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STRIKE FOR CLIMATE, JOBS AND JUSTICE

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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.

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Things they say

It could be that Mr. Corbyn manages to run the gantlet and get elected… We won’t wait for him to do those things to begin to push back

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo pledges to help prevent Jeremy Corbyn becoming Britain’s Prime Minister

This is a substantial global contribution to be proud of.

Energy Minister Angus Taylor on news Australia’s carbon emissions have risen for a third year

It never troubles me that our laws are being upheld.

Scott Morrison’s response on whether he was concerned about the Australian Federal Police raiding media outlets

Some, mostly rich, decision makers think another recession will be good for the country, if it prompts a new round of Keating-like reforms.

David and Libby Koch, columnists with News Limited in early June.

I’m not being racist when I say this, but… the people who are making judgments while they wear these authoritative coats are not people who appear to have a great knowledge of our game

Jeff Kennett on crowd control at AFL games in Melbourne. He was forced to apologise for his racist comment a day later

It comes down to: At what point are you obliged to basically rebel against the government?

Defence whistleblower David McBride on the charges against him over the “Afghan Files” reports

Nigel Farage is a friend of mine. Boris is a friend of mine. They are two very good guys.

US President Donald Trump
US wants to silence Assange with 175 years’ jail

THE US has formally requested the extradition of Julian Assange from the UK, detailing a raft of charges under the Espionage Act. Assange is charged with conspiring with Chelsea Manning to obtain secret defence documents, as well as risking “serious harm” to the US by publishing the names of confidential sources.

Chelsea Manning, who served seven years in prison for her involvement, was jailed again in May for refusing to testify in the US grand jury investigation investigating Wikileaks. Assange is currently serving a 50 week sentence in a British prison for breaching bail when he fled to the Ecuadorian embassy to seek asylum.

He has been exposed to “psychological torture”, according to UN Special Rapporteur on Torture Nils Melzer, and the Australian government has done little to support him.

Many of the secret documents in question were published as part of a joint investigation with world-famous media outlets including The Guardian, the New York Times, Le Monde and Der Spiegel. So the efforts to charge Assange with encouraging a source to leak material have major implications for journalists everywhere.

Yet the US Justice Department’s John Demers attempted to justify the charges by saying, “Julian Assange is no journalist”.

Assange also faces an ongoing rape investigation in Sweden. But a Swedish court in June prevented his extradition there, while opening the door to interviewing him over the allegations from Britain. The rape allegations deserve to be properly investigated.

But the efforts to extradite him to the US, where he faces a maximum of 175 years in prison if convicted of all charges, are simply an effort by the US state to hide its crimes.

Wikileaks exposed graphic evidence of the cost of the US’s occupation of Iraq for ordinary civilians through state-sanctioned killings and torture.

This included the famous video of US troops shooting down Iraqis who as they tried to surrender, as well as cables detailing US spying operations worldwide and covert US bombings in Yemen.

The US Department of Justice has described the leaks at issue as, “one of the largest compromises of classified information in the history of the United States”. 

Workers pushed to the limit

AUSTRALIAN WORKERS simply can’t give any more after years of demands to work harder and deliver higher productivity, a new report says.

Human Resources firm Garnet surveyed 1909 workers in Australia as part of the global study.

“Australian workplaces have exhausted staff morale and demotivated effort levels, with employees now on the brink of burnout and ready to quit”, the firm says.

The company’s Aaron McEwan explains that, “for years, organizations have expected their workers to do more with less… they’re feeling pressure to work longer hours, often without pay, and take work home in order to meet deadlines.

“With the added stress of ‘always on’ technology and flat wage growth, it’s not surprising that employees are feeling overworked, disrespected, stressed and anxious”.

But most are responding by looking to get out and find another job, as opposed to staying and fighting for better conditions. When an HR firm sounds the alarm on workers being over-worked, you know something is seriously wrong.

Emissions canter under Coalition

AUSTRALIA’S EMISSIONS are still increasing, the federal government’s latest National Greenhouse Gas Inventory figures have revealed.

After failing to comply with a Senate order to release the figures by 31 May, Energy Minister Angus Taylor made them public the day the AFP raided the ABC’s offices.

Emissions have now been rising steadily since 2015. Taylor tried to explain away the previous set of embarrassing figures in March by claiming that emissions were “coming down right now”. They weren’t.

Government projections show emissions are set to keep on rising. And the Liberals still lack any credible climate policy to meet Australia’s Paris targets, let alone the kind of emissions reductions we really need. So much for their claims they’d get there “in a canter”.

Cooking with billionaires

BILLIONAIRE GINA Rinehart has just published her own cookbook. Titled Things we love, the volume features recipes and stories on her company’s cattle properties alongside contributions from Andrew Bolt and former trade minister Andrew Robb.

Gina reflects on the hardships her family experienced growing up on a giant cattle station owned by her multi-millionaire father. Christmas celebrations included turkey, an alcoholic plum pudding six months in the making and, “chocolate coated almonds, and excellent chocolate rum balls, and homemade shortbread” amongst other treats.

Sadly just 500 copies were printed initially, but a new print run is on the way.
SCOTT MORRISON may have won the election. But his government has a very thin majority—and plenty of problems ahead.

Despite the Coalition’s election boast of “strong economic management”, almost as soon as the election was over the pitifully weak state of the Australian economy became clear.

In an effort to boost growth, the Reserve Bank has cut interest rates to a historic low of 1.25 per cent. They will likely go even lower.

New figures have shown the economy grew just 1.8 per cent in the last year—the slowest since the global economic crisis in 2009. On a per person basis, the economy has been in recession for almost a year. The retail sector is already clearly in recession, according to NAB. And things could get much worse if the trade war between the US and China accelerates.

The Liberals’ main priority when parliament returns is passing their tax cuts. They want to lock in changes between now and 2024 that overwhelmingly favour the rich.

The Liberals have also seized on the charges against CFMEU Victorian construction secretary John Setka in an effort to justify further anti-union laws. Setka should stand aside to demonstrate that the CFMEU takes the fight against sexism seriously. Not that the Liberals care about women’s rights, they are only interested in attacking a militant union.

Their new Ensuring Integrity Bill would allow the courts to ban anyone who breaches the law from being a union official and even de-register unions that breach industrial laws. This would give the government a further weapon to enforce the restrictions on legitimate strike action.

The Liberals’ remaining agenda is thin—but pressure from big business and the ruling class for new “economic reforms” to boost profits is piling up. And the Coalition’s hard right is agitating for further “religious freedom” laws to allow discrimination against LGBTIQ+ people as well as support for coal power stations.

Morrison won’t have it all his way. Despite improved numbers in the Senate, he will still need support from four crossbenchers to pass legislation.

Labor moves right

Instead of preparing to fight the Liberals, Labor is moving to the right in response to its shock election defeat.

New leader Anthony Albanese has joined the attack on John Setka, moving to expel him from the Labor Party. And he has made it clear that the party’s tack to the left is over. Instead of taxing the rich he wants to court small business and shareholders, saying, “I want to appeal to people who are successful as well as lift people up who aren’t as successful.”

Albanese has even promoted himself as able to connect with conservative religious voters. In short Labor wants to become even more like the Liberals.

Kristina Keneally is doing her best to attack Peter Dutton from the right over refugees, saying he has “lost control of our borders” due to an increase in asylum seeker plane arrivals.

Labor has also moved to embrace coal and the Adani mine, with MPs including Joel Fitzgibbon and Shayne Neumann declaring they had to “listen to the voice” of regional Queenslanders who voted against it.

Queensland Labor Premier Annastacia Palaszczuk has responded to the election result by fast tracking Adani’s remaining environmental approvals.

The fact that Labor was seen as a threat to mining jobs did cost it votes. The lesson for the climate movement is that funding for new public sector jobs has to be at the centre of climate campaigning.

This is not the first time Labor has responded to defeat by shifting to the right and courting “aspirational” and wealthier voters. It drew the same conclusion after election defeats in 1998 and 2001.

But it’s not aspirational voters that Labor should be concerned about. It was lower paid workers who swung against Labor at the election, not the well-off. Moving to the right will only give workers even less reason to vote Labor.

The focus on door-knocking in marginal seats, by Getup and the union movement’s Change the Rules campaign, did not work to shift the election.

It is mobilisation and struggle through protests and industrial action that can shift society to the left and win change.

The refugee rights movement has called protests to mark six years of offshore detention on Manus and Nauru on 20 July—and oppose the repeal of the Medevac Law that allows refugees there to access medical treatment in Australia.

High school students have called another Strike for Climate on 20 September. This needs to have clear demands for climate jobs and a just transition for coal workers and communities on the front line of climate change and fossil fuel extraction.

We need unions to join the climate movement that is prepared to use its industrial muscle—and to break the law if necessary—to boost wages and workers’ rights.
POLICE RAIDS

Increasing powers have let security state off the leash

By James Supple

DRAMATIC FEDERAL Police raids on the media have sparked alarm over press freedom and the growing powers of Australia’s security state.

The raids are not just an attack on journalists and their sources. They are designed to ensure evidence of war crimes and abuse of state powers remains hidden.

The Australian Federal Police (AFP) raid on the ABC was over its “Afghan Files” reports from 2017.

The “Afghan Files” were severely embarrassing to the army’s elite SAS regiment, exposing war crimes in Afghanistan. They revealed evidence Australian soldiers covered up the killing of a 14-year-old boy, as well as concocted a story to justify gunning down Bismillah Azadi and his son Sadiqullah while they slept. SAS soldiers claimed the man pointed a gun at them, yet his relatives insist he was unarmed.

The ABC also published evidence about SAS soldiers mutilating dead bodies, including a notorious incident where they cut off the hands of dead fighters.

These revelations gave an insight into the real nature of the bloody war and occupation of Afghanistan, where the US and Australia claim to be carrying out a humanitarian mission.

News Corp journalist Annika Smethurst had her house searched over a report on discussions between Home Affairs Secretary Mike Pezzullo and Defence Department Secretary Greg Moriarty about allowing Australian’s cyber-security agency to spy on Australians’ emails, bank accounts and text messages. This would significantly expand the powers of the agency, set up to monitor foreign signals intelligence.

At the time it was shelved by then Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull. But in the wake of the raids Peter Dutton has revealed the proposal is again under active discussion.

The report showed how security agencies are pushing for ever greater powers to spy on us.

Intimidation

The AFP raids were clearly designed to intimidate journalists and potential whistleblowers.

Federal police spent nine hours going through files at the ABC, coming armed with a ludicrously broad warrant. ABC journalist John Lyons, who live-tweeted the search, commented, “This warrant was so broad that there seemed nothing that the AFP could not seize or take.

“In fact, the warrant even gave the AFP the power to delete ABC documents if they so chose.”

Acting AFP Commissioner Neil Gaughan confirmed that it was possible the ABC journalists could be charged, saying that, “it is an offence to actually have that particular material [the original Defence Department documents still on websites]. Publishing or receiving “official secrets” is an offence under the Crimes Act with a maximum sentence of seven years’ jail.

Punishments for whistleblowers are even more extreme. David McBride, responsible for the leak of material for the “The Afghan Files”, is facing charges that could mean around 60 years in jail.

Any charges as a result of the two raids will take place under old legislation. But new espionage laws introduced last year increase potential jail time for the leak of classified security information to ten years’ jail. Journalists can also face charges for publishing such material, although a vague “public interest” defence exists.

Both investigations were requested by the Defence Department secretary, not the government itself.

The investigation into the ABC reports was also requested by the chief of the Defence Force, according to the Federal Police.

But the government can’t escape responsibility.

Federal parliament has introduced over 60 new pieces of security legislation since 2001, from preventative detention, to new anti-terrorism offences, citizenship cancellation and control orders.

Australia’s security agencies now have a budget of $2 billion a year and over 7000 staff. ASIO has tripled in size since 2001.

The effort to increase security agencies’ powers has been the work of both major parties. The Labor Party even wrote to the government last year demanding it investigate the leaks behind the raid against Annika Smethurst.

And placing Peter Dutton as minister in charge of these agencies only gives them a further green light to step up their activities.

The security agencies want to amass the broadest possible powers to spy on and investigate anything deemed a threat to “national security”, with as little scrutiny as they can.

ASIO has a history of abusing its powers, spying on thousands of activists, academics, public servants and Labor Party figures over time in an effort to tackle “subversion”. More recently it has harassed and intimidat ed innocent members of the Muslim community, and in 2005 deported an anti-war activist.

National security agencies are not designed to keep us safe. They are a means of furthering the interests of Australian corporations and the rich through imperialist adventures abroad and repression at home.

The more of their secrets that are exposed the better.

Above: Federal Police officers exit the ABC building in Sydney

Federal parliament has introduced over 60 new pieces of security legislation since 2001
Coalition backs funding for coal and gas power

By Thandi Bethune

SINCE THEIR re-election, the Coalition has made it clear there will be no change to their useless climate policies. As it stands, the government is unlikely to even reach their own pathetic emissions reduction target set out in the Paris Agreement.

The government’s main climate policy is the Emissions Reduction Fund, recently re-named the Climate Solutions Fund, which pays large polluters to reduce their emissions and funds offset projects like re-vegetation.

This has proven to be incredibly ineffective. Since 2017 emissions reductions through the program have almost stopped, due to the cancelation of contracts for unfeasible projects and an increase in the cost of suitable projects. Although the scheme has spent $2.55 billion of a planned $4.55 billion, Australia’s emissions continue to rise.

In addition, the government will financially support a number of other energy projects, whether through a floor price, loans, small grants or other mechanisms under the Underwriting New Generation Investment (UNGI) scheme. This was proposed in response to the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) Inquiry into Australia’s energy network. Its conclusion was that price increases and the danger of an energy shortfall were caused by a lack of competition in the energy market.

Shortlist

In March the Morrison Government released a shortlist of 12 energy projects it is proposing to support to boost competition and encourage new investment. Five of these projects are gas power stations and one involves the expansion of the coal power station at Lake Macquarie in NSW. Resources Minister Matt Canavan has confirmed the government plans to, “progress investments in coal-fired power” and conduct a feasibility study for a coal-fired power station in North Queensland.

This ignores both the climate science that demands we reduce emissions created by burning coal and gas, and the evidence that the problems that have arisen are due to energy privatisation. In effect, the scheme places a band-aid over a large wound without removing the infection.

The ACCC’s Retail Electricity Pricing Inquiry outlines many of the problems with the Australian energy sector. Privatisation since the 1990s has made energy unaffordable and disproportionately burdened low-income earners. The lack of restrictions on monopoly ownership has allowed a few companies to control energy production and sales, enabling them to dictate prices.

The report outlines two significant failings in renewable energy policy. Firstly, the solar feed-in tariff schemes implemented by various states have meant those who can afford solar panels have benefited from an average $538 per year savings in electricity.

Households that cannot afford solar are forced to pick up the bill for reduced revenue from the grid. Secondly, the lack of an “enduring and stable climate change policy” has created problems around energy investment. On the one hand it has enabled the owners of Northern and Hazelwood to suddenly close down coal-fired power stations, leaving a hole in energy production capacity and over 1000 people without jobs. On the other, it has created investment uncertainty and discouraged investment in renewables.

Even without any government action the market is projected to reach 48 per cent renewable energy by 2030. But if left unregulated, this could mean an increase in energy shortages and further price increases.

However, it will take far greater measures to even begin to stabilise the climate. To stand a fighting chance against the climate crisis would require reaching net zero emissions by 2050 globally.

Investment in coal and gas power stations must end. The government needs to establish a clear climate policy that supports the development of renewable energy through direct funding and public ownership, as well as new jobs and training programs to transition those employed in fossil fuels. No market mechanism will work because the privatisation of our energy system is part of the problem.

The Spreading the Climate Strike organising group at Sydney University has called a rally outside Liberal Party Headquarters on 7 July to protest the underwriting of investments in coal and gas, and calling on the government to instead invest in renewable energy and climate jobs.

But the key focus for the movement is the next Climate Strike called by the School Strike for Climate organisers as part of a global day of action on 20 September. This time unions and workers need to strike with them too. The UTS NTEU Branch Committee has already passed a motion saying it will, “work to ensure the widest possible stoppage of work and study to attend demonstrations on this day.” Last time the university allowed staff to leave work and reschedule classes, and the hope is to repeat this.

Discussions are also underway with the aim of organising contingents from as many other unions as possible.

As the Liberals continue to ignore the need for climate action, we need to step up the fight.
Religious freedom no excuse for Folau’s homophobia

By Daniel Cotton

THE RIGHT has seized upon the sacking of football superstar Israel Folau to further a homophobic campaign in the name of “religious freedoms”.

Folau had his multi-million dollar contract terminated by Rugby Australia just before the federal election, for persistently spruiking homophobia from his public social media accounts.

Barnaby Joyce has taken the opportunity to demand a “Folau’s law” protecting bigots from these kinds of sanctions.

Even sections of the union movement including the CFMMEU national president Tony Maher have lined up to defend Folau. Former ACTU assistant secretary Tim Lyons says there is an, “important principle here about employers regulating private conduct”.

But Folau is not a worker defending his livelihood against a boss. He is a public figure being held to account for spreading bigotry who earns over $1 million a year.

His homophobia has been widely rejected. Wallabies coach Michael Cheika said he wouldn’t be selected for the team again. The NRL also indicated he could not play there, given the league’s inclusiveness code.

The important principle here is the basic one of solidarity with the oppressed. No unionist should defend the right for millionaire bigots to tell gays they’re going to hell.

In defending such bigots, union leaders undercut workers’ rights—like those of Craig Campbell, a Perth teacher who lost his job due to his sexuality.

“Religious Freedoms” Offensive

“Religious freedom” is nothing more than a smokescreen for homophobia, in a backlash against the progress made on LGBTI+ rights following the equal marriage vote. The same slogan was used in the US to roll back anti-discrimination law by bigots like Mike Pence.

The leaked Ruddock review into religious freedoms drew public condemnation when it recommended enshrining an Australia-wide standard allowing schools to discriminate based on sexuality and gender identity against students and teachers. One poll found 74 per cent of people opposed laws allowing discrimination, which already exist under federal law and in a number of states.

“Religious freedoms” are about protecting the freedom to discriminate, by constraining the already limited anti-discrimination law that exists.

However this is not enough for sections of the hard right. Coalition MPs Barnaby Joyce and Concetta Fierravanti-Wells, alongside religious hate groups and shock jocks, are pushing for a positive right to religious freedom that could extend legal protections for discrimination even further.

Ruddock’s proposal only gives the right to discriminate to religious educational institutions. Eric Abetz, the Liberals’ most distinguished homophobe, has argued that the right to “manifest one’s religious beliefs” should be extended, “not only to ministers of religion, but to all people of faith… business owners or individuals taking part in day to day life”.

The Liberals are split over how far to go. Attorney General Christian Porter plans to introduce an initial bill banning religious discrimination as soon as July. But the issues of discrimination against teachers and students have been sent to a further review by the Australian Law Reform Commission. It will not report until April next year.

Tragically, Labor’s new leadership means reining in the marriage equality campaign. Eric Abetz, the Liberals’ most distinguished homophobe, has argued that the right to “manifest one’s religious beliefs” should be extended, “not only to ministers of religion, but to all people of faith… business owners or individuals taking part in day to day life”.

The Liberals are split over how far to go. Attorney General Christian Porter plans to introduce an initial bill banning religious discrimination as soon as July. But the issues of discrimination against teachers and students have been sent to a further review by the Australian Law Reform Commission. It will not report until April next year.

Tragically, Labor’s new leadership are moving to soften their position against LGBTI+ discrimination, anxious about the federal election results. New leader Anthony Albanese has promised to “work cooperatively” with the Liberals on religious freedom, while front-benchers like Chris Bowen hope to bolster Labor’s acceptance of the “socially conservative”.

But accepting and promoting the idea that “the gay agenda has gone too far” in terms of anti-discrimination provisions will not help Labor. It was whispering mixed messages from either corner of Shorten’s mouth that helped lose the election. A repeat of this tactic on gay rights is a tragic mistake. If Labor stays silent while the conservatives wage concerted campaigns for “religious freedom”, it will be helping promote homophobia.

There can be no complacency for LGBTI+ activists. During the election campaign, Christian Schools Australia distributed 160,000 flyers in marginal seats attacking Labor for its promise to, “remove the exemptions that permit religious schools to discriminate against students and staff”. And one hate group, the Australian Christian Alliance, organised rallies for “religious freedoms” in no-voting electorates held by Labor in NSW, campaigning against LGBTI+ and abortion rights.

The modest mobilisations in Melbourne and Sydney calling for “no exemptions to equality” earlier this year were an excellent start in building the fight. But facing down a growing religious freedoms offensive will mean redoubling these efforts, and building on the solidarity developed in the marriage equality campaign.

This means opposing all “religious freedoms” scaremongering and the homophobia behind it, from Israel Folau to the Anglican school principals demanding the right to discriminate. This will help us build the fight against a Liberal government growing in confidence in its homophobia.

Above: Israel Folau attends a hearing over his sacking
The Liberals are the real thugs, Albanese is encouraging them—but Setka should stand down

By Ian Rintoul

THE CAMPAIGN against John Setka, Victorian branch secretary of the CFMEU, has reached fever pitch. The move by newly-installed Labor leader Anthony Albanese to expel him from the Labor Party is a disgraceful effort to kow-tow to the bosses to prove Albanese’s conservative credentials.

Albanese says there is no place for Setka in the Labor Party because of statements he allegedly made in a closed CFMEU executive meeting. It is obvious that someone on the CFMEU executive was politically motivated to leak Setka’s comments to the media.

Albanese’s move has been backed by right-wingers like former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, who is well known for his anti-union views.

Worse, Albanese’s move has given encouragement to the Liberals to target the union movement. Scott Morrison has taken the opportunity to call CFMEU members “thugs” and to move to re-introduce the “Ensuring Integrity Bill”, which will give the government more powers to interfere with the union movement.

It is understandable that CFMEU officials, delegates, and many rank and filers as well as other left-wing unions in Victoria are defending Setka.

He and other CFMEU officials have been some of the few willing to defy anti-union laws to defend the interests of their members and have been persecuted as a result.

Trumped up “blackmail” charges were dropped last year, and there has been a campaign of slander against Setka from right-wing politicians and the press.

But the domestic violence charges against Setka are very serious. These have now been reduced to two charges, to which he has agreed to plead guilty, including one of “using a carriage service to harass a woman”.

The fact that Setka has not been willing to take responsibility for them has allowed the Liberals and his enemies in the right wing of the union movement and the Labor Party to target him.

His failure to stand down, while openly pleading guilty to the charges, is making a mockery of the union’s strong stand against domestic violence, support for women in the construction industry and opposition to sexism more generally. It is also giving encouragement to openly sexist attitudes and to those who advocate for the men’s rights movement.

By standing down, Setka could show that the union really is serious about fighting for women’s rights and that he is prepared to make a determined effort to rectify the mistakes.

Exactly what Setka said in the CFMEU executive meeting about Rosie Batty is not clear. If anything was said that indicated that he was a victim of laws that favour women, it is politically mistaken.

But with ACTU secretary Sally McManus now denying there were comments about Rosie Batty or any comment about laws “being worse for men”, Albanese’s opportunistic reasons for expelling Setka from the Labor Party are exposed.

Fighting the right

There is no doubt that it is more difficult for Setka to stand down now because of the attack on him from the right. But to maintain his position will weaken the CFMEU when it most needs unity to fight Morrison and the bosses.

The Liberals care nothing about women’s rights—we know that from the number of Liberal women MPs who have resigned from the party. Morrison refused to back Labor’s move to provide abortions in public hospitals. The Liberals also opposed raising the wages of childcare workers.

But if Setka refuses to stand down it will allow the Liberals to pose as defenders of women’s rights.

This can only weaken the CFMEU and undermine the militancy that will be needed to stand up to the ABCC and the building corporations.

The moves against Setka have also exposed the lengths that the Labor leaders will go to do the dirty work of the bosses. They want to weaken the CFMEU’s defiance of the ABCC.

Setka should not make it easier for them. There is an opportunity to put the union on an even better footing to fight the right wing of the movement if he does stand down.

There is a huge fight ahead of the unions in the face of an aggressive Liberal government and a Labor Party that is moving to the right. Labor has been exposed as a very unreliable ally.

The unions need to focus on how we build the strongest possible defiance of the Liberals.

The CFMEU has been central to that fight over the past few years—in industrially, politically and in the social movements. To do that most effectively, it means the union has to show that it takes women’s rights as seriously as it takes the fight against the ABCC, and for safety and conditions on building sites.
Players are right to boycott the national anthem

By Tom Orsag

INDIGENOUS PLAYERS caused a storm by refusing to sing the national anthem during the opening State of Origin rugby league game in Brisbane in early June. This echoed US footballers’ “taking a knee” during the playing of the national anthem in protest against police brutality.

“The anthem doesn’t represent us as Indigenous people... We have to change it”, NSW’s Josh Addo-Carr told the Sydney Morning Herald.

Four Indigenous players spoke out publicly before the game to support the protest: NSW’s Cody Walker, Addo-Carr, and Latrell Mitchell. In the Queensland team, Will Chambers also said he would refuse to sing.

In all 11 players stood silent during the anthem, with a number of players with Pacific Islander or Maori heritage joining the boycott. Indigenous players also stood silent in February during the NRL’s Indigenous All Stars vs Maori All Stars game. Walker criticised the anthem, telling Channel 7, “We aren’t young and free. We’re the longest-living culture in the world.”

Former NSW star Timanan Tahu criticised the dropping of Mitchell and Walker following the game, claiming their anthem protest played a role.

Indigenous rapper and comedian, Briggs, has produced a video that points out that “free” hardly fits for an Indigenous population that is the most incarcerated in the world. Others have pointed out that the song reflects the white Australia of the time it was written.

The anthem controversy comes just a few months since nine-year-old Queensland girl Harper Nielsen, who is non-indigenous, was threatened with suspension because she for refusing to stand for the national anthem at a school assembly. Harper’s protest drew an extraordinary attack from racist Senator Pauline Hanson, calling her a “brainwashed brat” who should be kicked out of school. Tony Abbott and Queensland Liberal MP Jarrod Bleijie also publicly attacked her.

The NRL’s Indigenous players should be applauded for their stand. It is a shame that non-indigenous players didn’t join them.

Politicians have been quick to suggest cosmetic changes such as replacing “young and free”, with “strong and free”. But small changes in wording are not going to fix the problems. The idea that a different national anthem can be “inclusive” is mistaken.

The national anthem is designed to bolster national identity and the idea of national unity. No matter what the anthem is it would inherently recognise Australia that is based on invasion and Indigenous dispossession.

Nationalism is designed not just to cover up Indigenous oppression, it masks the fundamental divide in society between the ruling class and the working class majority.

There is no common national interest between bosses and workers.

Nationalism also works to exclude all those outside the nation, encouraging the idea that the “other” is fundamentally different. This leads to racism against Indigenous people as well as migrants and refugees.

“Advance Australia Fair” only became the national anthem in 1984, as part of an effort by the then Hawke Labor government to rejuvenate Australian nationalism. Nationalism only got worse under the Howard government, which forced schools to have a functioning flagpole to fly the national flag, along with singing the anthem.

None of us should sing any national anthem—and the sooner it vanishes from schools and sporting events, the better.

Courtney’s death exposes housing crisis

ON 25 May, the body of yet another young woman was found in a Melbourne park. Her name was Courtney Herron. She was only 25, had struggled with addiction issues and she was homeless.

Courtney is the fourth woman to be found murdered in a public place in Melbourne in the last year. Like those of Aiia Maasurwae, Natalina Angok and Eurydice Dixon, Courtney’s murder has raised the ongoing issue of violence against women. But it has also shone a light on the housing crisis and the vulnerability of women who are sleeping rough.

The average person who is seeking crisis accommodation in Australia is a 25 to 34-year-old woman. Many of these women are experiencing mental illness, struggling with addiction or fleeing domestic violence situations. But each night, half of all women seeking a bed are turned away from crisis accommodation services. In Melbourne alone there are only 423 crisis accommodation beds but close to 2000 people sleeping rough each night.

These overstretched services are also being let down by the lack of public housing. There are around 400,000 social housing properties across Australia, but density has barely grown in the past 20 years despite the increasing demand.

In Victoria alone there are 82,500 people on the waiting list for public housing. Their waiting time could be ten months or it could be ten years.

At the last census night in 2016, there were 116,000 people who were homeless. And on that same night, there were one million homes left empty across Australia because the system is set up to favour investors.

For many people, housing is simply unaffordable. An Anglicare report released this year showed that out of 69,000 rental properties, only two, both of them in regional Australia, were considered affordable for people living on Youth Allowance or Newstart.

But the government isn’t doing much to help. Victoria’s Council to Homeless Persons estimate the state government needs to be investing in 3000 social housing properties per year to make a dent in the unmet need. But it has shamefully only committed to an additional 1000 properties by 2022.

We need a strong public housing system that doesn’t leave people’s homes in the hands of the market or push people into overstretched crisis accommodation. Because Courtney, like so many women across Australia, should have had a warm bed to sleep in that night.

Ruby Wawn

The idea that a different national anthem can be “inclusive” is mistaken
Sudan’s revolution hangs in the balance

By Jasmine Ali

OVER 100 people have been murdered in a soaring wave of brutal attacks on Sudan’s revolution. Tens of thousands have also been injured and dozens of women and men were raped as part of an assault on the sit-in outside the military headquarters in Khartoum, deployed by the paramilitary Rapid Security Forces (RSF).

Although the Transitional Military Council declared the end of negotiations with the civilian opposition, cutting off internet and phone services to disrupt ongoing protests, the latest general strike has forced the regime to backtrack.

Austerity and autocracy
The attack comes seven months after people in Sudan first took to the streets in December, protesting the Government’s decision to triple the cost of bread.

The regime had previously faced down mass protests in 2013 after it capitulated to pressure from IMF for debt repayments and cut subsidies, resulting in massive fuel price increases. Security forces attacked and killed 50 people in order to maintain power.

This time months of protests and strikes succeeded in ending the 30-year dictatorship of Omar Al-Bashir, who seized power in a coup in 1989. Demonstrations first broke out in the city of Atbara and rapidly spread nation-wide in the face of a deepening economic crisis.

Sudan’s inflation rate is among the world’s highest, with the country’s economy struggling after losing 75 per cent of its oil reserves after South Sudan seceded in 2011.

In October 2018, two months before the uprising began, Al-Bashir’s government announced a major 15-month austerity plan. Sudan’s then Prime Minister Moata Moussa said the plan would include “further strict austerity measures”.

Tens of thousands have participated in a mass sit-in outside the military headquarters in Khartoum. The leading organisation in the revolution is the Sudanese Professional Association, comprised of academics, health workers, teachers and lawyers. “Resistance Committees” organised within neighbourhoods, have also been pivotal to the success of the mobilisations.

Sudanese trade unions have also played an important role from very early on. As early as December 2018, there was a nationwide work stoppage to protest the price hikes. In February, 1,800 workers at Port Sudan’s southern container terminal went on strike against plans to privatise the port during a visit by the Prime Minister.

Protests have even spread to Darfur, a region marginalised by successive central governments in Khartoum following divisions established from the period of British colonial rule. Al-Bashir and the military oversaw the brutal suppression of rebellion in Darfur. The Janjaweed militia committed vast amounts of ethnic cleansing. Al-Bashir also waged a ruthless civil war against South Sudan.

Protests in Darfur in January featured banners opposing the “racist regime” and demanding “the racist system must go”. Encouragingly, protests in other parts of the country have also opposed the regime’s racism, raising chants of “we are all Darfur”.

The Rapid Security Forces were formed out of the notorious Janjaweed militias responsible for rape, torture and killing in Darfur. Mohamed Hamdan (Hemedti), the current Deputy Chairman of the current Transitional Military Council, is the former commander of the Janjaweed.

Al-Bashir’s removal from power was carefully managed by the military. He was replaced with a Transitional Military Council which has insisted on maintaining “sovereign powers” until elections are held. Revolutionaries have demanded a civilian majority on the transitional council.

In response to the military’s attempt to hold power, the popular movement escalated action. A “freedom train” brought 1,000 people from Atbara to Khartoum to attend the protests at the military headquarters.

On 28 and 29 May, a general strike was declared demanding civilian rule.

Immediately before the crackdown, the military council sent Hemedti to Egypt’s own revolution.

Protests at the military headquarters in Khartoum, backed by the ruthless Rapid Security Forces, hoped its crackdown would disperse the revolution, a new general strike was launched on 9 June.

Khartoum’s streets were deserted and shops closed. Airport workers and pilots grounded most flights, and banks, along with schools, ports and rail lines were shut.

Workers in oil fields in West Kordofan organised by the Petro Energy Workers Association also committed to stop work.

But the opposition coalition has now called off the strike in order to return to negotiations with the military. This is a mistake—the general strike actions have the potential to drive out the military and place the economy under workers’ control.

Workers’ councils based on delegates from workplaces are needed to pose an alternative to military rule, and address the severe economic crisis hitting workers and the poor.
Trump’s war on women and abortion rights

By Sarah Bates

THE UNITED States is a dangerous place to be a woman. An onslaught of laws has chipped away at abortion rights since Donald Trump’s inauguration as president two and a half years ago.

So far this year at least 13 states have introduced bills to outlaw abortion as early as six weeks into pregnancy. A new law in Alabama, effectively banning abortion, has hardened the battleground.

“The Alabama bill makes abortion illegal except where pregnancy poses a “serious health risk”. There are no exceptions in cases of rape or incest. Doctors face 99 years in jail if they perform an abortion.

The bill was signed into state law by Republican Governor Kay Ivey. She said it was a “powerful testament to Alabamians’ deeply held belief that every life is a sacred gift from God”.

Jan, an activist in Michigan, said that the bills are part of a bigger attack. “Many states have been trying to put forward anti-abortion laws,” she said. “The long term strategy is to have laws that will be overturned in a lower court. Then one or many can be appealed and find their way to the Supreme Court.

“The plan is to have Roe v Wade reversed.”

Row v Wade was the landmark case in 1973 that made abortion a legal right. Right wingers have fought it ever since.

But seven out of ten Americans believe that abortion should be legal.

So some right wingers think a better strategy is to try and undermine existing abortion rights gradually. For instance, many “heartbeat bills” that aim to outlaw abortion when a fetal heartbeat can be detected have failed.

But anti-choice politicians also use other tactics, such as forcing women to undergo counselling before they have an abortion.

There are only three abortion clinics in Alabama—a state with a population of 2.5 million women.

Yanica Robinson is medical director at the Alabama Women’s Centre for Reproductive Alternatives. She said women face “many obstacles just related to their postcode and financial status”.

Many women undertake a six to eight hour drive to get to her clinic.

Many sleep in the parking garage because Alabama law forces women to undergo counselling 48 hours before an abortion.

Yanica described how they face a battle, “trying to coordinate time off work, come up with the finances and arranging travel”.

Across the US, one quarter of women of reproductive age would need to travel at least 50 kilometres to reach the nearest abortion clinic. And the poorest are hit the hardest.

Most abortion care can’t be paid for by federal cash under the Medicaid programme, which the poorest rely on for help with medical costs. And 26 states restrict abortion care for women who use discounted private insurance provided through the Affordable Care Act.

**Trump**

Attacks on abortion didn’t begin with Trump—424 abortion restrictions were enacted at state-level between 2010-18. But it’s no surprise that Trump—424 abortion restrictions were enacted at state-level between 2010-18. But it’s no surprise that Trump demanded that women who sexually assaulted women—has overseen huge attacks on choice.

Trump demanded that women who have abortions should receive “some form of punishment”.

One of his first acts was to stop government funding to international organisations that provide information on or offer abortions. He’s surrounded himself with vile anti-abortionists, such as deputy president Mike Pence.

Trump has also filled the federal judicial system with conservatives who want to limit access to abortion or stop it altogether.

Both Trump’s nominees to the Supreme Court are on the right wing of the Republican Party. The appointments of Neil Gorsuch in 2017 and Brett Kavanaugh in 2018 mean the court now has an anti-choice majority.

New Jersey campaigner Fiona said, “Gorsuch and Kavanaugh will have a negative and lasting impact on women’s issues. These white, conservative men are on the Supreme Court for life and are only in their 50s.”

The Alabama law is the first to directly challenge Roe v Wade. And it comes as the anti-choice minority are emboldened. But there is a long history of resistance to attacks on abortion rights in the US.

The fight for abortion rights was a big part of women’s liberation protests in the 1960s. Women set up their own abortion services. Pressure from campaigners lay behind Row v Wade. And the struggle continues today.

Two Alabama groups that support women accessing abortion services reported record donations. And the National Network of Abortion Funds received donations of over £83,000 in two days—20 per cent of their total donations for the last year.

Tough laws don’t stop abortions, they just make them dangerous. If Alabama’s law comes into force, women will die. That’s why everything has to be thrown at defending and extending a woman’s right to choose.

Socialist Worker UK
Teachers stage historic strike in New Zealand for public education

By Anna Lee
Retired member, NZEI Te Riu Roa

AOTEAROA/NEW ZEALAND’S largest ever nationwide education “mega-strike” took place on Wednesday 29 May. There was a mood of determination, enthusiasm and strong solidarity shown with the participation of teachers, principals, parents, students and the public.

It was the first time that the two teacher unions have coordinated strike action across the entire compulsory schooling sector. The strike involved approximately 50,000 teachers—and three quarters of a million children stayed away from state and state-integrated, “special character” often religious, schools. For primary teachers this is the third day of strike action since their collective agreement expired on 8 June 2018.

Tens of thousands of teachers, principals, parents and members of the wider community participated in nationwide public protests. In Auckland the march was 15,000-strong, taking over 20 minutes for all the marchers to pass the start point.

The strike was very widely supported by parents and the public. Many attended the protests while others assisted with childcare for parents who had to go to work. This included some employers allowing workers’ children to be taken to work for the day.

This mega-strike was the result of the current Labour, New Zealand First and Green Party Government refusing to negotiate effective solutions to the real and growing crisis in NZ education. This crisis is the result of 35 years of neo-liberal governments deliberately underfunding education whilst attacking effective teaching practices and structuring education on a business model where schools are left to compete against each other for students and inadequate funds.

Teacher unionists have steadfastly resisted these changes. They have defended the right of every child to attend an excellent school, and to meet their full potential.

Now, after nine years of intensive attacks on the public service by National Government, teachers, as government workers, have high expectations of the Labour Coalition government.

The teacher unions have been trying to negotiate pay, teaching and learning conditions that will attract and retain teachers, reduce workloads and provide additional skilled staff for the growing number of children with additional needs.

Teachers are demanding that the government fund education so that every child, including those with additional needs, receives the personal attention they need to learn and thrive.

Prior to the strike Linda Stuart, president of NZEI Te Riu Roa, the union representing primary school teachers, said that, “The outcome shows teachers and principals are united and resolute in their commitment to getting significantly improved pay, time and support for learning needs.”

Jack Boyle, President of the Post Primary Teachers Association (PPTA) stated that, “We want to work with the government to find solutions that make teaching the attractive career it should be.” He added that, “A well-resourced, equitable education system is essential for a healthy society. We hope the government acts on its principles and makes that happen.”

**Government back-flip**

The PPTA planned continuing nationwide industrial action each week beginning with “rostered-home” year levels, where teachers refuse to teach one year level for a day. This started on Monday 4 June. “Rolling Regional Strikes” for a full day across each region were set to follow.

Before the strike the Minister of Education, Chris Hipkins insisted, “there’s not going to be any more money”. But two weeks later he back-flipped, offering an extra $271 million to boost teacher pay. Teacher base rates will now increase by around 3 per cent a year on average, and current teachers have been promised a total pay increase of at least 18.5 per cent over three years taking into account progression to higher pay scales.

Pay parity between primary and secondary school teachers will also be restored.

However the deal does not address teacher demands over reducing workload through more classroom release time and extra learning support staff.

The Education Ministry has signed a separate accord with the teaching unions with an undertaking to investigate further measures on these issues.

Both teacher unions have recommended that members accept the deal, with teachers to vote by 25 June.

Teachers have not won everything they wanted. But the result shows that strike action works to force gains on pay and conditions.

The teachers’ strike was the latest in the strike wave in New Zealand since the election of Jacinda Ardern’s Labour lead Coalition Government, with nurses, public servants, junior doctors, bus drivers and fast food workers all taking action after years of intimidation.

The fight for a better education system will continue. But the teachers’ campaign is a lesson for other workers about how to win.
WHY DIDN’T WORKERS TRUST LABOR?

Labor was unable to win over working class voters at the election with its promises of change—reflecting long term decline in its class roots and credibility, writes James Supple

AFTER ITS unexpected election defeat, Labor is thrashing around trying to understand what went wrong. It wasn’t simply regional and mining areas in Queensland that lost it the election.

In seats across the country Labor failed to win the swing it needed. Many marginal seats even saw swings to the Liberals. Labor went backwards in every state and territory except Victoria, South Australian and the Northern Territory.

This came despite Labor’s tack to the left and promise of a significant increase in spending on schools, hospitals, TAFE, childcare and pensioner dental care.

Many workers voted against their own interests to back the Liberals. In NSW, Labor suffered larger swings in the poorer areas of marginal electorates like Lindsay and Banks. Polling booth data examined by the Grattan Institute’s Carmela Chivers shows that every income group except the top 20 per cent swung to the Liberals.

It’s clear many working class voters simply did not believe Labor’s promises—and some saw Labor’s tax changes, such as over franking credits, as a sign it would attack retirement incomes more generally.

One key reason is that Labor never clearly argued for taxing the rich. Instead it often justified its changes as simple “fiscal responsibility”.

But it also reflects the disillusionment with Labor that has been growing since the 1980s and is compounded by declining union membership and strike figures.

As workers have less confidence that the unions can win improvements in conditions through industrial action, so their confidence that a Labor government will deliver improvements for workers in government has also declined.

This is part of a deeper disillusionment with the political system and the major parties. The Australian Election Study carried out after the 2016 election by ANU academics shows that 74 per cent thought people in government look after themselves, and that just 14 per cent believe politicians know what ordinary people think.

Labor’s membership and its base in the working class are in long term decline. In the past Labor could rely on its own mass membership as well as trade union networks to help carry its arguments deep into working class communities.

When unions were leading strikes that fought for improved conditions, the connection between the unions and Labor gave workers more confidence that a Labor government would represent workers’ interests. This is much less true today.

Numerous party figures have described the woeful state of Labor Party branches and membership.

Former state government minister Rodney Cavalier has listed 100 branches in NSW that folded between 1999 and 2009, and claimed there were just 1000 members in the state who “play any sort of active role in the party”.

Labor’s formal membership has remained around 45,000 since 1955, despite the country’s population almost trebling. And just 30,426 bothered to vote for the party’s leader when given the opportunity in 2013, suggesting the figure is inflated by branch stacking.

Union decline has also drastically weakened Labor’s working class support. People who are members of trade unions are far more likely to vote Labor—as a study by Andrew Leigh confirmed.

But union membership has crashed in recent decades. In 1980 around 50 per cent of the workforce were union members. This has fallen to just 15 per cent today.

Labor’s “rusted on” vote has also steadily ebbed away. The percentage of the population who said they always voted Labor has fallen from 33 per cent in 1979 to 16 per cent in 2016. Its primary vote this election was just 33.3 per cent nationwide, a fraction above its worst ever figure in 2013.

Neo-liberalism

This decline is the result of Labor governments since the 1980s embracing neo-liberal policies and attacking their own supporters.

The neo-liberal agenda pursued by both major parties has increased inequality, forced people to work harder, and produced a decline in public services.

This began during the 13 years of Labor government under Bob Hawke and Paul Keating from 1983. Labor abandoned policies that it had once been known for—such as public ownership of assets, and increased spending on services and the welfare state—and embraced policies in the interests of big business.

There was a ruthless policy of wage cuts and trading off conditions under the Accord, designed to boost profits and restore the fortunes of Australian capitalism. Whole industries were restructured, at the cost of thousands of jobs, and privatisation began in earnest.

The steepest drop in membership as a percentage of the workforce took place during Labor’s time in government between 1983 and 1996.

The experience of Labor in government federally just six years ago did equally little to inspire support. Kevin Rudd built up people’s hopes for change but then spectacularly failed to deliver.

Social researcher Rebecca Huntley says Rudd’s election in 2007 is the only time she has witnessed a widespread sense that people, “felt they were voting for something, rather than against someone”.

People remember not simply the divisions between Rudd and Gillard, but a government which made big promises while doing little to improve workers’ lives. Labor even imposed...
cuts to single parents’ payments and universities, as well as a carbon tax that was designed to drive up power bills, and set back the climate movement by insisting that workers would have to pay for climate action.

Labor’s recent record of betrayals in government is not unique in its history.

Every Labor government has eventually attacked the working class voters that put it in power. Labor Prime Minister James Scullin, in power during the 1930s Depression, imposed vicious cuts to government spending and wages. Even Gough Whitlam handed down a budget before his dismissal in 1975 that slashed spending in response to the end of the post-war boom.

Labor’s commitment to working within capitalism means that, in times of economic crisis, it chooses to impose policies in the interests of big business and the rich in the hope of nursing the system back to health.

But the long-term crisis of capitalism since the end of the post-war boom has reduced the space for Labor to deliver reforms that improve workers’ lives.

This is playing out across the developed capitalist world. Social democratic parties like the Labor Party have imposed drastic austerity measures and moved so far to the right that a major gap has opened up between the expectations of their supporters and what the parties will deliver.

Some have practically imploded. In Greece the equivalent of the Labor Party, PASOK, saw its vote collapse to 6.3 per cent at the last election. The French Socialist Party fell to fifth place in the 2017 presidential election with 6.4 per cent of the vote.

New parties of the left and the right have also made electoral breakthroughs as politics has polarised—similar to the process here where the share of the vote of minor parties like The Greens and One Nation has grown over time.

Product of struggle
The Liberals also have their own problems with their membership and support base. But this is a much more serious issue for Labor.

The Liberals are the direct political representatives of big business and therefore the preferred option for corporations and the rich. They normally receive the support of the bulk of the mainstream media. Their ideas represent the common sense of capitalist society.

By contrast Labor was founded to represent the trade unions officials and their base in the working class.

One of Labor’s main explanations for its election disaster has been Clive Palmer’s $70 million advertising splurge.

Bill Shorten said Labor had been the victim of “corporate leviathans” like Murdoch’s News Corp and a “financial behemoth” in Palmer.

Labor’s capacity to push back against these interests relies on working class people recognising, at least to some degree, that they have class interests distinct from those of big business.

This understanding is strongest when the working class is organised and has experience of class struggle.

Labor is a reformist party that works within capitalism.

Outside of revolutionary situations, support for reformist politics is the main product of workers’ involvement in struggle.

This fits with the experience of workers who can see that the system works in the interests of the bosses, and produces inequality and oppression—but at the same time accept the continuation of capitalism.

The Labor Party emerged as a result of the class struggles in the 1890s, following the development of trade unions and their defeat in a series of major strikes.

It was this involvement in struggle against the bosses that led wide layers of workers to understand the need for a working class party.

Labor’s membership reached its height in the period after the Second World War, as workers went on the offensive to make up for the sacrifices of the war years. It also grew during the era of the Whitlam government, fuelled by a high level of trade union struggle, as well as mass movements against the Vietnam War and for Aboriginal land rights and women’s liberation.

Even Kevin Rudd’s election victory in 2007 came on the back of significant trade union stopwork demonstrations against the Liberals’ WorkChoices laws, the largest of them involving 500,000 people Australia-wide.

Labor is far from a finished force. The election result was not a ringing endorsement of what the Liberals stand for. Scott Morrison has just a two seat majority in parliament.

But Labor only has itself to blame for its decline. Its shift to the right will only make things worse. Labor’s failures also show the folly of waiting another three years to elect a Labor government hoping it will be different.

The main task for unions and the left is to build the struggle outside parliament in the workplaces and on the streets. Without this, Labor will have difficulty improving its primary vote and winning government.

The unions will have to take the fight to the bosses if we are going to see the kind of movement that can really fight Morrison and his system he rules for.
FEATURES

FIGHTING FOR CLIMATE JOBS, PAY AND UNION RIGHTS

New jobs in renewable energy and low emissions industries need to be well-paid and unionised if workers are going to welcome them as an alternative writes Penny Howard.

ONE LESSON from the disastrous federal election is that the current climate debate is leaving workers in communities dependent on fossil fuel extraction concerned about their future.

This left the door open to right-wing, pro-coal parties.

One Nation championed climate denial and ran two coal miners as candidates in coal mining areas: Stuart Bonds, a CFMMEU member, received 21.6 per cent of the vote in Hunter NSW while the ALP lost 14 per cent. In Capricornia in Queensland, Wade Rothery won 17 per cent and the ALP lost 14 per cent of the vote. This has led to some Labor MPs drawing the conclusion that party has to be more explicitly pro-coal.

What is actually necessary are more explicit and forward-looking plans for jobs that communities can trust. We need a campaign for a real climate transition plan that includes good unionised jobs across the economy, including a jobs guarantee for workers and communities currently reliant on fossil fuels.

Decarbonising the economy requires massive investment in new infrastructure and industries. An important first step is a plan for a rapid transition to 100 per cent renewable energy.

However, the efforts to build renewable energy are currently being left to private investors and the free market. Even where there are public subsidies, or loans from the Government’s “Clean Energy Finance Corporation”, projects are built and owned by private companies, and run for profit. The result is an overriding emphasis on cost cutting, as energy generation projects and technologies compete against each other within the National Electricity Market.

This is leading to a race to the bottom for workers in these industries. In contrast to the heavily unionised coal industry, there is little union organisation in the renewables industry and many existing jobs are poorly paid.

A just transition is impossible unless new industries can offer good jobs. Unfortunately, workers’ experience of industry transitions in Australia is not good—an ACTU report shows that only one-half to one-third of displaced workers find an equivalent job.

It is critical that the climate and union movement ensure that action on climate change does not come at the expense of decent jobs and workers’ pay and living standards.

A race to the bottom for workers

The cut-throat competition that dominates the renewables industry leads to constant attempts to drive down working conditions. While 11,000 jobs were created in construction of large-scale renewable energy in 2018 and another 3000 ongoing jobs, this work has been largely casual, low paid, and often dangerous.

There are virtually no programs in place for workers in high-emissions industries to transition to renewable energy, and no industry-wide agreements or minimum labour standards in the industry.

This is even the case when renewables companies are receiving government subsidies or participating in “reverse auctions” run by state Labor governments.

Electrical Trades Union (ETU) Queensland and NT secretary Peter Ong warned of a, “wild west, get away with what you can until you are caught, mentality within the solar industry” when solar company RCR Tomlinson announced their bankruptcy in November 2018. At the time, the company was responsible for eight of the 22 solar projects completed or under construction in Queensland, more than any other company, and at least another two projects in Victoria. Peter Ong described the company’s failure as due to, “significantly undercutting competitors during the tender process” which, “delivered nothing but a race to the bottom on wages, safety and conditions”.

At the RCR site in Kerrang, Victoria, the ETU found unlicensed backpackers performing electrical work, and at least one received a serious electric shock. After a complaint, the regulator ruled that RCR had to use licensed electricians for the remainder of the project.

The pattern was repeated at RCR’s next project in Wemen, Victoria. The company’s CEO quit a few months before the bankruptcy, taking a $1 million payout and $10 million in shares.

This was allowed to happen despite significant public funding. $51.4 million from the Australian Renewable Energy Agency went to only six Queensland solar farms. All 20 Queensland solar farms are privately owned, except for one owned by the Sunshine Coast City Council.

At the Ross River solar farm being constructed outside Townsville, the ETU discovered four migrant workers being paid $40 per day and eating only plain rice, as they were unable to afford any other meals. Unionists raised money for them and forced the employer to provide backpay, but the workers were soon dismissed.

The CEPU in South Australia was able to secure a good union agreement at the Taliem Bend solar farm, with permanent jobs and good facilities. The CEPU and ETU are fighting to ensure that the Taliem Bend standard is spread to all solar farm projects. But
they describe the site as the “exception” to the “sub-par pay and conditions” that are “the deplorable norm” in the industry.

At the Bangala site in Port Augusta, the largest solar farm in Australia, 150 workers were effectively locked out in October 2018 after the labour hire company that brought them to the site tried to force them to sign contracts once they arrived on much worse conditions than they were promised. Workers contacted the CEPU and CFMEU, but when they showed up for work found a contractual dispute between the labour hire company, the subcontractor and the owner left them with no employer, no work and no pay.

In February of that year, a worker was killed on the same site, and in December another worker at the site was hospitalised after an electrical shock. The site is regularly subject to dangerous dust storms—but there is only room for 50 workers in crib rooms, although there are up to 350 people on site at a time.

In NSW the CFMEU construction division has union agreements with most mobile crane companies. But contracts to build wind farms have often gone to non-union companies, and the union reports many safety issues on sites, as well as underpayment of wages specified under their enterprise bargaining agreements.

Fighting for a public renewables industry

Despite recent attacks from employers leading to growing casualisation, working conditions in the coal industry still reflect over 100 years of struggle, and unions remain strong.

The climate movement needs to take the fight to unionise the renewables industry seriously, so these become jobs communities can look forward to. The broader union movement needs to fight for clear and direct transition plans and training for workers to enter the renewables industry.

Unionised renewable energy workers could also play a crucial role in leading the fight for an expansion of the industry. In addition to large-scale onshore and offshore wind and solar projects, new grid interconnectors and storage facilities need to be built. Vehicles and public transport currently powered by petrol or diesel will need to be electrified or powered by hydrogen made using renewable energy. Public transport will need to be massively expanded. Heating and cooking powered by gas will also need to be electrified. Manufacturing and industrial systems that rely on coal and gas will need to be redesigned using renewable energy.

Public ownership and investment will be crucial in planning these new systems and securing a just transition to these jobs. In April the Queensland government established a new public renewable energy company called CleanCo. The power industry in Queensland remains state-owned, thanks to a series of determined union campaigns.

Two existing government-owned hydro power stations, a pumped hydro storage facility and a gas generator, along with their workers, have been transferred to CleanCo. The state government also says it will also invest $250 million in 1000 MW of new renewable energy through CleanCo, about half the capacity of a large coal-fired power station.

Employees transferring to CleanCo from either state-government corporations CS Energy or Stanwell (which operate coal-fired power plants) will maintain their existing conditions, including no forced redundancies or relocations. New CleanCo employees will also be on the same terms and conditions. This is a model that needs to be expanded, and that other state governments should follow. The ETU are calling for all state renewable energy to be built through CleanCo, and for the profits from state-owned firms CS Energy and Stanwell to be invested in renewables.

But at present the Queensland government is still expecting private investors to deliver the bulk of its planned renewable energy target of 50 per cent by 2030.

The Queensland government has also brought in a new Safety Code of Practice for solar farms, the first in Australia. The Code requires licenced electrical workers to install solar facilities above 100kW. The Code was developed following a safety audit of solar farms across the state in late 2018 which resulted in 67 statutory notices being issued for breaches of work health and safety and electrical safety laws. These included unlicensed electrical work, non-compliant electrical installations and inadequate safe work method statements and emergency plans.

New York State has ordered 9000 MW of offshore wind projects by 2035 as part of a state Green New Deal. The Climate Jobs New York union coalition won a requirement for union agreements on prevailing wages on all offshore wind projects, as well as local procurement.

We cannot bet the future of humanity and the planet on a transition to renewable energy run through the free market. A rapid transition to renewable energy is going to require taking electricity back into public hands in order to plan the transition we need—and ensure well-paid jobs with good conditions.

It is also critical that systems are put in place for workers to transition directly from high-emissions to low-emissions jobs, and that jobs in renewables are secure union jobs. The climate movement needs to take up this fight.
FEATURES

THIRTY YEARS ago protests in Tiananmen Square shook China for six weeks. The upheaval spread far beyond students, and well outside Beijing.

Things were ripe for an explosion across China by 1989.

There was deep anger at economic reforms, with runaway inflation, skyrocketing unemployment in the State Owned Enterprises and rampant official corruption. Students saw their education system as grossly inadequate.

The death of former Communist Party General Secretary Hu Yaobang on 15 April 1989 proved to be the spark. He had supported political reforms and been removed from the party leadership in 1987 after supporting an earlier student movement.

On the day of Hu’s official funeral, 150,000 people filled the square, defying the ban on protests. Three students knelt on the steps of the Great Hall of the People, trying to present a petition to the top leaders inside. They waited in vain for more than ten hours.

The regime responded with an editorial in the official mouthpiece People’s Daily that denounced the protests, carried out by an “extremely small” number of people intent on “overthrowing the proletarian dictatorship, socialism and the Communist Party”. It called on “the people” to suppress them by “every possible means”.

This backfired badly, galvanising a wave of support for the students.

Another huge demonstration of 200,000 students filled the square, and marched around the city for 14 hours. Students shouted “long live the workers” as they passed building sites, while workers banged their lunch boxes shouting “long live the students”.

One bystander, quoted in student leader Li Lu’s Moving The Mountain, recalled, “More than a million people stood along the way, hailing the demonstrators and giving them lemonade and bread.” Li added, “No matter where I went, when people knew or guessed I was a student, they would give the V (for victory) sign and shout, ‘Long Live the Students’.”

Some in the West have portrayed the movement as one for democracy and free market capitalism. Yet it was The Internationale that became the anthem on the barricades.

The movement grew and spread to over 400 cities across China, while protesters turned Tiananmen Square into a well-organised camp with food, first aid and protestor-run checkpoints.

On 29 April, the government held a televised dialogue with the official students union. But those in the square condemned this as a sham. The Independent Students Union of Beijing Universities called on the government to talk with their representatives. The government replied that they wouldn’t have dialogue with an “illegitimate, unregistered group”.

However, cracks were emerging within the regime. Zhao Ziyang, Communist Party General Secretary, told a meeting of the Asian Development Bank that the students’ slogans were “by no means opposed to our basic system”. Zhao also pressured the state media to report the demonstrations more positively.

On the centenary of the May 4th Movement another huge protest of 200,000 filled the square. It was joined by many workers. Some 800 journalists approached the square from East Chang’an Avenue carrying banners: “Journalists support the students; Don’t force us to tell lies. We renounce them”; and “The April 26 editorial was not written by us”.

A newly formed Beijing Autonomous Workers Federation sought to connect with anger among workers

Workers’ participation tended to be ignored in Western reports.

But a newly formed Beijing Autonomous Workers Federation (BAWF) sought to connect with anger among workers. At their headquarters adjacent to the square, thousands of workers attended meetings about wages, workplace democracy and political representation. Grievances like inflation and shortages that were impacting on workers’ lives were raised.

Academics Andrew Walder and Gong Xiaoxia argue that while some student leaders tended to see themselves as assisting “liberal reformers” within the Communist Party leadership, the BAWF were critical not only of the “hardliners”, but also the “reformers”.

One of their activists wrote: “There are people who divide the government up into factions: the reform faction, conservative faction, new authoritarian faction, moderate faction. The way I see it, the Communist Party is all one faction, the ‘harm the people’ faction”.

As the movement looked to be ebbing, a group of students launched a hunger strike on 13 May, and within a short time 2000 were participating. The strike galvanised Beijing and brought the movement into sharp conflict with the regime.

The students knew that the world’s cameras would be in Beijing for Mikhail Gorbachev’s historic visit - the first by a Russian leader since the Sino-Soviet split of 1962. It was meant to be a major diplomatic coup for the regime. Instead officials had to sneak Gorbachev into the Great Hall of the People via a side door.

Numbers swelled to a million, as workers marched into the square in organised groups from workplaces. The following day, there were two million.

Workers brought banners from

In 1989 students in Beijing sparked an upheaval that drew in millions of ordinary workers, and spread all across the country, writes Mark Goudkamp
the Capital Iron and Steel Factory, Beijing Petrochemical Company, Capital Hospital, Xidan Department Store Workers, No 1 Machine Tool Factory, the People’s Bank of China, the Ministry of Railways and others. Even 1000 members of the People’s Liberation Army’s General Logistics Department were there.

In at least four other cities, students organised sympathy hunger strikes, including 30,000 camped out in central Shanghai. There were sympathy marches in dozens of cities. Tens of thousands of students were flocking to Beijing from across China, and rail workers provided them with free travel. Li Peng complained, “There is complete chaos in Beijing. Moreover, the turmoil has spread throughout the country.”

In the early hours of 20 May the government declared martial law. Between 180,000 to 250,000 troops were brought to Beijing.

An initial attempt to occupy Tiananmen Square without the use of force failed, after thousands of people blocked troop convoys. The troops withdrew.

Following this, as two eyewitnesses wrote in Britain’s Socialist Worker, the city was “entirely in the hands of the people. Though the atmosphere is tense, there is no drunkenness, no looting and no violence”.

Workers across Beijing built barricades at major intersections leading to Tiananmen Square.

“The barricade won’t stop tanks”, the eyewitnesses wrote. “The idea is to halt and slow up moving troops to allow people to argue with the soldiers and turn them back. The barricades are to stand in front of, not behind… “People talk of five million people, over half the entire population, out on the streets yesterday. Most of them are workers.”

On the barricades, and in the square itself, women came to the fore as organisers and leaders. One eyewitness estimated the crowds were 40 per cent female. There was a huge sense of comradeship, with the police and the state seemingly absent.

The Beijing Autonomous Workers Federation now became increasingly pivotal. Its membership grew, and it took a high profile in organising the resistance to martial law.

Some students recognised the strategic importance of workers. Student Siu Chong told reporters, “Only if the workers stop steel production and the power stations and the railways can we bring these people down. There are not enough soldiers to keep the vital industries running. The workers have the power, let the workers have their say.”

However, the majority of student leaders rejected the BAWF’s call for a general strike. Many of them still hoped to win support from “reformers” inside the Communist Party, and feared that involving workers would lead the regime to crack down.

Not until the end of May did the students even allow BAWF into the square to protect them. And only after military action was underway did students run to the workers’ headquarters asking them to call a general strike. It was too late.

On 29 May students erected the “Goddess of Democracy” statue in the square, and a new hunger strike began. The state was preparing to crush them.

From around 10pm on 3 June, tanks, armoured cars and troop carriers burst through the barricades, firing into the crowds that came out to oppose them. It was the working class people living in the densely populated blocks leading to the square who bore the brunt of the army’s advance. Although they had few arms, workers tried to oppose the troops with whatever they had. Numerous burnt-out tanks showed the extent of the resistance.

When the soldiers reached Tiananmen Square, there were still crowds of student protesters. They agreed to withdraw, but the army fired on them as they left.

There were credible reports of large numbers of troops deserting, and of deserting units being killed by other troops.

Across China sympathy demonstrations exploded. Huge crowds occupied city centres, called for strikes, and fought the police and army. Over 180 towns and cities saw disturbances serious enough to report to Beijing. And in Hong Kong a million people, a sixth of the population, marched in protest.

Savage repression followed, with 30,000 people arrested by the end of the year, and several thousand killed. Many were publicly executed.

Seven of the government’s 21 most wanted student leaders were smuggled out of China. Leaders of the Beijing Autonomous Workers Union managed to evade capture for several weeks.

The repression came down hardest on workers who had fought back against the army—execution, long prison terms, and beatings under interrogation.

In the 30 years since China’s economy has grown enormously, but also produced astounding levels of inequality and corruption, breeding deep wells of discontent. There have been small outbursts of workers’ struggle, such as the strike wave of 2009-12. Last year dozens of student activists supported striking workers at the Jasic Technology factory in Shenzhen, only to face harsh penalties.

With the largest working class in the world, and an economy that is beginning to slow, the potential for a new movement to emerge that challenges China’s rulers remains.
DON’T LET DUTTON REPEAL MEDEVAC BILL

By Ian Rintoul

SINCE THE election of the Morrison government, Manus Island and Port Moresby have become a pit of despair. The number of refugees and asylum seekers self-harming and attempting suicide keeps rising. As Solidarity goes to press, there have been over 60 incidents on Manus and around 30 in Port Moresby.

In just one day there were two hanging attempts, three self-harm incidents with people cutting their necks, hands and arms, while one person doused himself with petrol in an attempt to self-immolate in front of the PNG immigration office in the East Lorengau compound.

That day, there were also three incidents in Port Moresby, including one refugee taking a tablet overdose and another refugee self-harming in the Pacific International Hospital.

The mental health crisis in PNG comes as the government has re-asserted its determination to repeal the Medevac legislation. Home Affairs Minister Peter Dutton says this will be one of the first business items for the new parliament. The Bill, which only became law in February through a combination of Greens, Labor and cross-bench MPs including Kerryn Phelps, allows for the medical transfer of sick refugees on Manus or Nauru on the advice of two treating doctors.

But it was the first time for 60 years that a federal government had been defeated on the floor of the House of Representatives. In a blatant piece of revenge politicking, the government wants to reverse its historic defeat, by repealing the Bill.

Morrison and Dutton have mounted a vicious campaign of lies against the Medevac Bill. Dutton declared, “I don’t want to see Australians who are in waiting lines at public hospitals kicked off those waiting lines because people from Nauru and Manus are now going to access those health services.”

Then, in a costly election stunt, Morrison re-opened the Christmas Island detention centre at a cost of $185 million, saying that hundreds of refugees would be transferred from Manus and Nauru. Before the election, Dutton claimed that paedophiles, rapists or murderers could be transferred to Australia, but that was another lie. Exactly no one has been sent to Christmas Island.

The hundreds of people still being held on Manus and Nauru need to come to Australia. But recent figures indicate that only around 20 people have been transferred under the Medevac Law, while another 31 have been transferred for medical reasons on the government’s own initiative.

The movement’s campaigning means there are now over 900 asylum seekers and refugees from Manus and Nauru who are in Australia, after being transferred here for medical treatment.

US deal falls short

The Manus crisis coincides with two related issues. There is pressure from the PNG government to cancel its shonky Manus contract with Australian-owned company Paladin security. And admissions from Peter Dutton that the US resettlement deal will fall far short of accepting anything like the 1250 refugees suggested when the deal was first negotiated.

Dutton has now admitted that hundreds of refugees won’t get a resettlement place in the US. Around 90 refugees accepted by the US have been waiting in Port Moresby—for transfers to the US. Dutton claims that there are 295 refugees in the pipeline for resettlement. On existing figures that seems unlikely, although even if was true, it would mean the total accepted by the US would be around 800.

No matter how you do the maths, there will be hundreds of refugees and asylum seekers that Australia continues to imprison offshore. The only other third country possibility is New Zealand, which has offered to resettle 150 refugees. But that offer has been rejected by the government.

Despite the election result, the refugee issue remains a potent political question.

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National rallies on 20 July will mark the sixth anniversary of the Pacific Solution II that has denied protection to asylum seekers who arrived by boat, and imprisoned them on Manus and Nauru.

As the distress on Manus and Nauru grows the demand to “Bring Them Here” is more urgent than ever.

Above: We need to keep protesting to end the medical crisis on Manus and Nauru

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