

Solidarity

Issue No. 76 / March 2015

\$3/\$5

SEXIST RACIST ANTI-UNION

LET'S FINISH

ABBOTT

OFF



WOMEN'S LIBERATION

Eleanor Marx and working women

GREECE

Challenges for Syriza as EU tightens the screws

ABORIGINAL RIGHTS

WA community closures: "They want to destroy us"



SOLIDARITY. NET.AU

Full content from the magazine / Online-only updates / Up to date details of demonstrations and meetings



FACEBOOK

Search for "Solidarity Magazine" or go to facebook.com/solidaritymagazineaustralia



TWITTER

@soli_au
twitter.com/soli_au



EMAIL

solidarity@solidarity.net.au

Solidarity No.75
February 2015
ISSN 1835-6834
Responsibility for election comment is taken by James Supple, 410 Elizabeth St, Surry Hills NSW 2010.
Printed by El Faro, Newtown NSW.

SOLIDARITY: WHO ARE WE?

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

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

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

SOLIDARITY MEETINGS AND BRANCHES

Sydney

Sydney Solidarity meets 6.30pm every Thursday at Brown St Hall, Brown St, Newtown
For more information contact: Erima on 0432 221 516
sydney@solidarity.net.au

Melbourne

Melbourne Solidarity meets 6pm every Wednesday New International Bookshop, Trades Hall, 54 Victoria St Carlton
For more information contact: Feiyi on 0416 121 616
melbourne@solidarity.net.au

Perth

For more information contact: Phil on 0423 696 312

Brisbane

For more information contact: Mark on 0439 561 196 or brisbane@solidarity.net.au

Canberra

For more information contact: Geraldine on 0458 039 596 or canberra@solidarity.net.au

Magazine office

Phone 02 9211 2600
Fax 02 9211 6155
solidarity@solidarity.net.au

SUBSCRIBE

Solidarity is published monthly. Make sure you don't miss an issue—send in this form along with cheque or money order or pay by credit card online at www.solidarity.net.au/subscribe and we will mail you *Solidarity* each month.



- 5 issues—\$15
- One year (12 issues)—\$36
- Two years (24 issues)—\$65
- I would like __ copies to sell

Name

Address

Phone

E-mail

Cheques/MOs payable to Solidarity Publishing. Send to PO Box 375 Strawberry Hills NSW 2012 or phone 02 9211 2600 for credit card orders.

Things they say

The right-wing government is in danger. Arabs are advancing on the ballot boxes in droves

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu knows foul racism is the key to rallying the right-wing to your side in Israel

Even Netanyahu knows that if the Arabs are going to the polls in droves, only a strong Lieberman can stop them

Avigdor Lieberman, leader of Yisrael Beiteinu party, joined the showdown

He took the opportunity to peel another onion, tell me how much it looked like the one in Tasmania the other day, and then took a few bites out of this one today

Chief executive of Onions Australia Lechelle Earl encouraging Tony Abbott's second public consumption of a raw onion

The truth is this is a cheapjack scare campaign designed to win back safe Labor seats.

Former ALP leader Mark Latham thinks NSW Labor's opposition to privatisation goes against Labor values

I want a commander-in-chief who will do anything in their power to ensure that the threat of radical Islamic terrorists do not wash up on American soil. If I can take on 100,000 protestors, I can do the same across the world.

Republican President Candidate Scott Walker compares ISIS to 10,000 labour protestors who occupied Wisconsin's Congress in 2011

I'm a fixer. So I fixed it. I found \$150 million

Chris Pyne can apparently "find" millions but couldn't fix his deregulation mess

In whatever role I've been in...I'm there to try and fix a problem.

Apparently Scott Morrison thinks he is a fixer too

CONTENTS

ISSUE 76 MARCH 2015

Finishing Abbott off

6 March 4 rally shows appetite to fight cuts

6 Co-payment victory, but Medicare war still on

7 Leadership change won't fix Coalition's woes

12 After deregulation - what's wrong with HECS?

13 Abbott ramps up desperate radicalisation scare



Features



14 Challenges for Syriza in Greece as EU tightens the screws

16 Australian economy: shock as mining boom evaporates

18 British shop stewards and the fight against WW1

20 Eleanor Marx: a fighter for workers and women

4 Inside the system

Aboriginal rights

10 Aboriginal community closures: "this is about destroying our culture"
11 Redfern Tent Embassy standing strong against developers

Reports

8 Sell off haunts NSW Libs this election

8 Shonky private education providers exposes privatisation

9 Court case challenges Manus

9 Exposing torture in detention

24 Nauru refugees protest and boycott

Reviews

22 The Extreme Centre

23 Selma

INSIDE THE \$YSTEM

Australia's mega rich the happiest

ULTRA HIGH Net Worth Individuals (UHNWI for short) in Australia are amongst the happiest in the world according to a new report by the global property consultancy Knight Frank. To qualify as you must be worth over US \$30 million excluding your principle home.

Sydney tops the list of Australia's cities for the ultra-wealthy with 765 people making the cut. According to the report only 4 per cent of Australia's mega rich group are considering moving overseas, compared to around 33 per cent of their counterparts in Russia.

Chevron maroons workers on island during cyclone



AROUND 1600 workers were stranded on Barrow Island off WA's Pilbara coast as category three cyclone Olwyn hit in March, according to the CFMEU. The Island is home the energy giant Chevron's multibillion dollar Gorgon gas project.

Evacuation plans were botched or non-existent and the workers were forced to bunker down in common areas. One worker said that under their contracts workers could choose to leave during a cyclone, but they were told this wasn't possible due to "birds on the airstrip".

He explained, "They just didn't want the expense of flying hundreds of men out of here and back again." The same worker reported that his mate narrowly escaped being cut to pieces by a speed limit sign swept up by wind gusts that eventually reached 195 kmh.

Another Barrow Island worker employed by John Holland Construction Group was crushed by a Franna crane and had both his legs broken, with the possibility of amputation. Unions say the injury may have been a result of high winds due to the approaching cyclone. The International Transport Workers Federation has called for an investigation into Chevron's evacuation procedures. The company posted 2014 earnings of \$19.2 billion.

Research and writing by Adam Adelpour

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

Crisis in US drone killings program as pilots quit

THE US drone wars being waged across the globe are facing trouble as drone pilots quit in record numbers. A recent internal Air Force memo revealed that pilot, "outflow increases will damage the readiness and combat capability...for years to come". Total current surveillance and combat drone patrols would ideally require 1700 trained pilots. Instead the US is working with a pool that recently dropped below 1000.

It's obvious why, when the program has recorded thousands of civilian casualties. An analysis of publicly available information late last year by Reprieve found attempts to kill 41 targets had resulted in the deaths of 1147 people.

Brandon Bryant, a former drone operator, reported feeling deeply disturbed and ashamed about his role in the killings carried out by Predator and Reaper drones. He said, "I felt like I was haunted by a legion of the dead. My physical health was gone, my mental health crumbled." Drone operators are well aware of the fact that attacks often brutally kill civilians. Former drone pilot Heather Linebaugh says the politicians who boast about the success of the program should ask themselves, "How many women and children have you seen incinerated by a Hellfire missile? How many men have you seen crawl across a field, trying to make it to the nearest compound for help while bleeding out from severed legs?"

Israeli Foreign Minister says decapitate Palestinian Arabs

BEHEADINGS ARE usually cited as evidence of the extreme fanaticism of Islamic State. But Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Liberman has called for the same treatment to be applied to Palestinians.

The psychotic comments came in the lead up to the Israeli general election in March. He said that those who live in the occupied territories and oppose Israel's discrimination against the Palestinians and its illegal expansion of settlements should be decapitated, "those against us, it cannot be helped, we must lift up an axe and behead them—otherwise we will not survive here" he said.

Immigration refuses delivery of detention letters

THE DEPARTMENT of Immigration and Border Protection has returned around 2500 letters of support sent to asylum seekers on Manus Island and Nauru. The letters were sent last April as part of a goodwill campaign organised by Julian Burnside. Burnside denounced the cruel act, saying, "What the Department of Immigration is doing is a calculated attempt to destroy any sense of hope that asylum seekers might have".

Gina Rinehart looks down on plebs

AN AUSTRALIAN *Financial Review* piece on Gina Rinehart's multi-billion Roy Hill iron ore project offers telling insights into her day to day contempt for ordinary people. At the project's head office near Perth airport Rinehart uses her own exclusive private entrance, while her inferiors use the front door.

Once inside she watches employees like a prison guard from her luxurious boardroom. Her corporate watchtower has a glass wall that can be made opaque or transparent at the click of a button, allowing her to mask her presence as she watches her staff.

On the Roy Hill construction site she has her own temporary accommodation, or donga, panelled with a wood finish and set up in a special VIP area. Its conspicuously elevated position is the ideal vantage point from which to survey the great unwashed below.

US toddlers kill more people than terrorists

PEOPLE IN the US are more likely to be killed by toddlers than terrorists. The last large scale US terror attack that captured headlines was the Boston bombing in 2013 that killed three people. In the first half of that year the US media reported at least 11 fatalities where a toddler pulled the trigger.

EDITORIAL

Budget measures finished, but Liberals still want cuts

TONY ABBOTT and Education Minister Christopher Pyne suffered another humiliation when their university deregulation plans were defeated in the Senate for a second time in March. Abbott's budget agenda is now in tatters. The government has declared that its Medicare GP co-payment was "dead, buried and cremated". The Coalition has been forced to drop its two most high profile budget attacks—for now.

But the government is in disarray. Abbott and Hockey have backflipped—going from demanding savage cuts to saying the budget is manageable. The backflip has dismayed senior public servants and big business.

And Abbott remains deeply unpopular. He seems incapable of taking his foot out of his mouth. Opinion polls show that the Liberals would lose any federal election, and Liberal MPs are still plotting to remove him.

After Abbott's absurd comment that living in a remote Aboriginal community was a "lifestyle choice", even Liberal-supporting conservative Aboriginal leaders like Warren Mundine and Noel Pearson rounded on him. This came after a self-destructive rampage against the Human Rights Commission's Gillian Triggs over children in detention.

Abbott's comments about an Aboriginal "lifestyle choice" came as open support of a vicious new wave of Aboriginal dispossession, with WA Premier Colin Barnett deciding to close down remote communities after Commonwealth funding cuts last year (see page 10).

The Liberals' push for cuts and their obsession with the budget deficit are not going away. Treasurer Joe Hockey was keen to use the Intergenerational Report to press the case for spending cuts. Yet Abbott knows he can't get away with further savage cuts, so he's now telling us this year's budget will be "dull and routine".

But some of the cuts the Liberals did push through are starting to bite. Abbott's cuts to remote Aboriginal communities may force them to shut down. The \$600 million budget cuts to Aboriginal services is now forcing legal services, family support programs, youth and other vital services to close their doors. Hundreds of Aboriginal workers are being forced onto the dole.

Education Minister Pyne was willing to threaten 1700 research jobs by saying he would cut research funding



Above: Opposition to university fee deregulation helped convince the Senate to reject it a second time

unless the Senate supported university fee deregulation.

He backed down but has still only promised to maintain the funding for one more year. And Pyne says he is will bring back fee deregulation legislation after the budget.

Abbott is desperate to find scapegoats and distractions to try and save his own skin. He is hyping up the terrorism scare, becoming even more vicious in his racist allegations that the Muslim community are somehow responsible for terrorism (see page 13). He has also suggested refugees pose a terror threat, linking his "stop the boats" agenda to national security, although no terrorism suspect ever arrived by boat. The rallies for refugees on Palm Sunday and in April in Sydney can help combat this scare-mongering.

The defeat of Abbott's big ticket budget "reforms" is only a result of enormous public opposition. The protests against Abbott's budget have indicated the extent of the opposition and put pressure on the Senate.

But the fightback needs to intensify. The March Australia rallies tapped the mood of anger against Abbott, drawing large crowds through social media. If the unions had backed them and waged a serious fight the Liberals could be dead and buried by now.

The ACTU's national day of action on 4 March showed the possibility of a more serious fightback. Even without a call for a national strike,

20,000 unionists joined the largest protest in Melbourne. In NSW, a number of unions, including construction and the nursing unions did take strike action, and were by far the largest contingents on the protests. If the rest of the union movement had followed suit we could have seen protests on a scale that would really shake the Liberals.

Tragically, union leaders remain focused on an electoral campaign against the Liberals in marginal seats in 18 months' time. This simply means putting our faith in Labor to deliver something different—and they are constantly disappointing. It does nothing to build workers' confidence about their capacity to fight the Liberals or strengthen our ability to organise.

The next major focus for action against the Liberals will be the budget in May. Abbott may have shelved his initial plans to attack Medicare and universities, but it's clear they are coming back for more. Thousands have rallied to stop the closure of Aboriginal communities. Thousands will March in March in Sydney.

Every union member needs to push for union action before the budget, demanding not just the end of the Liberals attacks but raising the need to tax the rich to fund services. This is the kind of action that can win real change.

Abbott may be on the ropes, but we need more strikes, protests and grassroots resistance to fight the Liberals' agenda and finish him off.

The Abbott government's support has evaporated in record time

March 4 rally shows appetite to fight Coalition's cuts

By Jean Parker

THOUSANDS OF unionists took strike action against the Abbott government as part of the Australian Council of Trade Unions March 4 day of protest. Over 20,000 people joined the march in Melbourne, and over 5000 in Sydney.

The ACTU called the protests in response to the Abbott government's new review of industrial relations. ACTU Secretary Dave Oliver told the Melbourne rally, "The Coalition government is using the Productivity Commission inquiry into rights at work in an attempt to cut penalty rates, abolish the minimum wage, bring back unfair individual contracts and swing even more power to the employers."

Thousands of construction workers in Melbourne defied threats of fines from Fair Work Building and Construction, the current incarnation of the ABCC, to walk off the job. CFMEU secretary John Setka explained, "There have been threats of fines of \$10,000 for turning up. That's democracy Australian-style under the Liberal Party." In Sydney unions shut down the massive construction site at Barangaroo, with 2500 workers from the site taking stop work action. Workers from other sites joined them as they marched through the city.

As many as 22 branches of the NSW Nurses and Midwives Association voted for industrial action, after the union left it up to individual branches to decide how they would support the rally. Over 650 nurses from across Sydney attended.

One nurse, Georgina, told *Solidarity* how her branch decided to take strike action to attend after, "I told the meeting that I remember the days when nursing had flat rates [before penalty rates]. We fought hard for something that this generation takes for granted. I argued that it would be very easy to lose something we fought long and hard for." A third of some nurses' wages consists of penalty rates.

Sydney's rally targeted Liberal Premier Mike Baird, as part of a union electoral campaign following successful union mobilisation for Labor's election in Queensland and Victoria.

Elsewhere the focus was on the next federal election, with the ACTU announcing it would hire 20 new full-time staff as part of a plan to target 32 marginal seats.



Yet the enthusiasm for taking strike action demonstrates the potential for successful, wider strikes against the Coalition's cuts if the union leadership was prepared to lead the charge.

Above: Workers join the March 4 rally in Sydney

Such a campaign holds the power to stop the Coalition's cuts before the next election, and put serious pressure on a future Labor government to deliver.

Co-payment victory, but Medicare war goes on

IN EARLY march, Health Minister Sussan Ley announced that she was scrapping the \$5 optional GP co-payment announced in December 2014. This is the Coalition's third backdown in three months on the GP co-payment. It is a victory—but the Coalition is still at war on Medicare.

Even while Abbott was telling parliament that the Medicare co-payment was "dead, buried, cremated", Ley was flagging a "Plan C" Medicare attack in May budget.

Just as important, the Coalition are keeping the Medicare rebate frozen until 2018. By keeping the Medicare rebate at 2013 levels until 2018 the government is cutting \$1.3 billion out of Medicare, the equivalent of \$3 per GP visit. Health economist Stephen Duckett was right to call this a "co-payment by stealth".

When Howard froze the rebate bulk-billing rates fell by 20 per cent in a couple of years. Some GPs are already ditching bulk-billing and charging the AMA rate of \$70 for each visit. This will continue until indexation on the rebate is fully restored.

Medicare has been at the heart of Abbott's woes. It was part of what

drove the anger as Victorian and QLD voters took to the ballot box in recent state elections, and a key factor in the backbench revolt against Abbott's leadership in February.

The fact that, in the face of this, the Liberals are trying for yet another Medicare "reform" shows how deeply they oppose universal healthcare.

Not only do they detest the idea that people can access high quality healthcare as a right, regardless of their income, but they see bulk-billing as a block on the profits that private health corporations could be making out of primary healthcare.

While the rebate freeze eats away at Medicare bulk-billing, the Liberals are also trying to eat away at community support for universal access, taking every opportunity to recast Medicare as a safety net for the poor and disadvantaged and asserting (contrary to all the evidence) that bulk-billing is "unsustainable".

But universal health means bulk-billing for all. We need to fight to keep Medicare universal, keep Medicare public and keep Medicare fully-funded.

Jean Parker

The Coalition is keeping the Medicare rebate frozen until 2018

Dumping Abbott no guarantee of Liberal recovery

By Lachlan Marshall

AFTER FACING down the leadership spill Abbott gushed to Channel Nine's Karl Stefanovic of feeling "young and vigorous and at the height of your powers."

Meanwhile leadership rival Malcolm Turnbull and other Liberal MPs were reported to be using a "secret agent-style" app to conduct their communications.

Since the Queensland election rout and the bizarre decision to knight Prince Philip, Abbott's days as Prime Minister have been numbered. A poor outcome at the NSW election could be the last straw.

But with so much of the Liberals' scant credibility staked on their claim to represent stable government after the volatility of the Rudd-Gillard-Rudd years, no one is yet willing to confront the inevitable and contest the leadership.

The Coalition's small recovery in the polls may hold off another challenge until after the budget. A Fairfax poll in early March had them trailing Labor by just 49-51. But as pollster Jessica Elgood explained one reason is, "Voters appear to already be factoring in Abbott's potential departure." Other polls have shown a much smaller recovery, or none at all.

Both Turnbull and Foreign Minister Julie Bishop are more popular than Abbott. Even Scott Morrison is touted as a potential leader, softening his image from brutal border patrolling Immigration Minister into cuddly family man in his new role as Minister for Social Services.

But a leadership change is no guarantee of the Liberals' return to popularity. Key to Abbott's self-destruction has been his cuts and fee increases for Medicare and universities. All the Liberals are united on the need for budget cuts and attacks on workers, differing only on how to deliver the attacks.

Turnbull

Turnbull is the standout contender, with the polish and refinement that Abbott lacks. Some even claim he might be in the wrong party, that his "progressive" views belong in the ALP.

But on the fundamental issue of the budget, Turnbull has set himself the task of merely improving the sales pitch, not altering the substance of Abbott and Hockey's plans. Turnbull



Above: Contenders for the Liberal leadership Julie Bishop and Malcolm Turnbull are sizing up Abbott

has prided himself on increasing the price of postage stamps as Communications Minister.

It's to be expected that this former head of Goldman Sachs and Australia's second richest parliamentarian worth \$186 million will continue the Liberals' agenda of cuts and privatisations.

As Liberal elder Arthur Sinodinos pointed out, "The fact of the matter is, Turnbull is a capitalist. He believes in market principles. Yes sure, he's socially progressive in inverted commas on certain issues but so are many others in the party".

In contrast to Abbott's open homophobia Turnbull attended the 2015 Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras and is one of the few Liberal MPs to support same-sex marriage. But his party doesn't even allow a conscience vote on marriage equality. Given the need to appease the party's conservative base, and to retain the backing of the Nationals, it's likely he would stay quiet on marriage equality.

On other issues the difference is purely a matter of style.

Turnbull backed Abbott over his appalling comments about Aboriginal people in remote communities making the wrong "lifestyle choice", remarking, "He does spend a week a year living in an Aboriginal community, he's very, very committed to it and I think he does have a very good understanding."

His martyrdom as leader of the

Liberals over the CPRS, for some, enhanced his climate change credentials. But the CPRS was never going to reduce emissions, and in the negotiations Turnbull secured amendments to the package that would have further increased compensation to polluters, while exempting agriculture—hardly the latte-sipping urbanite of Nationals' nightmares.

Since then Turnbull has made his peace with Abbott's Direct Action and has ruled out reviving even useless market mechanisms like the carbon tax or an emissions trading scheme.

As Abbott followed up his announcement that "good government begins today" with the witch-hunt against Gillian Triggs, Turnbull refused to join in. But his only response was to talk up the government's efforts to get children out of detention—with no apology or condemnation of the abuse of asylum seeker children.

As opposition leader he advocated the return to Temporary Protection Visas and offshore processing, while lambasting Rudd for being "soft" on boat arrivals. Long before Abbott made the slogan his own Malcolm was droning that "only a Turnbull government can stop the boats".

So long as Turnbull remains committed to the policies that are at the root of the Liberals' woes, a change of leaders would bring no more than temporary relief. It's our job to make sure that, whoever replaces Abbott, their honeymoon is brief.

.....
All the Liberals are united on the need for budget cuts and attacks on workers, differing only on how to deliver the attacks

Private colleges rort students as TAFEs gutted

PRIVATE VOCATIONAL training providers are making the news for ripping off students, funded by student debt through government schemes.

The Federal Government gives \$1 billion a year to the private sector, with profits in Victoria alone totalling \$230 million. Three companies made more than \$18 million in profit. The rate of return for Australian Careers Network was 51 per cent in 2014, while other providers recorded over 30 per cent margins.

TAFE, the traditional provider, has been gutted of funds in both NSW and Victoria, where \$300 million was ripped out by the state Liberal government. TAFEs in Victoria now have only 27 per cent of enrolments. The state Liberal government “opened up” funding to all training providers, forcing TAFEs to compete with private operators.

Private providers have been caught using ambush marketing, saying the courses are free and luring prospective students in shopping malls with free iPads. The rorts in private “education” are so widespread that the Federal, NSW and Victorian governments are looking for ways to impose new regulations and higher fines. Twenty-three vocational education institutions are under investigation.

Evocca College has only graduated 2058 students between 2011 and October 2014, despite enrolling more than 38,000! It received at least \$131 million from the Federal government.

Evocca told ABC Radio that 15,000 students “are currently progressing towards graduation”, leaving 20,000 unaccounted for. Victorian government figures show only four in ten students who started short courses had completed them in 2013.

Fees charged to students in Victoria rose from \$2.4 million in 2009 to \$79.6 million. The total amount students owe to the VET FEE-HELP scheme has ballooned to more than \$1.1 billion in three years. Students pay back the loans to the Federal government when they have reached the same \$51,309 income threshold as under HECS loans. Vocational courses can cost between \$10,000 and \$19,000.

The rorts show everything that is wrong with privatisation and the free market model. But Abbott isn’t about to end this corporate welfare.

Tom Orsag

Liberal privatisation plan fuels swing against Baird in NSW

Baird is facing real challenge because he has staked his re-election on privatisation



By Jean Parker

THE LIBERALS under Mike Baird were still favourites to win the NSW election as *Solidarity* went to press. But a big swing to Labor looks likely. A month ago Baird, touted as one of the most popular politicians across the country (not high praise given the competition) looked comfortable. But the factors that produced one-term Liberal governments in Victoria and Queensland—Tony Abbott and privatisation—are eroding Baird’s lead.

Compared to Tony Abbott and Campbell Newman, who are experts at alienating voters, Baird is seen as reasonable and appealing. This image has been particularly easy to cultivate with Labor so weakened in NSW after 16 years of corrupt, pro-business government.

But Baird is facing real challenge because he has staked his re-election on the privatisation of the metropolitan “poles and wires” electricity network. Tellingly the network in regional NSW is not up for sale because the Nationals know this would cost them support. While the Liberals are polling at 53 per cent, only 25 per cent of voters support the sell-off.

Baird’s plan is to “lease” for 99 years three of the electricity distribution companies. He hopes to make \$20 billion to build private toll roads including the monstrous WestConnex. But \$2 billion of this comes from the

federal government’s “asset recycling” program which is blocked in the Senate. The asset-recycling plan proposes to use \$5 billion from the sale of Medibank Private to encourage state governments to privatise assets and use the proceeds to fund infrastructure through public private partnerships (PPPs).

Twenty-five years of privatisation have brought declining services, less safety, rising costs, and massive job losses. There is also a perverse logic in selling electricity networks that generate \$1.7 billion for the state budget each year. Once sold this money goes to private profits instead of hospitals and schools.

The Greens won their first lower house seat in 2011 and are hoping to add Jenny Leong as the MP for the new seat of Newtown. This election The Greens and Labor are swapping preferences, citing common opposition to privatisation. This needs to spill into action after the election if Baird wins.

Unions NSW has been mobilising members against privatisation, modelled on the “We are Union” door-knocking and station leafletting organised for the Victorian state election. These efforts will need to be translated into mobilisation and industrial struggle after the election, especially if Baird wins. After all stopping the power sell-off, defending TAFE and public hospitals are “worth fighting for” just as they are worth voting for.

PNG court challenge to Manus Island detention

By Ian Rintoul

A MAJOR constitutional challenge to the Manus Island detention centre, and the violation of the human rights of asylum seekers detained there, is underway in the PNG Supreme Court.

Ironically, instructions to take the action against the PNG government came after asylum seekers, who had been taken to jail from the detention centre during January's hunger strike, managed to get statements smuggled out of the jail.

As *Solidarity* goes to press, PNG lawyer, Ben Lomai, acting initially for 25 asylum seekers, is seeking court orders to allow lawyers' access to the detention centre to obtain statements, potentially from the asylum seekers.

The legal action seeks the release of all asylum seekers and the closure of the detention centre.

A previous constitutional challenge by Opposition leader Beldan Nemah stalled over the issue of his "standing" before the court and a relentless bureaucratic effort to frustrate the action.

Similarly a PNG National Court inquiry initiated by Justice Canning into the Memorandum of Understanding between Australia and PNG was stuck in legal limbo following the Australian government funding lawyers to subject the inquiry to endless legal manoeuvres.

The current legal action has been taken on behalf of asylum seekers themselves to challenge the human rights abuses they have suffered—their initial transfer to PNG, the inhuman conditions, the torture, deprivation of liberty and lack of access to the law.

Thirty asylum seekers—supposed ringleaders of the hunger strike—are still under close surveillance in Charlie compound. Statements from asylum seekers beaten and abused during the hunger strike are also being collated to make individual complaints.

One Wilson's security guard is reported to have been sacked following asylum seekers' complaints of being assaulted on a bus taking them to Lorengau jail when they were rounded up during the hunger strike.

Even if the report is true, it is only one among the scores of Wilson's security guards and PNG police that are guilty of assault, and are yet to be held to account.



Above: Asylum seekers in the Mike compound on Manus Island

UN Committee Against Torture finds Australia guilty

IT WAS hardly news, but when the UN Committee Against Torture (CAT) tabled its report, finding Australia guilty of torture in its detention centres, Tony Abbott spat the dummy, declaring, "Australia is sick of being lectured to by the UN..."

Abbott was quite happy for the UN to give lectures to all and sundry when Foreign Minister, Julie Bishop, was chair of the UN Security Council.

But this is the same government that, last November, in its submission to CAT insisted that violence against women was not torture, saying that, "As a matter of international law, domestic violence does not fall within the scope of the Convention."

Abbott is out to shoot the messenger, just as he has attacked Human Rights President Gillian Triggs over its report into the mistreatment of children held in detention. The CAT has been scathing in its condemnation of Australia's treatment of asylum seekers.

The committee flatly rejected the long-standing position of successive Australian governments that what happens in the hell-holes of Manus and Nauru is the sole responsibility of the governments of Nauru and Papua New Guinea.

Committee chair, Claudio Grossman, said it was clear that Australia had "effective control" over the detention centres in PNG and Nauru, and so it was responsible for ensuring

that they complied with Australia's obligations under the convention. The report, released in Geneva in early March, also condemned mandatory detention and Australia's use of offshore processing, stating, "The combination of ... harsh conditions, the protracted periods of closed detention and uncertainty about the future reportedly creates serious physical and mental pain and suffering." The committee said Australia should repeal the laws that send all "irregular" arrivals into mandatory detention.

In other observations, Committee chair, Grossman, said that the mandatory detention of undocumented immigrants and children runs counter to interpretation of the Torture convention.

The Committee also said its was concerned "in particular [about] the policy of intercepting and turning back boats, without due consideration of [Australia's] obligations" under international law. No wonder Abbott wasn't happy. The report is the strongest to date from any of the international human rights bodies.

But it will be the campaign here and the resistance inside detention, on and offshore, that will ultimately end mandatory detention and offshore processing. The "Welcome Refugees" Palm Sunday rallies in most cities (and 19 April in Sydney) need to be the biggest we can make them.

Ian Rintoul

Aboriginal community closures: 'This is an attempt to destroy our culture'

On Wednesday 11 March Tony Abbott, visiting Kalgoorlie in the WA Goldfields, strongly endorsed WA Premier Colin Barnett's decision to shut down 150 remote Aboriginal communities after Commonwealth funding cuts. WA is planning to withdraw essential services such as power and water. In a statement condemned as racist by Aboriginal leaders across the political spectrum Abbott said, "the taxpayer can not be expected to endlessly fund people's lifestyle choices".

Snap protests were held across Australia on "Black Friday", 13 March, including a rally of more than 1000 people in Melbourne. **Meriki Onus**, protest organiser from the youth group **Warriors of the Aboriginal Resistance**, spoke to *Solidarity* about the need to resist these community closures and the broader agenda of assimilation.



Above: Meriki at the Melbourne protest in March

Why was this protest called and why did it get such a strong response?

The rally was very last minute, called at 12 hours notice. I posted it in response to the Federal and WA Government's decision to close down remote Aboriginal communities in WA. There was a real emotional reaction to Tony Abbott's comments about "lifestyle choices" in particular. People in Melbourne were disgusted. It's so clear that these are attempts to destroy our culture. It is just a further attempt at assimilation and genocide.

Colin Barnett has offered all these reasons about doing this for the welfare of people in these communities. No one believes them any more, particularly after the recent experience of the NT Intervention. There you had a blatant lie [that all remote communities had pedophile rings] that justified very similar policies. There seems to be change in the air. We've really noticed it in Melbourne over these last 12 months. People want to hear the truth about what is going on for our people, not the sugar-coated version.

What will be the impact of these community closures?

Aboriginal activists in Perth have re-established the Nyoongar Tent Embassy as a refugee camp for people being

pushed off their communities. They are estimating that 20,000 people will be made homeless. We know that WA has a terrible track record with the treatment of Aboriginal people. It is a police state [with one of the highest incarceration rates for black people in the world]. There are horrific welfare practices with forced child removal, terrible suicide rates, I can only imagine the terrible social impact that making so many people homeless will have in WA.

Assimilation is very stark when they are shutting down whole communities of people speaking Aboriginal languages on their lands, but it is very much the policy position in relation to Aboriginal people right across Australia. How do you see the continued drive for assimilation operating in Victoria?

We know more than anyone in Victoria what dispossession does to a people. We have people working on learning language now, but it is a very small group. I don't think there are any fluent speakers of Aboriginal language anywhere in Victoria. That's from dispossession, from the mission days, the stolen generation, those attempts to destroy the cultures

of Indigenous peoples. This is exactly what our brothers and sisters in remote areas, in the NT and WA, are facing today.

The federal government's decision to stop funding communities is happening right across Australia, like at Lake Tyers Aboriginal Trust (in Victoria). The state government have said they will keep providing funding, but are making it very hard for an Aboriginal person to live at Lake Tyers, the government control of Aboriginal people's lives there is horrendous. There has been an administrator imposed on that community for more than 15 years. They are trying to displace us all in Australia. It's just a final nail in the frontier wars coffin, it's not over.

We have numbers of Aboriginal children being removed by the Department of Human Services absolutely blowing out over the last few years. There are about 1000 Aboriginal children in "out of home care" at the moment in Victoria. The way things are going, that will be 1500 by the end of this year.

Assimilation is a fundamental part of colonisation. This is still continuing. Land acquisition goes hand in hand with the death of Indigenous peoples. It's fundamental for the Australian government and other colonial

.....
"[Activists] are estimating that 20,000 people will be made homeless"

Redfern Tent Embassy stands strong against developers



By Paddy Gibson

THE REDFERN Aboriginal Tent Embassy is currently standing strong against repeated threats of eviction from Aboriginal land at the Block in Redfern.

The Embassy was established on “sorry day”, 26 May last year, to stop bulldozers moving onto the Block to begin construction of a new corporate development. The camp has successfully stopped any construction for a full ten months.

The Block was returned to Aboriginal ownership in 1972, following a long fight by local Aboriginal activists and supporters, including the Builders’ Labourers Federation, for a grant of land and money to develop Aboriginal community housing. It was a vital hub for the radical Aboriginal rights struggle that was taking off around the country.

But in 2004, the Aboriginal Housing Company (AHC), which controls the land, started evicting Aboriginal residents. Once a grassroots organisation accountable to the community, membership of the AHC has been closed for many years and the leadership group around Mick Mundine have aggressively pursued commercial aims and embraced the gentrification of Redfern.

All existing Aboriginal housing was knocked down to make way for the “Pemulwuy Project”. This project was initially focused on rebuilding Aboriginal housing and community facilities. In response to a refusal by both state and federal governments to fund community housing however, Mundine radically altered the plan.

According to local Aboriginal activist Ray Jackson, senior government officials, representatives from the local police and Mick Mundine himself all began arguing publicly that there should be “no black enclave at the block”. Mundine offered the land to major property developer Deicorp to

Above: The Redfern Tent Embassy has become a thorn in the side of developers

build units and a commercial precinct where space is sold to the highest bidder. Money from this development will apparently then be used to then build just 20 affordable housing units for Aboriginal people. The racism of Deicorp was exposed last December when online advertising for another one of their Redfern projects, Dei Cotta apartments, proclaimed, “the Aboriginals have already moved out, now Redfern is the last virgin suburb close to the city”.

Free market dreams

The AHC sell-out is just one example of the impact of a concerted campaign by government and big corporations over the last two decades to repackage capitalist development as offering a solution to Aboriginal disadvantage. The “Aboriginal Employment Covenant”, a plan led by mining magnate Andrew Forrest to employ 50,000 Aboriginal people in the corporate sector, has failed spectacularly, with skyrocketing black unemployment, but Forrest still plays a central role in government policy. The Redfern Embassy is an important symbol of the struggle against this approach.

Corporate developers are only interested in profiting from Aboriginal land. Winning Aboriginal housing requires a hard fight against the system.

Since 2008, there has been a national moratorium on government funding for any new Aboriginal housing, outside a handful of “growth towns” in remote areas. This despite 25 per cent of all homeless people in Australia being Aboriginal, from less than 3 per cent of the general population.

The vicious assimilation driving forced remote homeland communities in WA is also on display in the heart of Sydney. The Redfern Tent Embassy needs supporters on site to prevent the threat of eviction, please visit to find out more and offer your assistance

governments to do this.

If we were a strong nation, many nations of people that never experienced the stolen generations, if we were raised to know our own law and language, they would have a hard time controlling our country and mining our country. It is essential for them.

We are not Australian. We have individual national responsibilities and we have a pan-national responsibility as Aboriginal people to each other. That’s why I refer to myself as Gunai and Gunditjmarra.

How do the current funding cuts to Aboriginal organisations contribute to this process?

Aboriginal community controlled services were originally set up for Aboriginal people to have some kind of political self-determination in their lives. It makes sense that Tony Abbott would cut that from us. It’s part of forcing us into the “mainstream”. Even the organisations that don’t get cut suffer, because they become overloaded with the spill-over from other cuts, with so many people with complex social needs.

So attacking these organisations is about trying to stop ways people can maintain a collective identity?

They have, in some sense, tried to destroy that already, even without funding cuts. Just the funding requirements they impose on our organisations now, mean that they are constantly trying to reach the targets set by the government funding body, rather than being accountable to the needs of the community. So they come to look more and more just like the “mainstream” service.

What are the next steps in the fight against community closures?

This fight is not over. There are already plans for what is happening next. We need to find ways to keep Melbourne city engaged, keep this issue on the platform and create change. We have a lot of work to do. It’s our responsibility to educate each other and get out with our feet on the streets and protest what we see happening in WA.

We cannot wait for these decisions to just roll out, we have to take control of our own lives again. We don’t have a choice anymore. And it’s our responsibility to do it, even we might be OK, it’s our responsibility to do it for our brothers and sisters across Australia.

.....
Since 2008, there has been a national moratorium on government funding for any new Aboriginal housing

Higher HECS fees keep poor students out of universities

By Eliot Hoving

ABBOTT AND Pyne's effort to deregulate fees has failed. Opposition to the prospect of university fees jumping to \$100,000 has seen it defeated twice in the Senate.

But many of the Senators accept the idea that students could pay a bit more, making it likely the Liberals will push for fee increases again in the future. The Abbott Government's efforts to sell its deregulation package included talking up the current Higher Education Commonwealth Support Scheme (HECS).

HECS was introduced in 1989 by the Hawke Labor government. Under HECS students take out government loans to pay part of the costs of their degree. This is only repaid when their annual income reaches \$51,309. Prior to 1987, university was free.

The Abbott government's advertising campaign told students not to worry about fee increases, because, "The Australian Government will continue to pay a big share, around half, of your undergraduate course fees. HECS covers the rest, which means you don't need to pay any course fees up front." However this ignores the inequalities entrenched under HECS.

HECS has been used to continually increase student fees, and shift costs onto students. In 1997, Howard increased student fees by an average of 40 per cent and introduced full fee places for most postgraduate courses. In 2004, universities were allowed to increase fees by up to 25 per cent more. All did so within a year.

HECS was initially set at \$1800 a year for all students (around \$3500 in today's money). Today, students face charges of \$6152 to \$10,266 a year. This is an increase of almost 300 per cent for some degrees. Currently, the average HECS debt is \$15,200 and is repaid over eight years.

Shifting education costs to a user pays model, rather than through the wider tax system, is regressive. Rich students end up paying the same price for a degree as others in their cohort. Since HECS was introduced, corporate tax rates have fallen from 39 per cent to 30 per cent, and top income tax rates from 60 to 45 per cent.

Entrenching inequality

University enrolments have increased despite the rise in HECS fees over time. Students often take on HECS



Above: We can't let ever increasing debts be the future for students at Australian universities

debt in the expectation they will be able to pay it off later.

But there are reasons to believe that students from poor backgrounds are more cautious about taking on debt, as the National Union of Students argues. This means they are more likely to be deterred by higher fees, and excluded from university. The university participation rate among the lowest socio-economic quartile of students has remained static at 14-15 per cent since HECS was introduced. This is despite increases in year 12 completion rates and the large expansion in university places.

The rising financial cost of education is a significant factor. As a 2008 review commissioned by Universities Australia detailed, "For many such students, it is the combination of financial pressures and distance with a lack of positive attitudes to higher education that makes university 'seem less attractive, less relevant and less attainable'." A Deloitte study similarly found student enrolments declined temporarily in 1997 and 2005 after increases in fees. University enrolment data suggests that this affected students from poorer backgrounds the most.

Fee increases will also entrench gender inequality. Modelling by the Melbourne University Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research shows that women on median salaries would require 26 years on average

to repay their loans if fees doubled, compared to 15 years for men.

In response to equity concerns, the government and many University Vice Chancellors have announced new scholarships. But handing back a measly \$1 from every \$5 of additional revenue for scholarships is just window dressing.

Who benefits?

Government advertising has also tried to argue that university graduates "can" earn 75 per cent more in their lifetime compared to high-school leavers hence they can easily pay higher fees. This figure is disputed by different researchers.

But education does not just benefit the individual. The benefits to business through having access to skilled and more productive workers are much more substantial. If the university system did not exist, companies such as Google or BHP would have to pay more themselves to train their workers.

The extra income produced by an increasingly productive workforce in Australia is already being swallowed disproportionately by business. Real wages have increased far less than productivity. Instead a greater and greater share of income is paid out in profits and dividends, rather than wages.

The only people to benefit from shifting more costs onto students are corporations and the rich.

By James Supple

TONY ABBOTT made his most explicit attack on the Muslim community yet in a “national security statement” in late February, surrounded by Australian flags.

Abbott went out of his way to talk up the threat posed by Islamic State (IS) and blame the Muslim community for terrorism, saying, “I’ve often heard Western leaders describe Islam as a religion of peace. I wish more Muslim leaders would say that more often and mean it.”

It is not Islam, or “Muslim leaders” who are responsible for the rise of IS, but the brutality of Western imperialism, which waged a war on Iraq which killed more than one million people, threw the country into chaos and installed a vicious sectarian government.

Abbott followed his security speech by announcing more troops for Iraq, with an additional 300 soldiers to train the Iraqi army alongside New Zealand. Australian warplanes have been consistently bombing Iraq since September 2014. This is the real reason threats have been made against Australia.

But while he throws fuel on the fire, Abbott scapegoats Muslim leaders, saying they aren’t doing enough to stop terrorism. He even asserted they “don’t mean it” when they condemn groups like Islamic State.

There was immediate and justified outrage. Randa Kattan, head of the Arab Council of Australia, slammed the comments as, “counterproductive and extremely insulting to many of us who have been working really hard on this. It just inflames sentiments that are bordering on hatred and racism.”

As she pointed out in a speech marking International Women’s Day at Sydney University, “no matter how often we have condemned terrorism it’s always questioned and we are lectured on the need to do more”.

“We hear and read things like: ‘Everyone’s got to be on Team Australia’... We hear that Muslims or Arabs are terrorists. You are with us or against us. And if you are not with us, you are with the terrorists. We also hear and read that Arab or Muslim women are oppressed and subservient to men.

“As a community, we have been at the receiving end of such stereotypes for decades. And I in my position as CEO of Arab Council Australia have lost track of how often over the years I have had to respond to the vilifica-

Abbott ramps up attack on Muslims in desperate search for support



tion and demonisation.

“They hold us accountable for the deplorable behaviour of a few. They pigeon hole us and ignore the diversity and richness within communities. They serve to divide, silence and marginalise us.”

As novelist Randa Abdul-Fattah also argued, “Out of 400,000 Australian Muslims, 110 are known to have joined ISIL. And yet, despite this minuscule ratio, Muslims and their faith are being held to account, clearly framed as the enemy in the ‘war on terror’.”

The media has been central to this scare campaign, leaping on every report of someone leaving to fight for Islamic State (IS). The news that teenager Jake Bilardi had died in a suicide attack in Iraq set off another round of hysteria.

Terrorist propaganda?

The government claims it is simply sophisticated terrorist propaganda driving people to join IS.

Attorney General George Brandis announced \$18 million for “countering terrorist propaganda”, as if it was online videos and Twitter accounts that are turning people to terrorism.

This follows a “Countering Violent Extremism” program announced last year to fund local service providers to, “help individuals to deradicalise and turn away from ideologies of violence

Above: The number of flags at Abbott press conferences has been multiplying

and hate”.

The media has also pushed this view, with Fairfax reporting “Bilardi’s 4400-word manifesto confirms that he radicalised himself by reading news sites from around the world”.

But when *The Age* delved a bit more deeply, they found Bilardi was reading, “about Israel’s bombing of Gaza, the Vietnam war, drug gangs in Mexico, the early days of Australia’s settlement.” In other words it was the very real crimes and atrocities of Western imperialism that affected Bilardi, as well as his experience of social alienation.

For young people in the Muslim community, the racism and Islamophobia that gushes forth from politicians like Tony Abbott and the media further fuel resentment.

Some Muslim community leaders have identified this, such as Ali Kadri from the Holland Park mosque in Brisbane who told the ABC that in the Muslim community, “Employment is a problem, alienation is a problem, marginalisation is a problem.”

It is these real problems that have seen, in a tiny number of cases, people attracted to IS.

This is a futile and wrong response to racism and imperialism. But, like the growth of IS in Syria and Iraq itself, it shows that it is Western leaders that bear the main responsibility.

While he throws fuel on the fire, Abbott scapegoats Muslim leaders, saying they aren’t doing enough to stop terrorism

EUROPEAN UNION OUT TO CRUSH SYRIZA'S CHALLENGE TO AUSTERITY

James Supple looks at how negotiations with the EU have seen Syriza agree to accept a new version of austerity—undermining its initial promises

GREECE'S NEW left government, Syriza, came to power in a major rejection of the austerity agenda, after five years of immense suffering for the Greek people since the global economic crisis began.

But the deal struck by Syriza in February for a four-month extension on the country's loans is a defeat for its strategy of negotiating an end to these policies within the European Union (EU).

The EU has set out to inflict a humiliation on Syriza. They, and in particular their leading economic power Germany, want to force working class people in Greece and across the Eurozone to bear the burden of restoring profits and economic growth through cuts to wages and public services.

They are trying to use Greece's debts to the EU and IMF of around \$340 billion to force it to accept a continuation of the privatisation, public sector job cuts and cuts to government spending that have been the price of the country's bailout loans since 2010.

At stake is not just the continuation of austerity in Greece, but across the whole of Europe.

If Greece can defeat austerity it will boost the confidence of workers, the left and new anti-austerity parties like Podemos in Spain who are all fighting the same policies in the context of ongoing economic crisis and mass unemployment.

Syriza was elected on a promise to end austerity and expel the Troika (the EU, the IMF and the European Central Bank) which imposed the ruthless austerity measures.

But it has now agreed to extend the loan on the basis that the Troika, now re-named "the institutions", retains a veto over any efforts to end existing austerity measures.

The list of initial reforms Syriza submitted to the EU as part of the deal

agrees to proceed with privatisation and promises to cut costs in government spending.

Syriza won, at most, modest compromises, such as a reduction in the budget surplus the government is required to run. It hopes to reduce this 1.5 per cent of GDP. But even this would still impose crippling restraint on the government's ability to fund jobs and services.

The February deal with the EU has caused significant anger inside the party. Economist and Syriza central committee member Stathis Kouvelakis called it a "thorough failure", saying it "represents the defeat of ... the government's current approach".

Ninety-two year old Syriza MEP Manolis Glezos, a wartime resistance fighter against the Nazis, called for urgent opposition to the deal inside the party.

A motion from the Left Platform group rejecting the agreement received the backing of 41 per cent of Syriza's central committee.

The Greek government was under severe pressure, with billions in loan repayments due at the end of February, and a run on the Greek banks as the negotiations began to falter. Some say they struck the best deal possible in the circumstances.

But the retreat from their previous promises shows the impossibility of negotiating an end to austerity and Greece's debt burden within the EU.

Exiting the Eurozone

Syriza refuses to contemplate any exit from the EU, a view opinion polls show is shared by the bulk of the population.

Yet there is a glaring contraction between the promise to end austerity and staying in the EU, a fact Syriza leader Alex Tsipras and Finance Minister Varoufakis have carefully

The February deal with the EU has caused significant anger inside Syriza

avoided.

Syriza's position gives Germany and the EU a stranglehold over Greece. Its banks in particular rely on continued bailout funding from the EU to prevent their collapse.

Greece's battle with the EU has just begun. By the end of June a new more comprehensive bailout deal has to be agreed.

But there is an alternative to these negotiations. The working class should refuse to pay the costs of the crisis through the continuation of austerity. Leaving the EU would allow Greece to default on its debts and remove the need to continue the crippling repayments.

This would require nationalising the banks to prevent their collapse and imposing currency controls to stop the rich taking their money out of the country.

Greece would have to go back to using its own currency instead of the Euro. This would mean severe economic dislocation, with a spike in inflation reducing the purchasing power of Greek workers' wages.

But this could be addressed through expanding social welfare programs and workers demanding pay rises to compensate for increased living costs.

All this could be paid for by seizing the wealth controlled by big business and the rich inside Greece. There are people in Greece who remain immensely wealthy despite the economic crisis.

Greece has the largest merchant shipping fleet in the world, but its shipping companies pay almost nothing in tax.

Struggle the key

For now Syriza's popularity has increased. This is because it is the first Greek government that has attempted to stand up to the EU since the bailout

negotiations began in 2010. But the Syriza government is trapped. If it continues to deal with the EU it too will now be responsible for implementing austerity.

The consequence of the deal is that many of its key promises are on hold. The increase in the minimum wage, already postponed for a year, will now be subject to consultation with “the institutions”. The plan to rehire 20,000 sacked public servants will go ahead, but at the expense of any new recruitment.

One example of the problems is the situation in hospitals. Health workers from a number of hospitals in Athens went on strike on 11 March. Costas Kadarachias, a union secretary at the Aghios Savvas cancer hospital explained, “Most of the workers here voted for Syriza to stop the austerity that has been imposed on Greece.

“But we know we can’t wait for the government. Our problems are getting worse every day—hospitals are understaffed, underfunded, with many facilities closed.” Hundreds of positions at the hospital remain vacant.

It is working class struggles like these outside parliament, not the actions of a Syriza government, that will ultimately determine whether there is an end to austerity.

Even if Syriza adopted the drastic measures needed to make big business and the rich pay for reversing austerity they would face enormous resistance from the European ruling class.

The wealthy would attempt to wage economic sabotage against the government and to mobilise the hard core of the state, in particular the police and the military, to fight such a challenge to their wealth.

This was the experience of Chile in 1973, where the democratically elected Allende government was overthrown in a coup, and also of Hugo Chavez in Venezuela who faced a series of attempted coups after his efforts to redistribute wealth.

This makes the decision to give the right-wing nationalist party Independent Greeks (ANEL) the post of Defence Minister, in charge of the army, particularly dangerous. An MP from another party has also been appointed Minister for Public Order, in charge of the police.

The only way to resist such an onslaught would be for the working class to take control of their workplaces out of the hands of the



Above: Celebrations after Syriza’s election victory this year

bosses and to start to run the economy themselves.

There have been small examples of this in Greece already, like the occupation of the national broadcaster ERT when the government tried to shut it down in 2013.

Workers took over and began running TV and radio services themselves, setting an example and showing how workers’ control over production could work.

Deepening and spreading struggles like these is the key to building an alternative to austerity and capitalism from below.

Ultimately, these struggles would have to end in a revolution where the working class forms its own government based on workers’ power in the factories and destroys the old capitalist state.

Left government

Governments that take power through parliamentary elections do not control the main sources of power in capitalist societies—the wealth and profits controlled by big business and the repressive functions of the state, like the police, the army and the courts.

This means that left governments face the danger of being pulled into compromises with big business and the state, which means acting to demo-

bilise the kind of struggles outside parliament necessary to bring real change.

There are already signs that Syriza’s leadership is locked into such a trajectory.

On the eve of its election leader Alex Tsipras made continual efforts to reassure big business in Greece and the international markets that the party would not be as radical as they feared and was committed to the EU. The major capitalists in Greece still want the country to remain inside the EU, seeing this as key to securing their own profits within Europe.

More recently Tsipras has tried to present the deal Syriza struck with the EU as a victory, saying, “We showed that Europe can be an arena of negotiation and mutually acceptable compromise”.

Yanis Varoufakis, the Finance Minister, went even further boasting, “We have great success. We were alone but became the majority”. These arguments send the message that workers in Greece have to accept some version of austerity, and undermine the resistance from below.

But it’s the resistance and class struggle from below that holds the key to reversing austerity and building a society based on human need, not the profits of the bankers.

PROBLEMS FOR AUSTRALIAN CAPITALISM ECONOMIC SHOCK AS MINING BOOM EVAPORATES

The Australian economy's dream run looks to be over as the mining boom runs out of steam and living standards are squeezed. **Peter Jones** takes a closer look.

IT WAS a "good outcome" according to Joe Hockey. Australia's GDP growth came in at 0.5 per cent for the December quarter; in line with expectations. According to the Treasurer, "Australia is still performing well by international comparisons".

But beneath the headline GDP figure, the Bureau of Statistics also reported a decline in real gross domestic income, measured per person. Unlike GDP, this takes into account the fact that imports have become more expensive relative to exports, and the effect this has on how many commodities we can buy with each dollar. On this measure, Australia was in recession for three quarters of last year, and may still be.

The immediate causes of the income recession, and the apparent end of the mining boom, have been widely discussed. The extraordinary expansion of the Chinese economy has underwritten 23 years of uninterrupted GDP growth in Australia.

The global economic crisis passed this continent by because it had the right rocks and gases in the right places. It still does, but the investment boom has raised capacity enough to satisfy Chinese demand, which is itself weakening as growth in China also slows.

Now as commodity prices crash down to more "normal" levels (or lower) investment in new mining capacity is plummeting. Because it takes a long time to build mines and gas fields, some projects which were started when prices were higher are only now starting to produce output—pushing up GDP. But companies are getting less for each unit they sell, which tends to push down their income.

The iron ore price for instance has halved in the last year, dropping below \$60 a tonne in March. And there are many fewer job vacancies in the resources sector because digging up and shipping out raw materials from existing mines is much less labour-

.....
Unemployment is now 6.3 per cent, a worse figure than for the US or the UK

intensive than building them (and the associated infrastructure) in the first place.

The lower cost producers of iron ore—BHP and Rio Tinto—are ramping up production to win market share from their competitors, adding further downward pressure to prices. This may lead to bankruptcies and job losses at some of the mines with less concentrated ore deposits or higher transport costs.

The Reserve Bank hopes that keeping interest rates low will stimulate growth and employment in other sectors. In February they cut interest rates to a record low 2.25 per cent, and most economists expect them to cut rates further.

This strategy has not really worked so far, either in Australia or the other advanced capitalist economies (where interest rates are near or below zero). Here, lower interest rates might have boosted residential construction, house prices and the stock market, but not much else. According to Deputy Reserve Bank Governor Phillip Lowe "it is difficult to escape the conclusion that changes in interest rates are not affecting decisions about spending and saving in the way they might once have done".

The fall in prices for resources is also hitting the Federal budget. The Treasurer has stopped talking about a 'budget emergency' because the government has been forced to step back from implementing some of its most unpopular policies, for now. But the decline in the terms of trade (and its effect on revenue) has already been much larger than Treasury forecast. This makes the Coalition's failure to sell its austerity agenda a serious concern for business, who had hoped for corporate tax cuts during this government's term.

Squeeze on living standards

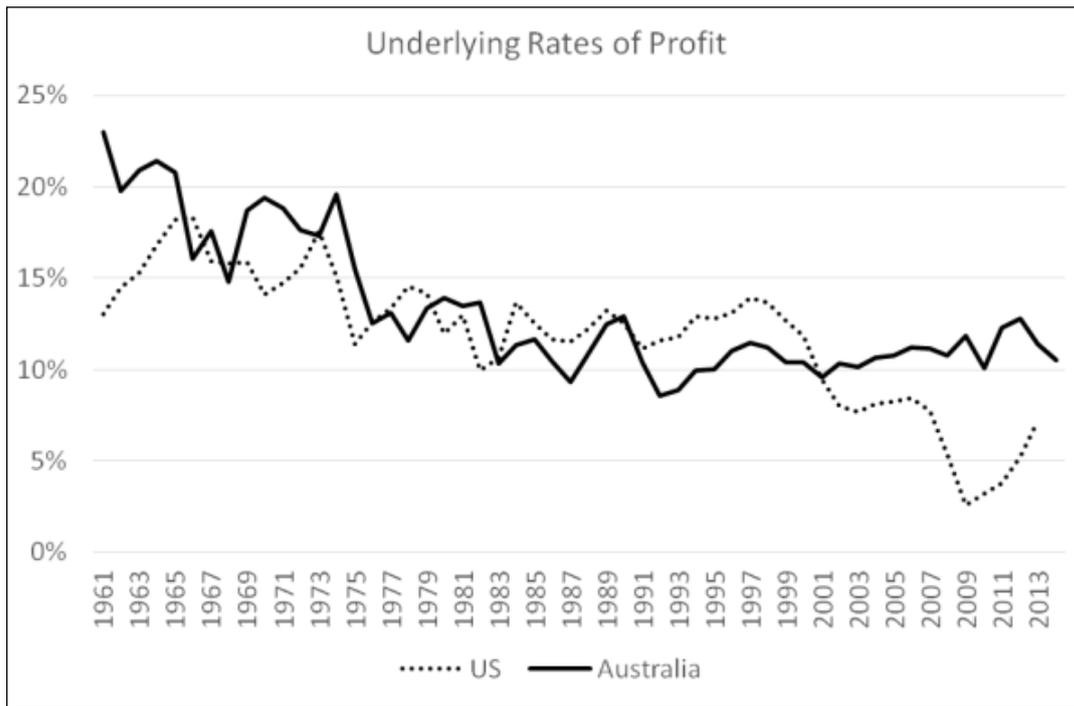
The income recession has also hit wages and employment. As usual,

business wants the working class to bear the brunt of the economic downturn, as they move to protect their profits. Unemployment is now 6.3 per cent; just below the highest in 12 years (recorded in January) and a worse figure than for the US or the UK. It's 20.3 per cent if we count everyone who wants more work. The paltry 2.5 per cent growth in wages last year was cancelled out by inflation (also 2.5 per cent).

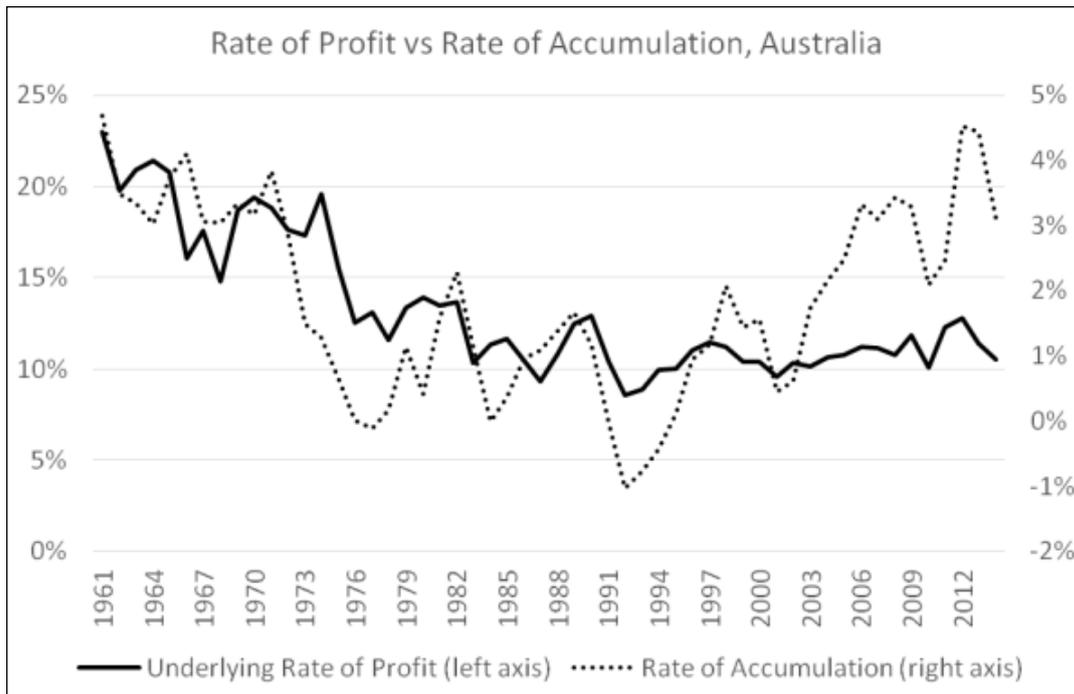
Although they've made a small concession on pay for the military, Abbott and Abetz want to lock-in real wage cuts for the public service for the next three years, and are going after jobs. They're offering less than 1.4 per cent per year to workers in the Department of Human Services and just 0.8 per cent to the Tax Office. And one in five public servants in the CSIRO can expect to lose their job over the next two years as the workforce is cut by 1300. Staff at Human Services and Veterans' Affairs have voted overwhelmingly for industrial action, and ballots are planned at the Tax Office, the CSIRO, Agriculture and Employment.

Bosses in the private sector also want to take advantage of the weak labour market, and have been campaigning hard for changes to penalty rates and the awards system. It's no coincidence that agreements for over one million workers are scheduled to be settled this year, including at Woolworths, Coles, the Commonwealth Bank and Telstra.

At the moment the government is too weak politically to go after penalty rates, and has instead announced a wide-ranging Productivity Commission review into industrial relations. This will almost certainly make business-friendly recommendations which the Coalition can use as ammunition later. The rallies called by the ACTU in response were an important indication of willingness to resist this agenda.



Graph one: Rates of profit in the US and Australia



Graph two: Australian rate of profit versus rate of capital accumulation

In the construction sector, where economic conditions are stronger (but worsening), the CFMEU have succeeded in extracting 5 per cent annual wage increases from around 200 contractors. This comes after a long industrial campaign against one of the companies involved (Boral) which included strikes and blockades. In spite of a legal challenge by Boral, and threats by the Liberals to change the building code to effectively ban companies

from winning government contracts if they concede too much to workers, the CFMEU's militant tactics worked.

Nevertheless, in the current economic climate, at many workplaces concerted industrial action will probably be required just to stop job losses and real wage cuts.

Profit rates

The deeper reason for the current malaise is that Australian capitalism

is suffering from weak and falling profitability. Karl Marx argued that the best measure of this was the rate of profit. The underlying rate of profit measures how much value is available for capitalists to invest (or spend on their personal consumption) relative to the value of their assets.

Graph one compares rates of profit in Australia and the US, based on national accounts data translated into a Marxist framework. We can see that, during the 2000s, the two rates of profit went in different directions.

Spurred on by the mining boom, the Australian rate of profit increased quite steadily, while the US rate of profit fell catastrophically. But in 2013, as the mining boom came to an end, the rate of profit in Australia started trending downward quite sharply, while the rate of profit in the US has been recovering.

This has had major consequences for investment. Graph two compares the rate of accumulation in Australia with the underlying rate of profit. Generally, the underlying rate of profit determines how much capitalists invest relative to the value of their assets (the "rate of accumulation"); and, ultimately, the rate of investment determines how quickly output and employment grow. But the resources boom disrupted this relationship, as investment poured in lured by the possibility of super profits in the future.

With the super profits in mining now gone, investment is crashing back down towards levels more consistent with the low rate of profit.

The low rate of profit, in Australia and elsewhere, is not something which can be easily reversed.

Historically, major increases in the rate of profit have only come about due to major devaluations of capital which can be caused by economic crises, and the widespread and needless human suffering this brings. This has not happened since the Second World War in Australia, and the evidence we have suggests widespread devaluation has not happened elsewhere either (despite the crisis).

Other ways to boost profit rates include holding down wages, extending working hours, having people retire later and cutting government spending. These are part of the ruling class' agenda throughout the advanced capitalist economies.

We must resist these attacks, but unless we get rid of capitalism itself they are going to keep coming.

HOW BRITISH WORKERS REBELLED AGAINST WWI

Tom Orsag explains how the sacrifices demanded during the war produced mass resistance and opposition amongst the British working class

AMID THE nationalist celebration of Gallipoli and the First World War in Australia, one thing we won't be reminded of is British workers' wartime resistance to speeds ups, inflation and undermining of unions.

The war required a huge increase in output, especially of the metal trades. To achieve this massive state intervention in industry was needed. By the end of the war the government controlled 90 per cent of total imports and the home production of food, coal and most other raw materials.

It controlled the distribution of food, through rationing, and of raw materials, through allocation. The engineering and shipbuilding industries were totally dominated by government orders and government controls.

But the control of labour was the most important of all.

The outbreak of war in 1914 saw the majority of the socialist parties across Europe capitulate to support their own governments' in the war. In Britain Labor Party leader Arthur Henderson, after urging workers to "stand together for peace" before the war, became one of the leaders of the parliamentary recruiting committee.

Collaboration of the union leaders with the war effort was also crucial. Early in 1915, Munitions Minister Lloyd George persuaded a conference of national trade union executives to agree, "there shall in no case be a stoppage of work upon munitions and equipment of war or other work required for a satisfactory completion of the war." This was the so-called Treasury Agreement. The mining unions alone refused to sign.

In June 1915, this was given legal force by the passage of the Munitions Act, which also provided for the prosecution of workers, for "losing time and other misdemeanours".

A system of "leaving certificates" was introduced which prevented any worker on "war work" from leaving their job except by permission of the employers. There was no corresponding provision to prevent employers

sacking workers.

But the willingness to accept sacrifices for the war was far from universal amongst the working class. As the war continued price increases and shortages produced a decline in workers' living standards, feeding bitterness at the war effort.

In July 1915, 200,000 South Wales miners went on strike for a new agreement. The strike was "proclaimed" as illegal under the Munitions Act.

It was then discovered that proclamations do not dig coal, and since that commodity was in acutely short supply, the government and the employers caved in after one week. The strike demonstrated that a group of determined and strategically placed workers could take on and beat the combined forces of the state, the employers and the Labour MPs.

Clyde Workers' Committee

But the key city of workers' resistance was Glasgow, the second city of the British empire and a centre of munitions manufacture and other heavy industry vital for the war.

Glasgow's population doubled between the 1860s and 1914. New groups of workers moved into overcrowded tenement blocks on the Clyde River.

The chief industry was metalworking, employing one-third of all workers, in large shipyards, marine engineering and factories.

The general level of metalworks trade unionism in Glasgow was high, with four out of five workers in their appropriate union. The strongest was the Amalgamated Society of Engineers (ASE).

At the end of 1914, on the expiry of a three-year agreement, the Glasgow District Committee of the ASE asked for a small pay rise. The employers rejected it.

An overtime ban was imposed. The union's executive council tried to persuade an aggregate meeting of members in early February 1915 to

.....
Three hundred delegates would meet every weekend in Glasgow. The vast majority were stewards in metal works and the shipyards.

call off the ban. It failed.

Then, on 15 February, a strike started at Weir's engineering works against efforts to speed up production. It quickly snowballed into a general stoppage for the pay rise. Some 10,000 engineers from at least 26 factories came out.

The ASE district committee joined the executive council in trying to kill the strike and, after a fortnight, succeeded. The eventual arbitration gave half the pay rise demanded as a "war bonus" plus 10 per cent piece rates.

The remarkable thing about this dispute was the emergence of a new body, the Clyde Labour Withholding Committee, composed largely of ASE shop stewards, which was accepted as the leadership in the companies on strike.

It would later be re-named the Clyde Workers' Committee (CWC). Three hundred delegates would meet every weekend in Glasgow. The vast majority were stewards in metal works and the shipyards.

The CWC was not an alternative to the trade unions, nor was it set up in opposition to them. It was a rank-and-file leadership formed to overcome the limits of the trade union bureaucracy.

The CWC's first leaflet from November 1915 still remains a guide to independent working class action, "We will support the officials just as long as they rightly represent the worker, but we will act independently immediately they misrepresent them."

Key to the CWC's strength was the fact that many of its stewards were socialists, members of the British Socialist Party (BSP) or the Socialist Labour Party.

Sadly, the socialist organisations that existed at the time, in particular the BSP, disdained involvement in workers' economic struggles.

The BSP's socialism, confined to soapbox speeches Sunday after Sunday, was irrelevant to the day to day concerns of workers radicalising in struggle.

John Maclean was not an elected



Above: Strikers raise the red flag in Glasgow just after the end of the war in 1919

member of the CWC. He was a primary school teacher.

But such was his standing as a socialist, an educator, an activist at factory gates and an internationalist against the war, that he and two of his supporters, Peter Petroff and James MacDougall, were initially accepted as having an important contribution to make to the committee's strategy and tactics.

Maclean's great strength was to break from the BSP's approach and immerse himself in these struggles, while remaining true to socialist principles. He was in Belfast, Northern Ireland, during the great dock strike of 1907. For the first time unskilled Protestant and Catholic workers fought side by side against the sectarian Protestant state and the bosses. Maclean witnessed for the first time the politicising effect of a major industrial struggle on masses of workers.

From there he went on to be involved in the Singer Sewing Machine strike of 1911 in Glasgow and the coal miners' strikes in the Rhondda Valley in South Wales in 1911 and 1912.

Maclean's approach was a breakthrough on the British Left. He continued to argue for socialist politics, not just sectional union struggles, but was involved in strikes and union struggles. This was unusual, if not unique, on the British Left at the time.

Dilution

The other main group in the CWC, the "syndicalists", rejected the idea of political leadership or the need to raise politics within the fight for workers' economic interests. When a major political issue like the war posed itself,

their abdication of political leadership proved disastrous.

Union strength in Glasgow was based on the dependence of factory bosses on skilled engineering workers. The key issue the CWC faced was dilution, the introduction of thousands of new unskilled workers into jobs formerly reserved for skilled men. This was part of the huge expansion of industry to feed the war.

But it was not enough simply to oppose this on sectional grounds, defending the higher wages of skilled workers against the introduction of lower paid workers.

The government argued that expanding the workforce was necessary to win the war. Opposing dilution was impossible without linking it to a fight against the war.

But the syndicalists in the leading positions of the CWC rejected the idea of political leadership, as a result of their experience of betrayal by political leaders in the Labor Party and the unions. Its chair, Willie Gallacher, expelled Maclean's supporters over their attempts to argue for strikes against the war.

The CWC had built few links with stewards across Britain. The government would now take advantage of this isolation to break up the shop stewards committee.

In 1916 the government jailed or deported from Clydeside key CWC shop stewards, as well as John Maclean. Emboldened by its victory in Glasgow, the government pressed ahead with dilution in other cities.

A new city-wide shop stewards committee sprung up in Sheffield, another key metal working city, with

Barrow and Manchester also having mass strikes.

The February 1917 revolution in Russia electrified the working class in Britain, feeding the growing anger against the war. Mass agitation led to Maclean's release from jail in June 1917, halfway through his three year sentence. In February 1918 he was appointed as consul for the new Bolshevik government in Russia.

A few months later Maclean was on trial for sedition. In his speech from the dock he said, "I am not here as the accused, I am here as the accuser of capitalism, dripping with blood from head to foot."

The shop stewards in the Clyde and Sheffield were catapulted again into leading mass strikes, the biggest during the war with up to 200,000 workers involved.

But although most stewards were socialists, they rarely raised the issue of the war inside the factories, fearing this would isolate them from the workers. They never raised an end to the war as a solution to the problems facing the working class, as John Maclean did.

Practically every issue facing workers—wages and conditions, industrial and military conscription, dilution—was a result of the war.

But the politics of the shop stewards, with their reluctance to raise political issues or offer leadership, prevented them from developing the movement beyond the narrow limits of trade union or economic demands.

Maclean wasn't able to build an organisation to overcome these problems. But his approach was a beacon for the left to build on.

ELEANOR MARX: A FIGHTER FOR WORKERS AND WOMEN

Lucy Honan reviews two new works on the lesser known Marx and her important contributions to Marxist ideas about women's liberation and class struggle

ELEANOR MARX was one of the greatest political activists of her time. She lived through, theorised and responded to the monumental waves of class struggle of the 19th century.

She demanded more than the bourgeois feminists' attempts to deal with sexism, and lead magnificent strikes, demonstrating the possibility of working class men and women fighting in solidarity. Rachel Holmes' new biography *Eleanor Marx: A Life*, and better still, Siobhan Brown's *Rebel's Guide to Eleanor Marx*, are rich histories for revolutionaries.

Holmes paints a vivid picture of Eleanor Marx, Karl Marx's youngest daughter, growing up in a London political hothouse. Karl Marx home schooled "Tussy" (Eleanor's nickname) while he was writing *Capital*. As a child she developed her own fierce opinions on insurrectionary Poland, Civil war in America and Italian Republicanism. Friedrich Engels and his partner Lizzy Burns initiated her to working class life and the Irish Independence struggle with an extended excursion to Manchester at the age of 14.

She was as thoroughly internationalist as her father, who at the time was setting up the International Working Mens' Association, known as the First International.

In the Commune

A theoretical commitment to the self-emancipation of the working class became a live possibility for Eleanor and socialists around the world with the Paris Commune. When Eleanor was 16, the workers of Paris revolted and ran first workers' democratic self-government the world had seen.

Eleanor drew immediate lessons about the role of women in class struggle. Women were leaders and fighters in the Commune alongside men, and their activity did more to transform their lives in 72 days than any reformist government had ever done. The working class promptly granted themselves equal pay and divorce rights, and promoted girls' education.

After two months the French government crushed the Commune, killing 20,000 communards and their supporters (Eleanor was briefly imprisoned in France as well). The defeat was devastating. But for Eleanor Marx and her political milieu, there were urgent lessons for communists: the real possibility of a world of workers' control, and the need for struggle and solidarity for such germs of socialist societies to survive.

The Woman Question

Among Eleanor Marx's most significant political contributions was the pamphlet she and her partner Edward Aveling wrote in 1886 called *The Woman Question from a Socialist Point of View*. Women were yet to win the vote anywhere in Europe, but the role of women in society was debated everywhere. Eleanor Marx used this pamphlet to argue that socialists must take women's oppression seriously, and consider the issue the perspective of working women.

It argues that women's oppression is bound up in the history of class society, not a universally immovable fact, an idea Engels introduced in, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*.

Marx and Aveling insisted that there was no disentangling sexism from the system that creates it, arguing: "those who attack the present treatment of women without seeking for the cause of this in the economics of our latter-day society are like doctors who treat a local affection without inquiring into the general bodily health."

The authors are particularly scathing of those concerned only with the injustices faced by ruling class women, and who "make no suggestion that is outside the limits of the society of today. Hence their work is, always from our point of view, of little value."

The Woman Question discusses the isolation and oppression women face in their social role under capitalism as wives and mothers, in

Eleanor Marx was scathing of those only concerned with the injustices faced by ruling class women

"serfdom recognised by law": "The old promise of the legend, in sorrow shalt thou bring forth children, is not only realised, but extended. She has to bring them up through long years, unrelieved by rest, unbrightened by hope, in the same atmosphere of perennial labour and sorrow ... The woman is occupied until bedtime comes. Often with young children her toil goes far into, or all through, the night."

Despite their sharp argument against isolating the woman question from the "mass of rotting" that is capitalism, Marx and Aveling make a confusing analogy between men as the oppressors of women and the middle class as the oppressors of workers, saying, "Women are the creatures of an organised tyranny of men, as the workers are the creatures of an organised tyranny of idlers ... But the one [woman] has nothing to hope from man as a whole, and the other [the worker] has nothing to hope from the middle class as a whole."

Perhaps these lines are what convinced biographer Holmes that Marx was a lifetime "feminist", fighting for equality with men as a project tied up with, but in some way separate from, the struggle for socialism. She suggests that Eleanor Marx was promoting the idea of a female "united feminist front, challenging across class divisions the divide and rule that regulates production and reproduction".

But Brown points out in *A Rebel's Guide* that as Marx gained more trade union experience and saw in action the power of solidarity between working men and women, she became far clearer about the best strategy for achieving women's liberation, and it did not include cross class feminist fronts. In an article for an Austrian women's paper in 1892, Marx wrote: "Now it seems to me we must commence by organising as trade unionists using our united strength as a means for reaching the ultimate goal, the emancipation of our class ... it will look less and less difficult in propor-

tion as the women and especially the men learn to see what strength lies in the unification of all workers”.

Eleanor Marx clarified her theory through collaboration with other Marxists, like Clara Zetkin. She saw that working women had different class interests to bourgeois women, and that their allies were working men.

In the 1892 article, Marx quotes Zetkin’s speech to the German Social Democratic Party’s Gotha conference, saying, “And that is why the working woman cannot be like the bourgeois woman who has to fight against the man of her own class ... [for] the proletarian women on the contrary, it is a struggle *with* the man of her own class against the capitalist class ... Her end and aim are not the right of free competition with men, but to obtain the political power of the proletariat.”

What Marx and Zetkin were discovering is that ruling class women, like the Julia Gillards of today, hold back the struggle for the emancipation of women through their role running a capitalist system that depends on women’s oppression.

New Unionism

1888 was the year that mass union struggle exploded across Britain. It was here that Marx married women’s liberation with working class struggle in practice. Far from urging an alliance with ruling class women, she was right at the epicentre of the working class explosion, driving a strident socialist agenda, arguing that the struggle must be built on solidarity with women, and marginalised workers. Tens of thousands of the most precariously employed and downtrodden workers formed or joined unions, held strikes and demonstrations and successfully wrestled better pay and conditions from their bosses.

The Bryant and May match women’s victorious three week strike inspired women, Irish and other marginalised workers to see their own potential power. The gas workers were next, demanding an 8 hour day, and they won their demand without even having to strike!

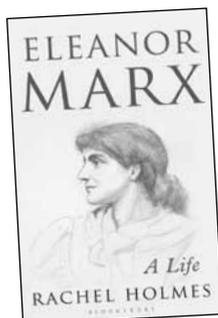
The National Union of Gas workers and General Labourers was born in 1889 at a meeting called by socialist militants, including Eleanor Marx. She built the union at Silver’s rubber, telegraph and electrical factory, putting particular effort into recruiting women, who were 15 per cent of the workforce.

Mark Hutchins and Will Thorne, presidents of the new union, spoke

Rebels’ Guide to Eleanor Marx
By Siobhan Brown
Bookmarks Available from Solidarity
\$12



Eleanor Marx: A Life
By Rachel Holmes
Bloomsbury Ebook \$18 RRP



of Marx’s role in bringing women into the union, “Mrs Aveling [Eleanor Marx] started a Women’s Union at Silvertown, and asked if they would be admitted ... 3000 men were present and her question was answered unanimously and enthusiastically in the affirmative. Since this, female branches—and very flourishing ones—have been organised in London and Bristol ... men and women are on equal footing.”

Workers had learned that solidarity was crucial, and that divisions between crafts, skill levels and sexes would be used by bosses to weaken their struggle. The Great Dock Strike in 1889 saw united struggle spread further. Port workers struck in mid-August, inspired by the match women and gas workers. By the end of August the strike had spread to other trades including ship painters, carpenters and workers in largely female trades like jam, biscuit and match manufacturing factories.

Eleanor Marx organised strike support, spoke in workplaces and at demonstrations, and always urged self-organisation, solidarity, and socialism. “We aim at a time when there

will no longer be one class supporting two others, but the unemployed at the top and at the bottom of society be got rid of”, she declared at one of her most famous and rousing May Day speeches.

Retreat and legacy

The 1890s saw a major bosses offensive. Workers were blacklisted and starved back to work, and the police were brutal and organised. Solidarity and militancy waned, and the new unions that Eleanor had thrown her life into were losing members.

In this climate of defeat, one of Eleanor’s closest comrades, Friedrich Engels died. She also suffered huge personal betrayal when she discovered Edward Aveling had secretly married another woman. Tragically, Eleanor Marx committed suicide by prussic acid in 1898.

Eleanor Marx’s loss was felt deeply around the world, but the lessons she drew out of the New Unionism movement and her arguments about the need for socialists to take up “the woman question” live on. Both biographies of Eleanor Marx revive an inspirational life and times.

Discussing the breakdown of the political system

The Extreme Centre: A Warning by Tariq Ali Verso \$20

TARIQ ALI is a serious figure on the left and has been since the 1960s. His new book skewers mainstream politics and its purveyors where “centre-left and centre-right collude to preserve the status quo”. Ali calls it “a dictatorship of capital that has reduced political parties to the status of the living dead”—quite right.

He focuses on Britain, where, “We live in a country without an opposition.” He writes, “Nowhere in Western Europe did a social democratic party capitulate so willingly and completely to the needs of a deregulated capitalism and imperial wars as the Labour Party.” The book is withering on “Blair’s kitsch project”, noting that by the time Blair stood down he “was universally loathed except by a majority of the Parliamentary Labour Party”.

“The Westminster gang are one,” he insists. “It is important to stress this fact as an election approaches.” Ali celebrates the radicalisation around the independence referendum in Scotland. There are chapters on the eurozone, the NHS, and an essay on Nato and imperialism which summarises Britain’s relationship with Washington as “a dog-like coital lock”.

Turning to the US, Ali dismisses “false optimism about the US’s imminent decline” as “a combination of economic determinism and wishful thinking”. He questions the extent of China’s military challenge to the US, suggesting, “There is no evidence [for] the propulsion of China towards proto-imperial status” and notes that “the course of a powerful empire cannot be diverted



without huge political convulsions at home or a serious challenge from abroad.”

The crash of 2008 and events since “have laid bare the weaknesses of the system, exposed its bald patches”, he writes, “but there has been no irretrievable breakdown... The economic situation in the US and Europe is serious but not terminal.”

What kind of resistance?

So what to do? Ali writes that “the contradiction between the dense concentration of capital and the needs of a majority of the population is becoming explosive.” He rightly adds, “Capitalism will not disappear of its own accord.” The first task is to shed “all illusions about the capacity of the rulers of the world to reform”. He looks to “mass mobilisations, popular assemblies, to create new movements and parties”, arguing, “Movements from below are a neces-

Above: Spain’s Indignados movement denounced the corruption of the political system

sary starting point for any change.”

Unfortunately, he sees the Russian Revolution of 1917 as a product of “the peculiar conditions of Tsarist Russia” and without explanation puts it on a par with the Cuban Revolution of 1959 when in fact, whatever the superficial similarities, these revolutions were quite different.

Ali appears to write off workers’ potential to change things, arguing that deindustrialisation “broke the spinal cord of the old working class” so that, “Defeated and demoralised, the official trade unions, linked to a segment of the extreme centre, capitulated to neo-liberalism.”

He sees the Bolivarian governments and movements of Venezuela,

Bolivia and Ecuador as reigniting hope, without analysing the current situation of these movements. He looks to Syriza and Podemos in Europe and celebrates the Radical Independence Campaign in Scotland, arguing, “The success of radical European parties may lead to serious discussion of an alternative economics.” Ali writes, “The South American model—state ownership of utilities and heavy regulation of capital—is an essential first step.” But he notes: “This will not be easy in Europe... Any such development will be hindered by each and every structure of the EU.”

The book is a mix of analysis, reportage and résumé, suffused with wit. It’s engaging but ultimately frustrating. In the final few lines Ali writes, “The attempts to roll back neo-liberalism are gathering momentum, but what to put in its place and by what means remain matters of debate.”

He quotes Lenin in 1913: “It is not enough for revolution that the lower classes should not want to live in the old way. It is also necessary that the upper classes should be unable to rule and govern in the old way.”

Then he concludes, “We live in a very different world on many levels, but what the Russian Revolutionary wrote...remains apposite.” Ali goes no further, failing to address the question which appears as a sub-head on the book’s back cover and echoes Lenin in 1902: “What is to be done?”

Ali has a memorable turn of phrase, so I approached the book with pleasure. Yet I wonder who it’s for. It is available as a cheap paperback, but I doubt it will reach a wide layer of those new to political activity who are more likely to look to Russell Brand. That is a shame because the left could do with a Tariq Ali on fire.

Ian Taylor
Socialist Review UK

Selma a reminder of the justice still to be won

Selma
Directed by Ava
DuVernay
In cinemas now

IN OFFICIAL US history, the civil rights movement has been emptied of its radical content.

Martin Luther King now gets a national holiday and is celebrated for non-violence and brilliant oratory, often by the same political forces that were trying to undermine him in the 1950s and 1960s. The implication is that the era of struggle is over, that in a post-racial USA, racism is a matter of individual racists, or worse, of blacks themselves creating their own problems.

But the official history has been shaken by the shooting murder of an unarmed teenager, Mike Brown, in Ferguson, Missouri, in 2014, and the subsequent emergence of the Black Lives Matter movement protesting systematic killing and harassment.

That's the context in which *Selma* arrives. Though it's primarily an historical account of the struggle for the right to vote, there are clear allusions to today's events in the scenes of police violence. The theme song *Glory* includes the lyrics, "that's why Rosa sat on the back of the bus / that's why we marched in Ferguson with our hands up".

The actors attended the premiere wearing t-shirts saying, "I can't breathe"—the last words of Eric Garner, a black man strangled to death by a police officer in New York City, accused of selling single cigarettes. Garner's death, and the failure to charge the officer responsible, helped spread the Black Lives Matter movement from Ferguson to the whole USA.



The struggle in Selma, a small town in the state of Alabama, was focused on winning a federal law against restrictions used by the former slave states of the South to prevent blacks from exercising their right to vote.

Selma shows the determined, successful protest against a vicious establishment. To the displeasure of many Democrat supporters, the film exposes the real role Democratic President Lyndon Johnson (LBJ) played, only introducing the Voting Rights Act of 1965 as pragmatic response to escalating protest, rather than an act of principle.

Selma ends, in some ways, where today's story begins—with the passing of the Voting Rights Act, one year after the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that formally ended segregation in the South.

But the attainment of formal legal equality was not the movement's conclusion. Many black activists radicalised in

Above: Martin Luther King marching on Selma in the film

the years following, and began to see that the continuing black poverty and inequality had its roots in the capitalist system.

In the 1960s, blacks in the North did not experience formal segregation laws and had the right to vote. Yet they still lived in segregated ghettos. Four days after the Voting Rights Act passed the biggest black riots the United States had ever seen broke out in Watts, in Los Angeles.

King

Martin Luther King is shown wrestling with these issues in *Selma*, when he asks a fellow leader while inside a jail cell, "what's the point of fighting for the right of a man to sit at a lunch counter if he can't afford to buy the burger?" In

the years following, King began to campaign for the redistribution of wealth and supported workers' struggles.

Ultimately, King's dilemma remains unsolved. As a result of the civil rights' movement, a small layer of blacks have been able to succeed in official politics or the corporate world. But it's a different story for the vast majority. The average black household makes 61.4 per cent of what a white household makes, black mothers have double the mortality rates of whites, and every 28 hours, a black person is shot by police, law enforcement or a vigilante.

No election can reverse this oppression—part of the reason why the voter turn-out rate, particularly of blacks, has been so low in the United States. Yet even voting rights are under attack. Some of parts of the Voting Rights Act were recently reversed by the Supreme Court.

America has its first

black President, and yet he consistently offers excuses for a racist system. Speaking in Selma to commemorate the 50-year anniversary Obama said, "Just this week, I was asked whether I thought the Department of Justice's Ferguson report shows that, with respect to race, little has changed in this country ... But I rejected the notion that nothing's changed. What happened in Ferguson may not be unique, but it's no longer endemic, or sanctioned by law and custom; and before the Civil Rights Movement, it most surely was."

But young blacks and their supporters standing up across the US are doing so precisely because of the endemic nature of racism. They are confronting the same dilemma King grappled with inside his Alabama prison cell in Selma. They, and not black politicians like Obama, are the force that can solve it.

Amy Thomas

NAURU REFUGEES FIGHT FOR FREEDOM

By Ian Rintoul

IN JANUARY, it was the mass hunger strikes on Manus Island that challenged the offshore processing regime. Now Nauru has become the latest flashpoint of resistance.

Around 400 refugees on Nauru have embarked on a campaign of non-cooperation with Australia's detention regime and the Nauruan government.

The campaign was launched following a state reception for Australian Immigration Minister, Peter Dutton, on 26 February. Dutton announced another five years' funding for the Nauru detention regime.

The Nauruan government eagerly grasped the money, but for the refugees it signalled another five years' imprisonment on the island, robbed of their future. Although recognised as refugees needing international protection, all they are offered is hell and uncertainty for them and their families.

The discrimination is compounded by the fact that asylum seekers were arbitrarily selected when they arrived in Australia to be transferred to Nauru and Manus Island. Those who stayed on Christmas Island have now been released into the Australian community and will be eligible for temporary protection visas.

Those on Nauru have suffered up to 20 months of horrendous conditions.

"We were no longer willing to co-operate with the detention regime on Nauru. It was like Australia and Nauru were treating us as slaves who be transported across the Pacific and 'sold' to Nauru," one refugee told *Solidarity*.

Children were withdrawn from school; refugee adults boycotted English classes; refugees refused to attend interviews with case managers; and around 150 withdrew from their jobs.

On Friday 27 February, around 300 staged their first peaceful protest. When the rally attempted to march along Nauru's main road, the police blocked the road, and a number of refugees were punched and knocked to the ground to prevent the march proceeding.

The refugees responded with a call to the Nauruan people to support their



Above: Refugees on Nauru protest as part of the non-cooperation campaign

fight against the cruelty of the Australian government and the collaboration of the Nauruan government. They called a protest for 4 March, and made it clear their protests are not directed at ordinary Nauruans.

But since the mass protests, tensions have mounted. The Nauru government first issued decrees banning asylum seekers and refugees from certain areas; now they have circulated notices threatening up to three years' jail for protesting. On 4 March, the police carried out pre-emptive raids; arresting families including a seven year-old at 4am. Police were stationed at the gates of the family compound and began arresting refugees who left the compound to shop.

Refugees gathered to protest the arbitrary arrests. But as they tried to walk to the police station to call for the release of those arrested, police swooped—arresting and jailing 183 people including children over that day.

While the children were taken out of the jail by case managers that night, some adults spent 48 hours in jail and all of them went 24 hours without food. Muslim women were stripped of their head coverings and some were forced to strip entirely.

The mass arrests have encouraged a minority of Nauruans to step up their vigilante attacks on refugees. Groups of up to 25 have stoned refugee compounds. There are growing cases of harassment. Some shops have

stopped selling rice to refugees; others refuse to sell alcoholic drinks and there also seems to be a ban on selling tools like saws or screwdrivers.

In November, one refugee was blinded in one eye by stone throwing Nauruans. In March, an Iranian couple were seriously injured when their motorbike crashed after a stone thrown by locals knocked the driver unconscious. Two days later, two masked men armed with a bat and a sword attacked a refugee on a motorbike right outside the family camp at Anabare. Other refugees drove the attackers off, although two suffered bruising from blows from the bat.

But the refugees are undeterred. Chants of "No more Nauru," and "Shutdown offshore," ring out across the island. Since the mass arrests, hundreds of refugees have staged further peaceful protests.

The Australian government says that refugees on Nauru have nothing to do with them; the Nauruan government says advocates are lying about what's happening. So who is pulling the strings?

One incident says it all. As *Solidarity* was going to press, the refugees met with a representative of the Nauruan government seeking permission to protest at the Australian immigration office or the Australian embassy. The Nauruan rep said she would raise the issue with the Australian government when she met them.

Chants of "No more Nauru" and "Shutdown offshore" ring out across the island