

REAL HAZARD REDUCTION: KICK OUT SCOMO

CLIMATE ACTION—BUILD RENEWABLES NOW



FRANCE

Massive strike movement fights neo-liberal cuts

CLIMATE DISASTERS

How governments and the rich leave workers to die

CAPTAIN COOK

Imperialism and the scramble to colonise Australia

Solidarity **WHAT WE STAND FOR**

Capitalism is a system of crisis and war

Capitalism is a system of competition, crisis, and war based on exploitation of workers, producing for profit not human needs. Although workers create society's wealth, they have no control over production or distribution. Through environmental degradation and climate change capitalism has become a threat to humanity's future and life on earth.

Workers power and socialism

The working class has the power to challenge the existing system and create a better world. We stand for socialism, a society based on democratically elected workers councils which would control and plan the economy to produce for human need. The authoritarian states like Russia and China are not socialist but forms of state capitalism where workers have no power.

What about elections and parliament?

Parliament, the army, the police and the courts are institutions of the capitalist state that maintain the dominance of the ruling class over the rest of society. The capitalist state cannot be taken over and used by the working class, it must be smashed. Workers need to create their own state based on workers councils.

While parliament can be a platform for socialists, real change doesn't come through parliament. It is won by mass action in strikes, protests and demonstrations.

We are internationalists

The struggle for socialism has no national boundaries. We oppose everything that turns workers from one country against those from another; we campaign for solidarity with workers in other countries.

We oppose borders and immigration controls, and welcome migrants and refugees.

We oppose imperialism and support all

genuine national liberation struggles. We oppose Australian nationalism.

Australia is an imperialist power established through genocide on stolen Indigenous land. We support the continuing struggles of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people for land, justice and self-determination.

Oppression and liberation

We oppose sexism, racism, homophobia and transphobia. We fight against all forms of discrimination and the oppression of women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, migrants, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people. We oppose discrimination against Muslims and people from the Middle East.

Linking up the struggles

We are active building movements for environmental and social change and economic equality. We are active in our unions and work to build the organisation and self-confidence of the rank and file. We work to bring activists together to strengthen each movement and build a common struggle against capitalism.

Educate, agitate, organise

Socialism cannot be introduced from above, by parliament or parties. The emancipation of the working class is the act of the working class itself.

Solidarity is an organisation of activists, anti-capitalists and revolutionary socialists committed to socialism from below. We are part of the International Socialist Tendency.

A democratic revolutionary party is necessary to deepen resistance to capitalism and to build a movement to overthrow the system. Solidarity members are beginning to build such a party out of today's struggles against the system.

SOLIDARITY MEETINGS AND BRANCHES

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Sydney Solidarity meets 6.30pm every Thursday at Brown St Hall, Brown St, Newtown

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Things they say

We don't want job-destroying, economy-destroying, economy-wrecking targets and goals, which won't change the fact that there have been bushfires or anything like that in Australia

Scott Morrison explains climate denial on 2GB radio

What is action on climate change? Building dams. What is action on climate change? Hazard reduction in these areas. It's native vegetation management. It's land-clearing laws. Morrison trying to confuse action on climate change with damage control

Testing the theory that the best way to resolve a crisis is to be as far away from it as possible.

Julie Bishop, former Foreign Minister, to PM Scott Morrison at a private dinner of senior Liberal Party people before Xmas about his decision to have a holiday in Hawaii.

It is not about climate change or arson

Chris Kenny, Murdoch journalist and climate denier, thinks the bushfires we're seeing are just normal

We are not the cigarette industry and do not want to be viewed as such.

Peter Coleman, chief executive of oil and gas company Woodside, worried about the climate movement—too late.

This is really reckless and selfish thing people are doing.

Lisa Neville, Victorian Labor Emergency Services Minister, on a climate protest organised in Melbourne in response to the bushfire crisis

His Twitter feed alone—with its habitual string of mischaracterizations, lies, and slanders—is a near perfect example of a human being who is morally lost and confused

Mark Galli, Editor in Chief, Christianity Today supporting Trump's impeachment. Trump won the 2016 election with 81 per cent of the white Christian evangelical vote.

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INSIDE THE \$YSTEM

Subs to cost an obscene \$80 billion

THE GOVERNMENT'S \$80 billion submarines project has been lashed by an auditor general's report amid delays and obscene cost blow-outs.

After spending \$396 million on the design phase the government's own defence advisory group concluded the project was in so much trouble it should, "consider alternatives to the current plan". The contract to build the subs was signed in February last year but is already nine months behind schedule.

Three years ago the cost of building the 12 submarines was estimated at \$50 billion, but Greg Sammut, of the Navy's submarine program, told Senate Estimates in November the estimate had grown to \$80 billion. In addition the cost to "sustain, update and upgrade" the fleet until 2080 was expected to be another \$145 billion.

There's no expense spared when it comes to weapons of war. Yet it took the current horror bushfire season for Scott Morrison to find the \$11 million in extra funding annually for aerial firefighting equipment requested by National Aerial Firefighting Centre.

One in four countries saw protest surge

2019 WAS a year of global revolt, a new report has confirmed, with one in four countries experiencing an increase in protest and unrest.

Risk management company Verisk Maplecroft's study found that 47 countries worldwide saw an increase in the level of protests.

Sudan, where a revolution in April toppled the 30-year long dictatorship of Omar al-Bashir, ranked at the top of the company's "civil unrest index". Chile, Hong Kong, Lebanon, Iraq and Haiti all ranked high on the index.

Report co-author Miha Hribernik said that "similar grievances" had driven many of the uprisings.

"These include stagnating incomes and rising inequality in the decade following the global economic crisis, the loss of trust in traditional political elites, corruption, and the erosion of civil and political rights." The increase in protests was expected to continue into 2020, with the events of the last year likely "the new normal".

Bushfire climate disaster—some areas will never recover



WITH RED apocalyptic skies and clouds of smoke that turned day into night, the immense and unprecedented scale of this summer's bushfires show climate change in action. Last year was the country's hottest and driest year on record.

The fires have even created their own weather, with the smoke fuelling "pyrocumulonimbus" thunderstorm bringing "fire clouds" that create lightning that can spark new fires.

Close to 20 million hectares have burnt, an area larger than England and Wales. The nationwide spread of the fires has not been seen before. "There has never been a situation where there has been a fire from southern Queensland, right through NSW, into Gippsland, in the Adelaide Hills, near Perth and on the east coast of Tasmania", David Bowman from the Fire Centre at the University of Tasmania told *The Guardian*.

Rainforest areas and wet eucalypt forests in northern NSW that are usually unable to burn have been incinerated, as well as wetlands dried out by drought. "There are areas, say Kanangra national park, west of the Blue Mountains, that has not been burnt in recorded history", Owen Price, Association Professor at the University of Wollongong, said.

Half of the Gondwana rainforests between Brisbane and Newcastle have burnt, as well as 80 per cent of the Blue Mountains world heritage area, according to assessments by the NSW government. Initial surveys show that half the land burned has also been farmland, tree plantations and logging forests.

One billion animals are estimated dead, according to Chris Dickman, an environmental scientist at the University of Sydney. The scale of the fires has likely already sent a number of endangered animals extinct.

Out of NSW's 300 most endangered animals, "For some species such as the long-footed potoroo, almost every species sighting ever recorded is within the area affected by fire."

Some ecosystems will never recover.

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

Billionaires got wealthier in 2019

THE WORLD'S 500 richest people increased their wealth by \$1.75 trillion last year. As a result they now control \$8.5 trillion in total, an average of \$17 billion each. Bloomberg's Billionaires Index calculated that their loot grew by 25 per cent over the year. It noted that the top 0.1 per cent in the US now control the biggest share of the wealth since 1929.

The biggest gain in 2019 went to French luxury goods magnate Bernard Arnault, who pocketed \$36.5 billion. His company LVMH sells products including Moët, Hennessy and Louis Vuitton. Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg clawed in another \$27.3 billion and Microsoft's Bill Gates \$22.7 billion. Amazon founder Jeff Bezos retained his spot as the world's richest person with an estimated \$116 billion.

Australia's billionaires got richer too

AUSTRALIA'S TOP 1 per cent has double the wealth of the poorest half of the population, or 12.5 million people, Oxfam's annual inequality report has found.

There were 36 billionaires in Australia last year, a slight decline. But their number has tripled over the last decade—and last year they increased their wealth on average by \$650 million. The top 1 per cent, or 250,000 people, controlled \$1.6 trillion or 22.2 per cent of the country's wealth.

Renewable energy growth hits a wall

INVESTMENT IN renewable energy in Australia dropped 60 per cent last year, in the face of the Morrison government's failure to replace the expired renewable energy target.

Rooftop solar panels were the only area where investment grew, the analysis by Bloomberg New Energy Finance showed. Investment increased by 1 per cent across the rest of the world, with generation capacity growing even more strongly due to the falling cost of renewable energy.

Other problems, including delays in connection to the grid, transmission and grid overcrowding also contributed to the collapse. These also point to the government failure to assist or plan for an increase in renewable energy.

The 2020 federal renewable energy target, the main policy responsible for driving the installation of large-scale renewables, was met ahead of schedule last August. There is still nothing to replace it.

EDITORIAL

Smug Scomo left us to burn—step up demands to fund renewables and action on climate

SCOTT MORRISON has been badly damaged by his response to the bushfire crisis, after weeks of refusing to act. He has been forced to shift and announce new funding for bushfire relief—but is still not willing to budge an inch on climate action.

During the worst fire days in December Morrison cleared off on holiday to Hawaii, while firefighters were dying in the blazes.

Angry residents from the fire-stricken town of Cobargo rounded on him when he visited. One person told the Prime Minister he should be “ashamed of himself” and had “left the country to burn”. So much for the quiet Australians.

After previously refusing to call the situation a crisis and insisting firefighters had all the resources they needed, Morrison has now had to change his tune.

The army reserves have been deployed to fire zones, and more funding has been announced for firefighting aircraft, as well as \$2 billion for bushfire recovery.

After rejecting calls for financial compensation to volunteer firefighters, he has now announced a meagre compensation package.

In a major ABC interview with David Speers, he attempted to recast his government’s response. This made it clear he will try to put the political focus on “the recovery and rebuild effort” from the fires, with further announcements and a Royal Commission to come, in an effort to bury discussion of climate policy.

Climate change

Some commentators have been taken in by his claims the government’s response to climate change would “evolve”, seeing them as an indication a shift on climate policy is coming.

But Morrison was clear: his aim is simply to “meet and beat” his existing hopeless emissions reduction target. This is only possible through his plan to cheat through using emissions “credits” from the Kyoto protocol period.

He refused to go any further—simply re-iterating his usual excuses about why nothing can be done, saying further action would mean “putting a tax on people’s [cost of] living... increasing people’s electricity prices” and “writing off \$70



Above: There has been raw anger at Morrison over his failure on the bushfires

billion-dollar industries”.

Labor leader Anthony Albanese has criticised Morrison’s handling of the fire emergency, but will say nothing on what the government should do about climate change. He is even helping prevent action by saying there is no problem with jobs in coal.

But the severity of the fires and the prolonged drought across large parts of the country are direct consequences of climate change. It is a glimpse of a grim future if we do not force the transition to a decarbonised economy.

The climate movement has to go on the front foot with clear demands for action. We need a huge government investment program in building publicly-owned renewable energy infrastructure. This is the only way to start reducing emissions on the scale and in the timeframe needed. Private investors and the market will only cherry pick the most profitable projects and cannot be relied upon to get us to 100 per cent renewables.

Morrison and the NSW government found \$3 billion for bushfire recovery spending within weeks. We need spending on the same scale for climate action.

This does not need to come at the cost of jobs and living standards. The rich and their corporations that have profited from polluting the planet should pay. Hundreds of thousands of good jobs can be created right now through a public works program in renewable energy, public transport, housing, land management and reforestation.

To deliver this we need to build a social movement that can take on Morrison and the capitalist interests blocking action, taking over the streets and shutting down the workplaces.

Rallies of thousands have already mobilised in capital cities.

The work stoppages in response to the hazardous bushfire smoke were also a step forward, linking workers’ safety with the need for climate action. The maritime union, representing wharfies who stopped work, explicitly linked the failure to act on climate change to increasing bushfire danger.

Volunteer firefighters have been working around the clock, often with poor equipment, to save lives and homes. But relying on volunteers to fight fires for months on end is unsustainable. We need more paid professional firefighters and funding to protect rural communities.

Firefighters’ union representatives have also spoken out, pointing to the unprecedented nature of the fires, the link to climate change, and calling for proper staffing and equipment.

We need much more of this. The climate disasters are a class issue and we will need to mobilise workers’ power if we are to prevent even worse ones in the future.

We need to go all out to make the national day of protest on 22 February another huge show of support for climate action—demanding the billions in government investment needed to tackle the climate crisis.

.....
The climate movement has to go on the front foot with clear demands for action

Capitalism and the rich create climate catastrophe

WE ARE in a climate emergency. With just over one degree of warming, the world is already experiencing catastrophic disasters. Australia's bushfire crisis has brought this home to millions of people.

Almost 30 people have now lost their lives. Homes and entire communities have been wiped out. Huge swathes of land have burnt with such ferocious intensity that some ecosystems will never recover.

This is set to get far worse. Current global pledges to reduce emissions will take us to 3.2 degrees of warming by the end of the century, the official UN Emissions Gap report says. Global climate talks in December once again failed to secure tougher action.

Governments have known what was coming for years. But in the 25 years since global climate summits began, annual emissions have increased by over 60 per cent.

Scott Morrison's government has not only failed to act, it has set out to sabotage the global response. And Labor is no better—defending the continuation of coal mining as it walks back even its modest commitments on climate action.

It's not hard to see why. Australian capitalism is addicted to fossil fuels. There are billions of dollars sunk in coal-fired power stations and energy-intensive transport and manufacturing. Mining companies exported \$26 billion worth of coal and \$49 billion of gas last year. Capitalism depends on ever increasing profits in order to function—and the corporations who make billions from polluting the planet are not about to give up their wealth.

Action on climate change requires fighting the system and demanding that the future of the planet comes before corporate profits.

This starts with building pressure from below for the climate transition needed through mass protests and strikes. But this must be connected to a fight for system change—to get rid of capitalism altogether and demand a socialist society run according to very different priorities.

We live in the richest society that has ever existed in human history, yet the world remains blighted by inequality, poverty and environmental catastrophe. The 26 richest people in the world control \$2.5 trillion—as much wealth as half of humanity. This wealth must be taken and used to meet the basic needs of people and the



Above: Bushfire damage in NSW

planet.

The wave of global revolt against inequality in countries from Chile to

Lebanon and Iraq has shown how to challenge the system. We need to build the same spirit of revolt here.

Morrison extends religious right to discriminate

IN DECEMBER, the Liberals released a second draft of their Religious Discrimination Bill.

The exercise is a concession to the hard-right of the party, who want to push back against the result of the marriage equality plebiscite.

Religious organisations refused to support the original bill on the grounds it did not give them enough rights to discriminate when hiring, or to protect bigoted speech under the guise of religious freedom.

The changes have received praise from many of the same religious bodies including the Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney, the Anglican Diocese of Sydney, the Executive Council of Australian Jewry, and the Greek Orthodox Church.

Labor says it is opposed to anything that over-rides existing anti-discrimination provisions but has refused to take a position on the bill so far.

The most significant change is to allow religious hospitals, aged care and disability care services as well as op shops, campsites and conference venues to discriminate against workers in hiring processes. Religious campsites and conference centres would also be able to refuse to hire out their facilities to clients on religious grounds.

The bill also extends the right to make discriminatory or derogatory

statements, through preventing bodies that qualify professionals, for example doctors and lawyers, maintaining codes of conduct that restrict statements of belief on social media.

This is similar to the "Folau Clause", proposed after rugby union player Israel Folau was sacked for posting "God condemns gays will go to hell" on his Instagram feed.

It bans large companies from restricting discriminatory or offensive speech that expresses religious beliefs, outside the course of someone's employment.

Lastly, medical practitioners' right to refuse treatment have been tightened.

Medical professionals will now not be able to refuse to provide treatment based on an individual's gender identity, sexuality or religion.

However, they can still refuse to provide particular treatments on religious grounds across the board, including anything from providing hormone therapy, contraceptive provision, IVF, gender and sexuality counselling and antidepressant medication.

We need to oppose the bill—it will only encourage division and bigotry in the workplace and in society, and will embolden religious bigots to launch further attacks on LGBTI rights.

Steven Kwon

Action on climate change requires fighting the system

Workers and toxic smoke: ‘People’s health has got to come before the dollar’ says Sydney port worker

AIR POLLUTION and smoke from the bushfires has blanketed the country for days on end. Many workers on construction sites and ports, and even in government offices in Canberra, have stopped work due to air quality problems. At Port Botany in Sydney the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) has drawn up official advice that members should stop strenuous outside work as soon as the air quality rating reaches “very poor” or “hazardous” on the NSW government’s air quality index. In early December following an initial stop work at DP World, all three terminals in Sydney stopped work due to poor air quality.

Solidarity’s Erima Dall talked to **Justin Timmins**, the safety committee rep at DP World at Port Botany in Sydney, about their fight to avoid unsafe working conditions.



Above: Poor visibility at Port Botany in Sydney due to bushfire smoke

What happened when the smoke became a serious issue in December? How did workers at DP World make the decision to stop work?

Due to the unprecedented air quality we were all suspicious that the [stevedoring companies at Port Botany], DP, Patrick and Hutchison, had no proactive control measures. It happened by chance that our port safety committee’s first meeting was in early December. So we spent the whole day formulating a process around air quality.

In our work wharfies are exposed to bad air quality as it is. We’ve had a couple of guys at DP World who’ve come up with viral infections that doctors are saying have been exacerbated by exposure to smoke. If you’re exposed to vigorous heavy work day after day in bad air quality who knows the longstanding health issues that may arise from it?

Sometimes people’s health has got to come before the dollar, like a shift delay when there’s a massive swell or particularly strong winds. This needs to be dealt with in the same way.

Why did DP World dock workers’ pay for workers on one shift?

The management tried to claim it was some type of industrial action [when wharfies stopped work].

They docked the [Christmas] bonus but did end up paying it back after a bit of pressure. But they’ve still withheld pay for a couple of hours on the afternoon shift, because they tried

to claim the correct consultation hadn’t taken place, even though the company supervisor had stood workers down.

It’s just a bullying tactic to try to get friction between the workforce and the decision the delegates and the union are making. But workers appreciate that they’re working in a highly dangerous industry and there’s safety and union delegates out there that are looking out for their best interests, because they haven’t got a lot of confidence in the business providing that.

Why did the union form the Port Safety Committee and can you explain what that is?

In late 2018 there was a national safety conference held in Sydney and [setting this up] was one of the resolutions.

Even with DP nationally it’s every port for themselves, there’s no real platform of best practice nationally. That’s why at Port Botany in Sydney we wanted to say at least that there’s [common safety standards] across the three ports.

We’re doing some good work at the three ports now in consultation with Worksafe and safety managers to minimise that exposure and we just need the managers from the three different ports to agree that their workers’ health is the number one priority.

What lessons are there in how you’ve dealt with the unsafe air quality and smoke for other workers

who face similar problems?

Under the WHS [Workplace Health and Safety] Act companies have to provide a safe workplace. But without unions and without structured safety committees and HSRs [Health and Safety Reps] and delegates that are aware of their rights in the workplace you’re on very shaky ground. Businesses will try anything just to keep the productivity on the wharf going.

It’s not too long ago that the stevedoring business were stating that it was safe to work with asbestos. It was unions and all their hard work for people impacted by asbestos that they’ve been entitled to compensation.

Is there a recognition amongst workers that climate change is responsible for the fires and the smoke conditions?

I personally think the government’s inaction and arrogant disregard of advice has contributed to what we’ve experienced recently. We can’t just keep spewing CO2 into the air and killing reefs and having water levels rise and catastrophic different conditions around the world.

I think everyone’s of the same opinion that we can’t just bury our head in the sand about it, something’s happening to our world and if we want our kids to be able to enjoy life the way we have it’s up to us. I’m proud of the student movement and how they’re doing leading the way on it.

.....
‘Management tried to claim it was some type of industrial action’

COP25 climate talks: World leaders fiddle as the Earth burns

By Chris Breen

GLOBAL CLIMATE talks in Madrid ended without agreement in December, demonstrating starkly that official politics has no answer to the climate crisis.

Alden Meyer from the Union of Concerned Scientists said she had “never” seen anything like the almost “total disconnect” at COP25, “between what the science requires and what the climate negotiations are delivering in terms of meaningful action.”

Even UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres said he was disappointed and that, “The international community lost an important opportunity to show increased ambition on mitigation, adaptation and finance to tackle the climate crisis”. Tragically this marked 25 years of failure of COP talks.

Australia played a major role in sabotaging the talks, along with countries such as the US, Brazil, China, India, Japan, and Saudi Arabia.

Scott Morrison has claimed Australia, with 1.3 per cent of global emissions, is too small to make a difference. But this didn’t stop Australia punching above its weight to politically sabotage the talks.

Australia pushed to be allowed to use the accounting trick of “carry-over credits” from exceeding its Kyoto Protocol target to count towards its 2030 target.

One of the architects of the Paris accord, Laurence Tubiana, told the *Financial Review*, “this carry-over it is just cheating. Australia was willing in a way to destroy the whole system, because that is the way to destroy the whole Paris agreement.”

Australia was only able to exceed to its Kyoto targets because they were a joke.

The government negotiated an initial 8 per cent increase in emissions for the period 2008 and 2012, and only a 0.5 per cent decrease from 2013 to 2020.

Australia was also allowed to use “land use change” in its emissions reduction calculations.

Another stumbling block was rich countries like the US rejecting help for poorer countries already suffering climate related disasters.

Instead of pushing for the deep emission cuts we need, world leaders debated how they could keep pol-



Above: The COP25 climate talks in Madrid were another failure

luting using the scam of “carbon credits”, which allow polluters to buy emissions reductions and go on polluting regardless.

Brazil wanted to claim carbon credits for keeping its existing forests intact, and also pushed for an accounting process that would amount to double counting—that both the seller and purchaser of carbon credits would be able to count them towards emission reductions. But carbon credits are a sleight of hand in any form.

Why won’t they act?

Global emissions have risen by 4 per cent since the Paris agreement was signed in 2015. But the COP25 conference saw rich polluting nations block attempts to deepen the inadequate Paris commitments.

The shift to the right in world politics has seen the US pull out of the Paris agreement, and there has been open climate denial from world leaders like Trump in the US and Bolsonaro in Brazil.

Scott Morrison is singing from the same hymn book, as Australia burns. But the fundamental reasons for failure go deeper.

Carbon in the form of coal, oil and gas is built into the modern economy. The world’s countries are locked by capitalism into global competition with each other, and none will give

ground.

The same capitalist competition that leads to trade wars, and real wars, is the key obstacle to global climate action.

Australia, the US, Brazil, China, India, Japan, and Saudi Arabia are some of the countries that did most to sabotage the climate talks.

With the exception of Japan, they all have major fossil fuel reserves (Japan is reliant on coal-fired power as a result of moving away from nuclear power following the Fukushima disaster).

Climate movement

A 500,000-strong protest led by Greta Thunberg marched through the streets of Madrid demanding climate justice. It was an important counter to the failure of the talks.

The climate movement is our real hope for action.

If our leaders won’t act, we will have to fight from below, country by country to make them.

A win for the climate movement in any country will be a win for all of us, and something that can be spread to other countries.

We need to build the climate protests and strikes, and organise for workers to take industrial action to demand climate jobs that will deliver real emission reductions.

The world’s countries are locked by capitalism into competition, and none will give ground

Medevac repealed but we're still fighting to 'Bring Them Here'

By Ian Rintoul

ON 4 December last year, the Morrison government, with the disgraceful support of Tasmanian Senator Jacqui Lambie, finally managed to repeal the Medevac legislation.

After a bizarre, self-indulgent, tearful speech, Lambie's vote put an end to the legislation that had allowed doctors to recommend the transfer of sick refugees from Manus and Nauru to Australia.

Lambie claimed she had put a secret proposal to the government; a claim the government itself vehemently denied.

Without a trace of irony that she was referring to herself, Lambie told the Senate that, "everybody who refers to national security as a reason to keep something secret is a 'lying cynical bum' and they are probably right most of the time." We should remember her words.

In the nine months of the Medevac legislation, around 180 people have been transferred for medical treatment. But the fate of those still on Nauru or in PNG is now back under the control of Dutton and Morrison.

People who the government itself had approved for medical transfer will only get treatment at the whim of their jailers. The government had approved more than 30 people on Nauru for transfer to Australia; but since the Medevac repeal just one person has been transferred.

Onshore no different

There are now many more people from Manus and Nauru in Australia than are being held offshore. That's a tribute to the campaign—but most of those transferred under Medevac are being kept in detention in Australia.

Around 160 people are in detention centres or hotels in Brisbane and Melbourne. The first people transferred under Medevac have now been in detention almost a year. The initial hopes for freedom have turned into despair.

But, just before Christmas, Grandmothers for Refugees and supporters held a carol-singing protest outside the Mantra Hotel in Melbourne to highlight their situation.

Complaints to Border Force are fobbed off with the standard reply that, "All people in immigration detention have access to medical care



Above: Refugees from Manus and Nauru imprisoned in the Mantra hotel in Melbourne

as required." But that's a lie. For one Iranian refugee brought from Manus to Australia for dental treatment and abscesses in his mouth, the treatment offered was to pull his teeth out. Fahad told SBS that he has had three courses of antibiotics but the abscesses are no better.

Onshore detention needs more attention in the run-up to the Palm Sunday refugee rallies on 5 April. Brisbane's Refugee Action Collective is planning a protest at the BITA detention centre on Saturday 8 February.

Official Border Force correspondence says that, "Once transferees no longer need to be in Australia for the temporary purpose for which they were brought (medical treatment), they are expected to return to a regional processing country." Yet the government knows that no one going to be sent back to PNG or Nauru. It is going to be up to the refugee campaign to make sure that they are not that they are not victims of indefinite detention in Australia.

Refugees and asylum seekers in PNG and Nauru are into their seventh year of offshore hell. There are still around 400 people there without a future.

In January, nine more people left from Port Moresby to be resettled in the US. But over 50 refugees accepted by the US are still waiting, some of

them for 12 months.

Others are waiting—it seems forever—for final interviews. But as has been said so often before, even when US resettlement is finally concluded, hundreds of people will be left in PNG and Nauru.

Nothing has been resolved. Refugees and asylum seekers have been distributed around several hotels in Port Moresby but with no future, the mental health crisis grows worse. In Nauru, the government wants to keep every dollar of detention money flowing from Australia, and systematically blocks the transfer of refugees for medical treatment.

Onshore the injustice of temporary protection visas (TPVs) leaves refugees who arrived by boat without their families and without a future. Many of them are required to re-apply for TPVs will find the system has set them up to be rejected.

Meanwhile the government has spent over \$100 million to keep Christmas Island operational to keep Priya, Nades and their two children, the Tamil family from Biloela, away from legal help and their supporters.

As long as refugees are denied support and permanent protection, and as long as offshore detention remains the underpinning of Australia's border protection regime, the demands to "Close the camps, and Bring them Here" are as crucial as ever.

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Around 160 people from Manus and Nauru are in detention centres or hotels in Brisbane and Melbourne

Trump takes the US to brink of war with Iran

By James Supple

THE US and Iran have stepped back from the brink of war, after Donald Trump's assassination of Iranian general Qasem Soleimani threatened to bring on a dangerous conflict in the Middle East.

The brazen US drone strike near Baghdad airport was the most recent in a series of belligerent US actions against Iran since Trump became president.

Iran responded with a missile attack on the Ain al-Asad US airbase inside Iraq. But the US received warning of the attack and was able to avoid serious damage to either personnel or equipment. Iran clearly saw the strikes as a cautious warning shot, and never intended casualties.

Tragically Iranian revolutionary guards subsequently shot down a Ukrainian passenger jet they mistook for a US missile attack, killing 176 civilians.

Both sides have since halted any further military escalation.

But Trump has announced yet another round of sanctions against Iran, including the petty decision to deny Iran's Foreign Minister a visa to travel to New York to attend UN meetings.

Immediately after the US assassination, the Australian government announced that the deployment of warship HMAS Toowoomba as part of joint US naval patrols of the Strait of Hormuz would go ahead.

The US is the major imperialist power in the Middle East and socialists oppose all US acts of aggression against Iran. And likewise, we oppose the presence of Australian warships and troops in support of US and Australian imperialist interests.

Tensions

Tensions have ratcheted up since 2018 when Trump tore up the Iran nuclear deal, which was negotiated by the Obama administration. Under the deal, Iran agreed to limit its nuclear enrichment program, in an effort to reassure other powers that it would not develop nuclear weapons.

Trump's unilateral termination of the treaty was condemned by the other signatories to the deal, including France, Germany and Britain.

The US has set out to impose "maximum pressure" on Iran in the hope it will capitulate, extending economic sanctions that have crippled the



Above: Trump's brazen assassination of Qasem Soleimani took the US and Iran to the brink of war

Iranian economy. Exports of oil have dropped from two million barrels a day to between 300,000 and 500,000, and its economy has plunged into a serious recession. It's estimated it will shrink by a frightening 9 per cent this year.

Iran has struck back through tit-for-tat tanker seizures, threatening oil shipments through the Strait of Hormuz. In September, it staged a drone attack that knocked out half of Saudi oil production. Now, Iran has announced it has restarted its uranium enrichment program.

Imperialist competition

The US invasion of Iraq after 2003 has plunged the Middle East into a much more open contest for influence between rival imperialist powers. The failure of the US occupation was a striking demonstration of the decline of US power. Iran and Russia have been the main beneficiaries of this, and many of the Shiite parties that dominate the Iraqi government are linked to the Iranian regime.

Soleimani himself was as symbol of this, openly directing Iranian-aligned militias inside Iraq.

Iran has also extended its influence inside Syria, with Iranian troops, backed by Russia, fighting in support of Syrian dictator Bashar Al-Assad.

US troops returned to Iraq in 2014 to fight Islamic State, after it over-ran huge areas of the country. But there is still enormous hostility towards the US as a result of the US occupation. In the aftermath of the US strike

inside Iraq than killed Soleimani, the Iraqi parliament demanded all US troops leave the country. The US has simply refused to comply.

Trump says he wants to reduce the US presence in the Middle East, to maximise pressure on China and ensure US domination in Asia. But he is not prepared to sacrifice US power in the Middle East to do so.

The US sanctions on Iran have created enormous hardship for ordinary Iranians, through unemployment, rampant inflation and restrictions on imports of life-saving medicines.

So it is not surprising that hundreds of thousands attended the funeral commemorations for Soleimani, chanting "Death to America." But Iran has also seen explosions of anger from below aimed at the regime. Thousands joined protests in Tehran after the government admitted it had shot down the Ukrainian jet, and initially tried to cover it up.

Late last year there were protests in over 100 cities across Iran, triggered by the decision to raise oil prices. These followed a larger series of protests at the start of 2018 against poverty and the cost of basic goods.

In Iraq, too, there has been an enormous wave of anti-corruption, anti-government protests since October that has called for the withdrawal of both US and Iranian troops.

It is movements from below like these that can pose an alternative to the war-mongering, sectarianism and repression that imperialism creates across the region.

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The US has set out to impose 'maximum pressure' on Iran in the hope it will capitulate

Weeks-long strike wave in France draws a line against cuts

By Tom Orsag

FRANCE IS in the grip of an extraordinary strike wave against President Emmanuel Macron's assault on pensions. Massive demonstrations have taken over the streets of every major city for more than a month.

A huge one-day strike on 9 January, the fourth of such kind, saw a rally of over 350,000 in Paris alone. In Marseille, France's third biggest city, 220,000 people took part, while tens of thousands of French workers remain on indefinite strike over seven weeks since they began on 5 December last year.

One chant in Paris told of the strikers' determination to win, "On ira jusqu'au retrait"—we will keep fighting until you back off.

On 12 January French Prime Minister Edouard Philippe announced a concession, shelving the plan to reduce the pension age from 64 to 62. But he made it clear this was just a temporary decision, and that the government remained determined to force through wider cuts to pensions to reduce payments by an average of 30 per cent.

The revolt is being spearheaded by workers at the national rail company, SCNF, and the Paris public transport company, RATP. They have vowed to continue an indefinite strike until the pension reform plans are off the table altogether.

The rail workers' walkouts have now lasted longer than the extended strikes of 22 days in 1995 that defeated then Prime Minister, Alain Juppé's, pension cuts.

Half of the national rail services have been cancelled and most of Paris's metro lines aren't working. Bus services are also much reduced. Picket lines have been bolstered by high school students, fresh from the climate strikes, who are stopping scabbing at train and bus depots.

Millions of workers have joined other days of action and mass demonstrations over the Xmas-New Year period, when much of France continues working.

Hospital workers and teachers have joined the strikes, in opposition to the pension reforms as well as shortages of hospital beds and reforms to the school curriculum. Firefighters held a week-long protest camp in central Paris.

Postal workers in 20 regions, who are in dispute with the state-owned La



Above: Rail workers have led a weeks-long indefinite strike in France

Poste over changes to working conditions, also went on strike.

Substantial sections of private industry have also participated including truck drivers, Carrefour and Geant Casino supermarket workers, Hippopotamus restaurants, Perrier and Haribo foods.

Hundreds of petrol stations have run out of fuel after strikers halted production with picket lines that blockaded refineries. Strikers and Yellow Vests protestors have marched together in several cities, despite police attempts to keep them apart.

The French Thatcher?

Since taking office, centrist President Emmanuel Macron has set out to succeed where other French presidents failed in dismantling pensions and the French welfare state.

French public social expenditure is still the highest amongst OECD developed nations, to the despair of big business and the rich.

Despite the impression that French workers go on strike all the time, Macron has so far been successful in driving through attacks such as privatisation in the rail system, more "flexible" labour laws and spending cuts.

This has seen him widely derided as "president of the rich" and has generated enormous bitterness—seen in the explosive Yellow Vests protests. That mood of revolt could be starting to spread. One newspaper said the current strike wave was the unions' "big-

gest show of strength in decades."

But France's top union leaders have not shown the same determination as the strikers. Some openly supported Macron's demand for a "Christmas truce" to restore transport services. This did not happen because rank-and-file strikers rejected it.

The UNSA federation called for its rail workers to go back over Xmas-New Year—but then 14 of its regions rejected the call and the strikes continued.

In some areas, rank-and-file workers have started to take control of the strike out of the hands of union leaders. Rail workers on indefinite strike hold regular local assemblies which discuss and vote to continue to continue the action. In some places workers come together across the five competing union federations, and across different industries, to maintain and build the strikes.

Other federations have backed further strikes, but most have not joined the rail workers to declare indefinite strikes or move towards an ongoing general strike.

The refusal of Macron to back down on this pension attack raises starkly the need for the kind escalation to secure victory against him.

The moderate CFDT union federation jumped at the chance to negotiate as a way to end the strikes, after the first weak concession on lowering the pension age.

The result hangs in balance.

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President Macron has set out to succeed whether other French presidents failed in dismantling the French welfare state

Protests and general strike challenge India's far right government

By Michael Douglas

INDIA IS being rocked by protests and strikes against hard right Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

On 8 January 250 million workers joined a general strike against labour law reforms. As many as one in five workers stopped work, according to some unions. An economic slowdown has led to a surge in unemployment, and plans for privatisation of state-owned airlines, banks, and mining companies will mean further job losses.

Recent months have also seen mass protests against legislation designed to deny thousands of Muslim and Tamil refugees Indian citizenship.

Tens of thousands have defied bans on demonstrations, and police have shot dead around 25 people.

The Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) would allow migrants from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan to apply for citizenship—unless they are Muslim. There are 20 million Muslims living inside India, around 15 per cent of the population.

There is also anger regarding the National Register of Citizens (NRC) legislation which requires people to produce documents of ancestry to be enlisted as Indian citizens. When the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) implemented this in Assam state in 2015 they said it was meant to “throw out infiltrators.” Now Modi wants to implement it nationally.

The BJP's neo-liberal policies have made India's rich and middle classes even more wealthy. But more than 20 per cent of Indians live below the official poverty line despite years of economic growth.

Last year Narendra Modi and the BJP swept back to power in an election landslide.

The opposition Indian National Congress vote collapsed.

Congress led the anti-colonial struggle against Britain. It has lived off the prestige of Congress leaders like Mahatma Gandhi who fought for independence. It also collaborated in partitioning the country along communal lines into India and Pakistan. Two million people died in the resulting crisis. The contested state of Jammu and Kashmir remains under Indian military occupation.

After independence in 1947, Congress pursued state-led capitalist development and social welfare. But



Above: On 8 January 250 million workers joined India's general strike

following the global economic downturn of the 1970s, Congress turned to neo-liberal economic policies.

It also encouraged communalism to divide and rule. In 1984 Congress Prime Minister Indira Gandhi ordered a military assault on the most significant religious centre for Sikhs, Darbar Sahib (the Golden Temple) in Amritsar, Punjab. The attack killed thousands of civilians. Gandhi was later assassinated by two of her Sikh bodyguards, triggering riots in which 20,000 Sikhs were massacred. Subsequent Congress governments were increasingly authoritarian, corrupt, and unpopular.

The BJP has filled the vacuum as the preferred party of Indian capital. It has pursued neo-liberal policies and allied with the US war on terror as cover for increased Islamophobia and repression of the left.

The BJP is the electoral wing of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). The RSS is a fascist organisation. It champions Hindutva, a far right version of Hindu nationalism. RSS leaders have advocated forced sterilisation of Muslims and have repeatedly organised communal violence, including the 2002 Gujarat riots in which 1000 Muslims were massacred.

Modi is a long standing member of the RSS and presided over the Gujarat riots as Chief Minister of the state. The RSS claims five million members, organised in 60,000 branches which provide ideological and also firearms training.

The RSS has street fighters with a record of mass murder and the BJP now has a majority in parliament.

But for the moment India's ruling class does not require fascism to ensure its rule. The economic crisis is not deep enough, nor resistance to it from workers strong enough, for India's bosses to feel sufficiently threatened. Economically Modi is pursuing the same neo-liberal attacks on workers as governments everywhere.

A previous BJP government was thrown out after one term in 2004 over anger at its failure to improve ordinary people's lives. Modi's recent legislative attacks on Muslims are a signal to RSS members that he remains committed to their extreme Hindu nationalism, and a way of diverting attention from his neo-liberalism.

The experience of fascist parties in Europe that have entered government, like the National Alliance (AN) in Italy and the Freedom Party in Austria, show the tensions he faces.

The AN's leader, Gianfranco Fini, became deputy prime minister in a coalition government with Silvio Berlusconi's Forza Italia in 2001, and declared himself “post-fascist” and loyal to parliamentary democracy. This was too much for many AN members who eventually resigned.

Both of India's Communist parties were nearly wiped out in the election due to their record of implementing neo-liberal policies at local and state government level. The armed struggle in rural areas faces increasing repression from the military.

But the recent strikes and protests are an opportunity for the left to break out of the dead ends of electoralism and armed struggle—and build a more powerful resistance against Modi and the BJP, and the system they represent.

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Modi's recent attacks on Muslims are a signal that he remains committed to extreme Hindu nationalism

Nationalism—obscuring the real social divide

Workers in Australia have more in common with workers around the world than they do with the Australian ruling class, writes **Raul Haagensen**

IN THE face of a rising far right and an intensification of racism and nationalist ideas around the world, it's increasingly important to have a clear understanding of nationalism.

In Australia, nationalism can often take on a particular vile form, encouraging not only racism and division, but also being used to justify Aboriginal dispossession and the legacy of White Australia.

Today, the world is divided up into nations all with supposedly distinct cultures and many with separate languages.

However, the modern nation state is only a relatively recent invention, one which developed in lockstep with the rise of capitalism.

Nationalism only began developing in Europe from the 1500s onwards, and even by 1800 only a handful of nation states existed.

Previous states and kingdoms had little necessity to structure themselves around nationality, culture, or even a common language. Instead, society was usually organised around the power of individual kings and emperors who drew their legitimacy from birth or religious sanction.

At the birth of the French nation in 1789, only half the population could speak French, and in Italy, only 2.5 per cent could speak the dialect declared the "Italian" language at unification in 1861.

It was only following the rise of the new capitalist ruling classes, who needed a unified market and a loyal labour force, that imposing a common "national" language and identity became necessary.

Today, nationalism is everywhere. In sport we are expected to support our national football team or celebrate when our country does well in the Olympics.

When an Australian wins a film or literary award it is even supposed to be a national point of pride. And in politics, mainstream politicians are always promising to govern on behalf of the Australian people, and in the name of the "national interest".

One of the fundamental things to understand about nationalism is that it serves to bind workers to their rulers. It says that workers and the poor have

something in common with wealthy CEOs and politicians and that their interests are aligned.

However, their class interests are diametrically opposed. This means there is no common "national interest", only "capitalist interest" in disguise.

When Scott Morrison talks about ensuring a healthy Australian economy, it is often implied that it will benefit all Australians. But there is a constant struggle about how the benefits of economic growth are distributed.

In recent times bosses have been taking the lion's share of economic growth while workers' wages are barely able to keep up with rising prices. As Jim Stanford, director of Centre for Future Work, points out: "From 2000 to the present, real wages have grown half as much as real labour productivity"—the output bosses are squeezing from us.

Nationalism is also often used to justify aggressive foreign policy and wars. Overwhelmingly, however, it is big business that benefits from this, not ordinary workers.

The Iraq war in 2003, for instance, was waged largely for control of the region's oil resources and provided billions of dollars' worth of contracts for US companies.

Breeding racism

Another important aspect of nationalism is its link to racism.

During periods of crisis, governments almost always urge some form of scapegoating to divert people's legitimate anger onto a weaker group. Mainstream politicians and the media often tell us that refugees and immigrants are responsible for our economic hardship, for the lack of jobs, and the decrease in wages and the standard of living.

In creating a divide between those considered part of the nation and those outside of it, nationalism encourages racist ideas which, in turn, can embolden the far right. It was Peter Dutton's and Scott Morrison's barrage of Islamophobic fearmongering that inspired the Christchurch massacre, for instance.

This is how nationalism divides

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Nationalism says that workers have something in common with wealthy CEOs and politicians and that their interests are aligned

workers against one another, both on a global scale as well as nationally.

However, a worker in Australia actually has much more in common with a worker in Indonesia or China, than either have with their respective ruling classes, owing to the fact that their material circumstances and position in society are the same. Often, in fact, they are employed by the same massive corporation.

The director of the award-winning South Korean film *Parasite* told an interviewer that, when he was making the film, his intention was to express what he thought was a distinctly Korean sentiment. But the film's themes about class inequality have proved universal.

When the film started screening, he said, all the responses from different audiences made him realise that, essentially, we all live in the same country called capitalism.

This is why socialists are internationalists. Now, more than ever in history, capitalism is a global system. It follows therefore that the fight against it must also be global in nature.

The primary purpose of nationalism is to make workers identify with their rulers rather than other members of their class.

It is true we are seeing a rise in the far right and an intensification of racist ideas around the world. But in the past year we've also seen a wave of global revolt and international solidarity from Sudan to Hong Kong, Iran and Iraq.

Despite the barrage of nationalist propaganda, workers can and do recognise that they truly "have no country", as Marx wrote in 1848. When workers engage in class struggles they often reject racist and nationalist ideas. But the degree to which this happens depends upon the level of collective struggle in society, and also the degree to which socialists are willing and capable of taking up the issue.

As socialists we must oppose racism and nationalist ideas, not just on a moral basis, but also because we understand the role they play in dividing the working class against one another, when the crosshairs should in fact be aimed at our rulers.

CLIMATE DISASTERS HOW GOVERNMENTS ABANDON WORKERS AND THE POOR

The bushfire crisis has shown the desperate need for disaster assistance in the face of climate change. But the official response can highlight the class divide writes **Ruby Wawn**

DESPITE A string of media announcements from Scott Morrison of bushfire relief funding, we are already seeing examples of people left behind.

In the NSW and Victorian fire zones, Centrelink recipients were cut off from their payments for failing to meet their “mutual obligations” while they were desperately trying to defend their homes from the oncoming fires.

Uninsured families who have lost everything in the fires have received as little as \$1280 from the government to rebuild their lives, despite massive donations from the public to the Rural Fire Service and other charities. Elsewhere asbestos-contaminated debris remains uncleared, despite the NSW government announcing a \$25 million package for bushfire clean up in November.

These failures are starting to show how natural disasters affect people along class lines—and how governments and the rich will leave poor and working class people abandoned, and even to die.

Climate change is wreaking havoc across the globe. Last year the Amazon rainforest burnt at a rate not seen in a decade. Meanwhile parts of regional NSW have completely run out of water after long periods of drought and government mismanagement. And in the Bahamas, one of the strongest hurricanes on record decimated the holiday resort of the rich and powerful, while the impoverished Haitian migrant community struggled in the wake of the disaster.

New Orleans

Hurricane Katrina in 2005 is remembered as one of the worst natural disasters in recent history.

It was also discussed as one of the first major climate disasters, exactly the kind of more intense storm expected as a consequence of warming ocean temperatures and rising sea

levels.

But what is most remembered about Katrina is the failure of the Bush administration to adequately respond to the disaster, revealing the race and class divisions at the heart of US capitalism, and causing Kanye West to declare on national TV that, “George Bush doesn’t care about black people”.

New Orleans is an example of what neo-liberalism and capitalism has done across the US—heightening class divisions across the city with the wealthy and middle class residents living safely out of harm’s way in the suburbs, while the predominantly black and poor inner city areas bore the brunt of the storm.

The state was aware of the risks natural disasters and tropical storms posed to New Orleans, a city well below sea level on the Gulf Coast. Ward Nine, the poorest African American neighbourhood where residents lived on less than US\$10,000 a year, was the most vulnerable to flooding and was already under six to eight feet of water within hours of the storm hitting.

For many black residents who lived in the city centre—without state support, without the funds to leave and without a place to go—there was no way to escape.

But the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) made racist claims that these people deliberately ignored warnings to evacuate.

New Orleans Homeland Security Director Terry Ebbert even suggested that, “Everybody who had a way or wanted to get out of the way of this storm was able to. For some that didn’t, it was their last night on this earth”.

The storm displaced more than a million people. The death toll is estimated at around 1800 with over 68 per cent of the casualties being black—in some areas the death rate

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The poor faced months of homelessness, while the city of New Orleans became a police state
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for black residents was up to four times higher than that of non-black residents. Most died in the low-lying, flood prone poor black neighbourhoods.

A total of 20,000 people sought refuge at the Louisiana Superdome. But the National Guard had only provided enough resources for 15,000 people for three days. With tens of thousands of displaced people left in the evacuation centre for five days, the dead were left to rot on the floor, there were no toilet facilities and people were forced outside into 35-degree heat.

In the face of a completely inadequate state response, residents were forced to take matters into their own hands.

One 20-year-old man drove an abandoned school bus of 70 people from New Orleans to Houston. But on arrival they were turned away and the driver was arrested on charges of looting for “stealing” the bus.

The disaster recovery effort was also tainted with racism, with FEMA providing emergency accommodation trailers to 63 per cent of the predominantly white areas but only 13 per cent of the predominantly black—and poor—areas which were worst affected by flooding.

In the aftermath, the poor faced months of homelessness and displacement, while the city of New Orleans became a police state.

Private security firms such as Blackwater, which had been involved in the invasion of Iraq, patrolled the streets of New Orleans with rifles protecting the interests of capital as racist media outlets claimed the black victims of the storms were looters.

Hysteria about the “criminal” black New Orleans residents also affected those evacuating to other cities.

When reconstruction began, the

war on the poor continued. Real estate speculation exploded as the government invested millions in redeveloping New Orleans and other affected regions.

Ten years after the disaster there were almost 100,000 less black residents compared to a drop in white residents of 11,500. Congressman Barney Frank labelled reconstruction as, “ethnic cleansing through inaction.”

In 2014, former New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin was convicted of corruption for accepting bribes from developers who received more than US\$5 million in public contracts in the aftermath of the storm.

Former Republican Vice President Dick Cheney personally intervening the day after the storm to re-direct emergency service crews restoring power to two rural hospitals to instead repair electrical substations for a diesel pipeline which the Koch Brothers, major Republican donors, had a majority share in.

The project was also closely connected to Cheney’s former energy company Halliburton.

The capitalist vultures also swooped upon the education system, with nearly the entire New Orleans school district being privatised and 4700 public school teachers losing their jobs. The decimation of the public school system was fuelled by an op-ed in the *Wall St Journal* by Milton Friedman who falsely claimed the system was in disrepair.

But the new private charter schools did not have to educate all students and routinely expelled underperforming, often poor and black, students forcing them to go to what was left of the overburdened public schools where classes were up to 40 students each.

Today, New Orleans is the second most unequal city in the whole United States. For black residents who remain, the conditions in New Orleans are a familiar story of unemployment, over incarceration and disenfranchisement.

Class struggle

As in New Orleans, other climate disasters will also hit workers and the poor the most. And instead of providing support, governments and state institutions are likely, at best, to leave them abandoned and prioritise the interests of corporations and the rich.

This means that natural disasters have the ability to upend people’s lives and in the process generate



struggle against the system.

Another example is the threat of rising food prices and food shortages—which literally threaten people’s basic survival.

Currently more than 10 per cent of the world’s population is undernourished—despite the fact that there is easily enough to feed everyone. The problem is that there are millions of people who cannot afford the price of food.

Capitalism’s exploitation of the Earth’s resources at “unprecedented rates” means over half a billion people live in locations which are rapidly becoming unliveable desert, and we are losing soil at a rate of ten to 100 times faster than it is forming.

Higher levels of carbon dioxide in our atmosphere are predicted to affect food’s nutritional value and as demand outweighs supply, the cost of food is also predicted to rise.

Food shortages will disproportionately affect the poor and are likely to increase the number of migrants and refugees. We are already seeing patterns of migration caused by food shortages, with five times the number of migrants leaving El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras between 2010 and 2015 due to drought which severely impacted the food supply in the region.

Above: Devastation in New Orleans due to Hurricane Katrina, another example of what we can expect due to climate change

Food insecurity has already given rise to struggle. In Egypt and Yemen, more than 40 per cent of the population live below the poverty line. Around 70 per cent of Egyptians rely on government food subsidies to survive.

But as the world’s largest wheat importer, government subsidies for staples are propping up private companies in Egypt and in 2011, rising costs of bread inflamed tensions and contributed to the revolution that saw the fall of the Mubarak government.

Food crises also played a role in the revolution that brought down Tunisian President Ben Ali in 2011, after a state of emergency was declared following protests against the rising costs of staple foods.

The struggles of workers and the poor can be a powerful force demanding climate action.

The climate movement needs to take up the fight for working class demands for jobs and a just transition—and side with those left behind following climate disasters like the bushfires.

The only way we’re going to stop climate change is if we replace the system that caused it with one run in the interests of the working class majority—and based on human need, not profit.

CORBYN AND THE FAILURE OF LEFT REFORMISM IN EUROPE

The hope that radical left governments in Europe could take parliamentary power and deliver change has proven hollow, writes **Caitlin Doyle**

JEREMY CORBYN'S resounding defeat in the UK general election last year was a blow to many people's hopes for radical change. Predictably, Labour is now moving rapidly to the right, and is set to replace him with a more centrist leader.

The right of the party, who have spent the last three years attacking Corbyn's socialist leadership at every turn, claim to have been vindicated and are pushing to abandon many of his left-wing policies.

But despite his defeat, Corbyn's manifesto and his policies were, and still are, popular.

His election as Labour leader in 2016 saw around 300,000 new people, many of them young, join the party. And the 2017 elections saw the party achieve its greatest increase in support in a single election since 1945.

Rather than being "too left-wing", it was Corbyn's concessions to the Labour right and his failure to encourage demonstrations and struggle that saw people turn away from Labour.

Compromise

Corbyn repeatedly compromised with the right of the party.

In particular, Corbyn's support for a second referendum over Brexit—disregarding the votes of some 17.4 million people to leave the European Union (EU) in 2016—meant the party lost support amongst huge swathes of its working class base.

Corbyn's retreat on Brexit also left them without any confidence that his radical promises such as re-nationalising rail could be relied on, either.

In the areas that voted most strongly for Leave, especially in the old industrial heartlands, Labour's

vote fell by an average of around 10 per cent. Some former Labour votes swung to the Tories, who promised to "Get Brexit Done". Many simply abstained.

While anti-immigration racism clearly drove part of the Leave vote, many ordinary people rightly associate the EU with falling living standards and austerity policies.

Before assuming the Labour leadership, Corbyn had been a critic of the EU. And at first he promised to respect the referendum result, vowing to push for a progressive Brexit.

But over time he first gave into pressure from the Tories abandoning even his call to maintain freedom of movement for EU citizens, then shifted to making concessions to elements within Labour who supported remaining in the EU.

When the Labour right attacked him over his support for Palestine and accused him of anti-semitism, rather than defend his position, he accepted a definition of anti-semitism that included criticism of Israel.

He also abandoned his longstanding call for nuclear disarmament and accepted a plan to renew Britain's Trident nuclear missile program.

Now, even the left's candidate for leadership, Rebecca Long-Bailey, has accepted the idea that Corbyn was too radical, and has agreed to further restrictions on members' ability to support Palestine.

Since the large rallies during Corbyn's 2017 election campaign, there were few strikes and mass protests. His commitment to an electoral strategy meant that Corbyn did little to build the level of struggle outside parliament.

Labour failed to organise serious protests against the Tories' cuts and

Corbyn's concessions to the right were a direct result of his commitment to reformist politics

racist policies.

The trade union leaders also hitched all of their hopes to a Labour election victory instead of calling for strikes or protests.

While Corbyn supported and often appeared at rallies and strikes, at best he saw these as supplementary to parliamentary manoeuvring, rather than as the key to building the kind of social power needed to force through socialist policies.

Given the Conservative government's deep unpopularity and the political crises that have plagued them since 2016—from leadership changes to the Grenfell Tower tragedy—a mass campaign of strikes and protests could have seriously shifted the mood in society.

The parliamentary road to socialism?

For many years Corbyn stuck to principled left-wing positions within a party that was sliding ever further to the right.

Yet, his focus on parliament and his concessions to the right are best understood as a direct result of commitment to reformist politics.

Corbyn saw winning parliamentary power as the way to bring about a socialist society, or at least a society with less poverty, war and grinding oppression.

And he saw the Labour Party winning office as the way to do this. That meant maintaining unity with the right-wing of his party was crucial—and led to concession after concession to keep the party together.

British Labour, like the Labor Party in Australia, seeks to represent the working class as a whole.

In order to win elections it seeks the votes of workers who are more conservative as well as the votes of

left-wing workers and militant trade unionists.

This means Labour often concedes to more right-wing ideas or attempts to find a compromise and find the “middle ground”.

Over Brexit, attempting a compromise only exposed Labour’s vacillations.

Labour’s commitment to gaining parliamentary power means trying to manage the capitalist system in a more progressive or humane way, rather than overthrowing it.

This means that in government, the party must ensure capitalist profitability, which often means implementing wage, job and service cuts that hurt its working class base.

The brutal austerity overseen by previous Labour governments lives on in the memories of many ordinary people who Corbyn attempted to win over in the election. Current Labour councils are still inflicting cuts at a local level.

Laura Pidcock, a left Labour MP who lost her seat to a Tory wrote that people in her electorate were, “bitterly angry... at the political establishment... angry at being left behind, angry that their life was not as good now as it was... The current Labour Party were blamed for much of the problems in our communities.”

Corbyn’s retreats also eroded any confidence that he stood for something different to the Labour leaders of the past.

Left reformism in Europe

Corbyn’s defeat is not an isolated exception. In recent years a number of new left parties have broken through across Europe, such as Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain. All have since suffered setbacks, some terminal.

Both Syriza and Podemos emerged out of mass movements against austerity following the global economic crisis of 2008, which saw unemployment and suicide rates skyrocket in both countries.

In 2015, after a series of general strikes and anti-racist campaigns pulled Greek society to the left, Syriza came to power promising to scrap the humiliating austerity measures imposed on Greece by the EU as part of a debt bailout.

But within months it had capitulated to the EU, and agreed to implement ever worse cuts and austerity measures than those it had promised to oppose.



It also began clamping down on refugees and migrants to placate its right-wing coalition partners.

Syriza paid for its betrayals in the 2019 election, losing decisively to the right-wing New Democracy Party.

In Spain, Podemos gave electoral expression to the Indignados movement of city square occupations after its retreat.

The party, led by Pablo Iglesias, called for the cancellation of Spain’s debt, an end to austerity and housing evictions, and for a Catalan independence referendum, and won 21 per cent of the vote in the 2015 election.

But, like Syriza, Podemos abandoned many of its more radical policies over time, including the call to cancel the debt outright, in the hope of capturing more votes and appearing respectable to Spanish business. And rather than rebuild the movement on the streets that it was born out of, it has relied solely on a parliamentary strategy, while the attacks on living standards and on migrants have continued.

In December Podemos entered into an unstable coalition government with the Labour-type Socialist Party, committing to a “balanced budgetary” policy that could rule out the reversal of austerity cuts, and effectively withdrawing support for the Catalan independence movement.

Socialist strategy

The failure of these left reformist projects does not mean the radical left is unable to win mass support or that ordinary people have shifted decisively

Above: Despite popular left-wing policies, Corbyn’s retreats over Brexit cost him the election

ly to the right.

There is still mass anger at the political establishment and an enormous appetite for change amongst ordinary people who have faced decades of neo-liberalism and racism.

Rather, it is the focus on parliament and working through the institutions of the state and the EU that ultimately led these parties to a dead end.

The capitalist system, in Europe, Australia and elsewhere, will continue to produce political and economic crises—and then try to force the cost onto working class people and the poor.

But these crises will also present opportunities to build struggle and resistance. Thousands of workers in France, Chile, Hong Kong and elsewhere have shown this in recent months.

But the system cannot be changed from within the halls of parliament, as Syriza, Podemos and Corbyn have all attempted.

In order to fight racism, austerity and environmental catastrophe, we need to build struggles where we have the most collective power—in our workplaces and on the streets.

Socialists and activists everywhere should commit themselves to building the kind of movements and campaigns we need to beat back the ruling class’s attacks.

But we also need to build a party of struggle, that draws together the most committed activists and revolutionaries to take the struggle forward, and ultimately overthrow the capitalist system that breeds such misery.

CAPTAIN COOK— ROTTEN CROOK?

The 250th anniversary of Cook’s landing in April will see him defended as a great navigator and explorer. But he was part of the imperialist scramble to colonise the world, writes **James Supple**

CAPTAIN COOK was as “an enlightened man for his generation and his time”, according to Prime Minister Scott Morrison, someone who sought to understand the Indigenous people he encountered and made great contributions to science and discovery.

Morrison has devoted \$48.7 million to celebrating him as part of promoting the story of European colonial achievement.

He wants Australians to “rediscover” Cook because, he says, “he gets a bit of a bad show from some of those who like to sort of talk down our history”.

This is designed to reinforce nationalist pride about the history of European settlement in Australia—another front in the History Wars begun by Prime Minister John Howard.

Yet Cook’s voyages opened the way for the theft of Indigenous land and the massacres and genocide of Indigenous people.

Far from some detached, scientific observer, Cook was a career officer in the Royal Navy, the key part of the British war machine of his day. He cut his teeth in the war against France, fighting in modern day Canada.

Cook’s voyages were part of the imperialist scramble between European powers to colonise and exploit new areas of the world—in a game of competition over trade, plunder and conquest.

France and Spain were Britain’s two most important rivals of his day. At the time of Cook’s voyage, Spain still controlled South America, the Philippines and a number of islands in the north Pacific. It claimed the Pacific Ocean as its own and ordered Cook’s arrest if his ship stopped in any Spanish port.

In 1763 Britain defeated the combined might of France and Spain in

the Seven Years’ War, seizing French colonies in Canada, and their territories in India.

Britain ran one of the most brutal empires the world had ever seen.

For a century a British corporation, the East India Company, ran India directly with its own private army.

It bled the country dry in pursuit of profit, destroying its industries and forcing Indians into poverty to the point where one of its own administrators admitted that, “the bones of the cotton weavers were bleaching the plains of India”.

No product or pursuit was too vile. Britain sold thousands of pounds of opium into China each year, creating millions of addicts.

It later went to war for the right to continue the drug trade.

It was also busily shipping three million African slaves to the Caribbean and North America, working them to death to produce sugar and cotton.

Britain had established itself as the leading naval power in Europe, in an era when command of the seas was all important in securing overseas colonies and trade.

It turned next to the south Pacific, sending a series of expeditions in search of the rumoured southern continent.

Chase for the Pacific

The French followed them. In 1763 Louis Antoine de Bougainville began establishing a French colony on the Falkland Islands, near the tip of South America, as a base for exploring the Pacific.

Forced to abandon the scheme, he instead set sail on a voyage of discovery himself two years before Cook. He attempted to claim Tahiti for France, only to discover that British ships had visited it the year before.

Other French explorers followed,

Cook was given secret instructions to search for the Great Southern Land, and to claim it for the British Empire

including Jean-François de Surville, who reached New Zealand just days after Cook had been there. In January 1788 La Perouse arrived to spy on the new British colony planned for Botany Bay.

There had been a long-held belief that a massive southern landmass lay waiting to be discovered in the Pacific, whose control might even tip the balance of power between the rival European states.

In 1756 Charles De Brosses, a French scholar, produced a book on the history of European voyages in the south Pacific, urging France towards further attempts at locating the continent, in order to prevent further British expansion.

Writing in 1770 on the basis of seized Spanish documents, the British East India Company’s Alexander Dalrymple speculated that the continent could be as large as Asia and contain civilisations like those discovered in South America. Trade with such a continent, “would be sufficient to maintain the power, dominion, and sovereignty of Britain, by employing all its manufacturers and ships”, he thought.

Voyage to Australia

Cook’s first voyage in 1768 was officially a scientific expedition commissioned by the Royal Society to observe the transit of Venus across the sun.

But he was also given secret instructions by the Admiralty to search for the Great Southern Land, and to claim it for the British Empire.

This was the first of three voyages Cook led to the Pacific, definitively disproving the more fantastic myths about the southern continent, and sailing as far as the icy waters around Antarctica in the south, to Easter Island and Hawaii, and as far north as

the Bering Strait off Alaska.

It was once claimed that Cook “discovered” Australia. Of course, Indigenous Australians were at least 60,000 years ahead of him.

Makassans, from modern day Indonesia, were also trading with Aboriginal people in northern Australia from at least 1720 and perhaps centuries earlier.

Cook was also far from the first European to set foot here. The Dutch first landed in Cape York in 1606, and later charted the west coast of Australia and Tasmania. He was not even the first Englishman, with pirate turned naval officer William Dampier shipwrecked off Western Australia in 1688.

Cook’s sole claim was to finding and mapping the east coast of Australia.

He did not hesitate to claim the land for Britain. Cook records that he held a little ceremony at Possession Island in the Torres Strait, hoisting the British flag in order to claim the entire east coast of Australia, as the first European to sight it.

Cook had followed a similar procedure in New Zealand, recording in his official journal that he had claimed the land, “in the name and for the use of his Majesty”.

Although he was told to win “the consent of the natives” for British possession Cook made no effort to do so.

In Australia, he shot at the first Indigenous people he saw. Cook fired at two Gweagal warriors at Botany Bay, injuring one of them, after they threw spears towards him as a warning not to come ashore.

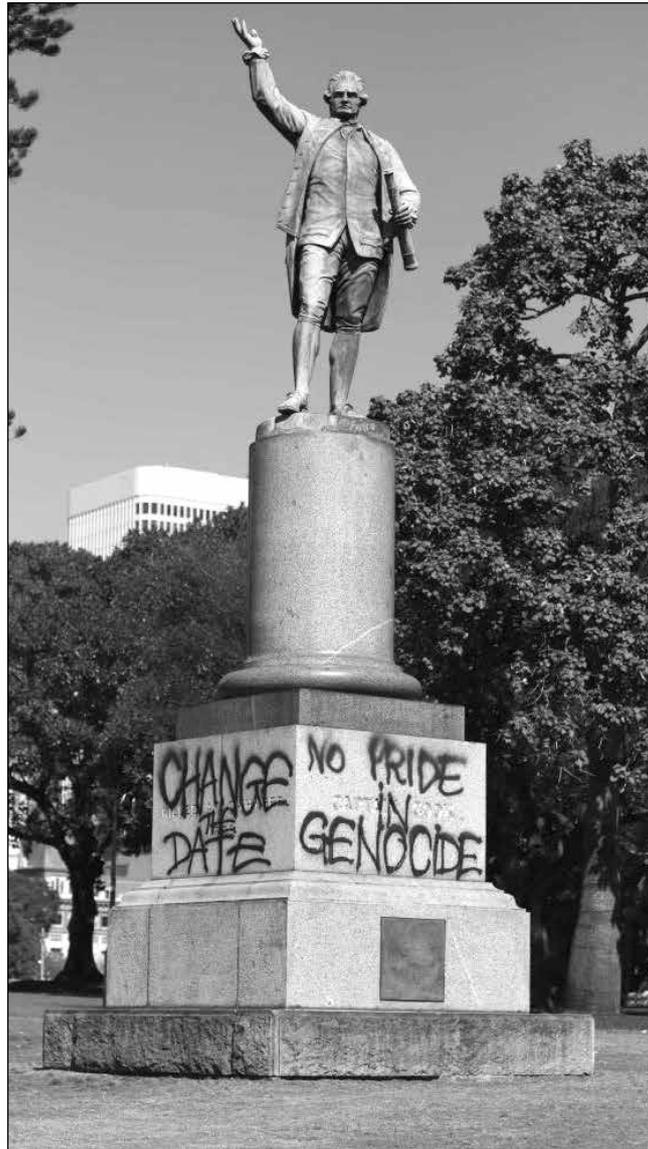
Cook took the Gweagal shield and spears that they abandoned. They are still held today at the British Museum despite repeated requests for their return.

First contact

Cook was officially warned by the Royal Society that killing the Indigenous people of any lands he visited was a “crime of the highest nature” and instructed to “avoid the wanton use of firearms”.

There was an obvious hypocrisy in British authorities, responsible for genocidal killings in North America and elsewhere, claiming such moral high ground.

But these instructions also reflect the fact that Cook’s mission was to explore and chart the areas he visited, as well as investigate profitable opportunities for trade, not to conquer or



Above: A statue of Captain Cook in Sydney’s Hyde Park covered with protest graffiti in 2017

invade them.

Often he did attempt to win local people over with gifts, and tried to understand their cultures. But he was also willing to use force to punish them and to assert European superiority.

When Maori showed him hostility on his first expedition, and attempted to grab weapons after efforts at trading broke down, Cook and his men shot at them.

In a month the expedition killed between nine and 13 Maori in a succession of encounters.

As many as four were shot when an effort to kidnap a party of Maori and take them aboard Cook’s ship went wrong.

At Tonga, Cook dealt with thefts on the part of the locals with vicious

punishments. As academic and Cook biographer Nicholas Thomas explains, “Tongans were subjected to two, three and even six dozen lashes... the ears of some thieves were cut off, and one man’s arms were cut with crosses through to the bone, to mark him out permanently, and to horrify and deter others.”

On the Pacific island of Mo’orea, near Tahiti, Cook led a punitive expedition of 40 men who sacked the island in an effort to recover a single stolen goat.

They burnt down houses as well as elaborate war canoes that had special ceremonial importance and took months to construct.

Cook’s ships also introduced venereal diseases that ravaged places like New Zealand and Hawaii. His crew used sought after European goods like iron nails, tools and fittings to force local women into prostitution, and almost certainly engaged in rape.

One of Cook’s favourite tactics was to kidnap local chiefs or leaders, in an effort to force the population to return stolen goods.

In Hawaii, this led to his death on his third and final voyage in 1779. Cook arrived as the islanders were carrying out religious ceremonies that recalled a series of battles between historic chiefs.

When he returned to seek repairs, Cook seems to have intruded on celebrations of the ruling chief’s victory.

After he went ashore and attempted to take Hawaiian chief Kalani’opu’u hostage, a large crowd gathered. Cook’s shot into the crowd failed to subdue them, and he was set upon, and stabbed and clubbed to death.

Following the practice for powerful leaders, the locals then dismembered his body and baked it, in order to keep his bones.

This gave rise to a myth that Cook’s body was eaten.

In Hawaii, Cook came to be remembered for disrespecting religious ideas, introducing foreign diseases and helping destroy the local culture. For Indigenous Australians too, as historian and Worimi man John Maynard has written, “he represents white Australia in all of its guises including invasion, occupation, dispossession and the conducting of a symphony of violence”.

His role as a pioneer of colonisation turned him into a symbol of all that followed.

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**In Australia,
he shot at
the first
Indigenous
people he saw**

INJUSTICE GOES ON AS ABORIGINAL PEOPLE JAILED AND KILLED

By Lucy Honan

THIS YEAR began with another shocking Aboriginal death in custody, the product of an injustice system set up to criminalise, jail and kill. Veronica Nelson Walker, a Yorta Yorta woman, was found dead in her cell on 2 January, after she was refused bail and sent to a maximum security prison simply for shoplifting.

Zachary Rolfe, the police officer who shot 19-year-old Walpiri man Kumanjayi Walker in November last year, received very different treatment from the courts, despite being charged with murder. He was bailed immediately and suspended on full pay.

Rolfe was only charged as a result of explosive protests emanating from the crime scene of Yuendumu, to remote communities and cities across the country. On the night police announced Rolfe would be charged, many hundreds of Walpiri people were on a convoy into a mass protest in Alice Springs and their #blacklives-matter protest videos were receiving international attention.

Further rallies in Alice Springs in December helped to stop Rolfe's request to move the trial to Darwin, which would have made it impossible for Walker's family and community to attend.

A decade of intensifying "war on crime" in the NT has seen hundreds of unsentenced Aboriginal children and adults go to prison on remand, often for petty crimes. But Rolfe can go home to his wealthy parents in Canberra.

Across the country, the system protects its attack dogs. A week after Rolfe was released on bail, an inquest into the NSW death in custody of Dhungutti man David Dungay ruled that five corrective services officers who held David face down while he yelled "I can't breathe" were not motivated by malicious intent but "misunderstanding".

Blind to the irony of their comments, the Police Association defended Rolfe's release on bail, stating, "he, like all, has the presumption of innocence in his favour." Yet, particularly since the NT Intervention, Federal and terri-



tory governments have handed police extraordinary powers to presume the guilt of all Aboriginal people across the Territory. They are licensed to harass and incarcerate en masse. For Rolfe, it was a short step to execution.

Lots of cops—no justice

The 2007 NT Intervention intensified a massive influx of Commonwealth resources for policing that began the previous year.

Under the Intervention, the Australian Crime Commission was granted extraordinary "star chamber" powers to refuse suspects and witnesses the right to silence. Regular police gained powers to search Aboriginal homes, vehicles and bodies without a warrant and to apprehend if they reasonably believed a person to be drunk.

Imprisonment rates in the NT have doubled for Aboriginal men and children since the Intervention and tripled for Aboriginal women.

The NT government keeps doubling down on criminalisation. In 2013 Mandatory Sentencing laws returned, and in 2014 "paperless" arrest laws allowed police to grab people off the street with no record if suspected intoxicated or "about to commit a crime".

Despite a Royal Commission into

Above: Protests across the country were key to forcing the decision to charge policeman Zachary Wolfe

the torture of youth in Don Dale and other juvenile prisons, guards have been granted greater powers to abuse inmates and now 100 per cent of the children in NT prisons are Indigenous. Kumanjayi Walker suffered in these prisons for many of his teenage years.

Just hours after Rolfe shot Walker dead, the Yuendumu community saw a plane flying in and thought it was coming to airlift Walker to the hospital. But the plane was full of a special paramilitary police force brandishing AR-15 assault rifles. These cops occupied the community for three weeks.

This was a blatant attempt to intimidate and suppress powerful community protests for justice.

Despite shocking poverty across the NT, money continues to gush from government taps for the war on Aboriginal people that has not stopped since invasion. The protests for Walker around the country were signs of a fierce resistance to the endemic police violence and systemic racism.

The murder charge on Rolfe is a real breakthrough. But a number of killer cops have had similar charges dropped before, like Constable Whittington, who shot Robert Jongmin at Wadeye in 2004 and then never faced trial. Continuing resistance holds the key to justice.

Despite shocking poverty across the NT, money continues to gush for the war on Aboriginal people

Solidarity