

NO TO FORTRESS AUSTRALIA NO TO FORTRESS EUROPE



OPEN THE BORDERS

DON'T BOMB SYRIA

REFUGEES

Epidemic of abuse
on Nauru

ECONOMY

China and the
stockmarket woes

GREECE

Fighting racism and
the far right



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SOLIDARITY: WHO ARE WE?

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

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

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

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SOLIDARITY MEETINGS AND BRANCHES

Sydney

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

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Things they say

We are moving forward, only forward.

Alexis Tsipras channels Julia Gillard in launching Syriza's election campaign in Greece. The party's campaign slogan is "Only forward"

A form of communication oppressively compelling a speedy response
Dyson Heydon justifies his distaste for email

The feeling on the ground is 'everyone can piss off back to Australia'.
Ronnie Knight MP for Manus Island, explaining that community goodwill had evaporated following the alleged rape of the local worker by Wilson security guards.

Something is happening here in Australia. People have united behind the simple idea that our boundless plains are here to be shared, especially with those that are in desperate need.
NSW Premier Mike Baird sniffs the wind, while conveniently ignoring the detention camps his party runs for refugees

Look at the Smorgons. There are 65 of them. A nightmare. With us I have two wives, past and present, who don't care and two daughters who don't care. So no fighting.
Harry Triguboff, boss of Meriton, explaining the problems of billionaire families

I didn't want to create a dynasty. I just wanted to create a business...for me! Triguboff explains why he is worth \$15 billion

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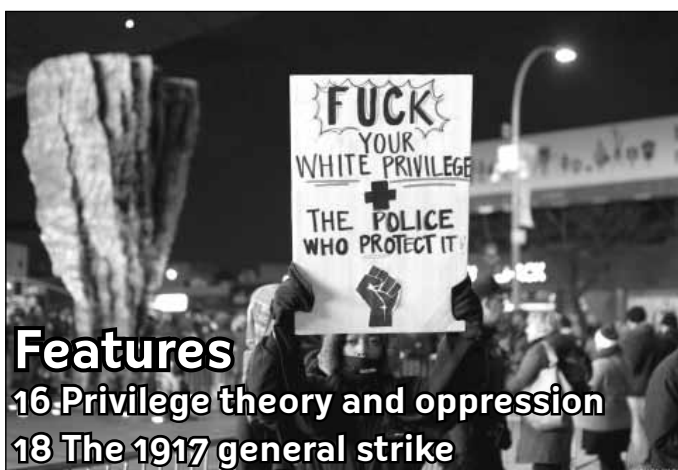
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INSIDE THE \$Y\$TEM

Qantas CEO gets 490 per cent pay rise

QANTAS CEO Alan Joyce has received an unbelievable 490 per cent pay rise—up almost \$10 million from last year. His already exorbitant salary will now be \$11.8 million, or 274 times the wage of the average baggage handler.

As if this wasn't shocking enough, recent research has revealed that top CEOs in Australia are actually being paid far more than official figures in Annual Reports suggest. According to the Australian Council of Superannuation Investors (ACSI), the ten highest paid CEOs from among Australia's 100 biggest companies collectively took home around \$71 million more than they admitted.

This took their collective remuneration up to \$171 million—equivalent to the pay of 4000 baggage handlers! Ramsey Healthcare CEO Chris Rex topped the rotten pile, grabbing more than three times the official figure. Thanks to "less obvious forms of remuneration" his pay hit \$30 million in 2014.

Force students to pay back HECS sooner, says Andrew Norton

THE GRATTAN Institute's Andrew Norton used a recent education conference to call for a dramatic lowering of the HECS repayment threshold. This would mean graduates with lower incomes would have to start making payments.

The rabid advocate of university deregulation and former adviser to John Howard's Education Minister David Kemp, says that, "If we keep the current threshold, increasing numbers of students will not repay their debt". Increasing numbers of graduates are not reaching the current repayment threshold of \$54,126 annual income.

But the falling ability of students to repay HECS debts is a result of the flagging economy and increasing graduate unemployment. The unemployment rate for graduates four months after completing their degrees is at almost 12 per cent—its highest level in 20 years. Norton also used the conference to repeat his calls for HECS debts to be taken from the estates of the dead.

Officer who locked up Haneef promoted



RAMZI JABBOUR, an officer who faced harsh criticism over his role in the infamous Muhamed Haneef case, has now been made Deputy Commissioner of the Australian Federal Police (AFP). Dr Haneef was targeted under draconian new "anti-terrorism" laws in 2007, arrested at Brisbane airport in connection with a failed London bomb plot.

Haneef was detained without charge for 12 days, had his visa cancelled and was eventually charged with supporting a terrorist organisation. The charges proved to be completely unfounded and were dropped almost immediately. But he still spent a month in total wrongfully locked up.

The subsequent embarrassment and public outrage forced apologies from the AFP and the Commonwealth. A 2008 report into the scandal by retired NSW judge John Clarke mentioned the new AFP Deputy Commissioner specifically. It said the then AFP Commander Ramzi Jabbour "lost objectivity" and also described him as being "unable to see that the evidence he regarded as highly incriminating in fact amounted to very little". Clearly the treatment he dealt out to Haneef is no barrier to promotion in the AFP.

UN report predicts Gaza to be uninhabitable

GAZA COULD be uninhabitable within five years, according to a report by the UN Trade and Development Board. Subject to an eight year economic blockade by Israel and Egypt, and three wars in the last six years, Gaza has been crippled. The report says the onslaught has, "ravaged the already debilitated infrastructure of Gaza, shattered its productive base, left no time for meaningful reconstruction or economic recovery and impoverished the Palestinian population."

It also points out that while Gaza's population of 1.8 million rely on coastal aquifers as their primary source of fresh water, 95 per cent of it is unsafe to drink. Food insecurity affects 72 per cent of households and almost half the population receive some form of food aid. The prediction is that the problems will worsen, firstly because of the constant destruction wrought on Gaza and secondly because the population is set to expand by 300,000 by 2020.

The report was released as the Egyptian army stepped up its efforts to shut down smuggling tunnels between Gaza and Egypt. The bloody dictatorship of General al-Sisi plans to build 18 fisheries along the Gaza border which are supposed to flood any smuggling tunnels used to bring in desperately needed supplies.

Research and writing by
Adam Adelpour

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THE SYSTEM to solidarity@solidarity.net.au

Border Force shows its soft side

TONY ABBOTT'S new gun-toting, 6000 strong Border Force may be designed to strike fear into the hearts of black and brown people in Australia and offshore prison camps, but they have a soft side for their political masters.

In September it was revealed that Melbourne based toymaker Wompro has been commissioned to produce 2000 "Border-force branded plush dogs"—soft toys to be used as "corporate gifts" for "international dignitaries and other stakeholders".

Border Force is desperate for some good publicity at the moment, so was happy to spend \$15,000 on the toys.

After the \$10 million cost of their new Gestapo-style uniforms and rebranding the department, it's next to nothing.

Sydney pub bans workers

A SYDNEY pub has introduced a new rule banning hi-vis work wear, following a ritzy renovation. The ban on florescent work wear at The Village Inn in Oxford St, Paddington will keep out construction workers who previously frequented the venue.

The pub now has a sign that reads, "Dress code: Upscale fashionable attire". Below it there is a comprehensive list of banned clothing, including "Steel Cap Boots", "Flannelette Shirts", "Trade-Work Wear" and even includes "Rats Tails" or "Mullets".

Owner Leeroy Peterson defended the decision by saying, "it doesn't fit the demographic of the area anymore". The venue has been bombarded with negative online reviews.

One reviewer put it succinctly, "Don't want tradies... Who refurbished ya pub mate?"

Who said that class is dead?

EDITORIAL

Abbott's ship sinking quick—time to build the resistance

THE ABBOTT government continues to lurch from one disaster to the next. The Canning by-election, due as we went to press, could be the final straw. Even a big swing against the Liberals will again put Abbott's leadership on life support.

There is already speculation about dumping Joe Hockey as Treasurer—as if that will do anything about the main problem: Abbott.

The refugee crisis in Europe has produced a sea change in the public mood around refugees. For the first time since he came to office, Abbott's anti-refugee attitudes have been under pressure. He was forced, after several days of begrudging opposition to raising the intake, to accept an extra 12,000 Syrian refugees.

There is a serious opportunity for the refugee campaign to take advantage of the public's shift to press the demands to end the full suite of Abbott's anti-refugee measures.

The government's decision to pick a notoriously conservative judge to preside over their Royal Commission into trade unions has also come unstuck, after Dyson Heydon was caught out for agreeing to address an event organised by the Liberal Party.

The "Border Farce" in Melbourne was another spectacular display of over-reach. The announcement that Border Force officers would be roaming the streets, "speaking with any individual we cross paths with" to target visa overstayers met an immediate backlash. In a rapid victory for public pressure and protest, 150 people shut down a scheduled press conference and forced the canning of the operation within hours.

Immigration Minister Peter Dutton claimed the idea had nothing to do with him. But the press release was run by his office on two occasions.

Once again Bill Shorten's conservative instincts were on display as he backed the operation when questioned by a journalist, even trying to up the ante by calling for a blitz on 457 visa holders. Only once the scale of the public response became clear did Shorten change his tune.

Dutton came out blaming the media for waging a "jihad" on the government, saying there was a, "huge move by Fairfax at the moment to try and bring the Government down", adding they were "being helped by the ABC".

Dutton was widely ridiculed, but the episode underlined the govern-



Above: Abbott continues to use Islamophobia and scaremongering, as his last chance to win back some support

ment's determination to whip up fear about national security. Dutton claimed the media was just venting its "frustration" over Operation Sovereign Borders and the way the government has "stopped the boats".

Unless Abbott is challenged he will keep using scaremongering about refugees and terrorism to try to build support. Even as he announced the increase in Syrian refugees he was dog whistling about keeping out Muslim refugees. Now Abbott wants to bomb Syria so he can keep playing up the threat of Islamic State.

Tax cuts for the rich

The problems for the Australian economy are another headache for Abbott. There are now serious fears about recession. The jitters on the stockmarket reflect concern about growth in China, and the latest figures show the Australian economy is barely growing. Unemployment, at 6.3 per cent, is the highest since 2002.

But instead of doing anything to fund services or jobs, the Liberals want tax cuts for the big end of town. Treasurer Joe Hockey has declared the need to eliminate "high rates of tax, particularly at the top level", noting his concern that "our top rate kicks in relatively quickly, at \$180,000".

Hockey wants to promise income tax cuts at the next election. But he can't say how the government would pay for it, adding fuel to speculation about moves to increase the GST.

The unions have focused their opposition to Abbott on a door-knocking

campaign in marginal seats, with a nationwide "door knock to knock off Abbott" on 12 and 13 September.

But a campaign just telling people to vote out Abbott does nothing to put pressure on Labor to deliver any alternative, or to build the unions' ability to fight at a workplace level.

The unions should be calling demonstrations and strikes against Abbott's agenda, and raising demands for Labor to reverse it.

CPSU members in the Federal Public Service are set to take a second day of united strike action on 15 September. This is the kind of action that can be a platform for demanding Labor reverse the cuts to jobs in the public sector, repair the damage done to services by Abbott's cuts and improve wages.

So far the CPSU's focus has been short half-day stoppages, as part of a campaign similarly focused on encouraging the public to vote Abbott out. A sustained campaign of strike action that disrupted the operations of government and key services would help build the confidence and workplace networks needed to defend workers' conditions under either a Labor or Liberal government.

Demonstrations over refugees, calling for an end to offshore detention and Abbott's full suite of anti-refugee policies, and against Abbott's Islamophobic terrorism scare, will both put pressure on Abbott and raise demands for change. That is the kind of fightback we need around Medicare, services and jobs too.

.....
The "Border Farce" in Melbourne was another spectacular display of over-reach

Wave of refugees challenges Fortress Europe

By Mark Gillespie

EUROPE IS being confronted with its greatest refugee crisis since World War Two. The scale of the crisis is immense. Germany alone expects to receive 800,000 asylum seekers this year.

Many politicians are preaching xenophobia, but the tragic photos of Alan Kurdi—a three-year-old Kurdish boy from Syria whose body was washed up on a Turkish beach—have provoked a flood of public sympathy.

Millions of ordinary Europeans have greeted weary people stepping off boats and trains with water, food, clothing, toys and huge welcome signs.

When Munich police tweeted that a train carrying 590 refugees was arriving, thousands of locals greeted them with food and clothing.

Online petitions demanding that political leaders take in more refugees took off like wildfire. Eleven thousand Icelanders volunteered to take refugees into their homes.

Sheer public pressure forced British Prime Minister David Cameron who earlier claimed “taking more and more refugees” was not the answer, into increasing Britain’s pathetic intake of Syrians.

Defending borders

The compassion coming from ordinary Europeans couldn’t stand in sharper contrast to the response of most European leaders.

Their priority has been to defend fortress Europe and demonise the asylum seekers as “marauding migrants”. Hungary constructed a four metre high razor wire fence along its 170 kilometre border with Serbia. Thousands of refugees were prevented from boarding trains as authorities tried to herd them into wretched detention centres.

Czech police detained 214 refugees and used pens to write identification numbers on their arms, reminding people of how the Nazis once branded people.

Greece and Bulgaria have built fences while Macedonia tried to close its border using riot police armed with truncheons.

The Netherlands and Denmark have introduced new laws so as to “deter” asylum seekers.

Last October Italy suspended Operation Mare Nostrum, its successful



Above: Syrian refugees get through a border fence to enter Hungary

search and rescue mission, after other European governments refused to help fund it. Only after a sharp spike in lives lost at sea was funding for Operation Triton, its replacement, increased. But funding is still below its previous level and focused on border protection not search and rescue.

Germany, France and Italy have argued the EU needs to accept more refugees. But Britain, Ireland and Denmark immediately opted out while the Spanish Prime Minister said “some countries don’t want refugees”. Slovakia and Poland said they’d only accept a token number of “Christian” refugees.

The largest number of refugees fleeing to Europe come from Syria. The rise of Islamic State has compounded the effects of the civil war that began when the Assad regime attempted to crush the uprising in 2011.

This can only be understood in the context of the Western-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. The brutality of the invasion and occupation and the sectarian divisions whipped up by the occupiers have all contributed to the sharpening of conflict in the Middle East.

Other source countries also bear the footprint of Western imperialism. Afghanistan, invaded and occupied since 2001, has only humanitarian disaster and growing persecution to show for it. Likewise refugees from East Africa flee societies left deeply militarised by Western intervention.

Yet the overall number of asylum seekers attempting to reach Europe is miniscule. The vast majority of refu-

gees live in undeveloped countries.

Turkey hosts more than all of Europe combined, close to two million and another million live in Lebanon. Impoverished Ethiopia is hosting over a million refugees from Eritrea, Somalia and South Sudan.

Justification

To justify their inhumanity European leaders speak of “queue jumpers”, a “war on people smugglers” and the need to “prevent further loss of lives at sea”. Tony Abbott said the tragic deaths in the Mediterranean show “you’ve got to stop the boats”.

But people only get on boats because they have no choice. The fence constructed along Greece’s border with Turkey has forced them to risk boat journeys.

Even when politicians are shamed into accepting more refugees it comes with a right wing twist. David Cameron increased Britain’s intake of Syrians, but will only accept those who stayed in the Middle East, suggesting those coming by boat are queue jumpers.

Politicians, too, are using the crisis to justify military intervention in Syria, despite previous interventions creating millions of refugees. Julie Bishop used the refugee crisis to call for more bombing in the region, as did Tory MPs in the UK.

While the politicians have disgraced themselves, refugee activists in Australia can take heart from the response of the people of Europe. It shows that we can challenge the xenophobia peddled by the media and the major parties.

.....
The compassion from ordinary Europeans couldn’t stand in sharper contrast to the response of most European leaders

Abbott's Syria refugee announcement: Too little, too discriminatory and too hypocritical

By Ian Rintoul

AS THE refugee crisis unfolded in Europe and the photo of the lifeless body of a three year-old on a Turkish beach galvanised calls for action, an outpouring of public pressure has forced the Abbott government to take 12,000 Syrian refugees.

The 12,000 will be on top of the existing humanitarian intake of 13,750, but the increase has come grudgingly and with a divisive twist.

It is a "one off" increase that some government Ministers are saying will take more than two tears to fulfil. The Abbott government cut Australia's humanitarian intake from 20,000 to 13,725 when elected in 2013. So in terms of numbers, this is not as generous as the government tries to make out.

Germany is accepting 12,000 refugees a day. When you consider the size of the humanitarian crisis it is a pathetically small increase. Even some Liberal backbenchers were suggesting 50,000.

Discrimination

Secondly the stipulation that Australia's selection would be from persecuted ethnic and religious minority groups is transparently anti-Muslim.

Christopher Pyne tried to cover this up—saying that the government would not be singling out any particular group.

But first Liberal Senate leader, Eric Abetz, and now Social Services Minister Scott Morrison, has made it very clear that "Christians will make up the bulk of the government's intake."

This has re-introduced a discriminatory basis for Australia's refugee program. Greens leader Richard di Natale rightly declared, that there is more than a whiff of White Australia about this policy.

Abbott is taking the opportunity to inflame the anti-Muslim sentiments being pushed by his backbenchers Cory Bernadi and George Christensen who claimed, "Reports of Islamic State terrorists posing as refugees is more reason to prioritise Syrian Christians".

The government's insistence that it will only accept women and family groups is a (not-so-silent) dog whistle to Islamophobia; with the clear implication that single Muslim men could



Above: Refugees celebrate after making it into the EU

be a threat to national security.

The Muslim community has hit back at the divisive policy. "We are obliged to condemn in the strongest terms the suggestion that priority should be given to people of one faith over another. It is truly abhorrent that in Australia in 2015 we are hearing that federal politicians have specified that there be "no more Muslim men" in the proposed refugee intake. Widyen Fares, media officer for Lebanese Muslim Association told a Sydney Press Conference.

The discrimination and the Islamophobia is blatant, but there is not a word from Labor leader Bill Shorten, who has fallen over himself to accept Abbott's policy, saying that, "the government move expressed the generous, decent and open hearted Australia that we all love and serve."

Abbott has disgracefully used the refugee crisis to try and win support for extending Australia's military intervention from Iraq into Syria. But bombing IS in Syria will only make the situation worse.

The Syrian refugee crisis is four years old and the vast majority of refugees are fleeing the barrel bombs and brutality of the Assad regime. Some estimates say up to 85 per cent of the civilian casualties have been caused by Assad. It was the sectarian divisions fostered by Western imperialism in Iraq that is ultimately responsible for the growth of IS.

Lastly, the Abbott government, and the Labor Party, have turned

their backs on the Syrian and other asylum seekers rotting in Australian-run detention centres in Villawood, Nauru and Manus Island.

Abbott says, "there is a world of difference between people in the camps on the border of Syria and people who have done a deal with people smugglers."

Shamefully Labor's Immigration spokesperson says the same thing, "It is essential to maintain that people who came by boat who go to Nauru and Manus, will not come to Australia."

But there is no difference between the refugees in Syria and those in Australian detention. The homes of both the Syrians in detention in Villawood, in Aleppo and Deraa, have been bombed by Assad, the latter as recently as six weeks ago. They have been held in detention for 26 months, first victims of Assad, now victims of Australia.

Promoting the government's Syrian refugee deal, Peter Dutton said, "The Government's been very clear about our desire in particular to help women and children, families who have been displaced, women who have been raped or sexually assaulted otherwise."

But this is a sick joke—the government actually cares nothing for the refugee women being sexually assaulted on Nauru.

Abbott's callous "Stop the boats" slogan has taken a battering. Now the campaign has to demand to free the Syrians in detention and to close Nauru and Manus now!

Royal Commission bias now out in the open

By James Supple

THE FARCE over Dyson Heydon's links to the Liberal Party has exposed the Trade Union Royal Commission for what it always was—a political stunt aimed against Labor and the unions.

Whether Heydon is removed as Commissioner or not the Royal Commission is seriously tarnished. The spectacle of Heydon himself deciding on whether he was biased only made it look worse. The ACTU is still considering the option of court action to force him to step down.

Dyson Heydon agreed to speak at a Liberal Party event, withdrawing only when news hit the media. But this is only the most blatant example of his conservative bias. He went on the record, speaking at a dinner hosted by the notorious right-wing journal *Quadrant*, attacking progressive “activist” judges of the High Court in 2002. The speech was widely described as a “job application” to the Howard government for his spot on the High Court bench.

A video of Heydon sneering at the actions of the Rudd Labor government has also surfaced, again speaking at a right-wing event, hosted by the Centre for Independent Studies in 2013.

He is being paid close to \$1 million a year to preside over the Commission, according to information published by News Corp.

The Royal Commission has spent most of its time investigating legitimate everyday union activity, and helped to brand it as criminal. The allegations against the CFMEU are a prime example.

Recent hearings have focused on the ACT branch of the union.

The only official issued with a genuine charge, Halafih Kivalu in Canberra, told the Commission the union had no knowledge of his efforts to extract bribes from builders, nor is there any evidence suggesting the union did know. One of his associates, form worker Tuungafasi Manase, has also been charged with perjury.

But the union has also been referred to the ACCC for, of all things, trying to force employers to sign onto EBAs the union was happy with. It is standard practice in construction to demand that all contractors working on a building site sign onto the EBA, ensuring workers all get paid the same



Above:
Commissioner Dyson Heydon's Liberal Party links have been exposed

rate. But according to the Royal Commission this is “cartel behaviour”.

The ridiculous blackmail charge against CFMEU organiser John Lomax is similar. He stands accused of getting a building company to sign a union EBA, hurting the company as it cost them money.

There was also a claim of intimidating a Work Safe inspector over allowing work to continue despite safety concerns.

But as ACT Construction Union Secretary Dean Hall pointed out, “The ACT has the worst safety record in the building construction industry by a country mile and the CFMEU and its officers have played a proactive role in trying to enforce and promote an improved and better safety standard”.

In 2012 a government inquiry found the number of deaths in the industry was almost twice the national average.

Standing up for safety on building sites should not be a criminal offence.

In Victoria, police have reportedly taken witness statements with a view to laying charges against CFMEU Secretary John Setka and Assistant Secretary Shaun Reardon for action taken against Boral during the dispute with building company Grocon.

The Commission recommended charges be laid in its interim report in December.

But this was simply an industrial tactic designed to put pressure on Grocon.

Even if many of the charges never stick, the Royal Commission has been used to air any and every allegation against the unions employers are willing to make, generating a stream of anti-union media headlines.

The circus has gone on long enough—this Commission should be shut down.

The Royal Commission has spent most of its time investigating legitimate everyday union activity

Public servants set to strike together

AS WE went to press, Federal Public servants were set to walk off the job on 15 September. The half-day strike action will be the second round of public sector wide action as pay bargaining continues.

The Abbott government has shown no indication of moving from its tough bargaining stance.

In early September Veterans' Affairs became the latest department to reject the government's pay offer.

The result of a ballot in the large

Department of Human Services is also due soon. Workers have been offered a 1.5 per cent pay rise, but would lose casual loading for work on weekends, public holidays and outside business hours.

The union is focused on a campaign to tell the public about Abbott's war on the public sector. But further public sector wide strike action can build members' confidence and cause disruption that will give the government a real headache.

Is the Australian economy facing recession?

By Peter Jones

STOCKMARKET GYRATIONS and slowing growth figures have raised renewed questions about the health of the Australian and world economy.

At the height of the mining boom Australia's elite came up with a range of ambitious perspectives for China's growth. The consulting firm McKinsey reckoned China's urban population would hit one billion by 2025. On that basis BHP Billiton and Rio Tinto decided China would be producing a billion tonnes of steel between 2025 and 2030, and they would supply the bulk of the iron ore.

The figure soon found its way into government reports and corporate investment pitches, helping fuel the largest mining investment boom in Australia since the gold rush of the 19th century.

As the Chinese economy slows these perspectives are looking doubtful. According to the Chinese government's top steel-industry forecaster production started to decline last year from a peak of 800 million tonnes, and that trend looks set to continue. Meanwhile Brazil's Vale is expected to ramp up production to 450 million tonnes of iron ore by 2018, which will make it a larger producer than BHP and Rio combined.

The official figures have China's real GDP still growing at just above 7 per cent a year, which might look healthy compared to the 0.2 per cent growth Australia recorded last quarter. But the official figures are notoriously unreliable. Based on more direct measures of economic output, like steel production figures, mainstream economist Harry Wu has estimated that GDP growth in China during 2012 was already as low as 4.1 per cent.

Concerns about China were reinforced last month when a closely watched manufacturing index recorded its worst reading since the global financial crisis. Stock markets responded with sharp falls around the world. This highlights the extent to which growth elsewhere now depends on growth in China.

Chinese authorities responded by buying up stocks on the Shanghai exchange and threatening to prosecute traders for "malicious short-selling". This, combined with the now less likely prospect that the US Federal Reserve will increase interest rates



Above: The turmoil on Chinese stock markets sent shockwaves across the world, not least in Australia

this month, has helped to stem further losses for now. But low interest rates do nothing about the underlying problems of profitability in the US, China and elsewhere.

Global growth continues to stagnate in the wake of the most serious crisis of capitalism since the 1930s. If the Fed leaves rates at zero this also risks exacerbating what already looks to be a stock market bubble.

Australia's transition

For some time the Reserve Bank has been trying to engineer a transition from export-led growth, mainly in mining and mainly to China, to growth driven by housing construction.

Australia has some of the highest property prices in the world because growth in housing investment fell below the level needed to keep pace with demand during the boom. It was more profitable for businesses to invest in building mines than it was to build houses, so, combined with the effect of low interest rates, prices for existing houses and apartments kept increasing.

But while there has been some increase in housing construction, it hasn't been close to enough to make up for the drop-off in investment in mining.

And it certainly hasn't put a dent in housing prices, especially in Sydney, where the median house price is over a million dollars.

With unemployment at around its highest rate in 13 years, the Coalition

are clearly feeling the heat on the issue of jobs.

The Coalition also sound far from convinced about their "dams in the North, subs in the South" strategy for economic development. Thankfully for northern Australia's ecosystems the end of the commodities boom has not made turning the rivers inland appeal to wider sections of business than Barnaby Joyce's mates. And Abbott's backflip on sourcing subs from Japan is transparently motivated by the fear of losing marginal seats in South Australia.

What we actually need aren't jobs to make military hardware but people paid to build renewable energy and public transport infrastructure. But this is something neither major party is offering.

Instead the Liberals have been trying to wedge Labor over their hesitation in supporting the China Australia Free Trade Agreement (ChAFTA). ChAFTA is important to business for obvious reasons, but given the recent fall in the Australian dollar hasn't led to an export-driven growth spurt, a few cuts in tariffs are unlikely to either.

Perspectives for the Australian economy are bleaker than for some time.

As a result bosses are stepping up demands for productivity increases and cuts to penalty rates. Workers will need to step up resistance through strikes and industrial action and refuse to bear the cost of maintaining corporate profits.

.....
Concerns about China were reinforced when a closely watched manufacturing index recorded its worst reading since the global financial crisis

China deal: the issue is exploitation, not migrants

By James Supple

THE DEBATE over the Liberals' China-Australia free trade deal (ChAFTA) has taken centre stage in federal politics. The problems with the deal are real. But there is no excuse for rhetoric blaming foreign workers for unemployment or taking jobs.

Federal Labor leader Bill Shorten has called for changes to the deal's enabling legislation to address union concerns.

Tony Abbott has dug in to defend it, accusing the unions of launching a "campaign of xenophobic lies" and insisting it will boost the economy and jobs. The government has even put aside \$25 million for an ad campaign.

But free trade agreements put corporate profits first. ChAFTA would allow Chinese corporations to sue the Australian government if it passes laws that harm profits. Australian companies would be able to do the same in China. This would allow challenges like that against the government's plain packaging laws for tobacco, currently facing legal action under an investment treaty with Hong Kong.

The unions' main attack on the deal has been over jobs. Under ChAFTA, Chinese-owned companies spending more than \$150 million on a range of infrastructure projects can apply for a special Infrastructure Facilitation Agreement (IFA).

This would allow them to bypass requirements to advertise jobs locally before employing workers on 457 temporary migrant visas and the current requirement they be paid no less than \$53,900 a year. The scope of this is wide, including investments in transport, agriculture and tourism.

The decision on employment standards and bypassing these "labour market testing" requirements will be entirely at the discretion of the Immigration Department.

This means the Department will negotiate wages and conditions on sites, without any ability for the union movement to be involved.

Workers on 457 temporary work visas are vulnerable to exploitation because they can be deported if they lose their job. Locking out the union movement from negotiations and reducing safeguards significantly increases the chance migrant workers will face exploitation.

Trade Minister Andrew Robb has branded these claims "dishonest", say-



Above: A union-organised protest against the China-Australia Free Trade deal

ing the Immigration Department would apply guidelines requiring companies to prove there are no qualified local workers to do the jobs. But according to the Australian Fair Trade and Investment Network (AFTINET), "such guidelines are not legally binding and could be challenged by the Chinese Government because the agreement makes legally binding commitments".

But some unions are using dangerous arguments that blame foreign workers for unemployment and taking jobs. The CFMEU's TV ads have been a case in point.

At a union rally against ChAFTA in Sydney, AWU official Russ Col-lison explicitly linked the 800,000 unemployed to foreign workers, saying, "good fair dinkum Aussies are being done over". Under the free trade deal, "There'll be no work in this country. It's going to end up with the Chinese coming in, they'll be flying in and fly-

ing out", he said.

The problem is not with migrant workers coming here but the potential for exploitation as a result of the new agreements. Instead of a xenophobic campaign, unions should be demanding a role in negotiating conditions for migrant workers under IFAs and for their right to join unions. We also need to demand an end to the visa conditions that make them reliant on their employer to stay in Australia and for the right to permanent migration.

Hundreds of thousands of migrants come to Australia every year. The union movement has been built on the unity in struggle of new migrant workers and local workers.

Migrant workers don't destroy jobs, they help build a bigger economy with more work for everyone. Opposition to free trade deals can't be an excuse for scaremongering about foreign workers.

Some unions are using dangerous arguments that blame foreign workers for unemployment and taking jobs

Charges over Anzac terror plot evaporate

POLICE HAVE dropped all terrorism charges against 18-year old Harun Causevic over the so-called Anzac Day plot in Melbourne.

He had been held in custody for four months, kept in isolation for 23 hours a day. He now faces only minor weapons possession charges.

Police had previously painted a lurid picture of his supposed involvement in a plan to run down a police officer in a car, behead him, then use his gun to go a rampage.

Now they admit there was never

enough evidence to charge him.

His lawyer Rob Stary said, "He ought to be recompensed and the family ought to be recompensed for what they've been subjected to.

"This episode, I'm afraid, is going to erode confidence in the authorities, when they charge a young man on this basis without any evidence."

Just one of the teenagers arrested is still facing terrorism charges. He is expected to face a committal hearing in December.

Abbott's bombs will make Syria's crisis worse

By Amy Thomas

TONY ABBOTT is cynically trying to use the Syrian refugee crisis as his excuse for extending Australian airstrikes into Syria.

Twelve months ago, Abbott announced Australia would bomb Iraq in Operation Inherent Resolve, and sent 600 troops to lead bombing missions. That mission was extended with another 300 troops in March this year, and has now been extended again.

Abbott has used a formal request from the US Embassy as the reason for extending the war. *The Guardian* has reported that Abbott actually pushed for the formal request after discussing it in a call he made to President Obama.

The aim of the US and Australian mission in Iraq is to secure stability in their economic and political interests.

The bombing will do nothing to resolve the humanitarian crisis in Syria, it will simply deepen the conflict and lead to more civilian deaths.

The United States has targeted Islamic State and Jabhat al-Nusra, and has even bombed Syrian rebel group the Free Syrian Army deliberately at least once. They are effectively in league with dictator Bashar al-Assad, who has been bombing his own people since they rose up against him in 2011.

But the Assad regime is still responsible for overwhelming majority of the civilians deaths in Syria. It is the only fighting force in Syria with an airforce, bombing civilian areas.

Abbott has stressed Australian bombs won't target the regime.

Labor is effectively backing the extension of war, with Deputy Opposition Leader Tanya Plibersek saying, "We do need to have a strong military response".

Abbott says the bombing is "not just [essential] to ending the humanitarian crisis in the Middle East but also to ending the threat to Australia and the wider world", continuing his efforts to manufacture a threat of terrorism at home. Yet ironically, the whole experience of the "war on terror" is that it is Western bombing itself that produces terrorism and has fed the rise of groups like ISIS.

The logic of Abbott's "mission creep" is more war, more bombing, and the creation of more refugees. The Coalition has already committed an extra \$750 million to the bombing of



Above: A house destroyed by a US airstrike targeting the Al Nusra front in Syria

Islamic State. That's money that could go back into education and healthcare,

or to resettling a larger number of Syria's four million refugees.

Abbott using citizenship laws to spread fear

NEW LAWS to revoke citizenship will pass parliament with Labor's support following the recommendations of a Senate inquiry.

Labor says the recommendations will narrow the impact of the law. But they still grant wide powers to ASIO and the Immigration Minister to cancel citizenship of dual nationals.

Embarrassingly, the government has been told to dump provisions that could have seen graffiti and damage to Commonwealth property trigger a loss of citizenship.

And the law will now be made retrospective, so Abbott can use it as soon as it comes into force to cancel the citizenship of people previously convicted of terrorism offences. This has been criticized because the rule of law normally requires a person be punishable by the law at that time.

Abbott is selling this bill as targeting Australian dual citizens who have gone to fight for terrorist organisations. But given Australia's absurdly broad anti-terrorism laws, the bill grants wide-ranging powers to revoke citizenship. Existing laws against possessing "a thing" connected with terrorism or collecting documents connected with terrorism would trigger cancellation of citizenship.

The law will now require a conviction for a terrorism offence before citizenship cancellation, unless the conduct has been committed outside Australia or the person has left Australia.

This has been justified by saying that gathering evidence outside Australia is difficult. But the effect of not requiring a conviction is to give ASIO the power to pass judgment. At the Senate inquiry hearings Immigration Department head Mike Pezzullo admitted that intelligence officers and officials would make these decisions in secret.

For acts committed in Australia, where a conviction is required, there must be at least a six year jail sentence imposed. The Minister will also have discretion about whether to revoke citizenship.

The laws also provides that dual citizens would lose their citizenship if they fight or are in a declared terrorist organisation outside Australian territory. While the review recommends clarifying that fighting only with declared terrorist organisations that demonstrate a "lack of allegiance to Australia" be included, it is unclear whether fighting with nationalist groups like the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) would trigger a cancellation of citizenship.

Abbott's citizenship laws are simply an effort to dramatise the threat of terrorism and justify Australian actions in the Middle East, including the new airstrikes on Syria. They are a racist and dangerous move to be able to remove citizenship based on ASIO and government discretion and need to be strongly opposed.

Feiyi Zhang

The logic of Abbott's "mission creep" is more war, more bombing, and the creation of more refugees

Protests continue over Hutchison sackings

By Paddy Gibson

SACKED WHARFIES are continuing to maintain a “community assembly” and protest camp outside terminals run by Hutchison Ports Australia in Sydney and Brisbane, demanding re-instatement.

Ninety seven workers, almost half of Hutchison’s workforce, were informed they had been sacked via a text message at midnight on 6 August. The sackings were targeted at workers active in the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA), with all members of union and safety committees at Port Botany dismissed and a similar pattern in Brisbane.

The entire Hutchison workforce took immediate strike action against the sackings and maintained picket lines which shut down both terminals for more than a week. This fantastic action took place in defiance of orders from Fair Work Australia.

The MUA stopped the strike on 14 August, following a ruling by the Federal Court that Hutchison place sacked workers back on the payroll until October 14, allowing more time for negotiations between the union and the company. But the ruling did not compel Hutchison to roster on the sacked workers and they remain locked out.

Despite no longer obstructing Hutchison business, the community assemblies have come under attack. On 3 September, a co-ordinated effort from Hutchison saw both the Brisbane and Sydney Port authorities issue the assemblies with a “notice to vacate” and threatened police action to evict the camps. Snap rallied attracted more than 200 supporters and forced a backdown.

We should not be discussing how to manage redundancies—there is no reason for Hutchison to sack anyone. They are the biggest stevedoring company in the world, with a multi-billionaire owner who can easily afford to keep the workers on. The state government poured more than \$1 billion of public money into constructing the new terminal—they should be forced to guarantee people are employed there.

Maintaining the assemblies will be crucial for building pressure on Hutchison to re-instate the workers, and could become an important launch pad for escalating the dispute and re-initiating industrial action. Hutchison are currently sub-contracting ships to



Above: The community assembly at Port Botany

rival terminal DP World, while they try to grind the sacked workers into submission. Action across all terminals

at Port Botany and Brisbane could create a more general crisis and force a back down.

Melbourne strikes halt trains and trams

INDUSTRIAL ACTION has paralysed Melbourne’s transport system in recent weeks as disputes with Yarra Trams and Metro Trains escalate.

The Rail, Tram and Bus Union (RTBU) was demonised in the press and by the state Labor government for taking legal industrial action, with the government even joining Metro in an application to the Fair Work Commission to quash the strike.

On Friday 4 September a four hour strike between 10am and 2pm disrupted services from 8.30am to 4.30pm, bringing 689 trains to a standstill. The strike cost the city \$10 million as commuters simply took the day off.

It comes only a week after the first tram strike since 1997, demanding an 18 per cent pay rise over three years and the retention of existing conditions.

Metro

Similar issues forced train staff to take industrial action. A key grievance is the weakening of driver training and consequent deskilling. Metro has proposed “repetitive running” which limits drivers to a single track or zone. Drivers fear this could put downward pressure on pay.

RTBU State Secretary Luba

Grigorovitch likened this to, “getting a driver’s licence to only drive down one road.”

Such a scheme would allow Metro to save on training drivers by cutting the 68 weeks currently required by half. Earlier cuts to training hours resulted in an increase in trains driving through danger signals.

Transport workers need to keep up the pressure to win a fair outcome. Metro made a profit of \$65 million and received over a billion dollars in government subsidies last year.

The union initially announced simultaneous train and tram strikes but called them off in favour of negotiations. And earlier threats of “free travel days” could have won widespread public support but still hit Metro’s profits.

Speaking at Friday’s strike rally CFMEU State Secretary John Setka suggested industrial action again during AFL finals.

Shadow treasurer Michael O’Brien claimed this “would pretty much be an act of treason”, revealing the pressure the strikes have put on bosses and politicians under.

Public transport workers have serious power to force the bosses to cave—they should use it.

Lachlan Marshall

Turkey begins bombing IS—and the Kurds

By Tony Bozdagci

THE TURKISH government has begun military operations targeting IS in Syria and Iraq, collaborating with US forces.

In return, Obama has turned a blind eye to Turkey bombing Kurdish targets, namely the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) both in Iraq as well as in south-eastern Turkey.

This has brought an end to the peace process with the PKK which had produced hopes of a historic end to Kurdish persecution by the Turkish state. The PKK has led an armed struggle for Kurdish rights inside Turkey since 1984.

Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) has long maintained that Assad's regime in Syria is the greatest threat to humanity in the region, supporting some rebel groups in a bid to undermine his power.

But Turkey also wants to prevent the emergence of a new independent Kurdish state on its border with Syria. Last year Kurdish forces in Kobani, a Syrian-Kurdish town gained US support for their successful efforts to push back IS.

The government of Recep Erdogan fears the jubilation of the Kurds following the Kobani victory will bolster the PKK.

Secondly, he appears determined to punish the Kurds for voting his AKP out of its parliamentary majority, which the party has held since 2002, in elections in June. Since then no party has been able to form a coalition government, forcing the country back to the polls in November.

Changing fortunes

In the first decade of the 2000s Turkey was shaped by pro-democracy struggles, opposition to the army's role in politics, and growing opposition to the war on Kurds. There was a growing sentiment for peace with the Kurds and an end to racism against ethnic minorities.

Erdogan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) came to power in 2002, and progressively increased its share of the vote each election since, until the June election this year, where it shed a fifth of its votes and lost its majority.

The AKP successfully pacified the army, created jobs and initiated a peace process with the Kurds.



Above: Turkish warplanes have begun bombing raids in Syria, Iraq and inside Turkey

But the Gezi Park demonstrations of 2013 marked the start of its decline, eroding the AKP's legitimacy and expressing the opposition to its neo-liberal policies.

Soon after Gezi, Erdogan claimed a "coup" attempt by the Islamic Gulen Movement had been foiled. He purged those sympathetic to Gulen from the judiciary and the police. Many supporters of the AKP viewed this move as evidence of Erdogan's autocratic behaviour.

Then, in May 2014 the Soma mine disaster, which killed 301 miners, was widely seen as a result of the neo-liberal policies the AKP had been pursuing for years. Solidarity actions in support of the families, and the dismissive arrogance of AKP ministers, only further encouraged the developing anti-AKP sentiment.

Turkey's elections and the HDP

The AKP's hostile stance against Syrian Kurds in Kobani provided the left with an opportunity to win over Kurds who had previously voted for the AKP. The main beneficiary is the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP).

The HDP is a coalition of the radical left and the Kurdish movement. Historically, Kurdish parties have won no more than 6.5 per cent of the vote. Last year, HDP presidential candidate Selahattin Demirtas won almost 10 per cent.

The popularity of Demirtas and the HDP is a game changer for Turkish parliamentary politics. Appealing to

the resentment of younger voters who demanded change at Gezi, Demirtas and the HDP have created a pole of attraction on the left which is loudly and visibly pro-peace and anti neo-liberal.

Since the elections, the AKP's smear campaign against the HDP (implying they take orders from the PKK) has had a polarising effect, making efforts at forming a coalition government impossible.

This situation is exacerbated by the state's attacks on the PKK, ending the fragile ceasefire and endangering the peace negotiations.

Since the June elections, upwards of 70 soldiers and police, and hundreds of PKK guerillas and civilians have been killed. Demonstrations against the AKP at state funerals for government soldiers suggest the AKP stands to lose further ground in new elections called for 1 November.

Two-thirds of the population support the peace negotiations, despite ongoing scaremongering in the media.

For the time being, the AKP's agenda of war and fear seems to be backfiring. The same kind of anti-war movement that kept the Turkish army out of Iraq in 2003 is what is needed for an end to Turkish involvement in Syria and for negotiations with the Kurds to resume until a lasting peace is achieved.

At the same time, the HDP needs to appeal to workers in western Turkey if it is to spearhead a mass movement against war and neo-liberal attacks on working and living conditions.

For the time being, the AKP's agenda of war and fear seems to be backfiring

Opposition to austerity in Greece forces Syriza back to the polls

By Jean Parker

AFTER CAPITULATING to Europe's rulers and signing a new austerity deal worse than any before, Greece's Syriza Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras has called a snap election for 20 September.

This is a product of opposition to Syriza's embrace of the harsh new austerity package.

Tsipras was forced to rely on the votes of right-wing parties to get the new measures through parliament. In the third vote in parliament, the number of Syriza MPs opposed to the deal increased, with 32 voting no and 11 more abstaining. This meant Tsipras no longer had a majority in the Greek parliament.

The election is a gamble. Tsipras knows that the austerity he has agreed to is hated and will provoke resistance. He's right. The new agreement means the fire-sale privatisation of €50 billion of public infrastructure, "labour-market reform" by October, pension cuts and VAT (like our GST) increases.

All of the progressive changes made since Syriza won power—such as the re-hiring of the cleaners from the Ministry of Finance (who protested for two years to win back their jobs) or the reinstatement of the public broadcaster ERT (after workers' heroic occupation)—will be reversed.

Tsipras has rushed to the polls with the aim of holding elections before the new cuts bite. He hopes to exploit every last ounce of the goodwill towards Syriza after it was elected as the first government promising to stand up to austerity.

During the negotiations with Greece's creditors Tsipras' popularity grew as he talked of standing up to austerity. But in reality he was preparing for surrender. Immediately after the magnificent landslide "No" vote in the referendum it was the former Prime Minister Antonio Samaras who had to resign as leader of the right-wing New Democracy party. Those, like Samaras, who had been the face of the "Yes" campaign were completely discredited. With a historic popularity of 70 per cent, it seemed that Tsipras was the only electoral force in Greek politics.

But things are moving very fast. Tsipras' plan to face voters before his standing is dented by austerity seems to be failing. His popularity has



dropped to 30 per cent.

Polls in early September show Syriza neck and neck with the right-wing New Democracy on 25 per cent of the vote. It should come as no surprise that Syriza's right-turn gives oxygen to the Right who always said there was "no alternative" to the Troika's demands.

Syriza splits

The pressure from Tsipras's left has also been crucial in forcing him to the polls. Now 27 MPs and hundreds of others from the party have split to form a new party, Popular Unity (PU). Having only just formed, Popular Unity is now racing to build an electoral profile on a platform of anti-austerity and a willingness to leave the Eurozone.

As Panos Garganas from the Greek Socialist Workers Party explained, "This is a positive development. It is a clear breakaway to the left by people who refuse to vote for the bailout agreement and austerity."

"It confirms that pressure on the government comes from the left. And it reinforces the confidence of working people to fight austerity."

But Popular Unity has not fully broken with Syria's politics. It maintains a reformist approach, promising a parliamentary solution to Greece's crisis. This vision of change through the existing state structures dangerously underestimates the current stakes. The political and economic

Above:
Demonstration
against austerity
at Thessaloniki
International Fair,
an annual big
business event

"waterboarding" of Syriza by IMF, the EU and the European Central Bank during the "negotiations", freezing funding to Greece's banks so that they were threatened with collapse, is only a taste of what the corporate elite in Greece and across Europe are prepared to do to impose continued austerity.

This is why Syriza leader Alexis Tsipras argues that there was no alternative but to accept the shocking bailout terms offered by the EU. The left must be able to show how workers' living standards could be maintained through a process of defaulting on the debt and leaving the EU.

But the leading figures of Popular Unity argue confronting austerity means only breaking from the Euro currency, not the EU. They also argue this will be beneficial to Greek capitalism.

Without anti-capitalist measures that involve taking back the profits and wealth of Greek business, workers will pay a severe price in such a transition.

It is only the anti-capitalist coalition, Antarsya, that argues for such an alternative. And it looks to workers' own struggles, through strikes, demonstrations and workplace occupations, as they key to implementing such a program.

Whichever party manages to form the next government will face continued workers' resistance. It is here that the basis for an anti-capitalist solution to the crisis lies.

**Now 27 MPs
and hundreds
of others from
Syriza have
split to form a
new party**

Corbyn's left politics sweep British Labour election

By Tom Orsag

JEREMY CORBYN is poised to take the leadership of the British Labour Party, with thousands turning out to hear the veteran “hard left” MP speak at meetings up and down the country.

Corbyn summarises the surge in interest in him as, “A wider global surge from the left that has seen momentum grow for the socialist Vermont senator Bernie Sanders’s US presidential bid, Syriza’s success in Greece and the rapid growth in support for Podemos in Spain”. And he’s right.

This is the latest expression of the desire for an alternative to the political mainstream across the Western world. People are flocking to Corbyn’s meetings because his views, like rail re-nationalisation, rent controls and taxing the rich, are widely popular. This represents a desire for a break with the pro-austerity consensus that has dominated British politics.

His campaign cuts against Labour’s rightward trajectory over recent decades. Tony Blair Blair’s “New Labor”, which carried Labor to power in 1997, weakened links with unions, embraced privatisation and vicious attacks on welfare and championed imperialist slaughter abroad. This saw working class voters turn away in disgust. By 2010 “New Labour” had chased away five million votes and membership had crashed from 405,000 to 180,000. In many ways this parallels the disastrous path taken by Australian Labor.

The fact Corbyn doesn’t just talk Left is helping him successfully channel this discontent. He’s been on protests and picket lines for more than 40 years. This sets him apart from the three other template candidates.

Rage of the Right

The uncomprehending rage of the Labour right, as it sinks in that Corbyn may well win the leadership, is a delight to behold.

The Labor Party machine and the media have responded with vitriolic attacks in an effort to crush him. War criminal and former PM Tony Blair told anyone whose heart told them to go with Corbyn to “get a transplant”.

For the first time, the leadership election is being decided by a vote of all party members and members of affiliated unions. Registered supporters can sign up to vote for just £3.



Above: Jeremy Corbyn speaking at one of many demonstrations

The new voting system was brought in to undercut the ability of trade unions to influence the outcome, after they tipped the balance to elect Ed Miliband as the last leader.

But now the right are denouncing it as it looks like allowing Corbyn to win. There has been a frenzy about the danger of “entryists” who voted for other parties in the past. So the party has moved to exclude thousands of people who have recently joined from voting.

Illusions in Labour

But for all the hope Corbyn offers, Labor can’t be reclaimed as an institution. It has two great oligarchic centres of power—the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP) and the trade union bureaucracy.

Corbyn will face an overwhelmingly hostile PLP. The Socialist Campaign Group to which he belongs has just nine of Labor’s 232 MPs. As he gets closer to winning his opponents, including fellow leadership candidate Andy Burnham, have begun indicating they would agree to sit in his shadow cabinet—with the aim of undermining his left-wing policies.

Surprisingly, most trade union leaders are backing him. This reflects their impatience with the refusal of the parliamentary Labour leadership to fight for working people.

It’s absolutely right that the unions should back Corbyn. But the trade union leaders are unreliable allies. They have repeatedly squandered opportunities to resist, allowing the Tories to run rampant destroying social

welfare and jobs. Their instincts are always to compromise with the system rather than consistently fight it.

Labor’s project is based on compromise with capitalism and parliament, so even a Left leader faces enormous pressure.

The state structures of the police, army, and the legal system are wholly insulated from democracy. They exist to thwart change, not enable it.

The mainstream media, so central to limiting public debate under capitalism, would be on the alert to seize on any slip up from Corbyn.

So if Corbyn does win, he will have powerful grassroots support but also powerful restraint. The most likely outcome is that he tones down his policies in order to maintain “party unity”.

However, the landslide to the Scottish National Party at the general election shows the way Corbyn’s challenge to the Labour establishment could boost the fight against the Tories.

The SNP channelled anger and disillusionment with Labour off the referendum on Scottish Independence. The spirit of mass defiance has created opportunities for a stronger grassroots fight against the austerity and racism.

Given Labour’s limitations, there is a danger that the rebellion giving Corbyn oxygen could turn to disillusionment if it is limited to a fight to reclaim the party.

But the enthusiasm around Corbyn could bounce into a stronger fight in the streets and workplaces if the Left outside Labour provides a strong lead.

.....
This is the latest expression of the desire for an alternative to the political mainstream

PRIVILEGE THEORY AND THE FIGHT AGAINST OPPRESSION

Privilege theory weakens opposition to oppression, because it misdiagnoses its source and portrays those who aren't oppressed as incapable of fighting it, writes **Lucy Honan**

PRIVILEGE THEORY has become a common-place starting point for people who want to respond to oppression. We have “Dear white people” the movie, “check your privilege” guide books for allies who want to “decolonise” themselves, online privilege calculators and blogs on how to call out privilege. It even dominates diversity workshops in workplaces.

The “call outs” of privilege are an attempt to make it clear that the oppressions are alive and well and need our attention—and socialists most certainly agree.

While John Howard was declaring sexism a thing of the past, reports of domestic violence in Victoria increased 72.8 per cent. Attacks on Muslims are frequently reported and the bashing of a transwoman at the Newtown hotel is a reminder of the persistence of bigotry and homophobia.

But beyond that agreement, privilege theory is a problem.

It fundamentally misdiagnoses the sources of oppression, and fatally disorients and disarms people who otherwise should be leading the struggle against racism, homophobia, sexism, and oppression.

Privilege theory

There are different schools of privilege theory, but the common themes are these: in any area of oppression you are either penalised or privileged. And if you are privileged, that is an unearned, usually unconscious, unfair advantage that you have.

Peggy McIntosh, perhaps the mother of privilege theorists, famously wrote a list of 46 examples of white privilege she experienced. She has regularly updated the list, to include the privilege of being reflected in the media, of not being likely to be stopped and searched, of not having to wonder if you didn't get the job because of your last name.

Finally, because of the unfair advantage, that very privilege is held to disorientate and infect a person's world view, so that they have a vested

interest in recreating the discrimination and oppression to maintain their position of privilege.

Privilege theorist and diversity consultant Frances Kendall argues, for example: “Any of us who has race privilege, which all white people do, and therefore the power to put our prejudices into law, is racist by definition, because we benefit from a racist system”.

Instead of arguing that it is unfair for women to receive almost \$300 less than men a week on average, the starting point for some privilege theorists is that it's unfair for a man to receive \$300 more. It directs our fury at husbands and men, as opposed to, for example, the lack of government services provided by Minister Scott Morrison, where women are lumped with the housework and unpaid child rearing.

The strategy for privilege theorists is to make privilege visible, to call it out, so that the privileged “do work on themselves” to become more self-conscious and self-aware.

This dovetails with lifestyle politics by focusing on interpersonal oppression.

Problems with Privilege theory

Privilege theory misdiagnoses the source of oppression.

Identity politics and privilege theory have their intellectual roots in postmodernism. Most famously, Michel Foucault argued for a rejection of any totalising theory, including Marxism, in favour of looking at the world through subjective positions, rejecting the idea of any single explanatory discourse or source of oppression. He argued that:

“Neither the caste which governs, nor the groups which control the state apparatus, nor those who make the most important economic decisions direct the entire network of power that functions in a society.”

Most privilege theorists assert that there is systemic gender and racial oppression. But they reject the idea they are rooted in capitalism; rather, op-

Most of the apparent agents of oppression derive little or no benefit from it.

pression is seen as cut adrift from any root cause. Forms of oppression exist autonomously from the economic system, and from all other oppressions.

The immediate experience of oppression can seem to confirm this. It is not the long arm of the law that reaches into our cots when we are babies to dress us in pink or hand us a doll, but our parents.

The humiliations and constricting expectations feel like they are come from everywhere—the church, the state, the family, the media, the school, the workplace, and often from people very close to us.

But most of the apparent agents of oppression derive little or no benefit from it.

Mothers or other women, whose comments often trigger body image issues, are not privileged. Virulently homophobic kids are often the most insecure. Working class people who hold racist ideas about refugees and Muslims are propping up a Liberal government that could hardly be more opposed to their interests. Research in the US shows that the areas of greatest inequality between black and white workers also have the lowest wages for whites.

On the other hand there clearly are some agents of oppression who are more powerful than others. Governments and the wealthy have a much greater capacity to wreck people's lives.

This is clear in the racism of Aboriginal community closures and assimilation projects going on ruthlessly around the country, the offshore detention centres and endless flag-clad press conferences about threats to our borders.

Intersectionality is supposed to account for this difference by looking at how class privilege intersects with race and gender privilege.

But again this leaves us at the level of static description of interpersonal experiences. Oppressions are not simply held in place by all those with the “privilege” not to share them.

It is not simply Joe Hockey and

Abbott's personal experiences as privileged white males that make them so destructive. It is the political interests they serve, and their concern to advance the needs of capitalism.

Yet Foucault argued that, "there is no single locus of great Refusal, no soul of revolt, or pure law of the revolutionary. Instead there is a plurality of resistances, each of them a special case."

This means refusing to differentiate between the importance of any particular struggle, and refusing to concentrate resources at the source of oppression.

For example, at a recent anarchist book fair, an argument that the fight against Abbott was crucial for fighting community closures and refugee racism, got a "privilege check" for scapegoating Abbott for that activists' own "white supremacy"! Instead there were suggestions to renounce citizenship privilege and support autonomous collectives.

Similarly, at Sydney University an Ethnic People of Colour Collective established itself in 2013 with a view that those who aren't oppressed all have a stake in perpetuation oppression.

One of the main conclusions they drew from this was that the Anti-Racism collective was "racist" because it involved white people in the fight for refugee rights. Instead of focusing on our rulers their target was a generalised "white culture", which meant predominantly focusing on discussion of personal experiences.

The produces profound disorientation, with the potential for dedicated anti-racists to funnel their anger into call outs and privilege checks when they could be organising to fight Abbott and the system.

Marxist theory of oppression

Far from the caricature of Marxism minimising or deprioritising issues of oppression, it helps us to understand oppressions as fundamental to the operation of capitalism.

Marxists don't ignore interpersonal dynamics. But we need to look below the surface to the social, historical and economic dynamics that underpin them to make sense of how oppression works.

If we apply this to women's oppression, we can see that beneath the many ways we experience oppression, the social and economic forces that organise our society have laid the foundation for inequality between men and women.



Above: Unity of workers of across racial and ethnic divisions can successfully erode racism

One of sexism's main functions is to enforce the nuclear family, and women's role with the major burden of child rearing. This means business does not have to pay the costs of bringing up the next generation of the working class, but instead gets this work done for free.

The Productivity Commission report into childcare indirectly revealed just how much unpaid childcare families, and mothers in particular, are doing.

Only 38 per cent of children are in formal childcare, and of total formal childcare costs, the government only pays 37 per cent of costs, which is about \$7 billion dollars a year. So the amount of totally unpaid time women—and it is mainly women—spend doing this essential work is enormous.

For some women, the burden of childcare means it is impossible to return to work, whether because of the difficulty of finding and maintaining childcare, or the cost. For others it means the misery of missing out on a child's early years if balance between work and being at home proves impossible.

This is all the result of government and business's refusal to provide free, accessible childcare, or adequate paid maternity leave.

The socialisation of women and girls as carers, whose main productive role is to care for children and the home, can be traced historically to the birthpangs of capitalism. The work-

ing class family was nearly destroyed by the brutish conditions and hours of work in the new factories. This meant they were simply unable to care for the next generation, which threatened the supply of labour. So the ruling class encouraged women to stay out of the workforce and focus on bringing up children.

In Australia there was a very deliberate establishment of the family wage paid to men—enforcing women's position in the family, and their child-rearing and reproductive role.

Socialists look to mass struggles as the solution, and in particular the power of organised workers, because they have both an interest in fighting oppression and also the ability to get rid of the capitalist system that produces it.

Oppression benefits capitalism and the rich, not working class people.

This can be seen in any major struggle, which breaks down racist, sexist and homophobic ideas as a barrier to the unity amongst workers needed to fight.

For instance the support for the workers' picket line at Hutchison from the Redfern Aboriginal Tent Embassy and equal love activists, who took a collection for the workers at their rally, has reinforced opposition to racism and homophobia amongst the workers and built a spirit of united resistance.

It is through such unity against oppression, and the capitalist system that produces it, that liberation is possible.

THE 1917 GENERAL STRIKE THE LARGEST STRIKE IN AUSTRALIAN HISTORY

Geraldine Fela starts a *Solidarity* series on great strikes, with a look at the largest strike in Australian history, the 1917 general strike during the First World War

IN AUGUST and September 1917 the Australian ruling class was rocked by the largest strike in Australian history.

Involving over 100,000 workers across NSW and Victoria, “The Great Strike” saw railway workers, Hunter Valley coal miners and waterside workers engaged in a spontaneous revolt against falling wages and standards of living, as well as the carnage of World War One.

Labour historian Robert Bollard has argued that, “In 1917, economic discontent intersected with a World War that was plunging ever deeper into senseless slaughter. ‘Bread and butter’ issues and ‘the big picture’ were not competing for attention, but reinforcing each other”.

The 1917 strike was called “from below”, with workers in the NSW railways walking off the job, initially without the backing of their union officials. There was enormous and widespread solidarity action.

Ultimately however, the strike lacked a strategy to deal with strike breaking and was crushed by scab labour and the capitulation of union officials.

Despite this, the 1917 general strike is rich in lessons, showing how workers can rock the foundations of capitalism and war. It shows the capacity of workers to take matters into their own hands and fight, even when their leaders lag far behind.

Origins of the strike

The origins of the general strike, seem, at first glance, to be small. The management of the railway workshops in Eveleigh and Randwick in Sydney wanted to introduce a new “card system” to monitor the work of their employees.

The card would record the task that each worker completed and the time they took to complete it. Workers were concerned this would allow

“slow” or “inefficient” workers to be dismissed. Their other great concern was with the effect of the card system on union organisation.

One of the three cards in the system was the “white card”. This was to be filled out by a sub-foreman, and kept secret from those whose work it recorded.

Workers feared (rightly) that this could be used to target union militants. The system, moreover, involved the promotion of 80 workers to become sub-foremen. Workers saw that this could break union solidarity by rewarding “loyal workers”.

The card system was a draconian measure to monitor and enforce “efficiency”. In the context of Australia in 1917 it was the spark that lit a tinderbox of dissatisfaction with the economic pressures produced by the First World War.

Ordinary people were sick of wartime sacrifices and senseless slaughter. Wages were not keeping up with inflation.

In the manufacturing sector real wages fell by approximately 15 per cent between 1913 and 1918. Similarly, the “basic wage” or minimum wage fell by around 8 per cent. Alongside this, the campaign against conscription had given confidence to unionists and the Labor Party rank and file.

Importantly, they saw the card system for what it was—yet another attempt to erode pre-war conditions.

The strike began on 2 August with a spontaneous walkout by 5780 workers in the rail and tramway workshops in Sydney, Newcastle and Goulburn. Within a week there were 30,000 on strike and within a fortnight 50,000. In early September there were 69,000 workers on strike in NSW alone.

In an inspiring example of militant solidarity action, the strike quickly

Ordinary people were sick of wartime sacrifices and senseless slaughter

spread far beyond the railways. Water-front workers and coal miners walked out in solidarity.

The coal miners went on strike pit by pit between 3 and 10 August, different groups of wharfies between 10 and 13 August and a range of engineering workplaces from 10 to 31 August.

Not only did the strike spread quickly and widely, the initiative came from the rank and file. The NSW Legislative Assembly commissioned a report on the strike in 1918, listing the workplaces involved, with the dates they walked off the job and the dates when they returned.

Significantly, the report reveals that each workplace decided to strike individually. It was this fast spreading, militant action directed from below that was the strength of the strike.

Robert Bollard has called 1917 “the most astonishing rank and file revolt in the history of Australian trade unionism”.

The Secretary of the NSW Labor Council, E.J. Kavanagh, reflected later on that, “the difficulty was not in getting men to come out, but to keep them in”.

A number of unions declared official strike action but consistently these formal declarations lagged behind the actions that workers had taken. For example, the strike began in the railways on 2 August but not “called” by the officials until 6 August.

The strike was accompanied by extraordinary, daily demonstrations in the centres of Sydney and Melbourne, reaching up to 100,000 on Sundays. They brought out masses of ordinary people to not only show solidarity with the striking workers, but to express their own anger and frustration at the war and its impact on living standards.

The rallies were vibrant and militant. At one point Adela Pankhurst (of

the famous Pankhurst suffragette family) led a crowd of 20,000 to confront the police outside federal parliament in Melbourne.

These demonstrations offended the Australian middle and ruling class daily. The *Sydney Morning Herald* was upset when a group of women were heard hooting and swearing at scab tram drivers.

A week later a contingent of waitresses from the railway refreshment rooms joined the protests, astonishing the paper by singing "Solidarity Forever".

Defeat

The speed with which the strike was spreading alongside these scenes of mass civil defiance terrified the government and the bosses.

Workers had ground parts of the economy to a halt in a serious challenge to the authorities. They set out to smash it.

Moreover, the government was concerned about the influence of the radical Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) in the strike. In fact, this was baseless because their organisation had already been smashed by state repression.

But many of the tactics they advocated were present, such as direct action from below and the militancy of the rank and file.

As early as 6 August the Farmers and Settlers' Association and the Primary Producers' Union were being mobilised to provide scab labour. These so called "volunteers" were made up of the middle classes: university students, teachers and older students from private schools in Sydney and Melbourne.

From 14 August the scabs' ranks had grown so large in Sydney they had to be camped at the Sydney Cricket Ground and Taronga Zoo. On the 30 August a striking worker was shot and killed by a strikebreaker. The scab was never charged.

The strikers had an organisation of sorts to respond to this. A Defence Committee had been formed with delegates from each of the striking unions.

However, it was dominated by union officials and had no strategy to deal with the mass scabbing. This meant they could not win the strike.

The mass demonstrations could have been mobilised to boost picket lines and defend workplaces from scab labour. But the union leadership saw them only as a means of keeping



Above: Workers in the railway yards at Eveleigh during the 1917 strike

up morale.

Where the committee should have organised the workers most enthusiastic about running the strike, the fact that it was made up of union officials meant that it acted as a deadweight.

As early as 20 August it made a secret offer to call off the strike in exchange for a modified card system. From 31 August the leaders of the committee were involved in covert negotiations, using the Lord Mayor of Sydney as an intermediary. The government remained immovable and the Committee capitulated, officially calling off the railway strike on the government's terms from 10 September.

The workers met this sell-out with fury. It was vigorously denounced at a series of mass meetings and many of the strikers refused to go back. However they did not have the confidence to continue without official support, and the last of the railway strikers drifted back by 19 September.

Defeat spread rapidly. After the end of the strike in the railways the miners began to negotiate for a return to work. The government forced them to re-apply for work individually.

Around 350 workers were victimised. One pit was opened entirely with scab labour and all pits had some

scabs in them.

The waterside workers suffered perhaps the worst defeat. They had been replaced almost entirely with scab labour and whilst many workers were offered their jobs back, it was on the condition that they give up union membership. Around 2000 workers agreed to this and it would be years before the union recovered.

Lessons

The defeat of the 1917 general strike had lasting consequences for workers and their unions. However, the spontaneous rank and file militancy that was the heart of the strike in NSW and Victoria could have transformed the landscape of Australian history and politics.

If the strike had spread to other states and if the mass demonstrations had been mobilised to defend the pickets the strike could have continued.

At the beginning of the strike, workers had taken matters into their own hands and fought, even though their union leaders lagged behind. If they had organised to maintain rank-and-file control and keep out the scabs, they could have ground capitalism and its violent war machine to a halt.

RACISM AND ECONOMIC CRISIS LESSONS FROM FIGHTING THE FAR RIGHT IN GREECE

Greek socialist **Petros Constantinou** spoke at Keep Left 2015 on the racism accompanying the economic crisis in Greece and how the left has organised to stop the rise of the fascist Golden Dawn. We reproduce his speech below.

IN GREECE, at the Macedonian border and around the Aegean Sea we have seen thousands of refugees trying to escape death especially from Syria, but also from Afghanistan, from Pakistan and African countries. All these people were confronted by the policies of Fortress Europe.

The whole policy of the EU is against the migrants and refugees, as they try to close the borders. They have a military operation in the Aegean sea, called Frontex, which means that there are airplanes and ships trying to stop the refugees entering Greece. The Greek coastguard are trying to push back the boats.

This meant that in the last years more than 3000 people drowned in the Aegean Sea, as well as others in the Mediterranean beyond the Italian coast.

All these policies of closing the borders meant death for the refugees.

These decisions were taken by the European Union. They decided to create detention centres, we call them concentration camps, and to form Frontex. But they also decided to crack down against the right of asylum. There was a law that gave the right to governments to imprison refugees for 18 months without trial if they entered “illegally”.

Racism was a card played by the government to scapegoat migrants and refugees, to avoid their responsibility for the capitalist crisis.

We can only understand the rise of Golden Dawn and the fascists by having in mind that the Greek ruling class was panicked.

In December 2008 the murder of a student, who was shot by a policeman in Athens, was met with the first revolt of the economic crisis.

Thousands were demonstrating for two months. Around Greece more than 150 police stations were destroyed

by young people, especially schools kids who shut down their schools and demonstrated outside the police stations.

The ruling class responded to this with a double method: attacking the young people and also with racism. The government started its racist campaign by announcing the creation of the first concentration camps in Greece.

When the fascists appeared in that period, they were a tiny group. When they tried to make the first attempts to establish themselves in the streets of Athens, they got support from the police.

The Nazis tried to build on the racism coming from the government. The police captured 40 refugees and tortured them for days and nothing happened to stop them. They was an open co-operation with the fascists. The fascists tried to build a movement against the refugees, calling demonstrations against “illegal immigration”.

Of course this met resistance. There was an anti-racist and anti-fascist movement from the first moment they tried to build a base.

The KEERFA movement was created in 2009 when, in the first period of crisis, the party attracting the anti-immigrant vote was Laos. Golden Dawn was still a marginal political force.

We can understand the rise of the fascists only by having in mind that the austerity package was a huge attack against the working class, but was accompanied with racism in an effort to divide workers.

We can only understand the rise of the Nazis by understanding the political crisis, and the meltdown of the traditional ruling class parties, the social democrats of Pasok and the neo-liberals of New Democracy,

.....
The government started the racist campaign by creating the first concentration camps in Greece
—————

whose vote collapsed.

The Nazis of Golden Dawn made their big breakthrough in 2010, when they were elected in the Athens municipal authority with a 5 per cent vote. But there was not a clear shift to the right, the shift was mainly to the left but there was polarisation.

The Nazis tried to build from the anger against austerity to argue the problems in unemployment, social services and so on were created by the mass influx of immigration. They used racist arguments that the migrants were bringing criminality and diseases like malaria.

In 2010 Laos participated in a national coalition government with New Democracy and Pasok supporting the austerity measures.

This opened the space for Golden Dawn, who presented themselves as against the international bankers and the austerity package. From 2010 to 2012 they tried to build a mass movement.

Fascism

When we speak about fascists we're not speaking about just a far right group who support racism, the crucial difference is they tried to build a mass reactionary movement in the streets to impose terror on the neighbourhoods.

Golden Dawn were attacking regularly migrants in the centre of Athens with the support of the police. Thousands of migrants were beaten.

An escalation came in 2012 when they finally managed to enter parliament with 7 per cent and they tried to build on this.

It was terrifying to see half a million people vote for a Nazi party, but this was against a background of a huge left turn in Greece.

New Democracy and Pasok lost 40 to 50 per cent of their vote but most

of this went to the left. This was the period where Syriza rose to almost 30 per cent.

We argued that you can stop the Nazis by the united front tactic. We argued to build a mass movement to confront the Nazis, to prevent them organising attacks against immigrants, to prevent them opening offices and pretending that they are a party like the other parties. We said this is a Nazi gang and we have to stop them everywhere by mobilising the organised forces of the workers' movement on the streets.

It was a very threatening situation, but thousands mobilised in the neighbourhoods and the Nazis were isolated. They couldn't build in areas where they didn't have the support of the police. They never mobilised more than 500 people.

The vote for Golden Dawn was not 100 per cent a Nazi vote. They got three kind of votes: one was a clear far right vote, it was the smallest part, coming from the tradition of the Nazi collaborators in Greece in the 1940s and the supporters of the military dictatorship of 1967-74. Secondly were also the voters coming from the collapse of the right-wing populist party, Laos.

And the third and biggest section came as a product of the political crisis where people voted for a whole range of parties including the left.

Mass resistance

The mobilisations were very strong whenever they tried to build a racist campaign.

In 2012-13 they went to Pakistani shopkeepers and said you have one week to close down your shops and go back to your country.

But in that week we formed a united front locally from the social democrats to the anarchists. Keerfa was central in this. More than 3000 mobilised and we stopped them repeatedly in that area.

They tried to move from central Athens where they had the support of the police to other areas. And they lost. After that they became more violent and in 2013 they attacked trade unionists from the Communist Party and injured more than 40 of them. The trade unionists were putting up posters for a festival and they sent them to hospital.

The next week they murdered Pavlos Fyssas the musician.

This was met with mass resistance: we had a general strike against the nazis and a huge demonstration of



Above: Petros Constantinou speaks at a meeting of migrant workers striking against racist treatment from their bosses

50,000 marching to the headquarters of Golden Dawn.

This forced the government to move for a crackdown and they ended up in prison. Half of the parliamentary group was in prison for 18 months. Now they are on trial.

They are still a threat. Their trial is crucial because there is a tradition of the courts clearing right-wing figures.

Isolating the fascists

We say they are not a political party, they are a Nazi gang and should be in prison forever.

We call on the workers movement and the left not to give them a platform but to isolate them in parliament and the municipal authorities and so on.

We ask the Ministers not to answer their questions in parliament. Unfortunately the Syriza government doesn't have a good record on that. The Minister of Immigration was answering the racist questions of the Nazi MPs.

The President of the parliament, who was against austerity and resisted the shift to the right of Syriza, argued that the Golden Dawn MPs who were in prison should be allowed to go to parliament to vote otherwise the parliament was not democratic. Fortunately she was not supported by the parliamentary group of Syriza.

Syriza adapted to the pressure of the racists, putting severe restrictions on the right to citizenship of the children of migrants, arguing that children born in Greece can get citizenship only when both parents are legal and only when a child has been born in Greece 12 years after their parents became legal, and also have a successful education in Greek schools. They didn't close down the detention centres even though there was huge pressure.

It's very important to fight against the fascists of Golden Dawn, to stop them presenting themselves as an opposition to the memorandum and it was very crucial what we did as an anti-fascist movement during the Oxi campaign in the referendum.

The campaign for "No" was organised by the left and we didn't give any space for them to appear in the demonstrations in the streets of Athens. So it was very clear that the "No" vote was a success of the left against the right. The Nazis were absolutely isolated.

In front of us we have huge duties. In order to keep the space open for an anti-capitalist left solution we have to stop the Nazis.

We have to smash the racists and to keep the left turn going. We are very optimistic that we can.

Gayby Baby: The kids are alright

Gayby Baby
Directed by Maya Newell
In selected cinemas now

THE FURORE over schools screening *Gayby Baby* has made one thing clear. If it were up to the vast majority of us, we would shake off the idiocy of homophobia and move right along. Same-sex marriage would be legalised, homophobia would be tackled in schools, same-sex parent families would not be ridiculed on the front page of newspapers.

The hysterical campaign from the *Daily Telegraph* and the NSW Liberals to shame the kids of same-sex couples, and ban schools from screening the documentary during the day, were miles away from public sentiment.

Not a single parent had complained about the planned screening at Burwood Girls High School. Instead there was a groundswell of support for the school, the film and the excellent students' statement defending the original plan to screen the documentary.

But as film maker Maya Newell noted at a Melbourne Q&A, the Piers Ackerman front page article and the Liberals' ban did have a terrible impact on the children of same-sex couples. "Gayby" kids who had barely registered homophobia in the past came home miserable that day. Bigots were emboldened to assert their right not to "believe" in gay rights or to be "uncomfortable" about the film's place in schools. The unbroken ban on schools screening the film hangs over NSW as a victory for a tiny cabal of ruling class homophobes.



Above: Gus, one of the Gayby babies from the film

Gayby Baby itself is a bittersweet representation of the way the kids of same-sex parents live in a society torn between pride and homophobia.

The film opens with an audio montage of politicians and media pundits fulminating about the evils of same-sex marriage, and their disbelief that children can grow up in a society that doesn't enforce the traditional family roles for men and women.

But their frothing conservatism is shown up to be nonsense. In each of the four families the film follows, the parents prove just as loving, nurturing and keen to bring up decent, educated kids as anyone else—and just as susceptible to the tensions and pressures that other heterosexual families bear. The kids are endearingly and overwhelmingly "alright".

A recent "meta-analysis" of 33 studies of same-sex children in the United States made the unsurprising finding that there's no evidence children raised by same-sex parents fared

any worse than those raised by heterosexual parents.

Families

In *Gayby Baby*, the extra burden of grappling with homophobia is a challenge for each family. The thoughtful and confident Matt from Waverly doesn't see any reason to accommodate discrimination. He stands up to the homophobia he sees in his mum's church. He intends to confront the Prime Minister Julia Gillard over her opposition to same-sex marriage at a face-to-face dinner!

After taking on both the church and state, he isn't too concerned about

any bullies he might encounter at school.

But class oppression compounds the homophobia for Ebony's family. Her parents are unemployed because they are caring for a very sick epileptic baby.

Ebony's mother desperately wants her to get into Newtown High School of Performing Arts, a school with a reputation for welcoming diversity. A desire to give Ebony an education free from bigoted bullying drives the family to spend what little they have on coaching lessons for Ebony's Newtown entrance audition. It is heart breaking to see the fear of homophobia compound the family's financial stress and to watch Ebony bear that pressure.

There is no reason inner city schools should be alone in stridently welcoming gay kids and rainbow families—schools from every socio-economic demographic are taking on campaigns against homophobic bullying like Wear it Purple Day. Ebony actually ends up at her

local high school ready to "kick the butts" of any bullies she finds, and there are plenty of kids like her ready to challenge homophobic school cultures.

But Mike Baird and Adrian Piccoli affirmed the right of school yard bullies and bigots to terrorise gay kids and families, and reinforced any hesitations principals will have had about openly challenging homophobia.

Same-sex couples do not yet have rights to adopt in Victoria, South Australia, Queensland, or the Northern Territory. Surrogacy, too, is illegal for male same-sex couples in the Northern Territory, Western Australia and South Australia.

Now, any teacher in NSW planning to acquaint their students with the common humanity of gay kids and families is an outright rebel. But, in the spirit of the gaybies, we need a willingness to stand up to the Liberals, break the *Gayby Baby* ban and put their censorship and homophobia behind us.

Lucy Honan

More blood won't solve the Middle East crisis

Blood year: Terror and Islamic State
By David Kilcullen
Quarterly Essay 58,
\$22.99

FORMER AUSTRALIAN army officer David Kilcullen has become a widely cited establishment expert on counter-terrorism.

A hired gun for western imperialism, Kilcullen likes to present himself as the thinking person's warmonger.

He has worked in the inner sanctum of the US state, at the State Department under Condoleezza Rice and as a counter-insurgency adviser to General Petraeus, as he implemented the troop surge in Iraq in 2007.

Kilcullen thinks the US war against Islamic State (IS) in Iraq and Syria is not going well. His new *Quarterly Essay* is an argument to escalate. He calls for more troops, in combat instead of just training roles, and a "radically increased" bombing campaign.

Kilcullen presents himself as a sophisticated defender of US power and the "war on terror". He thinks the 2003 Iraq invasion was a mistake, he tells us. But, hundreds of thousands of deaths later, Kilcullen wholeheartedly backs US power.

The surge saw the US set things right in Iraq, playing the role of honest broker, he believes, where, "it was the presence of international troops, money, pressure and advisers that compelled Baghdad to act more inclusively".

Once the US left, the Shia-dominated regime led by Nouri al-Maliki had a free hand to exclude Iraq's Sunnis from political power, denying them government funding for basic services and beginning an authoritarian crackdown.



This drove Sunnis into renewed rebellion against the Iraqi government, so that IS is in essence, "one party in a conventional civil war between a break-away territory and a weak central state".

But this ignores the fact that the US itself that set the sectarian bloodbath in motion, as it desperately looked for a way to maintain its control of the country.

In 2004 resistance to the US occupation threatened to combine Sunni and Shia in a challenge that could have thrown the US out of the country. Muqtada Al Sadr's Mahdi Army mobilised Shias in Najaf and Baghdad, while a popular Sunni insurgency in places like Fallujah defied the US. Opinion polls showed the overwhelming majority of Iraqis wanted the US out.

The US's brutality, like the torture exposed in Abu Ghraib prison, turned Iraqis against US control.

So the US parcelled out political power to sectarian parties, each with their own militia, in an effort to divide and rule. This worked in enabling

the US to stabilise the occupation, but also created divisions it could not control.

This shows that the US has never been an honest broker in Iraq. The occupation, just like the 2003 invasion, was about controlling Iraq and boosting US power. Its motives in Iraq today are just the same.

Kilcullen argues that the consequences of refusing to beat IS could be catastrophic, "disrupting global energy flows, shipping routes, air transportation and telecommunications systems". But the US does not just have economic interests at stake. Kilcullen believes the refusal to escalate the war will see other regional and world powers drawn into the conflict. This threatens US influence and control of the Middle East.

He argues for a military operation on the scale of Kosovo in 1999 or Libya in 2011.

Backing sectarian militias

The Iraq surge in 2007 was a counter-insurgency operation, where the US

both took the fight militarily to the precursor of IS, Al Qaeda in Iraq, as well as set out to win hearts and minds in the Sunni community through offering them grants of money for local projects and a share in political power.

But it will be much harder to repeat this, after the promises that Sunnis would be drawn back into the political process have already failed once.

The key problem in Iraq is sectarian politics pitting Sunni against Shia. The major parties the US supported and left in control are all sectarian groups.

The current US war in Iraq sees it fighting on the side of a Shia sectarian government. Shia militias, rather than regular Iraqi army units, are doing much of the fighting.

Human Rights Watch has documented a reign of terror against Sunni civilians in areas recaptured by the Shia militias. In Amerli, recaptured from IS last year, they raided Sunni areas, abducted at least 11 men, looted property of civilians who had fled the fighting, and

burned and demolished Sunni businesses and homes. A similar rampage took place after the recapture of Salah al-Din province in March and April this year.

This makes a mockery of the US claims that new Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi can run a more inclusive government.

The US and Australian troops should get out of Iraq now.

The solution to Iraq's nightmare cannot come from the US or Australia backing one side in a sectarian conflict. It can only come from within Iraqi society. Most importantly, anti-sectarian political forces must emerge from within the Shia and Sunni communities.

In recent weeks Baghdad has seen protests against electricity shortages during the crippling summer heat, blaming corruption for the failure to fix the problem. Iraq has a history of revolt uniting working class people across ethnic and sectarian divides. These are the forces that can bring real change.

James Supple

REDFERN EMBASSY WINS ON KEY HOUSING DEMANDS

By Paddy Gibson

THE REDFERN Aboriginal Tent Embassy (RATE) has won an inspiring victory. After more than 15 months of maintaining a protest camp at the Block in Redfern, in late August RATE forced guarantees about the inclusion of Aboriginal housing in the major redevelopment plan.

In a victory statement, Jenny Munro, one of the founders of RATE said: “The Embassy has demonstrated that for our people, resistance is the only way to go. For all the communities around the country facing closure—don’t talk sovereignty, assert your sovereignty. Put up an embassy and demand the funding for your basic rights. We will fight with you every step of the way.”

RATE was established in May 2014, obstructing attempts by the Aboriginal Housing Company (AHC), who currently control the Block, and construction firm Deicorp, to start work on “the Pemulwuy Project”, a commercial redevelopment. This includes a student accommodation complex (with plans to charge extortionist rents) and retail and office precincts.

Sixty-two dwellings, “affordable housing” for Aboriginal families, were included in the development application. But the AHC and Deicorp said they would need to wait ten to 20 years to build the housing from income generated through the commercial ventures.

Aboriginal leader Jenny Munro said that if these plans went ahead, “I predict within ten years the Block will be owned by developers”. Under the banner, “Aboriginal housing should be first not last”, RATE set up camp and refused to move. The land was won back in 1973 as a home for the inner-city Aboriginal community. This redevelopment was seen as the latest attempt by powerful interests to reverse this victory and disperse the community.

Many supporters, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, spent sleepless nights guarding the Embassy. Campers were assaulted by goons loyal to the AHC leadership. Police issued “trespass notices” and threatened force to disperse

the camp.

In Sydney the rallies against plans to forcibly close communities in WA and SA were run out of RATE, with mobilisations of thousands of people marching to the Block to highlight the forced closure of an Aboriginal community in the heart of Sydney. RATE also became a base for organising against plans to hold a referendum to offer token “recognition” to Aboriginal people in the constitution, while assaults on Aboriginal rights progress apace.

Feeling the heat, Federal Indigenous Affairs Minister Nigel Scullion took measures to solve the dispute. During negotiations, the Minister was clear that he did not want to see police dragging Aboriginal people off the Block in the middle of a national debate about community closures. The Commonwealth Government offered \$5 million to help build the “affordable housing” and committed to organising bank finance to ensure the remainder would also be built. The AHC were forced to agree to terms ensuring that Aboriginal housing will be built during the development’s first stage.

There are still dangers. It is a disgrace that the government is not providing all the funding needed to build the housing. Mortgaging the Block to access finance could see the AHC lose the land if they cannot meet payments. Minister Nigel Scul-



Above: After 15 months of occupation resulting in a victory the Redfern Aboriginal Tent Embassy packs up to vacate The Block.

Photo: Glenn Lockitch

lion has an agenda of changing Land Rights legislation around the country, to allow for similar mortgages to fund infrastructure and services that government should be providing as a fundamental right.

Along with the housing, the commercial side of the development will also go ahead, another disgrace given the homelessness crisis gripping Aboriginal communities.

The AHC still has an agenda of gentrifying the area, including by refusing tenancies for Aboriginal people who have criminal records. During the negotiations, the AHC reneged on a commitment to allow a RATE representative on their board to oversee the Pemulwuy project, after pressure was applied by Deicorp. The local Aboriginal community still has no access to the “commercial in confidence” agreements between the AHC and Deicorp. The battle continues to transform the organisation into one that is once again accountable to the community.

But by winning a commitment to build Aboriginal housing as part of the first stage of development, RATE has ensured that commercial interests will not be able to triumph and force the community out completely. Aboriginal people will retain a foothold in the heart of the city—an important base for resistance for many years to come.

The AHC and Deicorp said they would need to wait ten to 20 years to build the housing

Solidarity