

Solidarity

Issue No. 106 / September 2017

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NO TO HOMOPHOBIA

YES TO

EQUALITY



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Coal power, privatisation and prices

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Union campaign could have won more

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The war that never ended



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SOLIDARITY: WHO ARE WE?

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

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

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

SOLIDARITY MEETINGS AND BRANCHES

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Things they say

He should be hung (sic) or he should be stripped and flogged, the bastard...

In the old days when Rupert Murdoch runs it, or Kerry Packer runs it, those sort of bullshit things don't happen. Because they pull them in and they tell them 'it's not on'.

Gerry Harvey objects to questions raised by a *Financial Review* columnist over his company accounts

There is no discrimination of LGBTI people in Australia.

Concetta Fierravanti-Wells launches the "no" campaign

I'm getting a lot of tweets from angry old white dudes in Australia and there's a petition today to ban me from playing so it's interesting times in Australia

Macklemore on his performance of Same Love at the NRL grand final

In a fit of pique he decides to do something about Kim Jong-un, there's actually very little to stop him. There's very little in the way of controls over exercising a nuclear option, which is pretty damn scary.

James Clapper, ex-US director of national intelligence, on President Donald Trump.

Philanthropy is a growing interest of mine that I spend a lot of nights and weekends on. It has enabled me to meet a lot of people in the business world that I hadn't met before.

Alex Waislitz, a member of the rich-list Pratt family, who has set up his own philanthropic foundation.

Liddell's an old lady and you can't ask an old lady to run a marathon a few days in a row without her falling over.

Liddell power station general manager Kate Coates speaks to the media during a media tour to show its deteriorating condition

The demonstrations and marches are important, but the only thing they listen to is industrial action. Coordinated action is the way to win.

John McDonnell, British Labour's shadow chancellor to unions fighting the Tory government's public sector pay cap.

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INSIDE THE \$YSTEM

Surge in Afghan deportations leads to violence and death

A NEW Amnesty International report has exposed the consequences of deporting asylum seekers to Afghanistan. Its author, Anne Shea, says deportations are, “putting people at risk of torture, kidnapping, death and other horrors”. Civilian casualties in Afghanistan are at their highest level ever. No part of the country is safe from attack.

The report catalogues case studies from a research trip to Afghanistan in May. Returned asylum seekers had been killed and lived in constant fear of persecution. Sadeqa and her husband Hadi fled to Europe in 2015 after Hadi was kidnapped and terribly beaten. After they were returned in mid-2016 Hadi was kidnapped and killed. Sadeqa told Amnesty, “Not a single word of what we said was a lie, but Norway didn’t believe us. If we had been accepted, my husband would be alive today”.

Europe’s acceptance rate for Afghan refugees has halved between September 2015 and December 2016 to just 33 per cent. According to Shea this, “did not reflect the facts on the ground, but rather the political situation in Europe” as countries have sought to tighten their borders. Last year the EU and Afghanistan signed a deal that allows European countries to carry out unlimited deportations to the war torn country. Australia is the only non-European country with a similar agreement.

British soldiers face neo-Nazi charges

TWO BRITISH soldiers have faced court as alleged members of a neo-Nazi terror group. The September court appearance saw them charged with terror offences in relation to a group called National Action. The organisation was banned in the UK last year due to its “virulently racist, anti-Semitic and homophobic” ideology.

Lance Corporal Mikko Vehvilainen and Private Mark Barrett were allegedly members of a chat group where they planned race war and a white-only Britain. Vehvilainen is alleged to have been in possession of the 600 page manifesto written by Nazi mass murderer Anders Behring Breivik, who massacred 77 people in Norway in 2011.

Police ramp up harassment to try to silence Dylan Voller



POLICE HAVE ramped up their harassment of Dylan Voller and his family after he spoke at a protest against youth prisons and Indigenous deaths in custody on 29 September. Photos of Voller shackled and in a spit hood at Don Dale Juvenile Detention Centre shocked the country when they were broadcast on *Four Corners* last year. Dylan was arrested at the rally in Alice Springs along with his mother after police viciously slammed her to the ground. He did nothing wrong and the only charge police have been able to come up with against him is “disorderly conduct”.

Following the arrest Dylan said, “They can put me in jail, it’s not going to silence me. I’ll still be talking from jail.” Police are arguing the charge against Voller is a breach of his parole conditions and he should be sent back to prison. At the time of the incident he had only a few days left on parole.

Police have also targeted the Vollers for harassment at home. On 3 October approximately 18 police officers and three police vehicles swarmed the Vollers’ house in response to their use of a small campfire to cook Kangaroo tails. It was the third similar police visit to the house in two weeks. Voller said, “I feel disgusted that the police keep targeting the family over and over”.

Facial recognition scanners to target Commonwealth Games crowds

STATE AND territory premiers met in Canberra for a “national security summit” with Malcolm Turnbull early this month. NSW Liberal Premier Gladys Berejiklian told the media the states were in “violent agreement” over the threat of terrorism to national security. Premiers agreed to new rules that would allow terror suspects to be held for 14 days without charge anywhere in the country.

They also enthusiastically agreed to hand over millions of driver’s license photos. This will allow Australian Federal Police to construct a national identity database for use alongside facial recognition cameras to scan crowds and identify people in close to real time. The system will be available for any kind of criminal offence. Turnbull also said private companies could request the information. Victorian Labor Premier Daniel Andrews dismissed concerns of civil liberties groups as a “luxury”. Queensland Labor Premier Annastacia Palaszczuk confirmed the Commonwealth Games on the Gold Coast in April would likely see sports fans face a test run of the digital drag-net.

Research and writing by Adam Adelpour

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

Woman shoots homeless man who asked her to move Porsche

TENNESSEE WOMAN Katie Quackenbush has been charged with attempted murder after allegedly shooting a homeless man who asked her to move her Porsche. She was arrested by Nashville metro police after a 54-year-old homeless man, Gerald Melton, was critically injured in the shooting.

Police say that Quackenbush drove her Porsche SUV close to where Melton was sleeping, with the exhaust fumes and loud music impairing his ability to rest. There was a verbal altercation where Melton asked Quackenbush to leave. She then allegedly exited her vehicle with a gun and shot him twice in the abdomen leaving him in a critical condition before fleeing the scene in her car.

Male primary school teachers disappearing

THE NUMBER of male teachers in primary schools is dropping so rapidly there could be none left in 50 years. Since 1977 male teacher numbers have fallen by 10 per cent in primary teaching, and 14 per cent in high schools.

Macquarie Uni’s Kevin McGrath, whose research uncovered the trend, says it is a result both of low pay and the stereotyping of teaching as a female profession.

“Men, and young men in particular, face social pressures to conform to particular masculine ideals,” he says.

Primary school teacher Daniel Steele, who works at St Jude’s Primary in Melbourne told the ABC he had faced, “[Comments] all the way through to, ‘Why would you want to work with young kids? That’s for women and mums to do’ [and] really terrible comments with regards to you touching kids”.

It shows how ridiculous society’s gender expectations really are.

EDITORIAL

Strike a blow at Turnbull—and send Labor a message

MALCOLM TURNBULL has passed a new milestone—trailing for 20 Newspolls in a row. He is fast closing on Tony Abbott's 30 in a row that was the justification for Turnbull toppling Abbott.

Turnbull has been all but invisible in the equal marriage debate, declaring there are, "a lot of other much more important issues for me to focus on".

Instead opponents of equal marriage within government ranks have been dominating the airwaves, exposing the Liberals for the collection of bigots that they are.

Government MPs have been busy making fools of themselves, not least over the NRL's decision to have US rapper Macklemore perform his track "Same Love" at the grand final. Abbott called for the song to be banned, making his claimed crusade to defend "freedom of speech" look a little shallow.

Peter Dutton said the NRL should "stand up to some of this political correctness", and launched the bizarre suggestion that someone should play an anti-equal marriage song after Macklemore's performance.

Turnbull has effectively struck a deal with the right of his party. Allowing them to run a rotten, homophobic campaign against equal marriage is the price for allowing a vote in parliament, which will almost certainly see equal marriage come into law.

This means Turnbull can avoid an election campaign where Labor runs on a promise to introduce equal marriage.

Turnbull's hypocrisy is on clear display. The man who once declared, "I will not lead a party that is not as committed to effective action on climate change as I am", has now embraced the climate deniers' war on renewable energy.

He threatened gas companies with government intervention, to force them to release gas into the shortfall in the domestic market. But the big problem in the power industry is not gas. It is replacing the aging, polluting coal power stations. The need to build renewable energy with battery storage is obvious.

The government has been weighing up the plan for a clean energy target proposed by Chief Scientist Alan Finkel. Yet Abbott has already pledged to cross the floor to stop, "any significant increase in the amount of



Above: Rallying in support of equal marriage

renewables in our system", and says he would take up to six other backbenchers with him.

Turnbull is stuck. He can either try to strike a deal with Labor and lose his political attack over energy, or capitulate again to the hard right in his party.

That is, assuming he can still hold onto government at all. The loss of just one lower house MP through the dual citizenship debacle would see Turnbull lose his majority.

Labor talks left

Bill Shorten made a good point in blaming the "ruthless pursuit of profits" following privatisation for price rises and the chaos over energy. But Labor is not promising to reverse privatisation, or use government investment to build the renewable energy system we need.

Labor has made a turn to the left, promising to tackle inequality and increase taxes on the wealthy. But it is more concerned with show than substance.

Labor refuses to break from its bipartisan support for detention on Manus and Nauru and turning back refugee boats.

The ACTU is demanding a future Labor government "change the rules" on workplace laws, suggesting the removal of bosses' ability to "terminate" enterprise agreements as well as allowing pattern or industry-wide bargaining.

But instead of putting real pressure on Labor, the ACTU is dithering

over what rule changes will be acceptable to Labor.

This risks repeating the mistakes of the Your Rights at Work campaign in 2007. That campaign helped get the Liberals out of office, but let Labor introduce WorkChoices Lite, which maintained the ban on the right to strike and the anti-union Australian Building and Construction Commission.

While ACTU Secretary Sally McManus said in March that unfair laws need to be broken, those words have not been turned into action. The ACTU now says it is, "building a movement to change the rules". But its campaign to "change the rules" is focused on getting Labor elected.

The Turnbull government is divided and weak. A determined industrial campaign could strike a real blow against Turnbull and the bosses. Such a campaign could also make it clear to Labor that the union movement will not settle for another version of WorkChoices Lite.

The Unions NSW combined unions' rally on 16 November, which was being called to "Stop Turnbull's War on Workers", is now being branded under the banner of "Change the Rules." Every unionist in NSW needs to mobilise to make this a success.

But the movement that can win real change will need defiant industrial action. We are not going to accept changing one set of bad rules for another. To defeat Turnbull and the bosses, bad rules and bad laws will have to be broken.

While ACTU Secretary Sally McManus said that unfair laws need to be broken, those words have not been turned into action

Opening shots in NSW Greens pre-selection—it's time to fight the right

By Ian Rintoul

AS THE Greens NSW Senate pre-selection campaign starts, it can be difficult to see the politics through the fog of official statements.

But as *Solidarity* argued last month, this is not a personal contest between Lee Rhiannon and Mehreen Faruqi.

An article in *Crikey* also plainly explains that the right is backing Faruqi, “Faruqi is not from this set [the right] but is expected to pick up a major chunk of their support as Rhiannon’s opponents seize their chance to dislodge her.”

Mehreen Faruqi’s website says she stands for, “A member-led party: Defend real grassroots democracy in the Greens”. How can anyone object to that? But in the context of the pre-selection, Faruqi’s use of “real” is code.

The NSW Greens already have “real grassroots democracy”—that is the ability of the membership to bind members of parliament to vote for party policy. It was that democracy that Richard Di Natale and the federal Party Room so strongly objected to when Lee Rhiannon indicated that she would vote against Gonski 2.0.

The ability of the party membership to discipline its MPs is a fundamental question of left politics. Without that, party policy is actually determined by the MPs.

To the federal Greens politicians who thought it was clever to stitch up a deal with Turnbull over Gonski 2.0, the policy of the NSW branch was an obstacle to their wheeling and dealing.

The right-wing NSW Greens MPs like Justin Field and Jeremy Buckingham do not support grassroots democracy; they support Di Natale.

In 2014, Jeremy Buckingham emphatically opposed the NSW Greens forming the Parliamentary Liaison Committee. He wrote that giving, “a select number of ‘ordinary members’ the power to direct our MPs how to vote in parliament... is in fact anti-democratic and presents numerous dangers for the Greens.”

Buckingham has contempt for the State Delegates Council and rejects any idea that a Greens MP should be accountable to party policy and the party membership.

He talks about “democracy” but he rejects anything that would hold MPs



Above: Lee Rhiannon campaigning for the Senate during the last federal election

to account—a point he repeated in the recent *Four Corners* episode which showcased the right wing of the party and their willingness to openly attack Rhiannon and the left.

Right-wing support

The right is backing Faruqi because it is their best chance of removing Rhiannon and striking a blow against the left. Regardless of Faruqi’s political record, by relying on their support to win the Senate spot, she has sold herself to the right.

Faruqi’s allegiance in the campaign has been revealed by her strategic trips to local groups controlled by the right like the recent meet-and-greet in Byron. She makes a point of being seen with active members of the right; door-knocking for marriage equality with Justin Alick and Jack Gough, a staffer in Buckingham’s office. Faruqi asks members to vote for her to, “Unify our progressive movement”, but she means “unity with the right”.

Trying to win support in the preselection by arguing that a vote for Rhiannon will allow The Greens to keep Faruqi in state politics and she have her available as a future Senate candidate misunderstands the importance of the left winning on a clear political basis of building an activist party.

Rhiannon is not going to win, and

the left is not going to win, by papering over differences or fudging the question that has been sharply posed by Di Natale’s attack—what kind of party should The Greens be?

There is not a word in Faruqi’s pre-selection video of what is needed most in federal politics—a determination to fight the Turnbull government and all that it stands for.

What is needed is a party that is more than the voice of the unions and the social movements; we need a party that is of the social movements; movements that are built outside parliament.

The green bans that were an inspiration for the formation of the NSW Greens were bans based on industrial action by builder’s labourers.

The Greens support the right to strike, but it will be industrial action in defiance of the law that will win the right to strike, not a vote in parliament.

At the moment, The Greens’ party apparatus organises almost exclusively around elections. Di Natale and the right want to keep it that way. But there is the possibility of building a committed left-wing party that builds in the unions, and campaigns on issues like inequality, jobs and penalty rates, as well as refugees, climate and the environment.

That’s why Lee Rhiannon’s campaign matters for the future of the left.

.....
The right is backing Faruqi because it is their best chance of removing Lee and striking a blow against the left

Homophobia of equal marriage's opponents comes out

By Feiyi Zhang

POPULAR SUPPORT for marriage equality is everywhere. Tony Abbott couldn't even convince his own kids to oppose it.

In an extraordinary outpouring, everyone from universities to sporting codes, the doctors' association and most unions have announced their support for a "Yes" vote.

In September tens of thousands of people across Australia demonstrated in the biggest ever marches for marriage equality.

Both major football codes, the AFL and the NRL have declared their support as well as ten individual AFL clubs.

When Abbott and the "No" campaign went on the attack against rapper Macklemore playing at the NRL grand final, his song "Same Love" then topped the iTunes charts.

The Bureau of Statistics' first weekly update showed almost 60 per cent of people have already voted, and a large ReachTel poll recorded 64 per cent were voting yes.

However, as everyone predicted, the postal vote campaign has given homophobes and the right an opportunity to whip up bigotry.

A homophobic campaign

Malcolm Turnbull has legitimised this homophobia, saying that, "I respect every Australian's view on this matter" and that, "The vast majority of people who do not agree with same-sex marriage are not homophobic and do not denigrate gay people."

But the "No" campaign is grounded in homophobia. Their scaremongering about "radical gay and lesbian sex education" implies there is something wrong with LGBTI relationships.

The Coalition for Marriage's official Q&A sheet says equal marriage threatens, "the ideal loving environment for growing children". This is a homophobic attempt to delegitimise LGBTI relationships and parents as somehow inferior to the nuclear family.

But unbelievably, the "No" campaign has tried to present itself as the victim of abuse and intolerance. Tony Abbott seized on his headbutt in Hobart, saying, "nearly all of [the ugliness] seems to be coming from one side and that is the people who tell us that love is love".



Above: Part of the 40,000-strong crowd at Sydney's rally for marriage equality in September

This is nothing compared to the discrimination, abuse and violence the LGBTI community has had to face. Sydney's LGBTI youth service Twenty10, who provide mental health and counselling services, have experienced a 20 per cent increase in people contacting them for help since the postal survey was announced.

Five of Australia's most prominent mental health groups cited research in other countries that have introduced equal marriage to argue that up to 3000 high school suicide attempts a year could be averted by a "yes" vote.

Homophobia on display

Homophobic and transphobic attacks have been reported across Australia. A Brisbane woman who decorated her house with rainbow flags, Olivia Hill, had rocks thrown through her windows by a person yelling homophobic abuse.

"I don't think I've ever been so scared in my entire life," she told the media, fearing he was going to kill her. A transgender teen in Hobart was attacked and seized around the throat during a debate about marriage equality.

Yet this has barely been reported in the mainstream media. This is partly because, as Marriage Equality campaign's Tiernan Brady has said, the yes campaign, "have chosen as a campaign not to highlight that because marriage equality needs to unite the country not divide it".

But this means refusing to tackle

homophobia or the right's bigoted ideas.

The campaign for marriage equality needs to undermine the supposed respectability of the "No" campaign and their homophobia and transphobia. This fight won't end with the postal vote.

The campaign needs to be as public as possible. Phone calls and door knocking alone leave individuals dealing with the issue in an atomised and less visible way. The big demonstrations during the campaign can play an important role.

Homophobia at work should be taken up through union meetings and workplace actions to show support for the "yes" campaign.

A good example was a CFMEU toolbox meeting in Victoria that led one gay union member on site to write to the union and thank them for their stand despite opposition in the form of "the negativity and vile hatred of a few". This is the kind of work that can make significant blows against homophobia.

The rallies, forums and campaign work in unions, schools and universities needs to continue to spread the movement against LGBTI oppression to defend every LGBTI unionist and oppose every instance of homophobia and transphobia.

We need to ensure equal marriage is actually legislated but we also need a fighting political movement that is willing to go on the front foot against the bigotry of the "No" campaign and their homophobia and transphobia.

.....
The "No" campaign is grounded in homophobia

Murdoch termination takes effect as staff demand fair deal

By Phil Chilton

ON 26 September Murdoch staff walked off the job for the second time since the Fair Work decision to terminate their agreement.

The Fair Work Commission granted Murdoch management’s application to terminate the enterprise agreement in late August. 26 September marked the date at which Murdoch University’s 3500 workers ceased to be covered. Murdoch has undertaken to maintain certain conditions for six months, but many employment conditions are still under threat. Those that remain—salary levels, superannuation contributions, redundancy payouts, leave entitlements—are all dependent on the “good will” of Murdoch management.

The University pled poverty during Fair Work proceedings but have been able to stump up \$2.8 million for legal fees to union busting law firm Seyfarth Shaw.

Murdoch is trying to use the threat of reverting to basic Award conditions to bully its staff into accepting a new sub-standard Enterprise Bargaining Agreement.

Four WA universities started bargaining with the stated intention of negotiating new “simple, contemporary and fair enterprise agreements.” This was code for seeking the removal of rights and protections from agreements. Guided by an agenda set by the peak tertiary education industry body (AHEIA) university managements sought to erode clauses regarding discipline and unsatisfactory performance and to continue the unfettered use of fixed term and casual contracts.

The NTEU feared that other WA universities would follow Murdoch and terminate their old agreements. The determination to strip back agreements, however, did not seem to hold. The University of WA, Curtin University and Edith Cowan University have all now settled without major loss of conditions. Murdoch is left as the only university without a new deal. Clearly there is no honour or solidarity among thieves or would-be anti-worker managements.

The strike on 26 September at Murdoch coincided with a national teleconference meeting of all NTEU members. About 4000 attended meetings across the country and passed a motion in solidarity with Murdoch workers. Grahame McCulloch, Gen-



Above: Rallying outside one of the Fair Work hearings on the Murdoch termination

eral Secretary of the NTEU, told the meeting of striking workers at Murdoch that he was confident of victory but the struggle could be a “war of attrition” to win a decent agreement. 120 Murdoch workers walked out to join a protest outside the University.

Murdoch workers have taken the first step in the battle against a union busting management. But there

will need to be a serious industrial campaign to maintain conditions. The ACTU points to Murdoch as an example of the need to “change the rules” over enterprise bargaining. But without rank-and-file members’ grassroots involvement and commitment to action, union officials might choose to compromise rather than “break the rules” to win the struggle.

The University pled poverty during Fair Work proceedings but have been able to stump up \$2.8 million for legal fees

UTS staff to strike for 24 hours

STAFF AT UTS will strike for 24 hours on 19 October in the last week of classes.

NTEU members voted for the strike as part of a series of actions during a two-hour stop work rally and meeting on 4 October.

Management is treating the union with contempt. After nearly five months of negotiations, they have offered nothing concrete except proposals to cut conditions. They claim staff are ‘rotting’ sick leave and want to tighten it up—and they are refusing our demand for sick leave for casuals. They want to get rid of Scholarly Teaching Fellows (STFs), one of the few paths out of casual employment. And they want to get rid of review committees for misconduct and make it much easier to dismiss staff. They’ve talked about “simplifying” the agreement and reorganising casual pay scales.

All this while they spend \$1 billion on buildings, hold onto a \$73 million surplus, and claim to be a “social justice” university.

We cannot afford to accept this—but more than that, we need to extend conditions and defend education at UTS. We have a rate of insecure employment nearly as high as McDonalds, with 77 per cent of staff on fixed term or casual contracts.

Industrial action works

We know that industrial action works. Last bargaining round, the university offered five STF positions, but by striking, we won 30. We won five days domestic violence leave, and we stopped efforts to force us to go on leave at Christmas, and for managers to pick the dates for Long Service Leave, amongst other things.

We have a short window to take action while classes are on. Teaching ends for most people on October 20 and doesn’t start again until mid-March 2018. Management is going to try to wear us down over the summer when we are not in as strong a position to respond. The strike on 19 October can signal we are serious now.

Amy Thomas

Setback as Sydney Uni EBA campaign brought to a halt

AFTER TWO well-supported strike days and an enthusiastic vote for a 48-hour strike, the NTEU at Sydney University has abruptly voted to accept a new agreement.

Our campaign came to a halt before we had won our core demands of a better pay offer, no forced redundancies, no teaching-only advertised positions, and equal superannuation and sick leave for casuals. The 301-139 vote to settle was a completely unnecessary setback.

The union did have some important wins, particularly around parental leave and casuals' conditions. These include clauses for casuals to be paid for all work undertaken, and better clauses to increase conversion to fixed-term and on-going positions.

But there is no doubt we could have got more. Sydney University is one of the richest in Australia and can easily afford decent pay and conditions.

The campaign was just getting started. Both the Open Day and the 13 September strike had well attended pickets. Building for these strikes saw increasing numbers of members drawn into activity with leafleting, posterling and workplace meetings. Union membership grew with more than 250 people joining since the campaign began.

Unfortunately, behind closed doors, the branch president and vice-presidents had already begun arguing for the strikes to be wound down and for the branch to accept an offer.

NTEU officials

Rather than back the enthusiasm of NTEU members to fight for a better deal, the NTEU state and national offices went to extraordinary lengths to convince members to settle. While the ACTU call centre had not been used to get people to the strike pickets, it was used to get members to a meeting to call the strikes off.

The NTEU national executive, as well as Queensland, Western Australia and NSW divisional secretaries issued statements urging a settlement, disregarding members' near unanimous resolution for a 48-hour strike.

The NTEU general secretary, Graham McCulloch, even flew into town to see the Vice-Chancellor. Yet the offer management made on the day after members voted for a 48-hour strike was essentially no different from the offer already rejected.



Above: Sydney Uni NTEU members during the 24-hour strike

One of the reasons given for state and federal officials wanting to settle is because of the threat that other universities could try the “Murdoch option” of applying to Fair Work to terminate their agreement and strip conditions back to the award. But the key to beating any Murdoch-style attempt to terminate agreements is a militant and confident union membership. The best answer to the threat was always industrial action. Instead what happened at Murdoch has been used to get members at other universities to settle for agreements that just maintain conditions.

Keep up the fight

With the end of the EBA campaign, we need to ensure the union continues to be relevant to its members. A major university restructure has already begun and we will have to respond to defend jobs. A staff-student campaign against job cuts in 2012 saved over 100 jobs.

Without the no forced redundancy clause, staff will be in a more precarious situation. A limited improvement in extending the redeployment period from 12 weeks to nine months ends in 2019. But it won't stop people being forced to reapply for jobs at lower wages through “spill and fill” processes and does not apply to academic staff.

The existing change management clauses didn't save Sydney College of

the Arts from closure last year. Jobs have also gone in Science and this month there have been redundancies, including the NTEU delegate, in the IT department.

We can campaign around the new clauses for casuals to build the union. The casuals' network campaigned over recent months to expose the exploitation of Sydney Talent workers and won these employees coverage by the agreement. Similar campaigns will be needed to ensure implementation of the clauses under the new agreement, including payment for all work.

Over the next period, the union will face many challenges to defend jobs and conditions, to defend subjects and courses, and to fight funding cuts being pushed by the Turnbull government.

We will need an NTEU that is willing to resist casualisation and defend members' jobs.

The vote to settle was a setback. But a large section of the members did vote to continue the fight for a better agreement. This puts us in a strong position to improve democracy in our union and continue to campaign for a better university. The challenge now is to develop a more organised rank-and-file membership that is able to defend jobs and ready, if necessary, to hold our union leadership to account.

Solidarity members, Sydney Uni NTEU

.....
A major university restructure has already begun and we will have to respond to defend jobs

Catalonia on the brink as Spanish state unleashes crackdown

By Miro Sandev and James Supple

THE SPANISH government is facing a major crisis as the struggle for independence in the Catalonia region intensifies.

The Tory government headed by Mariano Rajoy unleashed brutal repression to try to stop a referendum on 1 October. He declared the referendum “illegal”, after a ruling by Spain’s constitutional court.

Rajoy deployed the paramilitary police Civil Guard to seize around ten million ballot papers, as well as pro-independence material. The Spanish Constitutional Court also announced that 24 referendum organisers would be fined up to \$20,000 per day.

Police tried to raid the offices of the pro-independence, anti-capitalist party the CUP. But there was a huge response, with hundreds of thousands of people rushing to the streets. Crowds prevented the police from occupying the offices and forced riot police to retreat.

People mobilised in their thousands to occupy polling stations on the day of the referendum and prevent efforts by the Spanish police to close them. Almost 900 people were injured in savage police violence.

“A village of 250 people was attacked by 60 or 70 paramilitary police”, said activist David Karvala in Barcelona.

“Elsewhere the police targeted a woman with official responsibilities in the referendum. They dragged her down stone steps by her hair, touched her breasts, then broke the fingers of her hand one by one. They shot a person at close range with a rubber bullet. He’s having emergency treatment and may lose an eye.”

But the vote went ahead. Ninety two per cent or just over two million people voted for independence.

Catalonia is a region of 7.5 million people with its own language and culture. In 2010 Rajoy’s party blocked in court a deal between the Spanish and Catalan governments for greater autonomy for the region. This provoked a million-strong demonstration and revived the radical independence movement, which had already existed for decades previously.

An independent Catalonia would be a blow against an imperialist state and a victory for a popular grassroots movement.

Following the vote Catalan Presi-



Above: Workers join the general strike in Barcelona on 3 October

dent Carles Puigdemont said, “We have won the right to an independent state, in the form of a republic.”

As *Solidarity* went to press he had begun moves to make a unilateral declaration of independence, saying, “Catalan institutions must implement what citizens have decided”.

But instead of building on the mobilisations from below, he has called on the European Union to help him mediate with the Spanish state.

Struggle from below

A general strike on the Wednesday following the referendum saw huge demonstrations and major roads blockaded. Firefighter Pau Serra told *Socialist Worker* UK, “The strike has been a success. I’ve walked all over Barcelona and everything is shut except for small cafes.”

The strike was initially called by left unions, but was also backed by the larger unions and a pro-independence alliance which described it as “a walkout for the country” not a “traditional strike”. The Catalan government gave public sector workers the day off and some bosses closed up shop voluntarily. But big business in Catalonia opposes independence as a threat to stability.

Winning independence will require mobilising the power of workers over the economy—against the wishes of their bosses—to force the Spanish government to concede. Such a struggle could spill over into a wider fightback across the Spanish state against the neo-liberal cuts imposed by the Rajoy government.

Far right enters Germany

THE FAR right has entered the German parliament for the first time since 1945, with the Alternative for Germany (AfD) winning 12.6 per cent of the vote to become the third largest party.

The AfD more than doubled its vote from 2013, tapping into a wave of bitterness at Angela Merkel’s conservative government and campaigning against her “softness” on refugees.

Geert Wilders, head of the racist Dutch Party for Freedom (PVV), hailed the result: “The PVV is number two in the Netherlands, the National Front is number two in France, the Freedom Party is second in Austria, AfD is third in Germany. The message is clear. We are not Islamic nations.”

The AfD includes hard right nationalists, racists and fascists. The fascist wing has grown in the last year.

But its support primarily represents a revolt against the establishment parties. Some 60 per cent of AfD voters said they had voted “against all other parties” and only 34 per cent voted out of belief in the AfD.

The vote for Merkel’s CDU/CSU conservative block fell 8.6 per cent while the Labor-style SPD, in coalition with Merkel, dropped 5.2 per cent to 20.5 per cent—its worst result since the Second World War.

The result does not mean Nazis

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People mobilised in their thousands to occupy polling stations on the day of the referendum

Australia complicit in Rohingya ethnic cleansing

By Jason Wong

THE PLIGHT of the Rohingya people in the wake of the crackdown by Burma's military has made headlines around the world.

Over half a million Rohingya Muslims have fled the rape, systematic arson and genocide in their home state of Rakhine, about half crossing the northern border into Bangladesh. The military has deployed illegal landmines on this same border stretch, with casualties already reported.

Burma's leader Aung San Suu Kyi has disgraced herself, refusing to criticise the military or even use the word Rohingya.

The crackdown is driven by a combination of entrenched prejudice against Muslims and minorities by



Above: Rohingya refugees crossing into Bangladesh

the military and Buddhist elite and by demand for land, especially after Burma opened up to foreign investment in 2011.

The government offers this “development” land to various foreign corporations for infrastructure, agriculture, tourism and resource extraction. The Rohingya and many other minorities have lost homes, livelihoods and lives in the process.

Refugees

Despite the horrific reports, little is being done to aid the Rohingya. Bangladesh has said that they will only offer temporary shelter to Rohingya refugees, whom they consider “illegal immigrants”.

US President Donald Trump's calls for the violence to end ring hollow, as he has halved the US refugee intake to 45,000 for next year.

Tony Abbott infamously said while Prime Minister “nope, nope, nope” to accepting Rohingya refugees, even as hundreds drowned when other countries in the region turned them away. Only 37 have been resettled in Australia since 2013.

There are close to 200 languishing in our brutal detention centres on Manus Island and Nauru.

As the illegal Manus camp nears its closing date, the government is trying to pressure refugees and asylum seekers to go back to danger. The government is offering bribes, including to Rohingyas, of up to \$25,000 to “voluntarily” return home.

Few have taken up the offer. Rohingyas are not recognised as Burmese citizens. Repatriation at this point risks death.

Australia's complicity in the crisis goes deeper than cruelty towards refugees. Australia has finally joined the international call for a ceasefire in Rakhine. But sanctions targeting Burmese leaders were lifted in 2012. And in 2014, Australia re-established defence ties, including a permanent defence attaché in Burma.

Then acting Defence Minister George Brandis said, “Australia's engagement with the Myanmar military, including this visit, allows the Australian Defence Force to reinforce the role of a professional defence force in a modern democracy.”

The Australian Defence Force has held training sessions and workshops in “non-combat areas” with the Burmese military.

While the UK has suspended military cooperation with Burma, Australia has not. The Australian government even moved to soften resolutions on Burma at the UN Human Rights Council, simply calling for an end to “violence” instead of condemning the military's human rights abuses.

Next to all this, whatever humanitarian aid Australia offers is an empty gesture. The Burmese military is blocking international aid shipments and will likely siphon off most financial aid through corruption.

The solution is clear. Australia must open its borders to the Rohingya refugees, and offer them immediate, permanent settlement in Australia with family reunification.

Justling for influence by cozying up to the Burmese military has not resulted in a “professional defence force”. It has only led to death and destruction for the Rohingya.

German parliament

are on the verge of power. But the hard core of the AfD will seek to use the result to harden up its supporters.

Just days before the election Alexander Gauland, one of the AfD's lead candidates, said: “We have the right to be proud of the achievements of the German soldiers in two world wars.”

The AfD campaign focused on Merkel's decision to allow 1.5 million refugees into Germany in 2015—calling for the closure of the border, as well as for the banning of the burka and the Muslim call to prayer. Party leaders also spoke out against abortion, same-sex marriage and action on climate change.

There were immediate protests against the AfD. Some 3000 anti-racists protested outside its election party in Berlin.

The left wing Die Linke party's vote rose by 0.6 per cent to 9.2 per cent (4.3 million votes) but its ability to pose a clear alternative was hampered by its role in three regional coalition governments that had voted for privatisation.

Christine Buchholz, a Die Linke MP, said: “For the first time in decades, Nazis are in the Bundestag.

“A share of responsibility for this is borne by parts of the media that always gave the AfD a stage. And the established parties are also complicit with their restrictive asylum policy, racism and neo-liberalism.”

David Glanz

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While the UK has suspended military cooperation with Burma, Australia has not

Players defy Trump as anti-racist protests sweep the NFL

FOOTBALL FIELDS, baseball pitches and basketball courts across the US have transformed into the latest political battlegrounds against racism, police violence and President Donald Trump.

This began during the 2016 NFL pre-season when San Francisco 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick sat down (and later started kneeling) during the pre-game national anthem. Kaepernick was responding to the systemic racism and police brutality that gave rise to the Black Lives Matter movement, saying:

“I am not going to stand up to show pride in a flag for a country that oppresses black people and people of color... There are bodies in the street and people getting paid leave and getting away with murder.”

Underscoring Kaepernick’s stand, less than a month later two black men were murdered by police. Terence Crutcher was unarmed and his killer, an Oklahoma police officer, was acquitted in May this year. Keith Lamont Scott had a brain injury and was waiting in his car for his son. The courts found that his killer, North Carolina officer Brentley Vinson, had used justifiable force.

Kaepernick’s football jersey became the country’s top seller. But after leaving the 49ers, he’s remained unemployed for his protest. Now hundreds of players have joined in sitting out, kneeling down and staying in their lockers rooms during the pre-game national anthem.

Trump fuels the fire

In September Trump raised the stakes during a speech in Alabama, calling NFL protestors “sons of bitches” and demanding they be fired.

Football is the most widely watched sport in the United States. In 2011 an estimated 64 per cent of Americans watched NFL broadcasts. So what happens in the stadiums matters.

More than 200 players hit back at Trump. Many were livid at the fact that Trump abused black footballers just weeks after defending protestors at the white supremacist rallies in Charlottesville as “very fine people.”

The Philadelphia Eagles raised their fists during the anthem. The Seattle Seahawks and the Tennessee Titans stayed in their locker rooms. Women’s soccer and basketball players joined the fray, as did college and high school football teams (and even their marching bands) in Florida, Virginia and South Carolina. Major league baseballer Bruce Maxwell knelt to a standing ovation from the crowd.



Above: Colin Kaepernick started the #TakeaKnee protests in the NFL last year

The NFL owners are trying to claim this as a marketing opportunity about the possibilities for national unity through sport. This is particularly hard to stomach in an industry where 70 per cent of players are black, while the white billionaire team owners contributed \$7.75 million to Trump’s election campaign.

There has also been a backlash. The owners of NASCAR, the auto-racing conglomerate, said drivers and employees who don’t stand during the anthem should be fired—and deported.

Anthems at the game

Every sports game and NASCAR race in the US begins with the national anthem. Singing of the Star Spangled Banner surged during the First World War. Athletes were being drafted into the military, and some people questioned why players were on sports fields rather than battlefields. Usually players remained in their locker rooms during the singing.

It wasn’t until 2009 that prime-time players were mandated to stand during the national anthem. The policy was designed to bolster support for the US wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The Department of Defense spent \$6.8 million between 2012 and 2015 to promote these patriotic displays. In 2013 the Atlanta Falcons were given a \$315,000 marketing contract in exchange for inviting 80 members of the National Guard onto the field

holding a giant American flag. Last year the season opening coincided with the September 11 anniversary. Every stadium had troops marching, flags waving, warplanes overhead, and even real-life bald eagles.

Feeding the resistance

With every childish tweet, Trump pulls more people into the resistance. Kaepernick’s protest began a year ago and the actions had begun to subside. Now the protests are impossible to ignore.

We may not usually look toward sports stadiums for political direction. But we should remember the 1968 Mexico Olympics, when Tommie Smith and John Carlos raised their fists for black power on the podium, Australian runner Peter Norman standing next to them with a solidarity badge.

A year earlier boxing champion Muhammad Ali was stripped of his title for resisting the Vietnam War draft. These were moments that reflected a widespread mood for change and helped force racism and war into the political spotlight.

Instead of kneeling, players are now standing with locked arms during the national anthem. This suggests the national unity under the anthem that Trump and the team owners would prefer. But the protests have been another powerful example of the anger against Trump and the potential for new movements against racism and all that he stands for.

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Trump raised the stakes during a speech, calling NFL protestors “sons of bitches” and demanding they be fired.

Dissecting the moral panic over Safe Schools

Moral Panic 101: Equality, acceptance and the Safe Schools scandal
Quarterly Essay 67
By Benjamin Law
\$22.99

HOW FABULOUS it would be if the homophobes' fears came true, and marriage equality really did place a tidal wave of pressure on schools to ditch the old and not-so-hidden curriculum of rigid gender roles and heterosexual standards.

Despite a marriage equality victory feeling closer, we are in the shadow of a vitriolic backlash against education programs that affirm the existence of LGBTI people.

Now even marriage equality advocates are distancing themselves from any demands for an LGBTI enlightenment in the education system. "Yes" campaign "fact checks" abound pointing out that the vote is "just about marriage", reassuring supposedly anxious parents that the, "State Government and your local school decide what gets taught in the classroom, and updating the Marriage Act will not change that." School principals promise that uniforms will remain gender segregated.

Benjamin Law's *Quarterly Essay* "Moral Panic 101" is a timely dissection of the 2016 backlash against the Safe Schools program, the non-compulsory set of resources that schools could use to progress toward (or even just gesture in the general direction of) eliminating LGBTI school bullying.

He shows how the crazed ravings of right-wing Murdoch journalists like Miranda Devine, Piers Ackerman and Natasha Bitá set an agenda that



State and Federal Liberal politicians were all too willing to add their own frothing conservative moralism to.

The "moderates" in the Coalition like Malcolm Turnbull capitulated to internal pressure to "review" the material. Then, against the advice of the review panel, Education Minister Simon Birmingham gutted the program and ultimately ended its federal funding.

This was a dress rehearsal for the talking points the right is trying to use to derail marriage equality. The same homophobic and transphobic moral panic has also resulted in a ban on public schools in NSW screening Gayby Baby, a documentary about growing up with gay parents, and a ban on NSW teachers revealing to students that gender roles are socially constructed! The principal of private Anglican girls school Kambala in Sydney

resigned in April after a campaign of moral panic against her for hiring and retaining gay teachers. The prospect of ending religious schools' right to fire and expel LGBTI teachers and students feels more distant, despite the rainbows, yes signs and love hearts around the country.

Safe Schools' aims

Law's account reveals how unimposing and modest the Safe Schools program actually is. The program was designed to address widespread and out of control homophobic and transphobic bullying. La Trobe University's 2010 *Writing Themselves In Again* report found it had actually increased in the past decade, with 61 per cent of LGBTI young people reporting verbal abuse and 18 per cent physical abuse.

Safe Schools' advocates consistently promote it as a public health

response to LGBTI mental health and suicide rates.

No school that is a signatory has been required to do anything practical at all—the program's lesson plans are wholesomely pitched, the training sessions and "guidance and consultation" on making school policies more inclusive and accepting are optional (and unavailable federally from 31 October).

As Law points out, this makes the fulmination and lies about schools teaching "radical gay sex" all the more preposterous.

It's not included in Law's account, but this unenforceable approach has sometimes been to the frustration of LGBTI students and staff. In 2014, one school signed up to the Safe Schools Coalition in Victoria banned a student from taking a same-sex partner to the formal, and Safe Schools' response was not to condemn the school for dis-

crimination but gently to suggest it review its policies. Another Safe Schools principal stopped a student LGBTI group from forming and campaigning for marriage equality.

Law concludes by encouraging us to "think of the children" for whom Safe Schools was designed. But his own account shows that we need much more than sensible ideas to support young people.

If a backlash can kill such modest gestures towards tackling homophobia, we need a movement willing to confront and challenge the conservative agenda head on.

That would mean marriage equality advocates declaring the campaign will not stop until we win compulsory and enforceable Safe Schools reforms, with no exemptions for religious schools or cowardly principals. It would mean teachers, supported by their unions, publicly defying the NSW bans by screening Gaby Baby and letting kids in on the state secret that gender roles are not biologically hard-wired. It would mean public and private school teachers fighting together for full protection for LGBTI teachers—including the elimination of precarious contracts.

Turnbull's plebiscite has given the right another opportunity to organise homophobic hatred. A strong "yes" vote is important, but for it to be meaningful blow to the right, the "Yes" campaign should be a full and confident challenge to all the homophobia coming from the "No" side. This means supporting mandatory curriculum reforms like Safe Schools, and an end to religious exemptions to anti-discrimination law.

Lucy Honan

MARKET FAILURE: POWER PLANTS, PRICES AND PRIVATISATION

Privatisation and a failure of government regulation have caused the crisis in the power industry, writes **Chris Breen**

TONY ABBOTT ran for election in 2013 promising lower power prices. But after four years of Coalition government power prices are higher than ever.

Now Malcolm Turnbull is promising “strong action” to address prices and ensure reliability.

The Coalition has tried to blame renewables, and state bans on coal seam gas mining for the price rises, but this is a lie. The fundamental cause of increasing power prices has been privatisation. This has happened at the same time as market madness has been allowed to quadruple domestic gas prices.

The government could entirely fix the power problem with price regulation, re-nationalisation, and direct government investment in renewable energy.

Gas crisis

The big gas companies have been exposed as price gouging in the domestic market. Two official reports showed there would actually be shortfalls in domestic supply over the next two years.

Turnbull has been able to force gas companies to provide enough gas for domestic use. But there is no guarantee on prices.

It turns out the shortfall is not the product of any lack of gas, but the refusal of gas companies to sell on the domestic market, in an effort to keep prices high. They have even been selling excess gas on the international spot market for lower prices than they charge domestically, restricting supply.

The result, as business journalist Ian Verrinder has written is that, “Gas prices haven’t just increased. They have quadrupled. And the tragedy is that Australia, with one of the greatest reserves of gas on the planet, now charges its households and businesses far more to use that energy than the

countries to which we export.” And because gas is also used in some power plants, rising prices add to power price rises as well.

The problem began in 2009-10 when the Queensland government let multinational oil and gas companies build three large export terminals. Prior to this Australia’s gas was almost entirely produced for the domestic market. But since the price of gas on the international market was higher, this put upward pressure on domestic prices.

The LNG exporters even used cheap gas from Victoria and South Australia to fulfil their international contracts. In 2014 the direction of the Moomba to Sydney pipeline was reversed to feed the Queensland export terminals.

The Coalition’s call to increase supply through more Coal Seam Gas (CSG) mining won’t cut prices either. CSG fracking is much more expensive than mining conventional gas.

Power prices

Ross Gittins writes in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, “The consumer price index shows retail electricity prices have doubled in real terms over the past decade”.

Rising electricity prices are a problem for workers and the poor. But they have also become a problem for big business. Rod Sims, Chairman of the Australian Consumer and Competition Commission (ACCC) says, “Energy affordability has gone from being a source of economic advantage for Australia to the opposite.”

His chief concern is for Australian business, but nonetheless he also points out, “our Retail Electricity Pricing Inquiry team heard stories of Australians having to ration electricity through winter, having to choose between paying medical bills and paying electricity bills, and having only a small amount to spend on

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Renewables are responsible for just 16 per cent of the prices rises over the last ten years

food after rent and electricity is paid for.”

Privatisation is the real problem

According to Sims generation costs are responsible for only 19 per cent of the electricity price increases over the last decade. This is the result of the closure of coal power stations and the failure to invest in new power generation. Network costs are responsible for 41 per cent of the increase, and retail costs and margins for 24 per cent. These costs are essentially the fruits of privatisation.

Coalition claims about renewables being to blame don’t stack up. According to Sims they are responsible for just 16 per cent of prices rises over the last ten years.

Starting in the mid-1990s with Victoria, state governments first corporatised then wholly or partly sold off their electricity sectors. Queensland privatised the retail sector for electricity and gas in 2007 while maintaining public ownership of the network. NSW didn’t privatise its network until 2015. Nonetheless as corporatised entities they acted similarly to their fully privatised counterparts. South Australia, which has a fully privatised electricity industry, has the highest prices of any state.

Rising prices haven’t been the only bitter fruits of privatisation. Insufficient investment in maintenance contributed to the South Australian power blackout, the five week Auckland blackout of 1998 and the Longford gas explosion. Privatisation has also led to substantial job losses and attacks on unions. At the same time the Australia Institute found that the number of managers in the electricity sector grew from 6000 to 19,000 in the five years to 2012.

The new trend was hidden at first because privatisation came in the wake of the 1990-91 recession. Businesses going to the wall meant excess

electricity production. This allowed surviving businesses to strike good deals in the early days of privatisation. However once retail privatisation was fully implemented and spare capacity reduced, consumers began to feel the full effect of rising prices.

Economist John Quiggin adds, “In the early years of the NEM [the National Electricity Market introduced in 1998], reductions in maintenance spending concealed this failure. When new investment became necessary in the early 2000s, the result was a dramatic upsurge in prices. This was primarily because the NEM regulatory system allowed rates of return on capital far higher than those needed to finance the system under public ownership.”

As a natural monopoly the electricity “market” is highly regulated, but in the interests of companies, not consumers. Profits for power companies are guaranteed by the Australian Energy Regulator which determines an “allowed rate of return”. This has led companies to regularly game the system.

Power companies notoriously over-invested in a “gold plated” network of poles and wires because they were guaranteed higher profits the more they spent.

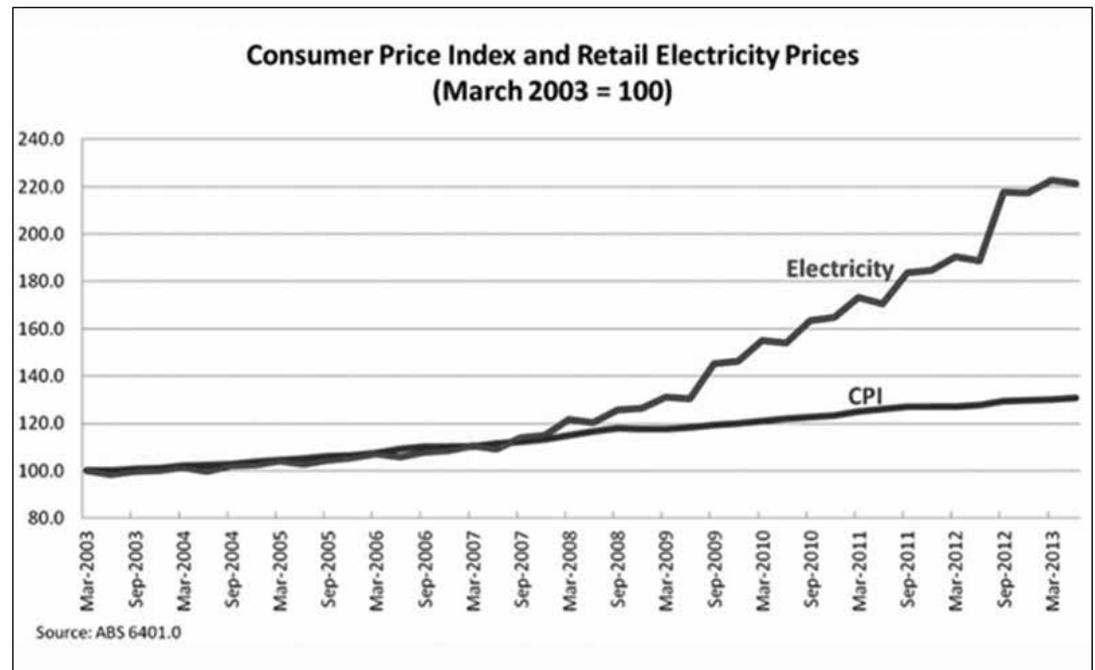
A Senate inquiry found that costs passed onto consumers for operating the poles and wires doubled in NSW between 2007 and 2013, accounting for between 30 and 60 per cent of power bills.

Quiggin’s 2014 report on electricity privatisation also shows how power companies have claimed a need for high investment, and then under invested in any given period. He writes that in Victoria over a five year period, “The regulators expected to give returns of six to seven per cent, but the actual returns were closer to 10 per cent.”

The privatised retailers then add further costs on top. The *Herald Sun* writes, “Major electricity retailers have been grabbing almost \$400 in gross margin per Victorian customer on average”, citing a report by the Australian Energy Market Commission. The same report shows, “gross margins were... a quarter of the average electricity price paid by residents.”

No wonder then that power company profits are booming. AGL Energy posted a 14.4 per cent increase in core profit to \$802 million for the last financial year.

The *Daily Telegraph* writes that a Grattan Institute report, “shows profit margins for electricity retailers



appear to be more than double what regulators traditionally consider to be fair.”

The problems of privatisation were not unforeseen. In 1948 a Royal Commission was set up by the conservative Playford government to examine the privately owned Adelaide Electric Supply Company. The commission found that over 24 years, two million pounds had been paid out unnecessarily in dividends and interest, and that “future capital costs at Treasury rates would result in reduced capital costs and lower charges”.

As a result the industry was nationalised.

Power stations

Today the problems remain. Every coal-fired generator in Australia was built with government money, because of the scale of investment required. Companies remain reluctant to invest on such a scale without guaranteed returns over a very long period.

The Coalition’s failure to agree on a climate policy to meet the targets it committed to at the Paris climate talks has not helped.

Nine coal-fired power stations have closed since 2012, and a number of others are reaching the end of their lives.

This investment problem has led to Turnbull’s bizarre proposals to subsidise the continued operation of the decrepit Liddell coal-fired power station after it scheduled closure date, and for the government to build a new coal-fired power station in North Queensland.

Above: The increase in power prices versus all prices (consumer price index) shows how prices started to take off after privatisation in the 2000s

What we really need is a plan for government investment in renewable energy with storage. This is entirely feasible, as the 100 megawatt battery Elon Musk is building in South Australia, and concentrated solar thermal power stations with storage operating in Spain and South Africa.

The NBN was effectively a re-nationalisation to deal with the same investment problems in telecommunications, but the mess of the electricity sector alongside climate politics makes Turnbull’s dilemma much greater.

Labor leader Bill Shorten rightly said in an ABC radio interview recently that, “There is no doubt that privatisation has been a big problem... we’ve lost control of prices, and we’re seeing that the profit of large companies is being put ahead of the needs of consumers and business.”

The problem however is what to do about it. Shorten has ruled out nationalisation.

Labor and The Greens should be campaigning for price regulation and re-nationalisation. Their inability to see beyond the market, including clinging to forms of carbon pricing, allows the Coalition to get away with posing as concerned about rising prices, when they are responsible for them.

Direct government investment in renewable energy could reduce emissions, create jobs, and lower prices. Price regulation could similarly cut electricity prices. Electricity is an essential service, like health care and education. We can pay for it through taxing the rich.

NORTH KOREA: CONFLICT FED BY THE GREAT POWERS

The Korean war involved an unbelievable level of destruction and death, writes **James Supple**, and North Korea remains caught up in the game of imperialist rivalry

LAST MONTH US President Donald Trump told the UN he's prepared to "totally destroy" North Korea. This was just the latest in a succession of threats against the regime. The prospect of a war between the two countries involving nuclear weapons has horrified the world.

North Korea has also talked tough, staging a series of missile tests seeking to develop the capacity to hit targets in the US. Its leader Kim Jong-un is often painted as evil or irrational. But his regime has good reason to fear the US military.

The US has remained officially at war with North Korea ever since the Korean War began in 1950. A formal peace agreement has never been signed.

The war brought death and destruction on an unbelievable scale. In three years at least three million people were killed, half of them civilians. Ten per cent of the country's population died.

At the end of the Second World War the world was divided into rival "spheres of influence" between the two superpowers, the US and Russia. This carve up was agreed at the Yalta conference in early 1945.

Russian troops had already entered Korea from the north when the Japanese surrendered in August 1945. The US hurriedly drew a line through the country at the 38th parallel, dividing the country between itself and Russia.

Russian troops stayed until 1948 to establish a regime in the north led by former guerrilla leader Kim Il Sung.

The US installed Syngman Rhee, who had lived in exile in the US for the last 37 years, in the south. He set up a dictatorship based on wealthy landowners and former Japanese mili-

tary officers.

Across the South people's committees, established to fight the Japanese, began demanding land reform.

The government broke up the committees and launched a reign of terror, killing 100,000 of its own people even before the outbreak of war.

Cold war conflict

The Cold War had begun. Both superpowers were anxious to avoid an all-out confrontation, which now risked a nuclear exchange.

But both Korean leaders wanted to seize control of the whole country. Syngman Rhee threatened to invade the North a number of times, and there were several exchanges across the border. But in 1950 the North launched a major offensive, rapidly capturing Seoul and taking control of most of the South.

At first this had an element of a war of national liberation, as peasant guerrillas in the South rose up against their landlords and the South Korean government.

But it quickly became a conflict between the superpowers. The US was anxious to prevent another country moving into the Soviet bloc, following the loss of China the previous year with Mao's victory in the Chinese civil war.

With Russia boycotting the Security Council at the time, the US was able to fight under the banner of the UN.

Enormous numbers of US troops, over one million in the course of the war, poured into Korea. They were supported by 17,000 Australian and 14,000 British troops, as well as small contingents from other US allies.

By October 1950 the North

US bombing flattened every major city in the North

Korean army had been effectively defeated, and the US captured their capital Pyongyang.

Then China sent hundreds of thousands of troops, with the approval of Russia, pushing the US back into South Korean territory. By the middle of 1951 the war was a stalemate, with both sides back virtually where the war had started. It dragged on a further two years before a truce agreement was struck.

The US controlled the air for most of the war, carpet bombing cities and civilian areas without challenge. US bombing flattened every major city in the North. The US air force estimated that the damage was worse than in German and Japanese cities fire-bombed during the Second World War.

They also tested out a terrible new weapon: napalm. More napalm was dropped on Korea than during the Vietnam War.

Guardian newspaper correspondent Rene Cutforth described its effects: "In front of us a curious figure was standing a little crouched, legs straddled, arms held out from his sides.

"He had no eyes, and the whole of his body, nearly all of which was visible through tatters of burnt rags, was covered with a hard black crust speckled with yellow pus...

"He had to stand because he was no longer covered with a skin, but with a crust-like crackling which broke easily."

The US came close to using nuclear weapons several times. In 1951 President Truman signed an order authorising a nuclear strike if China escalated the war by sending in more troops. Later lone B-29 bombers were sent over the North on simulated nuclear bombing runs.

At the end of the war the US bombed hydroelectric and irrigation dams, washing away whole villages and destroying 75 per cent of the country's rice supplies.

Despite the cease-fire in 1953, the war never really ended. Although the terms of the armistice prevented the US from bringing nuclear weapons onto Korean soil, in 1958 they began placing hundreds of nuclear missiles, bombs and artillery shells there.

They were not removed until 1991, but by then the US had the ability to launch nuclear strikes anywhere in North Korea from well offshore.

The US still maintains 28,500 troops in South Korea today.

North Korea's dictatorship

North Korea's rulers created what historian Bruce Cumings calls a "garrison state". Like Stalin's Russia it sought to hold down living standards, ruthlessly exploiting workers and peasants in order to rapidly industrialise its economy.

North Korea is a state capitalist country that has never had anything to do with real socialism. It channelled the country's energy into weapons and military spending. With 1.2 million active personnel it still has the fourth largest army in the world.

A personality cult was established around the country's leader and his successors. The regime is effectively a monarchy with current leader Kim Jong Un the grandson of North Korea's founding leader.

At the end of the Cold War North Korea lost its Russian sponsor, just as its own economy was running into trouble.

The loss of fuel subsidies saw electricity production crash to just 40 per cent of 1990 levels by 1999. This meant it was unable to produce fertilisers, crippling agricultural production and resulting in a decade of famine. At least half a million people died.

Since the 1990s the country has been isolated and in desperate need of aid. So it began to sound out South Korea and the US about normalising relations and ending US trade sanctions.

When the US responded aggressively, re-targeting some of its nuclear weapons against North Korea and demanding inspections of its nuclear power plants, the regime announced that it would withdraw from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

This crisis was defused through talks between the US and North Korea in 1994. A deal was struck where



Above: A US soldier among the rubble of the city of Hamhung, North Korea, during the Korean war

the US agreed to build new nuclear reactors, with less capacity to produce plutonium for nuclear weapons, and deliver shipments of fuel oil while they were under construction. In exchange the North agreed to suspend its nuclear weapons program.

The US also agreed to move towards ending all trade sanctions against North Korea and normalising relations.

But the US reneged on the deal, with fuel shipments continually delayed and the two new reactors never built. Then in 2002, George W Bush declared North Korea part of an "axis of evil", together with Iraq and Iran. This was part of the build up to the US invasion of Iraq. It was not hard for the North Koreans to conclude they were next.

North Korea responded by resuming its nuclear weapons program and missile tests.

The regime has probably now decided it needs nuclear weapons as deterrence against a US attack. However North Korea already has the capacity to kill hundreds of thousands in the South Korean capital of Seoul within minutes. Just 55 kilometres from the border, Seoul is within range of hundreds of hidden pieces of artillery and cannons.

This makes any US attack far too costly, even for someone like Donald Trump.

As recently as June, North Korea offered to freeze missile and nuclear tests in exchange for a halt to US military exercises in the area. But the US continues to demand unilateral concessions from the North as a precondition for talks.

North Korea remains caught up in the game of imperialist rivalries, in particular the growing tensions between China and the US.

Since the North's crisis in the early 1990s, the US has held out hope the regime will simply collapse. It wants to squeeze North Korea through pressuring China and Russia to agree to tougher sanctions.

This has had some success, with China, the North's main trading partner, agreeing to cap oil exports and restrict other trade.

But the last thing China wants is a regime collapse that results in US troops on its border and hundreds of thousands of refugees moving into its territory.

The US benefits from keeping the conflict boiling, as justification for a military build-up in China's region, and maintaining military bases in South Korea and Japan.

Earlier this year South Korea installed US-built THAAD missile defence systems to protect against North Korea.

China has voiced alarm, since its radars also allow the US to keep tabs on Chinese missile launches too.

North Korean missiles fired over Japan help bolster war hawks in the Japanese government who want to build up Japan's armed forces to face off against China. This only aids the US's efforts to encircle China.

As tensions between the US and China ratchet up we can expect more crises like the one over North Korea. It is ordinary people in North and South Korea, and across the whole region, who will bear the cost of these imperialist power games.

SOVIETS AND THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

The October revolution of 1917 saw the soviets take power. What were the soviets and how did they work?

MOST OF the media and mainstream politicians don't think much of ordinary people. Even in an election we're told only seasoned politicians and bureaucrats know how to run society.

But 100 years ago the Russian Revolution proved that all wrong.

In 1917 masses of downtrodden people organised to look after themselves, run their own workplaces—and eventually take charge of society.

This was done through the “soviets”—councils based in working class districts made up almost entirely of workers and soldiers.

Soviets first sprang up during the 1905 Russian revolution—and again during the revolution of February 1917. Workers had to organise to direct and defend the revolution.

When the Tsarist regime collapsed, the capital city Petrograd had fallen to the revolution. Workers and soldiers, through the soviets, controlled the city.

Even capitalist politicians had to defer to the soviets.

Petrograd

The US socialist journalist John Reed, who reported from Russia during the revolution, wrote that the politicians, “had no connection with the revolutionary masses.

“They were obliged to appeal to the representatives of the workers and soldiers—in other words the council.”

Each soviet was made up of delegates elected by workers based in factories or soldiers' garrisons.

Some 1200 delegates made up the Petrograd Soviet—and these came from smaller soviets based in each district.

They met every two weeks and elected a central executive committee of 110 members. Twice a year soviets across Russia would send delegates to an “All-Russian Congress”.

This giant soviet meant workers and soldiers could debate and organise the revolution together. Any group of workers could organise and demand representation.



Above: Russian workers carry a banner calling for support to the soviets of workers and soldiers

The atmosphere of these meetings shines through in the records of those present. Historian Sukhanov described one of the first meetings of the Petrograd soviet.

He wrote, “The Hall had never seen such an invasion or such people.

“Cigarette ends were already scattered among the nice clean desks. Men sat in their caps and fur coats. There were glimpses here and there of rifles and other military equipment.”

Sukhanov wrote that visiting peasants “uttered their stormy, heroic hymns to the revolution.

“They excited the audience, took possession of it, and somehow illuminated it, welding it into one by the heroic emotion of the revolution.”

Throughout most of 1917 the soviets rivalled the power of Russia's capitalist Provisional Government that had replaced the Tsar.

The revolutionary Bolshevik party demanded “All power to the soviets”. They saw the soviets as the basis for a new kind of socialist society where power was based in workers'

organisation.

They called for insurrection to put the soviets in full control—something workers achieved in October.

Some people today say that the soviets were taken over and used by the Bolsheviks to crush genuine workers' democracy.

Bureaucracy

But the soviets created one of the most democratic and free societies the world has ever seen. It was only later, under Joseph Stalin's counter-revolution, that power was taken by a growing bureaucracy.

The All-Russian Congress elected a Central Executive Committee which became the soviet government's “parliament”.

Its decisions were valid throughout Russia. But, as John Reed wrote, in local areas the district soviets were in charge and “their authority is practically supreme”.

That was because “the local soviets created the central government”.

This meant that delegates could

be recalled immediately if workers weren't happy with them.

Delegates could be replaced if they didn't stick to the programme they were elected on.

So the make-up of the soviet government could change very rapidly depending on the decisions of workers.

Bolshevik control in the soviets would have been impossible if the majority of workers didn't support them.

In December 1917, shortly after the soviets had taken control, a demonstration of supporters of the previous government was fired on by the soviets' militia.

Many workers saw this as a mistake. Within 12 hours several Bolshevik delegates to the Petrograd soviet were recalled. They only got back weeks later when support for the Bolsheviks returned.

The gains of the Russian revolution were rolled back by a bureaucratic counter-revolution with Stalin at its head. But the soviets give us a vision of what genuine democracy can look like.

Workers' control in the factories

Alongside the soviets, workers had to take control of their own workplaces too.

Some bosses fled, or simply disappeared with the government if the factory was publicly owned.

In other factories, bosses stayed on but tried to sabotage the revolution with lockouts or by disrupting production.

So workers had to organise to take control of production themselves.

Workers elected delegates to factory committees from among themselves. These were key to winning demands such as the eight hour working day.

But in some factories the workers were even in control of hiring and firing. They oversaw everything that went in and out of the factory gates.

One Petrograd boss warned his workers that he would shut his torpedo factory down.

This was because they didn't have enough of a certain part, which was made at a factory just across the river.

The chair of the factory committee said, "I'll get them", and went straight to the committee of that factory.

The committee arranged it so that the parts went straight to where they were needed, and the factory stayed open.

Socialist Worker UK

The soviets created one of the most democratic and free societies the world has ever seen

The October revolution

By Rob Ferguson
Socialist Review UK

ON 22 October 1917, the workers and soldiers of Petrograd (now St Petersburg), poured into meetings across the city. In one huge hall Leon Trotsky addressed the crowd:

"The soviet regime will give everything that is in the country to the poor and to the people in the trenches. You, the bourgeois, have two coats—hand one over to the soldier who is cold in the trenches. You have warm boots? Sit at home; the worker needs them."

As everyone raised their hands to fight for workers and peasants to "the last drop of blood", Trotsky declared:

"Let this vote be your vow, with all your strength, at any sacrifice, to support the soviet, which has taken on itself the great task of bringing the victory of the revolution to the end, and of giving land, bread and peace."

The following day the provisional government issued the orders it hoped would forestall its overthrow. At dawn on 24 October the Bolshevik Party newspapers were closed, for openly advocating insurrection. Detachments of officer cadets were sent to guard government institutions, and the bridges across the Neva were raised to isolate the workers' districts from the rest of the city. The battle cruiser Aurora, whose sailors favoured insurrection, was ordered on a training cruise. The telephone lines to the headquarters of the soviet were cut.

But orders and edicts alone could not save the government, nor officer cadets guarantee its security.

The government of well-dressed gentlemen in the Winter Palace had lost authority over the soldiers, sailors and workers it claimed to govern. Surrounded by white marble and dripping gold leaf, these gentlemen had continued to prosecute a war that ground millions into the mud of no man's land.

While peasant soldiers' families toiled on patches of earth the landlords kept the best land. The employers who profited from the war locked their workers out for demanding decent wages, hours and conditions.

Workers, peasants and soldiers wanted change. Alongside the slogan "Bread, peace and land!" was now heard another: "All power to the

soviets!"

The soviet's military revolutionary committee acted. The printshops were forcibly reopened and by midday the presses were running once more. The orders to the Aurora were countermanded and its crew helped drive the cadets from the bridges.

The garrison of the Peter and Paul Fortress, its guns commanding the approaches to the palace on one side of the river and the garrison on the other, wavered. Some leaders of the insurrection favoured seizure by force. But Trotsky insisted upon political persuasion. He addressed the garrison and won them over. A government stronghold had fallen without a shot.

On 25 October armed workers, sailors and soldiers took over the telephone exchange, the telegraph agency, the state bank, rail stations and bridges. The Cossack regiments refused to defend the government.

By the end of the day five sailors and one soldier had been killed in all—none of them defenders of the government.

By the evening armed workers, sailors and soldiers began to enter the labyrinth of halls, corridors and galleries of the Winter Palace.

By the time the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets met that same night, news was pouring in of support for the insurrection. The delegates elected to the Second Congress were overwhelmingly workers, ordinary soldiers, sailors and poor peasants. The Bolsheviks had won the majority. Gone were the well-dressed intellectuals and the moderate leaders of the First Congress. These delegates were what the Russian intelligentsia contemptuously referred to as "the dark people"—the masses.

Within 24 hours the new government had proclaimed for peace without annexations and abolished landlord ownership. And as the factories, barracks and smoke filled corridors of Smolny echoed to decrees and resolutions, the revolution spread across the empire. Its success inspired millions across the world and lit a beacon of revolutionary hope.

All dates here are in the old Julian calendar then in use in Russia. The modern equivalent date for the insurrection is 7 November as opposed to 25 October

DUTTON SCORNS AS MANUS MOURNS

By Ian Rintoul

THE *DAILY Telegraph* headline screamed, “From Manus to Manhattan” as if, after four years of hell on Manus, refugees were about to live in luxury apartments next to Central Park.

Shock jock 2GB host Ray Hadley sneered that refugees were wearing designer sunglasses, and Immigration Peter Dutton joined the chorus with comments about refugees on Nauru having the, “world’s biggest collection of Armani jeans and handbags”.

More smears from Hadley and bile from Dutton. The sunglasses cost less than 10 kina (A\$5) at the Lorengau market on Manus, and refugees were mostly being scattered across western states of the US.

The refugees are even required to pay back the cost of the airfare—\$US2500. But facts don’t matter to Hadley or Dutton.

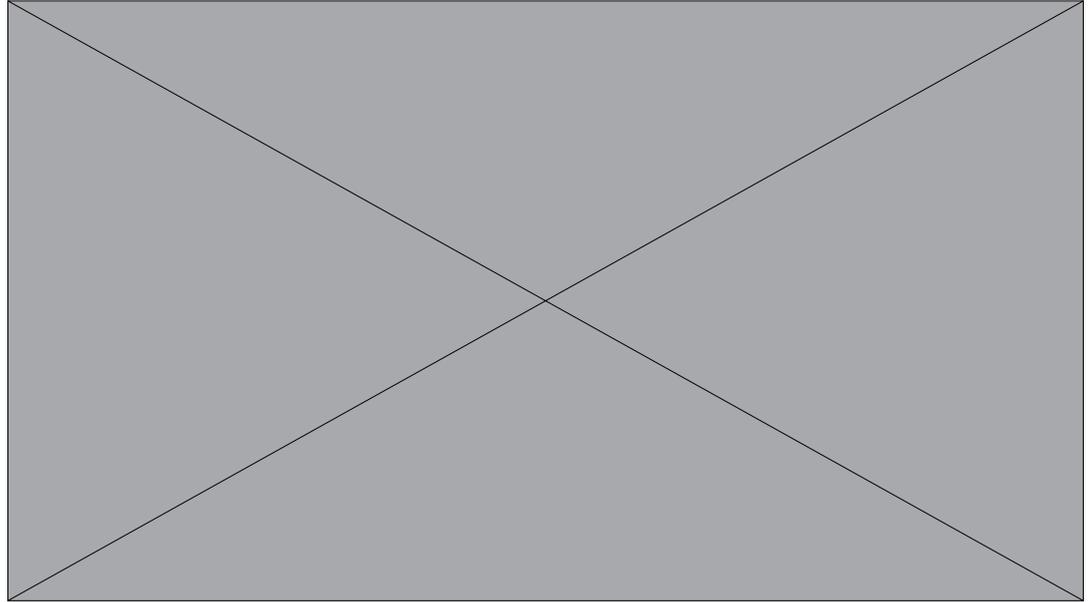
The beginning of refugee resettlement in the US has also revealed all the flaws. It is painfully slow. It has taken 11 months to get 52 people off Manus and Nauru. Even if 50 people were moved every month, it would take almost three more years to get the refugees off the islands.

The crisis on Manus and Nauru remains unresolved. Hundreds of people will be left behind on Manus and Nauru that the US deal does not account for. And the conditions on the islands continue to deteriorate as people lose their minds and lose their lives.

The death of a 32-year-old Tamil refugee on Manus brought the number of deaths there to six—two suicides there in less than two months. The responsibility lies with the Australian government and the offshore detention policy that imprisoned them for four years.

The US deal won’t get the Australian government off the hook. There are around 800 refugees or asylum seekers either on Manus or in Port Moresby. PNG has no resettlement plan.

On Nauru, conditions are set to decline dramatically as services are withdrawn from refugees after the Broadpectrum contract ends in



Above: Daily protests continue in the Manus detention centre against the plans for its closure

October.

On both islands, the years of detention, the uncertainty, and family separation, has created an epidemic of

mental illness, for which freedom is the only cure.

The need to evacuate Manus and Nauru only grows more urgent.

Community support meets October protection deadline

AFTER BARRING people seeking asylum from applying for protection for years, in May, the government gave 7000 people a deadline of 1 October to apply for a protection visa or risk being prevented from ever being allowed to do so.

A massive community effort was scaled up to contact asylum seekers who had been left in limbo for years and to help them to apply. It was an enormous challenge for the few community centres that offered free assistance.

As the 1 October deadline approached, there were about 500 asylum seekers who had still not applied. Legal action will be mounted if the government should attempt to deport any asylum seeker without allowing them to apply for protection.

Like the outpouring of support for the refugees from Manus and Nauru that the government cut off

from housing and income support, the community response to meet the deadline has been fantastic.

The Refugee and Casework Services in Sydney reports that since the deadline was announced in May, they have assisted 1779 families and individuals.

Now the government says that it expects all interviews to be completed by October 2018.

The ruthless funding cuts to the community legal centres are just one more reason that the Turnbull government has got to go.

Labor has promised that temporary protection visas will be replaced with permanent visas once they take office. More than that, Labor needs to commit to re-instate the funding of the legal centres and to fully support all asylum seekers and refugees that the Liberals have cut off support.

Hundreds of people will be left behind on Manus and Nauru that the US deal does not account for