forcibly deporting. Among those re-detained are five Iranians and six Afghans, although both countries say they will not accept forced removals.

In the Afghan cases, their rejections as refugees are based on country assessments made in December 2012—almost two years ago. The situation in Afghanistan has seriously deteriorated since then.

The Taliban is making daily gains. On 16 September, there were two successful and fatal attacks in Kabul itself. Insurgents have been shelling Hazara areas of Kabul.

Despite the obvious injustice, the Immigration Department makes no re-assessment of its unsafe decisions.

All of those who have been re-detained had been offered six-week visas after spending months on expired bridging visas, and taken into detention either at immigration interviews or with raids on their houses.

Forced removal is a brutal and inhumane process itself—reason enough for it to be opposed.

.....  
**It is simply no step forward to swap one form of insecurity for another**

## NSW union delegates push to revive budget campaign



**Above: The NSW union delegates meeting held on 17 September**

UNIONS NSW used a meeting of around 250 delegates to announce plans for a community-based state election campaign. But a group of rank-and-file activists won a resolution calling for a “Your Rights at Work style campaign including regular mass work-day rallies and stoppages and combined unions delegates meetings to oppose Abbott’s budget measures”.

Unions NSW has decided to move away from a campaign against Abbott’s budget and instead focus on a “Jobs, Rights and Services” campaign to elect Labor in the NSW state election. Unions NSW Secretary Mark Lennon called on the meeting to participate in “189 days of action”—the number of days, minus Christmas and Boxing Day, until the election on 28 March.

The strategy mirrors that of unions in Queensland and Victoria who are focusing on their own state elections, and the ACTU’s focus on the next federal election. The ACTU called off a day of action against Abbott’s budget initially floated for 23 October.

Leading up to the 17 September meeting, activists decided to get organised following a previous delegates meeting in June, where discussion of industrial action was bureaucratically shut down.

NTEU activist Sam Russell put the motion, backed up by a rousing speech from CFMEU delegate Dennis McNamara, who declared, to much applause, “there is lots of discussion here about a fight—well, we show them our fight by getting on the streets and taking industrial action!” He said, “The ACTU underestimates our willingness to fight” and that given the lead, “we’ll follow.”

This time, rather than shut down the debate, Unions NSW rushed the motion through, with no one prepared to speak against. Its success will help increase the pressure for a more serious budget campaign.

A fuller discussion was shunted to another meeting to be held at Unions NSW on Thursday 23 September. Union activists now have to mobilise for this meeting to turn the motion into reality.

The mood is firmly on our side. Thousands have joined the March Australia demonstrations and Bust the Budget rallies. Up to 20,000 marched in Melbourne on a weekday in June, with many taking “illegal” stopwork action.

Tarring NSW Liberal Premier Mike Baird, who leads Labor 54-46 in the polls, with the brush of Abbott’s attacks on Medicare, universities, the

jobless and pensioners can help dent his support. But we will need to build stronger rank-and-file networks and

campaign groups like Save Medicare to force the hand of the union leadership. **Amy Thomas**

## Uni Vice-Chancellors push for higher fees

AFTER PASSING the lower house, the government’s higher education reforms are now set to be decided in the Senate in October.

While students will be riddled with debt, leaked modelling prepared for the Group of Eight (Go8) showed that elite universities might gain as much as half a billion dollars in one year from the changes.

It is no surprise then that Vice Chancellors from the Go8 have been lobbying for fee deregulation.

Vice Chancellors from the Regional Universities Network are now also supporting deregulation. Their position was cemented when Go8 universities said they would forfeit \$20 million a year government funding for disadvantaged students to fund a regional scholarship program. This will further force poorer students out of the top universities.

Michael Spence, Vice Chancellor at Sydney University, was forced to hold a “town hall style” consultation meeting under pressure from the University Senate, students and staff. The meeting was clearly a farce as speakers were chosen in advance and the “consultation” came just days before the legislation hit parliament. Spence has never been interested in consultation. There was no consultation when he tried to cut 340 jobs in 2012, nor when he attacked staff pay and working conditions last year,

or when he recently announced the redundancy of 156 library staff.

The 200-strong meeting showed the overwhelming opposition to fee deregulation. Only two speakers out of 26 spoke in favour of it, one a member of the Young Liberals.

Students, staff and community members spoke about how the reforms would disproportionately affect women, students from regional areas, and people from disadvantaged backgrounds. Nick Riemer from the NTEU argued that the money exists to fund public education, telling him, “You should be using your influence to publicly oppose billions of dollars that could go to education being thrown instead at warplanes [and] at the persecution of refugees.”

An informal motion condemning the reforms, put to the crowd by student Ed McMahan, a director of the student union, was enthusiastically supported. Not one person had the gall to vote against it.

Yet the morning following the meeting, Spence flew to Canberra with other Go8 VCs to urge Pyne to push ahead with deregulation.

The student movement has the potential to stop the education reforms. But the Vice Chancellors are not our allies in defending quality, equitable education. We will have to fight them just as hard as we fight Abbott.

**Vivian Honan**

# Don't let Abbott slash renewable energy target

By Chris Breen

TONY ABBOTT is coming after renewable energy, with plans to junk the Renewable Energy Target (RET).

He set up a review of the RET chaired by climate denier and former Caltex head Dick Warburton, and including three others all connected to the fossil fuel industry. Shirley In't Veld is a former head of WA's biggest coal generator, Verve Energy. Brian Fisher is a long-standing consultant to fossil fuel emitters and Matt Zema is CEO of the Energy Market Operator.

The Renewable Energy Target is one of the few climate policies that have actually worked. It forces power companies to source a percentage of their power from renewables, with the target reaching 20 per cent of power by 2020.

Since 2001 the amount of energy produced by renewables has doubled. South Australia produced half its electricity from solar and wind in June and it is estimated around 13.5 per cent of electricity produced this year in Australia will come from renewable sources. Growth has mostly been in wind energy and rooftop solar.

The review produced two proposed options. One is to close the RET to new entrants, and so stop any further growth in renewable energy. The second is to review the target each year and only grant increases if electricity demand is increasing. Demand has decreased for each of the last five years. Both options recommend the target be scrapped in 2030.

The review panel said that the RET is "contributing to a large surplus of generation capacity", has therefore put downward pressure on wholesale electricity prices and caused "a transfer of wealth among participants in the electricity market". In other words renewable energy has eaten into the market share and profits of the fossil fuel generators. Modelling actually found that power bills would fall from 2021 if the RET was kept in place.

The Climate Institute, the Australian Conservation Foundation and WWF-Australia commissioned modelling found that weakening the RET could result in "\$8 billion additional profit to coal and \$2 billion to gas generators". Greens Senator Scott Ludlam has said that 21,000 jobs are threatened by the attack on the target.

Abbott is Prime Minister for profit, and therefore backs the fossil fuel industry. Australia has abundant reserves



**Above: Wind power has been the main beneficiary of the Renewable Energy Target**

of coal that still produce relatively cheap electricity, and companies have sunk billions in the existing coal and gas plants. Renewable energy also makes profits, but nothing comparable to the scale of the existing generators.

The panel claimed that the RET is a "high cost" emissions abatement measure that requires government subsidies, but refused to name any "low cost" alternatives. The panel also found that because of falling demand for electricity the RET "could achieve a 26 per cent share of electricity from renewable sources by 2020". That the RET is tracking ahead of target should be cause for small celebration, and for the climate movement to demand the target to be raised higher still.

## **Demand investment in renewables**

Abbott, still trailing in the polls after his unfair budget, shouldn't be able to get away with reducing renewable energy. Even when first elected he wasn't confident enough to begin by slashing the RET, targeting other climate policies first.

Supporting the carbon tax as the key policy on climate has helped Abbott. The carbon tax allowed Abbott to mask his climate denial by pretending to care about cost of living. Yet it did nothing to help renewable energy.

Media reports say that whilst much of Abbott's cabinet want the target scrapped altogether, they are politically nervous, and want a compromise of reducing the RET to a "real 20 per cent". This would take falling energy demand into account and reduced it to 20 per cent of that level.

Renewable energy to reduce emissions remains hugely popular. It works and it needn't mean price rises.

The climate rallies on the 21 September can be the beginning of fighting to defend the RET. But we need to move beyond simply general demands for "climate action".

Labor's version of "climate action" is an Emissions Trading Scheme that won't work. Even the existing RET hasn't delivered the large scale solar power needed if we are to move to 100 per cent renewable energy. One large solar power plant first proposed for Mildura in 2006, which has been cancelled and then revived many times, has just been scrapped yet again.

We should demand government funding to build large scale solar power plants, just as governments once build all the coal-fired generators. This would produce hundreds of thousands of jobs, which should go alongside job guarantees in new industries for fossil fuel industry workers. Demands like this could help restart the climate campaign.

.....  
**The Renewable Energy Target is one of the few climate policies that have actually worked**

# New war on Iraq no humanitarian mission

By Adam Adelpour and  
James Supple

THE US has stepped up its bombing in Iraq after President Obama announced plans to “degrade and destroy” the jihadist group the Islamic State (IS).

Abbott is joining the rush to war by sending 600 Australian troops, combat aircraft and military equipment to the United Arab Emirates to assist the US. But increased Western intervention will only make the situation in Iraq worse.

The US began air-strikes against IS in August, justifying their actions as necessary to prevent genocide against Iraq’s Yazidis and protect Kurdish territory.

But the US’s main concern is that IS is a threat to its own influence in Iraq and potentially to other Western-backed states. Obama’s expanded operation may also extend into bombing targeting the group inside Syria.

The bombing campaign, backed-up by local forces on the ground, may be able to contain ISIS to Iraq’s North West. But the US’s options are limited given Obama’s commitment that the US will not be sending ground troops.

The US has been desperately trying to broker the formation of a functioning “unity” government in Iraq. The previous government of Nouri al-Maliki pursued a Shiite sectarian agenda, discriminating against Sunnis. In 2013 it brutally crushed protests in Sunni majority areas like Mosul using US supplied weapons.

Although Obama has claimed that Iraq now has “an inclusive government” the new prime minister comes from the same party as ousted PM al-Maliki, who remains in the government as one of three Vice-Presidents.

Indiscriminate bombing of Sunni areas by a Shiite dominated government will only reinforce sectarian divisions. Already there are reports of atrocities like an air-strike that hit a school in Tikrit killing 31 civilians including 24 children.

If the military offensive serves to prop up a sectarian government with a reputation for corruption and violence against the country’s Sunni minority it will solve nothing.

The knowledge that such a gov-



ernment waits on the other side of IS lines will be the greatest asset IS have in terms of entrenching their rule in Mosul and other areas of Northern Iraq.

## Western hypocrisy

The dramatic territorial gains and brutality of IS have grabbed headlines across the world since it seized control of Mosul and declared a Caliphate, joining sections of Iraq and Syria, in June. IS’s brutality and intolerance are beyond question.

But the hysterical rhetoric from Obama and Abbott labelling them “pure evil” is simply hypocrisy designed to justify war.

Much has been made of IS’s beheading of Western journalists. Yet there is nothing like the same language used to condemn the imprisonment and killing of journalists who cover anti-government demonstrations in Egypt, a US ally.

There has also been complete silence about a surge of beheadings in Saudi Arabia, with at least 45 people executed this year, at least eight of them beheaded. Instead on a visit in March Obama announced that “Saudi Arabia is a close partner of the United States”.

When it comes to killing civilians Western leaders have remained silent about the 1500 civilians killed in Gaza by Israel’s latest attack, as well as the

**Above: Australian troops have joined the rush back to war in Iraq**

horrifying figure of over one million killed as a result of the US occupation of Iraq after 2003.

But it is no accident that political leaders and the media have simply condemned IS as a purely immoral force of “evil”.

Such moral condemnation helps obscure the fact that it was the 2003 Iraq war that paved the way for its growth in the first place.

The sectarian fault-lines that fuelled the rise of IS were engineered by the US to manage their occupation of Iraq. Faced with the prospect of a joint Sunni-Shiite rebellion against the occupation in 2003, the US encouraged sectarian divisions in order to divide and rule.

By 2006 a sectarian bloodbath had engulfed the country. At its height 3000 people were found dead in the streets every month.

The US armed and collaborated with Shiite death squads that terrorised thousands, and Sunni fundamentalist groups like Al Qaeda in Iraq (the precursor to IS) carried out their own sectarian reprisals against Shiite civilians.

All this exposes that the latest Western war in the Middle East is not a battle of “good against evil”. Western plundering, murder and meddling created the mess in Iraq and more of the same will only pour more fuel on the fire.

**The sectarian fault-lines that fuelled the rise of IS were engineered by the US to manage their occupation of Iraq**

# Scottish independence can shake the British elite

AS *SOLIDARITY* goes to press, the people of Scotland are voting on independence from Britain.

A narrow lead for a “Yes” vote in some polls has sent the entire British establishment into a panic. The queen said she was “horrified” at the prospect.

British PM David Cameron is under huge pressure to avoid “national humiliation” and go all out to “Save the Union”.

The Yes campaign has captured the imagination of ordinary people and has fused with a yearning to end austerity policies and cuts.

People have come to see independence as an opportunity for political renewal.

In contrast the “No” campaign is clearly about defending business-as-usual. They have relied on scare stories about how an independent Scottish economy would be a disaster. This has led to opponents branding it “Project Fear”.

David Cameron claimed an independent Scotland would be at an increased risk of terrorist attack, while Labour Party leader Ed Miliband argued that border guards may be needed between England and Scotland. Cameron held a secret meeting with business groups early in September to urge them to back the No campaign—and a string of threats and warnings have followed.

Unsurprisingly, Tony Abbott is also on their side. He said in August that those who supported independence were “not the friends of freedom”.

A “British Together” march by the anti-Catholic Orange Order in early September showcased the reaction, bigotry and racism that supporters of the union are defending.

## Hope for change

The referendum has thrust the Scottish National Party (SNP) into the limelight.

Many of the SNP’s policies are well to the left of UK Labour, which like the ALP has moved sharply to the right in recent decades.

The SNP has pledged to defend the public hospital system and the welfare state. This is why it is winning support, and why socialists and other leftists have joined the campaign for independence.

Many people hope that an inde-



**Above: The referendum campaign has galvanised activists with the hope of radical change and an end to austerity**

pendent Scotland will mean an end to conservative Tory governments. Scotland has a long history of voting to the left but ending up with Tory government because of the Union’s voting system.

Scottish Tory leader Ruth Davidson acknowledged this when she was reduced to saying it was “not very likely” the Tories would win the next general election, meaning it wasn’t necessary to vote Yes to avoid the Tories.

Immigrant groups are also campaigning to support independence and against the anti-asylum seeker policies of the UK.

Independence for Scotland could also diminish the imperialist power of the UK and its alliance with the US. The removal of Trident nuclear submarines from the Clyde would be a blow to Britain’s position as a leading nuclear state and a real threat to the ability of the US to use Britain as a launch pad for its missiles in Europe.

The generals in Washington and at NATO HQ are terrified of losing the Faslane nuclear naval base. They are acutely aware that there are no other deep waters around the UK that won’t involve spending tens of billions of pounds to relocate it.

“Losing” Trident would help relegate Britain from its top position in the pecking order of world states.

The issue is closely tied up with Britain’s membership of NATO. Britain has been a major player in NATO’s failed and bloody operations in Afghanistan. It also led the bombing of Libya and is now threatening to increase its involvement in countries like Ukraine.

The NATO question is also significant because the Scottish National Party (SNP) and its leader Alex Salmond have ditched an immensely popular 30 year old policy of opposing NATO, albeit while still opposing Trident.

If Scotland wins independence, there will be a contest over what a future Scotland will look like.

The SNP is a nationalist party, seeking to unite the rich and poor in Scotland for the sake of what it class “the national interest”. Nationalism, whether left or right, ultimately serves to mask class divisions. That’s why the SNP has tried to woo both working class voters while backing down over NATO and assuring the Scotland’s bosses they will provide them with a low tax, low regulation environment to reap their profits.

Many voting “Yes” have much higher expectations. This means the SNP could face opposition to any austerity and corporate tax cuts it tries to impose in an independent Scotland.

**Adapted from Socialist Worker UK**

.....  
**If Scotland wins independence, there will be a contest over what a future Scotland will look like.**

# Gaza punished, but Israel can't eradicate resistance

By Paddy Gibson

AS PALESTINIAN children in Gaza restarted school on 14 September, the number of their classmates slaughtered during Israel's recent war stood at approximately 500, while upwards of 3000 had been injured.

School age children make up almost one quarter of the 2188 Palestinians killed.

More than 200 school buildings were damaged or destroyed during the bombardment, while an estimated 44,300 housing units were affected. One hundred thousand Gazans have been rendered permanently homeless.

Vital infrastructure also lies in ruin. Power is unavailable for 18 hours a day, after Israel hit Gaza's only power station, already operating at reduced capacity due to the ruthless blockade.

Yet despite its overwhelming firepower and ability to bomb with impunity, Israel has not been able to dislodge Hamas and put out the flame of Palestinian resistance.

Last time Israel attacked Gaza Prime Minister Netanyahu, then in opposition, blustered that, "the action that is required is something that removes this Hamas regime from the scene." This time he's been forced to concede such an effort would be far too costly.

During the war, Hamas had refused any ceasefire without agreement that Israel would lift the crippling siege, a demand backed overwhelmingly by Gaza's population. Reports from the ceasefire negotiations said Israel had conceded some liberalisation of flows of people and goods at the border crossings.

But on the ground at the checkpoints, nothing has changed.

This makes reconstruction work virtually impossible. Gazan economist Maher al-Tabbaa told Reuters, "You would safely need 10,000 tonnes of cement per day for six months". Before the war an average of just 30 tonnes of cement per week crossed the border.

One widely reported concession made by Israel was a commitment that Palestinian fishermen could take their boats beyond the limit of three nautical miles from shore imposed by the Israeli Navy.

However, Nizar Ayyash from the Union of Gaza Fishermen told the Ma'an news agency that Israeli gunboats had conceded no extra distance and "have been firing at fishermen



**Above: One hundred thousand are homeless after Israel reduced much of Gaza to rubble**

every day since the ceasefire agreement was signed".

## West Bank expansion

Meanwhile, in the West Bank, Israel has announced the confiscation of approximately 1000 hectares of private Palestinian land, much of it used for olive farming.

Israeli settlement watchdog Peace Now said, "As far as we know, this declaration is unprecedented in its scope since the 1980s and can dramatically change the reality in the Gush Etzion and the Bethlehem areas".

Even Australian Foreign Minister Julie Bishop conceded that the land confiscation was "unhelpful" given international efforts to ensure the ceasefire holds.

Israel is also pushing ahead with plans to forcibly relocate thousands of Palestinians living in Bedouin communities in the West Bank into a single township. A joint statement from 42 Palestinian, Israeli and International NGOs condemned the move, saying that Israel was using "coercive tactics to heighten the pressure on Palestinian Bedouin communities, issuing eviction orders and demolishing homes and livelihood structures".

## Counter-revolution

Both Israel's war on Gaza and its new expansion in the West Bank need to be seen in light of the retreat of the Arab revolutions, which exploded in 2011 against dictatorships backed by imperialism right across the Middle East.

Israel's position as a watchdog of Western Imperialism in the region

rests not just on the enormous flow of military support from the US, but from the support of Arab dictatorships.

The revolution in Egypt in particular created new hope, given the central role played by toppled Egyptian dictator Hosni Mubarak in supporting Israel's siege of Gaza.

But the Muslim Brotherhood government that came to power, and who Hamas came to rely upon, did little to break the siege and failed to deliver gains to the Egyptian masses. They were ousted by a coup in 2013. As the General Sisi massacred Brotherhood supporters in Egypt, Israel knew it could turn up the heat on Gaza.

Even before the war, Hamas' growing isolation had forced them into co-operation with the hated Palestinian Authority (PA), who effectively run an outsourced occupation for Israel in the West Bank. The PA are now set to take over most of the reigns of government in Gaza.

PA President Mahmoud Abbas is positioning himself as a key player in the desperately needed "reconstruction", announcing a deal with Israel and the UN to allow supplies for reconstruction into Gaza without any reference to Hamas.

But Israel's brutality has led it to lose further ground in public opinion globally. The wave of protest during the war internationally showed a further deepening of support for the Palestinians, especially in the US.

Such solidarity can both give heart to the Palestinians and encourage the revival of the Arab revolutions necessary to bring real liberation.

.....  
**On the ground at the checkpoints, nothing has changed**

# HOW THE UNIONS STRUCK TO SAVE MEDICARE

**Kent Ireland** examines the union campaign to defend Medibank from Liberal PM Malcolm Fraser, and how it led to a national general strike

THE ONLY national general strike in Australia's history took place in 1976 in response to the Fraser government's dismantling of Medibank. Around 1.6 million workers struck, bringing the major cities' public transport networks to a halt and disrupting other services.

Medibank was one of the Whitlam Labor government's most popular reforms and its successor, Medicare, passed by the Hawke Labor government in 1984, remains popular today. Considering the Coalition's current attack on Medicare, the 1976 general strike is worth examining for lessons about fighting to defend Medicare today.

## Whitlam and Medibank

Gough Whitlam was elected on a platform of expanding social programs such as Medibank, free university education and social security.

Medibank was established as a universal insurance scheme to fund healthcare costs for the whole population. It agreed to meet a standard rate for GP visits and procedures but allowed doctors to continue to run private clinics.

Doctors could "bulk-bill" by accepting the fee set by Medibank. If they wanted to charge more than this amount, they needed to charge the patient their full fee upfront and leave it to them to claim back the rebate. This encouraged doctors to provide services free of charge to the public by eliminating administrative costs. The reconstructed Medicare works in the same way.

Sections of the establishment had initially backed Whitlam, who was from the right-wing of the Labor Party. *The Australian* captured his relationship to big business when it described how, "Gough Whitlam strode into the grand ballroom of one of Australia's finest hotels today, and greeted members of the Company Directors' Association of Australia like brothers."

But when a major economic crisis

began in 1973, Labor quickly fell out of favour with the ruling class.

Whitlam's Medibank legislation was blocked by the Conservative-controlled Senate until the double dissolution election in 1974. When parliament re-convened after a Labor victory, a joint sitting of both houses passed it into law.

Labor had worked hard to explain the benefits Medibank would have for the healthcare system. They pointed out the excesses of the private health insurers (one had recently purchased a plane for its CEO) as well as the number of people without healthcare who would be covered under the new scheme.

The medical profession and the Liberal Party opposed the idea of universal health care from the outset. Once Medibank began in July 1975, some doctors continued to boycott the system.

The conservatives blocked supply and convinced the Governor-General to dismiss Whitlam as PM in November 1975.

The Liberals under Malcolm Fraser won the election that followed. Their first budget was full of cutbacks and attacks. One of the most discussed was on Medibank. Fraser had decided to introduce a 2.5 per cent levy on incomes to fund the system.

However people would be able to opt out by buying private health insurance. This would have severely undermined Medibank by allowing wealthier people to opt out, undermining the funding necessary to maintain it.

According to socialist historian Tom O'Lincoln, "The government itself expected about half of all taxpayers to opt out. The basic principle of the Medibank scheme—universal health cover—was being undermined as an initial step towards its complete abolition."

The Liberals hoped to eventually shrink Medibank down to a safety net only for pensioners and the very poor,

**The medical profession and the Liberal Party opposed the idea of universal health care from the outset.**

and force everyone else into private healthcare. This aim has been consistent through the Howard government's time in power and now through Abbott's co-payment plan.

In the meantime, however, the system was largely a success. Even the *Financial Review* praised Medibank as both extending access to healthcare and containing costs. Fraser had chosen to attack one of the more dearly loved aspects of Whitlam's legacy.

All this meant that, as 1976 started, many unionists were expecting a year of strikes. The union movement had been through a period of intense militancy since the late 1960s. Membership of trade unions reached 56 per cent of the workforce in the mid-1970s. The renewed union militancy was symbolised by the strike to defend Clarrie O'Shea in 1969.

O'Shea, the secretary of the Victorian Tramways Union, was jailed for defying the "Penal Powers", laws that imposed large fines on unions for taking strike action. There were immediate walkouts and a 24-hour strike by 40 Victorian unions, followed by state-wide strikes in WA, Queensland and SA.

This confidence to openly defy the law helped to fuel further action around wages and conditions. There were three million strike days in 1971, up from one million in 1968, and six million by 1974. Some unions even took strike action over wider social issues, for example the Green bans initiated by the Builders Labourers Federation to halt the redevelopment of The Rocks in Sydney and maintain heritage and working class housing in the area.

After 1974, however, recession weakened workers' confidence. Fraser's election managed to breathe some life back into the union movement.

The government had, in early 1976, announced that it would ask the Arbitration Commission, which set workers' wages, to halve the annual



**Above: Bob Hawke, who as head of the ACTU helped undermine the push for an industrial campaign to save Medibank**

wage increase.

This started the year off with a wave of strikes, including by tug-boat drivers, immobilising 110 ships and costing \$1 million a day, and 2500 transport workers at the airport.

### Striking for healthcare

In response to the attack on Medibank, pressure began to build on the ACTU to call large scale action. Left-wing unions in Victoria declared that “rank-and-file support was greater than in the 1969 battle for the repeal of the penal provisions”.

But senior union officials and then ACTU leader Bob Hawke did everything they could to derail the campaign. Whitlam had funded Medibank from general revenue, without any specific tax increase to pay for it. Fraser wanted to increase income tax to maintain his slimmed down version through a specific levy. The ACTU offered him an unjustified compromise by announcing that a new levy was acceptable—as long as the scheme itself was not changed.

Workers on the South Coast of NSW led the first major demonstration to defend Medibank on 7 June, with a mass strike of local unionists that gathered 40,000 people to rally through Wollongong. But their attempts to win NSW-wide action through the Labor Council in Sydney were frustrated.

In historically militant Victoria union leaders at Trades Hall proposed just a single four hour strike to a delegates meeting on 9 June. This was proposed jointly by union officials Ken Stone, representing the ring-wing unions, and John Halfpenny repre-

sending the left-wing unions.

But rank-and-file workers at the meeting rejected this token stoppage and passed a motion demanding a 24-hour strike instead. The officials at Trades Hall ignored this and proceeded to organise only a four hour strike.

This decision outraged union members. Belatedly the left-wing union officials backed the push for a 24-hour strike to avoid being out-flanked by the anger.

A meeting attended by 6000 unionists on the day of the four hour strike on 16 June passed another resolution for a 24-hour strike. This time left-wing official John Halfpenny spoke in favour of the motion.

As more union leaders realised that they could not sit by in the face of the mood for a fight, the number of unions backing a 24-hour national strike grew.

But Bob Hawke and the ACTU worked to undermine and deflate the momentum for action. Hawke managed to delay the date of the national stoppage until a special unions conference in July, meaning Victorian unions went ahead with their 24-strike on their own. Nevertheless it succeeded in shutting down trains and trams, closing factories and restricting services like electricity and telecommunications.

But even in Victoria, it was clear the union officials were less than enthusiastic about the strikes. Trades Hall failed to call a rally to bring union members together on the strike day. Some union members showed up in Melbourne city centre confused by the lack of activity.

It was left to far left groups includ-

ing the Maoists and the International Socialists to organise a demonstration, albeit one much smaller than it should have been.

A national strike was eventually held on 12 July. But the delay allowed some unions to go back on earlier announcements that they would call members out to join it.

On top of this, the strike was called on a Monday, meaning some unionists just took a long weekend. The refusal to call demonstrations on the day was repeated, except in Newcastle, Wollongong and the ACT.

To top it all off, without any images of mass demonstrations to play in the media, Bob Hawke allowed himself to be filmed playing tennis, driving home the message that the unions weren't serious about a strike campaign to defend Medibank.

While the strike campaign petered out, there was a continued push to maintain activity around Medibank. The union action helped give students the confidence to hold demonstrations against education cuts that were some of the biggest since the Vietnam War.

The pressure for an industrial campaign to save Medibank was also a clear indication to Hawke of the popularity of the scheme. Without this knowledge, he may not have reinstated it under the banner of Medicare in 1984.

The 1976 strike showed that we can't rely on the union leaderships to call the industrial action needed to fight the Liberals.

It was only rank-and-file pressure that pushed union leaders into calling the Medibank strikes. Even left-wing officials like Halfpenny initially opposed action.

The reluctance of Hawke and others in the union bureaucracy to fight for Medibank demonstrates the ingrained conservatism of the union officials.

But the unions' potential power to lead an industrial fight against the conservative agenda persists. It was clear at the Unions NSW delegates meeting in June and the nationwide Bust the Budget rallies that there is popular support for industrial action amongst rank-and-file unionists.

But it will take much stronger rank-and-file pressure to push the unions to take action.

The co-payment is a direct attack on one of the pillars of Medicare. The unions have the opportunity to capitalise on the hatred for the government and make this fight theirs.

# ISRAELI ACADEMIC: ‘A REGIME BASED ON BRUTAL MILITARY OCCUPATION’

Israeli academic **Marcelo Svirsky**, now at Wollongong Uni, explains his opposition to Zionism and why he supports BDS, in a speech from Solidarity’s Keep Left conference

“I WAS born to a Jewish family and lived in Israel most of my adult life. While living in Israel, one needs to lack a heart not to realise that the privileges of Jewish-Israelis stem from the continuing dispossession of the Palestinian people, not to realise that the political and economic superiority of Jewish-Israelis was established on the basis of the ethnic cleansing of Palestine in 1948.



One really must be self-absorbed not to comprehend that the privileges of Jewish-Israelis are the flip side of the racial discrimination of the Palestinian citizens as much as they are profit of the military occupation of the West Bank and Gaza.

This is an unearned and tainted privilege, and this Jewish privilege has a name—it is called “the only democracy in the Middle East”.

In the “only democracy” Jews have rights and Palestinians have struggles for rights. In the “only democracy” the right of Palestinian citizens to choose a place of residence is restricted by law; their right to marriage and form a family with Palestinians non-citizens is limited by law; their right to equal social welfare and budget allocation does not exist; their right to commemorate the Nakba is forbidden; their school principals are appointed by the Israeli security services; their language is studied by Israelis as the language of the enemy and only to fill the ranks of the intelligence units in the army—and this is only a partial list.

The “only democracy” is the only democracy that for half a century imposes a military occupation on four million people depriving them of all basic rights and self-determination; it is the same “only democracy” that since 2007 sieges and blockades the Gaza Strip to prevent a Palestinian national reunification that might lead to political negotiations. How a regime based on such brutal forms of military occupation be defined as a democracy, we leave to the Western media to explain.

But the “only democracy” could not have become “the only democ-

racy” without compelling its youth to military indoctrination and without a culture of Abrahamic sacrifice in which parents celebrate the conscription of their children. In this “only democracy” young people refusing to become “soldiers for life”, sit in jail. And while they sit in jail, their peers train themselves in crimes against humanity.

This is the same regime where the police help fascist thugs beating up leftists demonstrators opposing war and racism; and it is in this very “only democracy” where people gather on hillsides close to Gaza to watch and cheer as the Israeli army drops bombs on civilians and slaughters entire families; with every impact and explosion, handclapping.

This is the cultural infrastructure of the “only democracy”, the cultural infrastructure of the Jewish state, the system of life of a people unwilling to transform or compromise.

Take this massive and despicable commitment to racism, war, segregation and Jewish privilege, add to it the full support of the hegemonic Western powers Israel relies on, and then one can understand why the Israeli leadership never had a real incentive to change the status quo.

As a strategy of change, there are, I believe, two interrelated levels we must work on. At one level, solutions must be sought in the long term, and on another level—it is imperative to reach solutions in the short term.

In the long term, I am a strong believer in the necessity for cultural transformation.

For more than 20 years I joined Israelis of conscience and together with Palestinians I was engaged in different struggles for justice. We never accepted the ethnic and racial assumptions and policies of the “only democracy”.

But many of you are probably aware that reasoning with Zionists is far from being an easy mission. Experience demonstrates that Zionists use the practice of dialogue to impose a false symmetry that erases the simple fact that there are oppressors

and oppressed; occupiers and occupied. And nevertheless, there is no other solution to this problem but the wholesale transformation of the infrastructure of society; this is the work of a generation.

In the short term however, we face a political and humanitarian urgency to end the military occupation of the West Bank, to end the siege of Gaza, to dismantle the separation Wall, and to put to an end the never-ending murderous military campaigns launched by Israel to avoid political solutions.

Since 1948 hundreds of United Nations resolutions have condemned Israel’s discriminatory policies as illegal; notwithstanding, Israel continues violating international law and human rights, expanding its colonies in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, displacing Palestinian families, and persisting in apartheid and oppressive actions, policies and legislation.

Israel has violated 28 resolutions of the UN Security Council and more than 100 resolutions of the General Assembly including resolution 194 which demands Israel to respect the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes following the ethnic cleansing of 1948. It is beyond clear that all forms of international intervention and peace-making to change Israel’s policies have failed. It is this reality that must be changed without delay.

## BDS

As the Palestinian sociologist Lisa Taraki explains, when diplomacy, persuasion and dialogue fail—it is the time to adopt pressure as a tactic to advance change.

BDS stands for Boycott, Divestments and Sanctions—and it is a political call made by the Palestinian civil society in 2005.

BDS calls to reject relations, through boycott, divestment and sanctions, with Israeli and other international institutions and companies that are involved in the perpetuation of apartheid and discriminatory policies including the military occupation of



**Above: Israelis gathered on hill-tops during the Gaza attack to cheer the bombing of Palestinian civilians**

the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip.

These measures target principally institutions and companies operating in or involved with the occupation of the West Bank, east Jerusalem and the siege on Gaza.

Also, the academic and cultural boycott launched in 2004 targets the state of Israel as a whole.

The academic and cultural boycott calls to refrain from participation in any form of academic and cultural cooperation, or joint projects with Israeli institutions, including cultural work in Israel; it advocates a comprehensive boycott of Israeli institutions at the national and international levels, including suspension of all forms of funding to these institutions; and it promotes divestment from Israel by international academic institutions.

The basic idea of the boycott is indeed very simple: one cannot maintain normal political, economic, academic and cultural relations of exchange with a belligerent regime that has an apartheid heart, a settler colonial body, and it refuses to change.

Boycotting Israel is not a principle but an urgently needed non-violent form of pressure on the Israeli leadership and on the Israeli society that can bring about compliance with international law and the requirements for a just peace.

The aim of the boycott is to en-

able new conditions of negotiation in which Israel realises that much is at stake.

I understand that for many people, particularly those in the Jewish communities in the diaspora, endorsing the boycott is for them far beyond their possible criticism of Israel.

#### **Why not to boycott?**

For some, boycotting the nation who survived the holocaust seems unthinkable and perhaps a contradiction. My answer is that you are drawing the same terrible conclusions of the holocaust that Israel wants us to adopt. One does not respect the Jewish victims of the holocaust by legitimising the oppression of Palestinians by Israel. This is the contradiction.

Others refuse to endorse the boycott because they claim that boycotting means undermining the very possibility of dialogue with Israelis which is necessary to peace. Boycotts are destructive and divisive, they claim.

But the reality is that we don't need boycotts to have a divisive state of affairs; it is the Israeli apartheid and occupation that makes the region into a world of divisions and segregations.

What is more, one must be aware that for Israel dialogue means one thing and one thing only: that the world must accept Israel as a Jewish state, a state

that privileges Jews at the expenses of the Palestinians. For Israel dialogue is not a platform to reach justice but one to perpetuate its current regime.

Others still are reluctant to endorse the boycott because they fear of harming the economic life of Israelis and indirectly, of the Palestinians.

In other words, according to this claim we should legitimise the current economic system of oppression that profits from the discrimination of the Palestinian citizens, from the occupation of the West Bank, and from the Palestinian lands and property that are being expropriated by Israel since 1948. Nothing can be more incoherent.

Do please tell us that a just process of political negotiations is underway; tell us that Israelis are willing to experiment with compromise and give up on their privileges for the sake of a shared and egalitarian future. Prove that these are real processes and I will tell you, "let us wait with the boycott." But given that nothing has helped to change the status quo—diplomacy, persuasion or dialogue—not endorsing the boycott is legitimising the continuing oppression of Palestinians by Israel.

More than everything else, it is the silence of people of good will that must stop. We do have a choice, and the right choice is now pressing on Israel by means of boycotts."

# DECIPHERING MARX'S CAPITAL

Alex Callinicos's new book *Deciphering Capital* argues that Karl Marx's main work is still vital to understand how to change the world, writes **Mark L Thomas**

THERE HAS been a real renewal of interest in Karl Marx's masterpiece *Capital* in recent years.

The huge success of Marxist writer David Harvey's online lectures on *Capital* is one of the most visible signs. Alex Callinicos's new book is a powerful addition to this process.

"The main reason is because of the radicalisation and resistance to neo-liberalism that we've seen since the 1990s," explains Alex. "But over time there's been a greater and greater focus on the Marxist critique of political economy, and that's involved going back to *Capital*."

It isn't entirely surprising that Marx's revolutionary study of capitalism should gain in popularity as the capitalists' own explanations fail to explain the recent crisis.

Even before the crisis began in 2007 many people had begun to question whether capitalism was the best way to organise society.

Marx did not write *Capital* as an academic exercise. He developed his method of understanding the capitalist mode of production as part of a process of overthrowing it.

Alex writes of current debates about changes in the structure of the working class, "The fact that they seep into the interpretation of *Capital* is yet another indication of how much this is still a living work."

*Deciphering Capital* is a work Alex has in some ways been working on "all my adult life". It shows how Marx laboured to understand capitalism to arm revolutionaries for the fight against it.

"The trick in reading *Capital* is to track Marx's formulation and reformulation, his orderings and reorderings of categories, while not losing sight of the big picture that Harvey commands with such panache," Alex argues.

In doing this he draws on insights from recent debates about *Capital*, but also challenges some of their limitations and confusions.

Our knowledge of *Capital* has been boosted by the recent publication of more of Marx's extensive draft manuscripts. Marx liked to "think with his pen" as Alex puts it and our increasing knowledge of his "laboratory" offers new insights into his

method.

Marx witnessed the outbreak of probably the world's first global economic crisis in 1857. This led him to begin the economic studies that would lead to *Capital*.

Marx had a unique vantage point when he sat down to write in the British Library. London was the centre of the British Empire. It was the commercial and financial hub of the first industrial nation.

From here Marx sought to understand all the contradictions of this explosive new form of production and society.

Alex's book is not an introduction to Marx's book. Its focus is on the development of Marx's method as he developed and reworked concepts that enabled the nature of capitalism to be fully grasped.

## Surface

This was important because unlike in earlier systems of exploitation under capitalism how things appear on the surface is not how they really are.

The heart of capitalism is workers engaging in an apparently free voluntary exchange with capitalists. Exploitation is not obvious as it is, for example, with slavery.

In financial markets money appears to possess the power to simply make more money without relating to workers' labour.

The roots of complex financial instruments such as credit derivatives in the exploitation of workers are well hidden—until an economic crisis takes place.

Marx's aim is to understand both the hidden inner nature of capitalist relations of production and to explain why they appear to be very different.

Central to Alex's argument is that Marx understood capital as a web of social relationships. These interactions need to be explored if we are to make sense of the system.

As Marx put it, "Does a worker in a cotton factory produce merely cotton textiles? No, he produces capital."

Two central relationships are at the heart of capital. The first is between capitalists and workers. Capitalists who control the means of production are able to exploit wage

## Central to Alex's argument is that Marx understood capital as a web of social relationships

labourers who lack any means to survive except their capacity to work for those capitalists.

Second is the relationship between capitals themselves. This is based on competition. Rival capitals have to successfully compete or face takeover or bankruptcy.

This means that capitalists are compelled on pain of extinction to relentlessly exploit workers.

The great classical political economists Adam Smith and David Ricardo had grasped central elements of this new system. Marx drew on their insights but also sought to overcome their limitations.

Ricardo, more clearly than even Smith, laid out the labour theory of value. This is the idea that the value of any commodity is based on the amount of labour that went into producing it.

It is a vital insight that points to the exploitative nature of capital. But Ricardo was unable to explain how this theory connected with aspects of capitalism that seemed to contradict it.

This failure has allowed other economists who wanted to say capitalism was not based on exploitation to abandon Ricardo's ideas as incoherent.

Alex shows how Marx, through successive drafts of *Capital* grappled to overcome the flaws in Ricardo's ideas.

To do so he drew on the work of the great German idealist philosopher Georg Hegel. He had to rework Hegel's concepts to develop a materialist method for understanding capitalism.

Alex assumes a familiarity with these thinkers' ideas, which can make some arguments hard to follow for people who do not know them.

But this is a complex issue that has confounded mainstream economists as long as capitalism has existed.

The reward of being able to understand key features of contemporary capitalism far better than the supposed experts repays the effort. This is particularly true in two areas that Alex explores in the later chapters of the book.

He notes that many recent thinkers, including David Harvey, have tended to downplay the centrality of

wage labour to the system.

### Exploitation

But Alex argues that one of Marx's main points was that exploitation of wage labourers was key to capitalism.

He writes, "Marx was surrounded by radical thinkers who treated exploitation as a consequence of capitalists' illegitimate manipulation of the laws of the market.

"His presentation of the capital relation is intended to show that exploitation is a 'normal' feature of a system of generalised commodity production where labour power has been transformed into a commodity."

It is true that capital does tend to replace workers with machinery, so creating a reserve army of underemployed and unemployed workers.

But capital also continues to create new industries, sometimes in new locations that draw on workers displaced from older industries.

Capitalism also creates new pools of workers, for example women who were previously outside the labour market or peasants who are driven off the land.

Indeed a central feature of the last 30 years has been the massive expansion of wage labour in the rising industrial capitalisms of East Asia.

Capitalism still depends on wage labour, more so than ever.

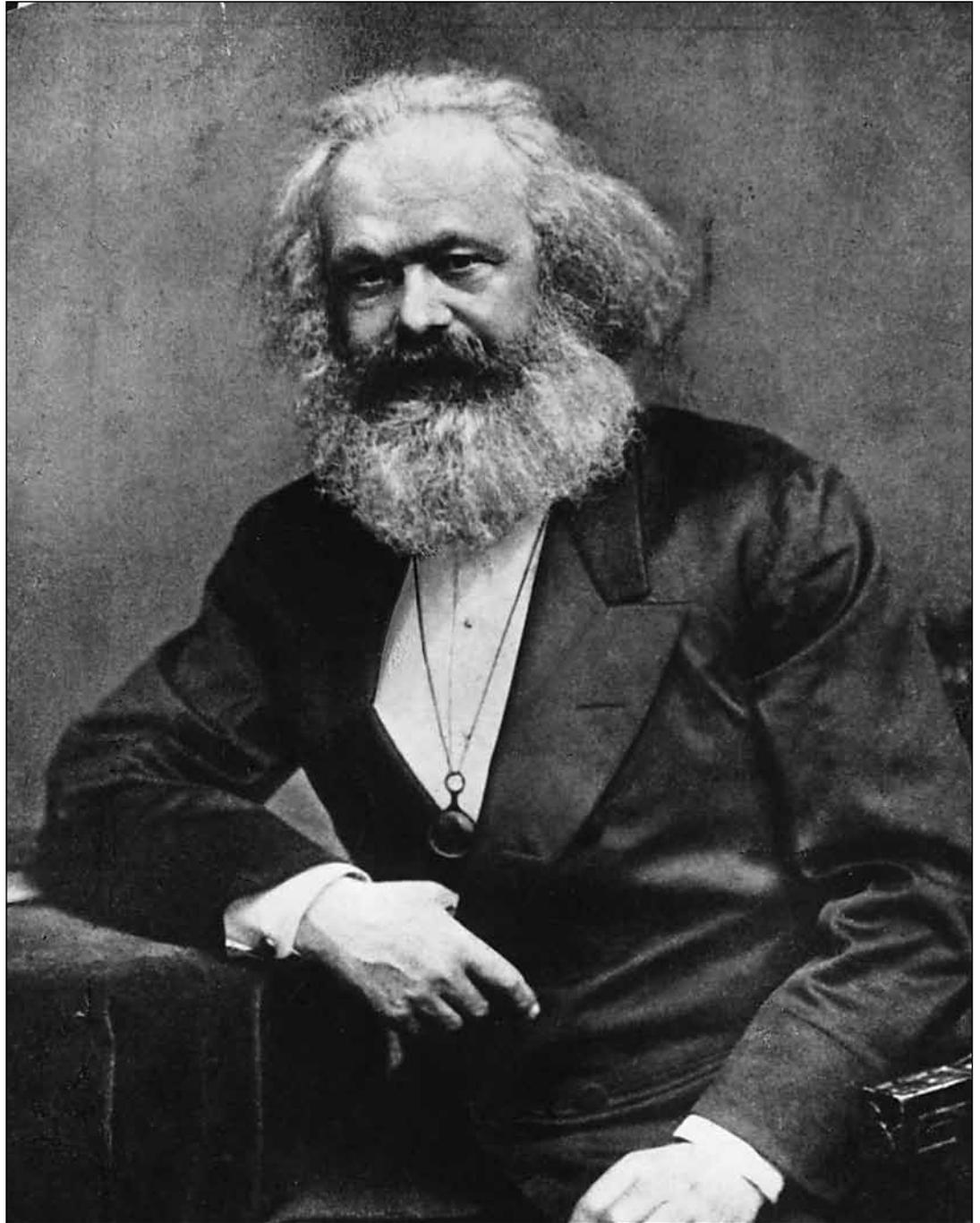
As Alex puts it, this continues to give workers "the collective capacity to disrupt, paralyse, and take control of the production process."

Alex also takes another look at Marx's theory of economic crises. He argues that Marx developed a sophisticated and multi-layered theory of how and why capitalism goes into periodic crises.

In an extensive chapter on crises he argues that, "Their significance lay in part in how they concentrated and summarised all the contradictions of the capitalist mode of production, and in part because they announced that 'the survival of the bourgeois world' could not be taken for granted."

At its centre was an understanding of the interaction between the tendency for the rate of profit under capitalism to fall and the role of financial markets.

"But what you see developing, from the original version of that idea in the *Grundrisse* to the draft of Volume Three of *Capital*," Alex explains "is the notion of the falling rate of profit becoming more complex. This is because Marx lends more and more weight to what he calls the counteracting tendencies."



**Above: There has been a revival of interest in examining Marx's *Capital* and what it can teach us about the world today**

"In other words, there are forces built into capitalism as an economic system that both bring down the rate of profit but also help to bring it back up again."

Marx identified the boom, bubble and bust cycle of the financial markets as playing a key role in both expansion and destruction of capital.

This underlines a key point that Alex makes about Marx's *Capital*. Far from being outdated, it retains an astonishing freshness in its understanding about capitalism.

In many ways the world we live in today is even more like the picture of capitalism that Marx drew in *Capital* than it was a generation or two ago.

A key feature of neo-liberal capitalism since the late 1970s has been the lifting of tight state controls over financial markets.

The vast growth of global trade, production networks and finance and the regular convulsions of economic crises would have been familiar to Marx. Marx's method remains critical to all those who want to carry on the struggle against capitalism in the 21st century.

**Socialist Worker UK**

**Deciphering Capital: Marx's Capital and its destiny**  
**By Alex Callinicos**  
**Bookmarks**

## Ausreo workers win pay rise after ten week lockout



Above: Ausreo workers on the picketline

AFTER A ten week lockout, striking workers at Ausreo’s Wetherill Park factory in western Sydney have won a victory against management. Ausreo supplies concrete reinforcement materials to the building and construction industry.

When the Ausreo workers’ enterprise agreement ran out in February, the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union demanded management raise the wage from \$25 to \$28 an hour. This would mean paying machine operators in Sydney the same wage as Ausreo workers in other states doing the same job. Workers in Victoria have better pay, conditions and a better redundancy agreement.

But management claimed this was “not sustainable” for the Sydney factory, offering instead a 3 per cent pay rise over three years. This would not even account for inflation. They also offered a potential 3 per cent “Christmas bonus”, but it was to be paid at management discretion and without changing the current base rates.

In June management locked 30 striking workers out of the factory and refused to negotiate a new deal. The workers maintained a daily vigil outside the site.

AMWU delegate Dennis Ngo said workers were able to maintain their presence because they had support from union members on other sites and from the local community. Thousands of unionists lent moral and financial support to the locked out workers.

The ACTU’s Ged Kearney joined them on the picketline in July. In August Unions NSW secretary Mark Lennon and NSW Labor Senator Doug Cameron addressed a 200 strong solidarity rally. Around 50 United Voice members also joined the rally.

AMWU organiser Ghazi Noshie said: “There’s a lack of respect from management for the workforce and I sense this company had always wanted to lock them out and try to destroy the union on site.”

But in September the Ausreo workers went back to their jobs with a new agreement and an above inflation pay rise.

The Ausreo workers showed that by sticking together they could beat management’s bullying. We will need an industrial campaign like this on a much wider scale against Abbott’s budget and incoming job cuts, where unions are prepared to stop work and extend solidarity across different sectors.

Clare Fester

## NTEU at UNSW gears up for strike action

By Erima Dall

NATIONAL TERTIARY Education Union (NTEU) members at UNSW have voted to stage a four hour strike on 20 October if management does not commit to a fair workplace agreement.

The strike is planned to coincide with a meeting of the University Senate.

Their Protected Action Ballot, returned on 5 September, saw members overwhelmingly support all forms of industrial action, including rolling strikes.

The union is fighting for a range of improved conditions, including a better pay offer, better bullying protection, stronger job security for fixed term, casual and contract research staff, and better regulated workloads.

They are also pushing to reduce the service time—down from the current stretch of five years—that is required before staff have access to 36 weeks paid parental leave.

Key to the dispute is the NTEU’s determination not to let management divide and rule, by leaving professional staff (general staff) behind.

Many months of bargaining forced management to put forward some offers to improve academic staff conditions for contract research staff, parental leave, performance management and rights to request flexible work. But the NTEU made

clear that they are “of course, calling for these improved rights and protections to flow on to Professional staff”.

The divide and conquer strategy of management was made explicit when the union finally lodged its intention with the Fair Work Commission to carry out a Protected Ballot Action, and UNSW management opposed the application on the basis that the NTEU called for a single academic-professional staff ballot.

Thankfully, management had its application thrown out, and the ballot went ahead.

The NTEU have put in their log of claims that they want a single academic-professional staff agreement. This is welcome news, and all the more important after the difficulties for the NTEU in negotiating two separate agreements at UTS (see Solidarity #70).

The importance of united action is all the more obvious while the Abbott-Liberal government seeks to push through its vicious higher-education reforms, which will undoubtedly lead to more attacks on staff jobs and conditions as competition in the university sector intensifies.

If staff at UNSW win a single academic-professional agreement with improved conditions for all, that can lead the way for the NTEU to push for united agreements around the country.

# Exposing the phoney 'deaths at sea' argument

**The drownings argument**  
**Edited by Robin Rothfield**  
**Palmer Higgs, \$15**

THERE IS a strong sense of déjà vu for refugee rights activists. Many of the battles waged against the Howard government, like opposing long-term detention and Temporary Protection Visas, are again urgent priorities.

So too is the strategic importance of breaking bipartisan support for offshore processing, which this time is underpinned by a phoney humanitarian argument that “preventing deaths at sea” justifies deterrence, no matter how brutal the consequences.

Compared to last time, dissenting Federal Labor MPs (Melissa Parke, Anna Burke, and Sue Lines) have quickly found their voices—although the first attempt to commit the Labor parliamentary caucus to scrap offshore processing failed. ALP state conferences in WA, Victoria and Queensland have already passed motions opposing offshore processing (in NSW, the Right diluted the resolution).

In many ways, however, the movement’s task this time is more difficult. Labor as a whole is deeply implicated. In 2012 it was the ALP Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, who enthusiastically reopened the Pacific Solution hellholes (with support from left MPs). And it was Kevin Rudd, not Morrison, who first insisted that no asylum seeker arriving by boat would be resettled in Australia.

This legacy underscores the pathetic responses from Bill Shorten and Shadow Immigration spokesperson Richard Marles to the horror of Manus Island and Nauru;



and the deaths of Reza Barati and Hamid Khazayi in particular. Their criticisms have focussed on centre mismanagement and government secrecy—with the implication that Labor does deterrence so much more nicely.

When Morrison visited PNG after Reza’s murder, Marles challenged him not to allow Australia to go back on the table as a resettlement option for refugees. In May, Marles told the National Press Club, that Labor would, “...keep offshore processing...because it is the single most effective deterrent in seeing people not risk their lives at sea”.

It’s therefore welcome that Labor for Refugees has published *The Drownings’ Argument—Australia’s Inhumanity: Offshore processing of Asylum Seekers*—a collation of articles by refugee advocates as well as Labor MPs Melissa Parke and Anna Burke.

The pamphlet’s introduction states, “We see the current debate being derailed by the cruel and duplicitous ‘drownings’ argument falsely dressed up as a humanitarian

**Above: Boat journeys are the only way for many asylum seekers to get to Australia**

response.”

Julian Burnside rightly points out that, “It opens the way to mistreat asylum seekers who have not drowned, and helps them pursue the darker purpose of keeping refugees out”. He usefully outlines how deterrence has gone through three phases since 2001: the “illegals” argument under Howard; Rudd’s demonisation of people smugglers from 2009; and the “stopping deaths at sea” argument since the Christmas Island crash tragedy in December 2010.

## Bringing them safely

Many contributions call for a higher refugee intake, well in excess of the 20,000 per year that Labor brought in (now cut back to 13,750).

Ben Saul argues for Australia to substantially increase support for the UNHCR in Indonesia and Malaysia, so that resettle-

ment could be guaranteed within a short time frame. It’s a point reinforced by Misha Coleman from the Australian Churches Refugee Taskforce when she condemns the huge cost of Operation Sovereign Borders, including the incredible statistic that, “In 2013–14 Australia will spend almost two-thirds as much locking up in detention a few thousand people seeking asylum, as the entire UNHCR spend in the last financial year assisting tens of millions of refugees and asylum seekers worldwide”.

Yet some of the articles make unnecessary concessions. Presumably this is in the hope of finding more “reasonable” alternatives that might be palatable to “middle Australia”. For example, Julian Burnside again puts forward his idea that after a month in detention, asylum seekers would be required to live (and work for low wages) in rural country towns.

Marg Hutton and Tony Kevin meticulously expose how a large number of drownings could have been prevented by a more swift response to boats

in distress. However, in Marg’s otherwise excellent piece, she unnecessarily suggests that Manus be used to detain people smugglers—despite knowing full well that convicted “smugglers” are overwhelmingly Indonesian fishermen, that smugglers service an urgent need, and that many (such as Ali Jenabi) have had strong altruistic motivations.

And in an article condemning Reza’s murder, Tony concludes that mainland detention centres are a lesser evil: “Whatever bad things have happened at Curtin, Woomera, Baxter, Maribynong and Villawood detention centres, these places were or are subject to Australian law and public accountability safeguards.”

*The Drownings Argument* provides plenty of ammunition to combat the “deaths at sea” argument.

However, the refugee rights movement needs to remain completely opposed to both offshore processing and mainland detention—the whole system of deterrence and border protection must be dismantled.

**By Mark Goudkamp**

# TWO DEATHS TOO MANY CLOSE MANUS ISLAND

By Ian Rintoul

THE DEATH of 24 year-old Iranian asylum seeker, Hamid Kehazaei in Brisbane on 5 September has again brought home the horror of offshore processing.

Hamid's life support system was turned off after he was declared brain dead after being brought from Manus Island suffering from septicaemia—blood poisoning—as a result of an infection spreading from an injured foot. He had been on Manus Island one day short of a year.

True to form, Morrison dismissed Hamid's death saying that 1200 people die from septicaemia in Australia each year, and, "This is just a very sad event." But virtually no 24 year-olds die of septicaemia in Australia. The 1200 deaths Morrison refers to are almost all people over 65, getting antibiotic resistant infections in hospitals.

Morrison went on to say, "When someone becomes ill they receive outstanding care from the people who work as part of our mainland detention network." But the truth is very different. There are between 25 and 30 people receiving medical attention in Port Moresby or Australia because the medical facilities on Manus are inadequate.

Information from Manus Island says that on the day Hamid was taken to the clinic in the detention centre he had been turned away that morning at the front gate of Foxtrot when he tried to get medical attention. He was told to "fill in a medical request". But as *Solidarity* was told from Manus Island, "Most of the time...even if you are looking sick it takes three days to see IHMS after filling in the form."

Hamid is a victim of the deliberate negligence that is a systemic part of the detention regime. In the first month of being on Manus, Hamid developed severe skin rashes that were never properly treated. Two months before he died, an IHMS doctor told him it was a reaction to the weather!

But there is an epidemic of skin diseases on Manus Island. The heat, the water shortages, the lack of soap powder, the lack of shoes, the fact that some asylum seekers have to walk



Above: A vigil for Hamid Kehazaei in Sydney

through raw sewage when it rains or there are high tides—all of this makes Manus, an unhygienic, unhealthy, unsafe hell-hole.

There are more than 1000 potential Hamids still imprisoned on Manus. Nothing has changed since the death of Reza Barati—except there is now a four metre high fence surrounding the detention centre. Inside the heightened misery continues with revelations of the use of an isolation unit named "Chauka" for detainees regarded as troublemakers, and numerous self harm and attempted suicide incidents.

Hundreds of people attended vigils and protests around Australia in sympathy with Hamid and to call for Manus and Nauru to be closed.

## Labor's support

But Hamid's death has also revealed the bankruptcy of Labor's support for offshore processing. In the wake of Hamid's death, the best that the Opposition Immigration spokesperson, Richard Marles, could do was express Labor's "strong concerns for the lack of transparency" regarding the treatment of asylum seekers.

Marles said, "Every single Australian-funded facility must be run in a manner that is safe, humane, dignified

and allows for proper oversight." That rules out Manus Island – and every other detention centre.

Marles told the National Press Club in June that, "We support offshore processing at Nauru and Manus Island as a step which has saved lives." But not the lives of Reza Barati or Hamid Kehazaei.

There is no justification for Manus Island—offshore processing has taken lives not saved them (see p27).

Hamid's death drew renewed international attention to offshore processing and Australia's abuse of asylum seekers. In the aftermath of Hamid's death, the new UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, said Australia's policy of offshore processing and its interception and turning back of vessels "is leading to a chain of human rights violations".

Meanwhile, the horror of Hamid's death led thousands more people to sign the joint RAC/GetUp petition to close Manus Island. At one point signatures were being added at 1000 an hour. The petition ([bit.ly/1uVnkgd](http://bit.ly/1uVnkgd)) now has 92,000 signatures and continues to grow.

Both Sydney and Melbourne are holding "Stand Up for Refugees" rallies on 11 October that will call for the end of offshore processing.

The heat, the lack of shoes, the fact that some asylum seekers have to walk through raw sewage when it rains—all of this makes Manus unhygienic