

# Solidarity

Issue No. 140 / September 2020

\$3/\$5

## MORRISON AND UNI BOSSES ON THE RAMPAGE



## STOP THE UNI CUTS FIGHT FOR EVERY JOB

### UNI CUTS

Lessons from campaigns  
that saved jobs

### CORONAVIRUS

The politics  
of lockdowns

### IMPERIALISM

US-China rivalry a  
threat to the world

# 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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Online meetings via Zoom  
6.30pm every Thursday  
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## Things they say

*We are not happy that some things haven't worked out as we might've hoped*

Aged Care Minister Richard Colbeck on the over 300 COVID-19 deaths caused by government failures in aged care

*Mr Walker is very clear on what the monumental mistakes were in his view, and certainly he expressed the view that they were isolated*

Gladys Berejiklian is not so clear on why there shouldn't be any consequences from the Ruby Princess debacle

*Several years ago, a vice-chancellor commented to me that the consequence of so many foreign students is that our universities have lost their Australian-ness, and that is my personal experience as well*

Jim Molan clearly has a problem with "foreigners"

*I never said arts students don't have the skills needed for the workforce or to contribute to society.*

Dan Tehan, Federal Education Minister, getting defensive after raising the cost of an arts degree by tens of thousands of dollars

*The stock market is up almost 300 points again today*

US president Donald Trump on the day that 1503 people died from coronavirus in the US, the highest number of deaths for three months

*The enthusiasm for Trump is through the roof even higher, even higher than last time.*

Donald Trump doing what he does best—lying

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## Companies use JobKeeper to pump up dividends and profits

JOBKEEPER WAGE subsidies have been used to subsidise profits and dividend payments at a number of major retail firms. Furniture retailer Nick Scali boosted its dividend payout by 12.5 per cent, delivering the Scali family a payment of \$2.5 million. The company admitted that it received \$3.9 million under JobKeeper and the equivalent New Zealand scheme.

Manchester and homewares company Adairs increased its profit by 19 per cent to \$35.3 million for the financial year. After an online sales boom in recent months it even increased its dividend payments to shareholders by \$18.6 million.

Yet it put its hand out for \$11.3 million in wage subsidies under the government scheme.

Dentist chain 1300 Smiles drew a wage subsidy of \$1.805 million, despite declaring a net profit of \$7.145 million and paying out \$2.95 million to shareholders, \$1.83 million of which will go to managing director Daryl Holmes alone, who owns 14.7 million shares.

## Walkouts demand safe workplaces amid Melbourne COVID surge

WORKERS HAVE been forced to take safety into their own hands at a series of workplaces across Melbourne, after their employers refused to take COVID-19 infections on site seriously.

In late July, workers at a Spotless laundry in Dandenong walked out in response to concerns about the company's handling of three positive cases on site. The company tried to keep the site operating, saying only a small number of workers were at risk and needed to stay home. Spotless even went to the Fair Work Commission to try to force everyone else back to work.

But it had to back down and shut the workplace after the Department of Health and Human Services ruled that any worker who had spent more than 30 minutes on site since 6 July would need to get tested and quarantine for 14 days.

Spotless workers' action won them paid pandemic leave at a minimum rate of a \$150 a day for full-time, part-time, and casual workers, as well as paid leave for the days they refused work due to unsafe conditions, according to the United Workers Union (UWU).

Over 60 workers at the Mitre 10 distribution center in Derrimont in Melbourne's west ceased work on 10 August after a COVID-19 case on site and won important health measures, their union, the UWU, reported. These included leave for workers at the site to get tested, a ban on working on more than one shed at the site (to decrease the risk of cross contamination), one separate set of equipment per person, and a commitment from the company to involve health and safety reps in determining contact tracing in future.

Abattoirs have seen some of the largest clusters of cases, but bosses have tried to cut corners on safety even here. Workers at Diamond Valley Pork in Laverton refused to go back to work in early August after their employer tried to reopen the abattoir before results of their second COVID-19 test were in. More than 50 cold storage workers also walked off the job at the JBS Brooklyn abattoir, demanding more safety measures over two weeks after the site was originally ordered shut following an initial 71 positive tests.

Hundreds of liquor distribution centre workers in Laverton ceased work on 3 August after their billion dollar employer, Woolworths, continued operations following a positive COVID-19 test. They went back to work after the company agreed to have a hygienist oversee deep cleaning on site, according to *The Age*.

Casualisation and insecure work have been a major factor in the spread of the virus. But the Victorian and federal government paid pandemic leave on offer is nowhere near enough. Workers need paid leave at their existing rates of pay, and a guarantee they will not lose shifts if they stay away from work when sick. Workers' collective action, through walking off the job if necessary, has the power to force employers and the government to take our health seriously and deliver these rights.

**Tom Fiebig**

## Morrison backs gas expansion in climate fail



SCOTT MORRISON is doubling down on fossil fuels in the face of climate disaster, backing more gas mining as a path out the COVID-19 crisis.

"Gas is the important transition fill for the changes in our energy needs for this country, for the future," he told parliament. "That is why we want to see more of it and get more out of the ground".

And he's signalled he will have "a lot more to say" on it in the months ahead. Morrison is working hand in glove with mining company executive and head of his hand-picked COVID Commission, Nev Power. The Commission has recommended the government provide funding to underwrite investment in new pipelines, to encourage new gas developments.

This would assist Santos' gas fracking development at Narrabri in NSW, according to the *Sydney Morning Herald*.

The NSW Independent Planning Commission has put back the date for its decision on the project until 30 September.

It plans to build up to 850 gas wells on Pillaga scrub, involving land clearing in the state forest in the largest remaining temperate woodland in eastern Australia, with important spiritual significance for the local Gamilaraay people.

The Coalition argues that an increase in gas supply is necessary, not just for power needs, but to lower gas prices for domestic manufacturing. Massive export developments have pushed up domestic prices because gas producers can sell at much higher prices on the international market.

But the 25-year project is incompatible even with the Paris Agreement aim of keeping climate change to 2 degrees, former chief scientist Penny Hackett wrote in a submission against the development.

"About 50 per cent of Australian gas reserves must remain in the ground to achieve a 2°C [global warming] scenario. Thus, approval of new fossil fuel development or expansion is incompatible with keeping global warming to 2°C", she argued. Over its life it would spew out the equivalent of close to a whole year of NSW's total emissions.

We need a rapid transition away from fossil fuels to avoid climate catastrophe. The bulk of gas used for household cooking and heating could be phased out immediately and replaced with electric alternatives, powered by renewable energy. This could free up gas for manufacturing use while producers work to switch to renewable energy alternatives.

And a climate-friendly recovery would create far more jobs. Beyond Zero Emissions has outlined measures in renewable energy, building design, transport and land management that could create up to a million jobs. That's the kind of recovery we need.

# EDITORIAL

## Start the fightback to save jobs at unis as Morrison imposes massive cuts

SCOTT MORRISON is determined to wind back government support for workers and the economy, even as COVID-19 outbreaks continue, while companies cut jobs and unemployment climbs.

JobKeeper payments will drop to \$1200 a fortnight from October and \$1000 in January—just two-thirds of the minimum wage, with even less going to casual employees who worked less than 20 hours a week before the pandemic.

The government itself admits effective unemployment will increase to over 13 per cent by December, as Qantas added to the jobs massacre, announcing the outsourcing of 2500 ground staff jobs.

Even after its extension into next year, the JobKeeper program will still cost \$30 billion less than the government initially budgeted for. Yet child-care workers have already been cut off, including those stood down due to the lockdown in Victoria.

The savage cuts across universities are a taste of Morrison and Frydenberg's Margaret Thatcher-inspired approach to reviving the economy.

Morrison claims his focus is saving jobs. Yet he has ruthlessly imposed huge job cuts on the university sector, refusing to allow universities to access JobKeeper payments and ruling out any extra financial assistance.

Thousands of job cuts have been announced, including 500 jobs at UNSW, 450 at Melbourne University, 350 at RMIT, 250-500 at UTS, 200 at UNE and 190 at Victoria University. Sydney University has floated plans to cut 30 per cent of jobs in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences and other faculties, amounting to 3000 jobs if applied across the board.

This will mean widespread course cuts and more use of recycled online lectures, another nail in the coffin of critical education.

The ACTU is clearly worried about where the government is heading, outlining "threshold issues" it would oppose.

But they have accepted Morrison's compromise that extends employers' flexibility to cut workers' shifts, even after they go off JobKeeper, as long as their business has still lost 10 per cent of income compared to before the crisis.



**Above: Fighting course and job cuts at Sydney University**

The ACTU is still opposing any deferral of the increase in compulsory superannuation, as well as adopting proposals that reduce workers' rights from the governments' industrial relations "working groups".

But all we've got from the ACTU is yet another advertising campaign.

### How to fight

The workers at Woolworths in Wyong, NSW have shown how to fight back. They faced down a lockout from their multi-billion dollar employer, effectively staying out on strike for almost two weeks. Their action won big pay rises and more permanent jobs.

The cuts at universities need the same response. Students and staff will need to build towards mass walkouts, strikes and boycotts of classes. This will mean defying the COVID-19 inspired attack on the right to protest.

Even small protests have shown that it's possible to stop cuts. Students and staff at Sydney Uni saved a number of courses in the history department by exposing management's plans and holding protests during the semester break.

Although the university bosses cry poor there have plenty of options to avoid cuts—such as borrowing against university assets and trimming obscene management salaries. Interest rates are at records lows, so they could easily manage repayments.

The cuts at universities are just the beginning of the austerity Morrison plans to impose to maintain business profits as the economy crashes.

Forty-two thousand jobs have already gone in the retail sector, and up to 205,000 construction jobs are estimated to go by March next year.

Morrison still prattles about returning to business-as-usual, "on the other side" of the pandemic. But it is the profits-first priorities of capitalism that have put so many lives at risk and made every element of the COVID crisis worse.

There was a crisis in aged care well before the pandemic, caused by underfunding and cost-cutting.

Now casualisation, lack of training, preparation and resources is taking a terrible and unnecessary toll in aged care homes.

Household income had been flat for six years before the economy slumped into recession.

Universities already had massive levels of casualisation, up to 72 per cent at Melbourne and Monash Universities. Morrison and Frydenberg have a vision of warmed-over Thatcherism "on the other side".

A determined fightback in the universities can help build the basis for the sustained fight that will be needed to stop Morrison and the bosses making workers pay for the crisis.

.....  
**Students and staff will need to build towards mass walkouts, strikes and boycotts of classes**

# Aged care disaster exposes understaffing and corporate greed

By David Glanz

The COVID-19 pandemic has shone a harsh spotlight on the state of aged care, revealing a system that all too often delivers suffering, isolation and humiliation to the elderly.

As of 25 August, aged care residents accounted for 328 of the 525 deaths from the virus in Australia, with many staff infected, too.

This is a system that was already badly resourced, relying on low-paid, casual staff who eke out a living across multiple employers.

The pandemic has made things much worse.

Lisa Fitzpatrick, Victorian state secretary of the nurses' union, the ANMF, told an inquiry that nurses going into an aged care home ravaged by COVID-19 experienced "a shift from hell".

Residents were listed in the wrong rooms, flowers sent by relatives were, "rotting and the water was putrid", and one resident had such terrible oral thrush that nurses were concerned about his ability to eat or drink.

It's been reported that at another home, a dead man was left in a bed for 26 hours and, on one occasion, only six staff turned up to work to look after 120 residents.

The pandemic has once again highlighted the appalling way in which many elderly are treated, but none of this should come as a surprise.

The royal commission into aged care released its interim report last year. It declared that the system, "fails to meet the needs of its older, vulnerable, citizens. It does not deliver uniformly safe and quality care, is unkind and uncaring towards older people and, in too many instances, it neglects them".

According to the ANMF, residents are currently receiving around 2 hours and 50 minutes of care per a day when they actually need about 4 hours and 18 minutes.

Over the last 13 years, chronic understaffing has seen a 400 per cent increase in preventable deaths of elderly Australians in aged care, with hundreds dying from falls, choking and suicide.

Elderly people are divided by class. Older wealthy people are insulated from this misery.



**Above: Lack of staff and funding have seen COVID-19 tear through many aged care homes in Victoria**

At the Mark Moran home in Vaucluse, in Sydney's wealthy eastern suburbs, breakfast is made for residents to order, a barista is on duty, residents can use a spa and choose meals from an extensive menu.

Access to this oasis is a snip if you can deposit up to \$2.2 million for a room.

One of Mark Moran's selling points is "registered nurses are on duty 24 hours a day; seven days a week".

This is very different to the bulk of the sector. The federal government gives \$13 billion a year to residential aged care providers but refuses to set staff-resident ratios.

Only Victoria has legislated minimum ratios, and then only for public hospitals and aged care homes. The difference is, however, stark. While about 10 per cent of aged care beds in the state are public, those facilities are responsible for only 0.25 per cent of COVID-19 cases.

.....  
**John Howard scrapped the requirement to have a registered nurse on duty and cut \$1 billion from aged care funding**

**Profiteering**

The sector's problems can be traced back to John Howard's 1997 Aged Care Act, which opened the floodgates to neo-liberal profiteering. Howard scrapped the requirement to have a registered nurse on duty and cut \$1 billion from aged care funding.

Today, owners rip off \$1 billion in profits each year. Tony Antonopoulos and his wife Stacey are half-owners of Heritage Care, which runs 10 homes in Victoria and NSW, includ-

ing Epping Gardens where more than 200 residents and staff contracted the virus.

They get by with a \$10.5 million mansion and prestige cars including a Lamborghini, a Maserati and a limited-edition Rolls-Royce.

So-called not-for-profit homes are not much better.

St Basil's in Fawkner, which has seen more than 190 cases, is owned by the Australian Greek Orthodox Church and gets almost all its annual \$13 million funding from the federal government. \$2.5 million goes straight back to the church as rent.

Meanwhile residents and staff across the system suffer. As one nurse said: "Minimum staff to resident ratios plus workload and resident demands ensures staff burn-out and extremely high staff turnover.

"Slave labour with low pay rates = a totally dissatisfied workplace with high stress and unrealistic expectations. Corporate greed wins."

Scott Morrison has issued a limp apology for this disastrous situation but is putting his main efforts into shifting the blame onto the Victorian government.

For Labor, Bill Shorten rightly said that the tension between looking after people and making a profit creates "faultlines in the system".

But he stopped short of the obvious conclusion—that aged care should be a public service, with permanent, trained staff who can care for the elderly with dignity.

## Hypocrisy as protests targeted and banned under COVID rules

By James Supple

THERE HAS been a concerted attack on the right to protest under the cover of the coronavirus. The Liberals and the Murdoch media have set out to scapegoat protests as somehow responsible for the virus's spread.

Hundreds of police have been mobilised to shut down demonstrations and fine organisers.

In Sydney, a Black Lives Matter protest on 28 July demanding justice for David Dungay Jnr was dispersed by police and five people fined \$1000 each.

The following week a small rally of 30 students at Sydney Uni was also broken up, with another two activists arrested and fined.

Even more ridiculous were Justice Jean Dalton's comments in the course of refusing to authorise the refugee protest at Kangaroo Point in Queensland's Supreme Court on 15 August.

The protest, she declared, was, "by its nature I think, more than likely to spread COVID-19."

This was after Queensland had gone nine days without a single case of community transmission, with just seven cases over the previous three weeks.

Unions have also been targeted. After a violent attack on two CFMEU officials at a building site in Melbourne on 30 June, the union held a small protest outside the site. Police arrived and fined the organiser \$1652.

In Sydney police also turned up at Port Botany, where union members were meeting with MUA Sydney Branch Secretary Paul McAleer outside the terminal, warning that they were in breach of COVID-19 restrictions.

The targeting of protest is not based on genuine health concerns. Outdoor protests in NSW are currently limited to a maximum of just 20 people under health regulations, at the same time as 10,000 at a time are allowed into football stadiums, 500 at community sporting events, and thousands can gather in shopping centres and workplaces.

Premier Daniel Andrews has said, in Victoria, 80 per cent of COVID-19 cases have spread via workplaces. In NSW, there have been clusters at pubs, restaurants and churches.

Yet there has not been a single case anywhere in Australia of the



**Above: Indigenous activist Vanessa Turnbull-Roberts is fined for attending a Black Lives Matter protest in Sydney**

virus spreading at protests.

There is a good reason for this: outdoor activities, where the wind disperses virus droplets, are far safer than indoor venues or workplaces.

And the vast majority of those at protests have worn masks and observed social distancing, in line with COVID Safe plans drawn up by organisers.

All this has not stopped a hysterical and dishonest media campaign.

The Murdoch press, spearheaded by *The Australian*, has tried to beat up the idea of "a link" between Melbourne's 50,000-strong Black Lives Matter rally on 6 June and the spread of the virus there.

A series of Liberal MPs repeated the lie. Scott Morrison declared further protests "completely unacceptable" and "appalling" and claimed they put, "the whole track back to economic recovery at risk".

But the only "link" is that six people who attended Melbourne's protest caught the virus elsewhere.

Victoria's Health Department issued a media statement clearly saying that, "no known nor suspected episodes of transmission occurred at the protest itself."

Not deterred, the Murdoch media even tried to link the outbreak in Melbourne's public housing towers to the protest.

The lie was parroted by NSW Police Commissioner Mick Fuller as a reason to ban protests in Sydney. But the Victorian Health Department debunked that one too, saying that, "None of these cases [of people at

the protest who later caught the virus] are known to reside at a major public housing complex."

### Essential

There is clear hypocrisy in the limits imposed on protests. What is allowed under coronavirus health restrictions is a political decision—and the priority of governments has been to allow businesses including restaurants and pubs as well as sports stadiums to operate.

Their commitment to the right to protest—supposedly a fundamental part of a democratic society—clearly ranks well below this.

Protest is not simply something that can be put on hold until the COVID-19 pandemic is over. It is essential for workers, students and the oppressed in order to stand up for their rights.

The Black Lives Matter protests in the US have forced changes within months that had seemed impossible previously.

Cities including Los Angeles, New York and Portland have all voted to defund the police and spend the money on services instead. The protests have also dramatically shifted public opinion, with 65 per cent supporting the movement.

None of this would have happened without people taking to the streets.

The pandemic has lasted six months already, and it's likely to be at least another six months before there is a vaccine. We need to keep fighting for our right to protest, and stand up to the use of health regulations to stop them.

**There has not been a single case anywhere in Australia of the virus spreading at protests**

## National assembly of university workers discusses strikes against cuts

By Miro Sandev

AN UNPRECEDENTED national assembly of university workers has condemned the job cuts and funding cuts to the university sector and resolved to mobilise against them, including going on strike.

More than 460 staff from around the country attended the assembly on 24 August and committed to, “mounting a vigorous campaign of coordinated actions with the goal of making democratically planned unprotected industrial action possible so as to defend universities from funding cuts and protect all university jobs”.

The successful assembly was organised by the National Higher Education Action Network, a rank and file grouping of NTEU members.

The size and diversity of the assembly shows there is a new layer of staff coming into struggle for the first time and keen to push the bounds of what is possible. There are a lot of steps between taking a vote like this and getting a mass strike off the ground, but the sentiment needs to be nurtured and connected to campaigns on campuses.

There were also non-union members at the assembly. These workers can be won to joining the union and taking collective action, but there needs to be a clear strategy for building power and confidence.

On a number of campuses union members are already leading campaigns against the cuts. At the University of Melbourne, an open letter against hundreds of job cuts has been launched and there is an online rally planned.

At Sydney University, hundreds-strong members’ meetings in the Arts and Social Sciences Faculty have condemned the 30 per cent cuts mooted there and resolved to campaign against them through mobilisations, up to and including industrial action. There is also a push for a vote of no confidence in the Dean of the Faculty and upper management.

Staff are also preparing to join the next student protest planned for 16 September, and there is a push for a staff walk-off as part of this. NTEU branch officials should support and amplify these initiatives.

At UTS, shamefully, the NTEU officials have refused to organise a members’ meeting for over two months despite a clear resolution from



**Above: Casual staff at Sydney Uni join a protest against job cuts**

the previous members’ meeting calling for one. It has been left to ordinary members to convene a meeting to plan the resistance to the cuts announced by the Vice-Chancellor.

Seeking “transparency” about the cuts is not good enough, the NTEU leadership needs to come out strongly against the cuts and help organise the resistance.

### Connecting the fights

All of these local campaigns are absolutely critical. But at the same time as targeting the Vice-Chancellors and university management we also need to target the Liberals’ refusal to extend JobKeeper to universities, and their plans to further slash university funding and hike student fees.

These two campaigning angles are not counter-posed, as some groups like NTEU Fightback have claimed. Large demonstrations against the cuts, jointly organised with student activists, will strengthen union members’ confidence and willingness to fight—especially if the plans for fee increases can be stopped.

The motion passed at the national assembly called for a major mobilisation in October around the time of the federal budget. This would be a perfect opportunity to connect the struggles against the Vice-Chancellors’ cuts to the Liberals’ attacks.

The NTEU leadership is still pushing its dodgy deals that cut pay and conditions around different campuses. But having been embarrassed by the rank and file revolt against the deals, it has now pivoted to spruiking its

Fund Universities Fairly campaign, which consists mostly of lobbying federal politicians. If it is serious about winning fair funding the NTEU leadership should support an October rally and build it among the membership.

Our most powerful weapon against the cuts is large-scale strike action. But that does not mean serious action has to wait until next year’s bargaining, as NTEU Fightback have argued.

We need to begin campaigning against the cuts now by mobilising on the largest scale possible, including through online meetings, protests and walkouts. But every action needs to build towards the kind of strike action we need.

The success of the assembly shows there is a sentiment to fight back right now, and we need to seize on this to push for the most militant action possible.

To get a mass strike means winning NTEU branches to support this strategy. Of course, the officials that were spruiking the surrender agreement of the Jobs Protection Framework will not lead the call for this. But if they endorse actions like the October rally, it makes it easier for activists to argue for more militant action as part of this.

Most union members still look to union endorsement of actions to give them security.

But being part of mass mobilisations can give them the confidence to go beyond what the union officials are prepared to support.

.....  
**The success of the assembly shows there is a sentiment to fight back now, and we need to seize on this**

## How student campaign saved jobs at SCA



By Thandi Bethune

THE CAMPAIGN to save Sydney College of the Arts (SCA), the Sydney University art school at Callan park in Rozelle, shows the power of student activism and the gains that can be won through organised resistance. In Semester two of 2016 the university attempted to close the art school by

**Above: Students occupying the administration offices at SCA in 2016**

forcing students to move to UNSW, a plan that would have meant hundreds of job losses and a significant reduction in the quality of education.

What was disguised as the creation of a “centre for excellence”, was in fact a cost cutting scheme as part of a university restructure, aimed at reducing staff numbers and resource intensive subjects. In response to the proposal, activists and SCA students

and staff held a mass meeting of 250 people, voting to hold a rally at the next University Senate meeting.

Four hundred people came to the rally, including representatives from multiple unions and Greens MP Jamie Parker. The first big win came shortly after, when the university terminated the merger and proposed moving SCA onto the main Camperdown campus, shattering the facade of the “centre for excellence” and exposing their true intentions.

Student activists helped to mount a rigorous campaign against the move, including multiple rallies across both SCA and Camperdown campuses, two student strikes, and a 65 day occupation of the administration offices at SCA. The campaign was built through open democratic meetings which voted on all steps and escalations. For activists, a significant part of the task was publicising the meetings and getting people involved by holding stalls, leafletting the gates, making lecture announcements and having one-on-one conversations with students and staff.

One significant downfall was the campaign’s inability to involve staff and lecturers. Multiple factors contributed to this including low union density at SCA and next to no support from union members on main campus. This caused confusion around what unionists were legally allowed to do, with many staff too afraid to speak out against the university for fear of repercussions.

While the student strikes disrupted SCA (some classes were cancelled, and the university looked bad in the media) a staff strike would have impacted the university in a way that the student strike could not. If this had happened in conjunction with industrial action from staff on main campus it would have benefitted both SCA and USYD staff, strengthening their position the next year going into EBA negotiations. This shows the importance of moving beyond just student involvement to involve university workers.

Nevertheless the SCA campaign won significant gains: the merger was scrapped, the Dean Collin Rhodes was forced to resign, the university capitulated to students remaining at Callan park for three more years, all the studios were saved, and 50 per cent more staff kept their jobs than initially proposed. It was an amazing example of the power that students have to fight the corporate university. Significantly, it showed what happens when a broad base of students are inspired to be active and take up their own struggle.

## Stopping job cuts at Sydney University in 2012

UNIVERSITIES ARE currently facing a bloodbath—with thousands of jobs set to be cut across the sector. But staff and students can fight back. In 2012, staff and student action at Sydney University saved hundreds of staff jobs.

In late November 2011 Vice-Chancellor Michael Spence sent out a video explaining that university management was looking to cut up to \$27 million in costs—starting with 340 staff who they assessed were less “productive” and therefore not valuable to the corporate university. The Refugee Language Program was seen as similarly expendable. Then, as now, similar cuts were being proposed in universities across the country.

Activists in Solidarity immediately called meetings through the Education Action Group (EAG) to mobilise students from affected departments and the existing campus left. Despite attempts from the education officers at the time to bureaucratically control the EAG, Solidarity members successfully argued that the collective needed to be democratically controlled by the students building the campaign.

The campaign involved broader layers of students beyond the exist-

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**Seventy motions against the cuts were passed in lectures to build a protest of 1500 students and staff**

ing left—30-60 students regularly attended meetings, taking seriously an ongoing commitment to the campaign and the debates necessary to collectively decide how to take it forward.

The success of the campaign was due to the mass building work of activists amongst the wider student body. Seventy motions against the cuts were passed in lectures to build a protest of 1500 students and staff. At the end of the rally, there was a 100-strong student occupation of the Dean of Arts’ office, which became a mass meeting which resolved to escalate the campaign of direct action.

This set the stage for a 250-strong student strike where eight classes walked out to join a lunchtime rally of 400, as well as a further rally outside the University Senate, where riot police were called in and dragged and threw students to the ground to stop them occupying the meeting.

The campaign managed to save 47 of the 100 jobs set to be cut and stopped other demotions to teaching-only positions. With a similar mass, democratic, and disruptive approach today, we can push back the enormous job cuts we are facing on campus.

**Cooper Forsyth**

# Hand-picked corporate advisers shaping COVID recovery

By Michael Douglas

SCOTT MORRISON has appointed an unelected and secretive group of fossil fuel bosses to advise the government on how to ensure any economic recovery from the pandemic will prioritise profits.

Morrison announced the National COVID-19 Coordination Commission (NCCC) in March claiming it would solve problems sourcing protective equipment and ensure more testing. But this was window dressing. Its chair Neville Power admits that its role is to “provide advice to the government from a business and industry perspective”.

In July Morrison announced the NCCC would become a personal “advisory board to myself as PM” to work on the economic recovery. It would even “form part of the Cabinet deliberative processes”, he said, feeding into government decisions at the highest level.

Morrison has stacked the NCCC with executives and lobbyists from gas and mining.

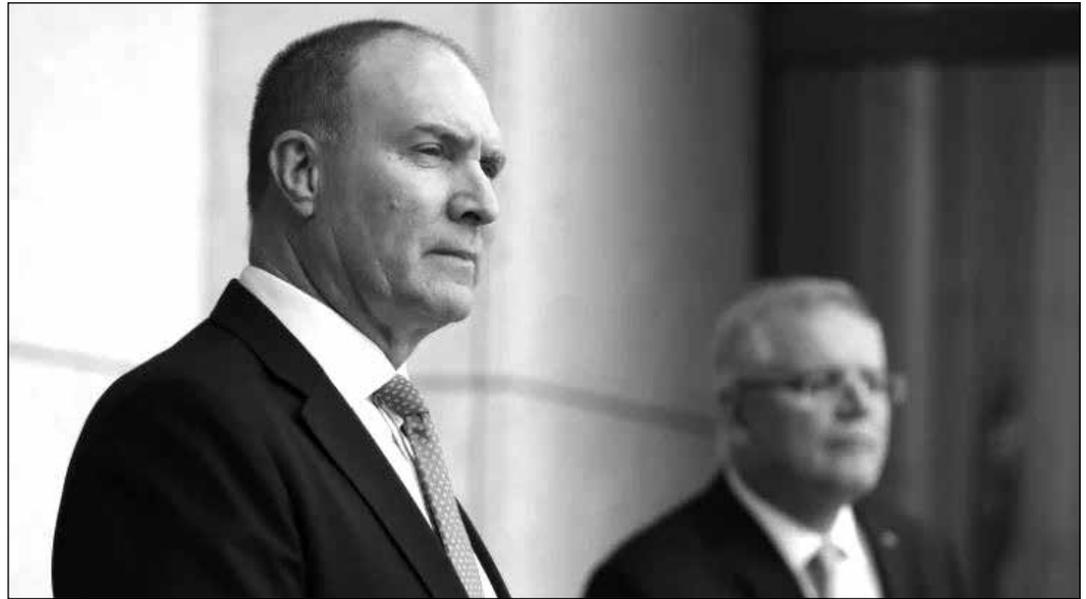
Andrew Liveris is a board member of Saudi Aramco which is lobbying to exploit gas reserves in the Beetaloo Basin. And James Fazzino is a board member of APA Group which is lobbying to build a network of new gas pipelines. NCCC chair Neville Power is a former CEO of Fortescue Metals Group with shares worth \$16 million.

As part of its move to being an advisory board the NCCC has been expanded and now includes former banking executive Mike Hirst and Transurban executive Samantha Hogg, as well as former union boss turned business consultant Paul Howes.

Power has repeatedly told the media the immediate agenda of the NCCC is to ensure businesses stay open. The results have been deadly.

In Victoria the virus spread from poorly trained low paid security guards at quarantine hotels to their families in the working-class west and north-west suburbs of Melbourne. Then to abattoirs, aged care facilities, and food distribution centres located nearby. Workers in these sectors are often causal with no sick leave entitlements.

According to Health Services Union national secretary Lloyd Williams “In every state and in every major outbreak in residential aged care the same workplace issues have been at play. People work across



**Above: COVID-19 Commission Chair Nev Power with Scott Morrison**

multiple sites and make the decision to go to work sometimes with minor symptoms because they’re trying to subsidise what is not a living wage.”

Labor and the unions are calling for a national scheme of paid pandemic leave to allow any worker to stay home if they have symptoms. Australian Council of Trade Unions secretary Sally McManus says, “paid pandemic leave costs are a drop in the ocean compared to ongoing lockdowns.”

But Morrison has refused. It has taken months for his government to offer a miserable one-off \$1500 “disaster payment” for workers having to quarantine without paid leave. But it is only available in Victoria and the application process is difficult.

## Pro-business plans

Morrison’s NCCC is part of a pro-business offensive that includes company tax cuts and slashing workers’ pay and conditions. Treasurer Josh Frydenberg has pointed to Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan arguing economic recovery requires workplace deregulation. This means further casualisation and the stripping of awards.

The offensive also includes winding back climate and renewables policies, suspending environmental protections, and fast-tracking fossil fuel projects. Energy Minister Angus Taylor says “I like to think of the other side of COVID-19 as being a gas-fired recovery”.

He has been busy redirecting hundreds of millions of dollars from renewable energy towards propping

up aging coal-fired electricity generators and bankrolling unproven carbon capture and storage to enable more fossil fuel production.

The gas industry has a history of marketing itself as a clean and safe alternative to other fossil fuels. But although gas produces less carbon emissions than coal it still causes global heating. Morrison has tried to spin gas as a transition fuel between coal and renewables. But the billions of dollars being spent on gas are long term investments intended to maximise profits rather than transition to a carbon free economy.

Morrison’s focus on keeping businesses open and profits flowing has gone hand in hand with a hysterical campaign of social distance shaming, racist scapegoating, lockdowns, curfews, and the criminalisation of daily life.

For months cops have tried, and failed, to link black lives matter protests with COVID-19 outbreaks. This was science not luck. The virus is spread when people touch infected surfaces or remain in confined spaces for extended periods of time—like in workplaces. Neither occurs on a protest.

A year ago 300,000 people attended dozens of rallies against climate change including a magnificent 100,000 in Melbourne and 80,000 in Sydney. Striking school students united with trade union members to demand an end to fossil fuel production and a just transition to green jobs. The same politics and action are required now to beat back Morrison, the NCCC, and their rotten system.

**Morrison’s NCCC is part of a pro-business offensive that includes company tax cuts and slashing workers’ pay and conditions**

## Woolies workers win big on permanency and pay, but more to be gained

By Adam Adelpour

AFTER ALMOST two weeks outside the gates, members of the United Workers Union at Woolies' Wyong distribution centre in NSW have won big pay rises and an increase in permanent jobs. But their demands on equal pay rates with other Woolies' workers and picking rates are still to be won.

Their stand shows that, even as many workers face pay cuts due to the COVID-19 crisis, strike action can win. "We hope what we did inspires other workers to stand up", Kayla, one of the workers, told *Solidarity*.

Most of the 550 workers will receive an 11.2 per cent pay rise over three years, while around 200 of them classified as "level 2" with six years' service will get 17.4 per cent over the period.

There is also a big improvement on casualisation, with 80 per cent of jobs guaranteed to be permanent positions.

This is an important victory, given that during some peak periods the centre has employed close to 50 per cent casual workers.

Many workers have been kept on casual contracts for years and subjected to humiliating performance checks to justify refusing them permanent contracts. Shift times have also been changed without notice.

Workers took their first 24 hour strike on Friday 24 July, before Woolworths locked them out for five days. They stayed on strike for a further day before Woolworths stormed out of negotiations and imposed an indefinite lockout lasting a week. The workers returned to work on 6 August after forcing a much-improved offer.

Woolworths has profited from an unprecedented sales boom as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"When COVID hit we got flattened. We had to work overtime. People were burning out from the amount of work here." Michael, one of the workers, told *Solidarity*. "Now, you'd think we'd maybe get a reward for that. People busted their guts through COVID. Our reward is we got locked out."

### Demands

The workers went into bargaining demanding equal pay with other Woolies' centres and a reduction in work speeds. Workers at the centre were



**Above: Workers on the picket line outside the distribution centre in Wyong**

paid 16 per cent less than distribution workers in Sydney and elsewhere in NSW.

The pay increases won from Woolworths are significant, but still fall short of the full demand. And their demand for an end to pick rates also hasn't been met.

Workers at the centre often do 10-12 hour shifts, lifting tens of thousands of tons of boxes. Management monitoring and pressure over work speed is deeply resented.

Kayla, one of the picketers during the dispute, told *Solidarity* that following the return to work, there were, "a lot of mixed feelings, but I'd say the majority thought it was a win."

"Everyone thinks the conditions we got are wins, the permanent to casual ratio and the pay level 2 to 3."

But an important reckoning still remains to be had with Woolies.

Workers narrowly rejected the offer in a vote on 6 August, held by secret ballot rather than a show of hands.

But officials and delegates successfully argued that 200 absent workers who didn't cast votes should be counted as endorsing a return to work. The steamrolling of the majority vote was questioned by some members.

Another key demand that hasn't been met is to limit the EBA a two year agreement.

This would ensure bargaining at the Minchinbury and Wyong distribution centres line up when the agreements expire, to prevent one centre being used to undercut the other's strike.

Workers are waiting for the result of a second ballot on whether to accept the agreement as we went to press.

If Wyong workers took a stand to demand a two-year deal, it would mean workers at both Minchinbury and Wyong could strike together next time to win the common conditions for all Woolies workers.

During the dispute Woolies took full advantage of the fact it was able to shift orders from Wyong to its other distribution centres, including the Minchinbury centre in Sydney, to keep its stores stocked.

Wyong workers protested at Woolies' Sydney HQ as well as outside the Minchinbury centre on 3 August.

Crippling Woolies' stores in the Central Coast area requires solidarity action at the other distribution centres to refuse to process orders re-directed from Wyong during strike action.

This would have forced the bosses to concede more, faster.

As the Morrison government and bosses try to make workers pay for the COVID-19 crisis, the Wyong workers' action and determination has been an example for workers everywhere.

**Crippling Woolies requires solidarity action at other centres to refuse to process orders re-directed during strikes**

# Explosion triggers new uprising in Lebanon

“WE HAVE been fighting the system for a long time, now our anger has overflowed, it has gone beyond everything normal because the explosion at the harbour means we have to change everything.”

“On Saturday we occupied the foreign ministry, the economy ministry, the energy ministry and the Association of Banks. The banking place we set on fire.”

“Some of our revolutionaries brought a large crane to take apart a barricade set up to defend parliament.”

Those are the words of Rasha in Beirut, Lebanon. He is one of the many thousands of protesters who defied tear gas, mass arrests and beatings to demand the fall of the government and the political system.

Their protests followed a shattering explosion in the city’s port area that killed over 150 people.

Around 2750 tons of highly explosive ammonium nitrate had been stored in the port for more than six years. Lebanese customs officials wrote letters to the courts at least six times from 2014 to 2017, seeking guidance on how to dispose of the material. But no action was taken.

As recently as six months ago, officials inspecting the consignment warned that if it were not moved it would “blow up all of Beirut”.

And on Tuesday 4 August it ignited.

“The explosion is really a massacre,” Rasha said. “It cannot be said to be an accident.”

“It is a symbol, and a result, of the corruption of the people in the government, and of a political regime that works for the powerful but not the poor.”

The protests took place across large areas of the city centre, with people hurling down security force barricades and chanting “Revolution! Revolution!”

Hundreds of people took over the foreign ministry building for several hours. They hung red banners with a raised fist from the building, which had been damaged in the blast, and proclaimed Beirut a “disarmed” city.

Thousands of people assembled in the central Martyrs’ Square. They erected gallows and conducted ceremonial hangings of effigies of politicians including president Michel Aoun, Nabih Berri, the speaker of parliament and Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah.



**Above: Mass protests calling for revolution took to the streets of Lebanon again following the disaster**

“Murdered, not martyred,” read one sign held by a demonstrator. “Leave, you garbage,” said another.

## Dignity

The *New York Times* newspaper reported, “The protesters chanted ‘the people want the fall of the regime,’ and held posters saying ‘leave, you are all killer’. ‘We want a future with dignity, we don’t want the blood of the victims of the explosion wasted,’ said Rose Sirour, one of the demonstrators.”

“No one in the streets set any store by government promises to hold those responsible to account.”

Lebanon was already in crisis before the blast.

The economy is in freefall, banks have refused to give depositors access to their money, and unemployment and inflation have soared.

The number of coronavirus cases reported daily was accelerating and many parts of the country were suffering from lengthy power cuts.

“Revolution” was the slogan of last October’s protests in Lebanon that demanded an end to inequality, corruption and the sectarian political system.

The slogans on Beirut’s streets now are similar to the ones that rang across the Middle East almost a decade ago and saw the fall of regimes in Tunisia and Egypt.

The scale of the protests now has forced Prime Minister Hassan Diab to say he will hold early elections.

Diab said he would introduce a law calling for early elections and said he would remain in government for two months until major parties can reach an agreement.

The entire government resigned.

But for many protesters that is not enough. “We do not want just some changing of chairs among the big ones as they are called,” says Rasha. “These criminals blew up our homes and took away our hopes.”

Sami Atallah, director of the Lebanese Center for Policy Studies, said, “This clientelistic and sectarian system breeds corruption and incompetence,” adding that Lebanon’s old guard was “trying to throw the blame on this government and let it take the fall so they distract the blame from them or their cronies”.

Politicians who have appeared in public, including former prime minister Saad Hariri, have been attacked. Angry demonstrators told Hariri, “Don’t you even think of returning to power.”

Justice Minister Marie-Claude Najm was followed through the streets of Beirut’s Gemmayzeh neighbourhood. Protesters threw water bottles at the minister.

Protesters are also angry at the police and army for their brutal treatment of those taking to the streets.

“The crisis in Lebanon is so deep that only change from top to bottom has a chance of saving us,” says Rasha.

**Socialist Worker UK**

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**The economy is in freefall, and unemployment and inflation have soared**

# Fighting the second wave: keeping the virus under control

By James Supple

MELBOURNE'S COVID outbreak has proven how easily the virus can resurface, and begin spreading on a large scale.

Many countries worldwide are facing either a second wave, or a similar resurgence in infections. Even countries that did manage to control the virus initially, such as South Korea, Singapore, New Zealand and Vietnam, have seen new outbreaks.

South Korea officially announced a second wave of infections in late June, after daily cases had declined to close to zero.

It began when an asymptomatic person partied across five nightclubs in the Itaewon area of Seoul the previous month, spreading the virus.

South Korea's response has been based on meticulous contact tracing. It tracked down 46,000 people who had been in contact with anyone in the nightclubs and tested them all. In total 160 infections were found.

Alarm spread after a warehouse worker, in a workplace with 4000 other people, was confirmed as infected.

But 9000 of his co-workers, family members and contacts were identified and tested, halting the infections after a week.

While there was a localised shutdown of nightclubs in Seoul, the rest of the city was not locked down.

Contact tracing is organised by a team of 130 trained epidemiologists who were in place before COVID-19 emerged, with hundreds of others recruited during the crisis.

Health authorities interviewed anyone infected, and used mobile phone GPS data, CCTV footage and even credit card logs to track where they had been. Handing such sweeping surveillance powers to the state has caused serious privacy problems. There was a disgusting homophobic backlash after it was revealed that some of the nightclub infections took place in gay bars.

But South Korea's approach has shown the primary importance of contact tracing in controlling the pandemic. After reaching a peak of 113 cases nationwide on 24 July, daily tallies were brought down to around 30 or 40 a day. But the country now faces another outbreak centred on the Sarang Jeil church, with cases again reaching around 300 a day.

A much larger outbreak in February, which reached a peak of 909



**Above: South Korea is facing a third increase in infections after successfully battling previous waves**

cases discovered in one day, was successfully contained.

Singapore was also initially successful in containing the virus. But it suffered a major outbreak in April amongst migrant workers. Exploitation and appalling living conditions were responsible.

Around 320,000 migrant workers in the city-state live crammed into overcrowded dormitories. Some were moved to alternative accommodation, but thousands were simply locked in under quarantine, much like the treatment of Melbourne's public housing towers.

As in Melbourne, this should have been dealt with through rehousing people in safe, better quality housing, and providing adequate meals and medical care during quarantine.

But a systematic program of testing all the residents, and isolating those infected or in close contact with them, has been able to control the outbreak.

There has been a steady decline since the peak of 1426 cases on one day in April. Outside the quarantined dormitories there are now only one or two cases a day being found in the community.

## Outbreaks

Parts of Europe, such as France and Spain, have also seen particularly severe "second waves". But their situation is quite different to Australia's. The virus was spreading out of control in much of Western Europe in March and April, until lockdowns slowed down transmission. The virus was never even close to being suppressed

to manageable levels. At Spain's lowest point it was still recording around 200 new cases a day. That meant infections just picked up again after the lockdown ended.

Adequate testing and tracing regimes able to keep the virus in check after the lockdown ended were not put in place.

The most any country can achieve is substantial suppression. There is no realistic prospect of eliminating the virus anywhere. New Zealand went 102 days without a case before the emergence of a cluster that has grown to nearly 100 people.

Vietnam went 99 days without cases, only to have a cluster emerge in the tourist city of Da Nang in late July. It has now produced more than 500 cases. Hong Kong, which was praised early on, now faces an outbreak triggered by exemptions authorities granted to hotel quarantining.

The reason there has been so much reliance on lockdowns globally is that most governments failed to properly prepare a public health response to the pandemic. Lockdowns are a last resort to try to limit community transmission.

Observing most social distancing measures is sensible. But the measures imposed by governments are always political. They have one rule for sports stadiums and another for protests for example.

And the experience so far shows that the main emphasis has to be on funding a health system capable of efficient testing and tracing to keep the virus under control.

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**South Korea's approach has shown the primary importance of contact tracing in controlling the pandemic**

# THE POLITICS OF LOCKDOWNS

## AND THE HEALTH FAILURE OVER COVID-19

We should not promote lockdowns as a response to COVID-19. If governments had taken adequate health measures, they would not be necessary

IN THE face of a COVID-19 surge in July, Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews declared a “state of disaster” and imposed a Stage 4 Lockdown, including an 8pm curfew and five kilometre limit on travel.

Lockdowns have been the main response of governments globally to COVID-19. This is not because they are necessary, but because most governments failed to properly prepare for a pandemic—and because capitalism puts maintaining profits above all else.

### The second wave

Victoria’s second wave is a product of a neo-liberal, casualised economy.

It was sparked by infection leaking from the quarantine hotels for returned travellers.

In Victoria the government used private security firms, with a poorly-trained, poorly-paid, sub-contracted casual workforce, with inadequate PPE, working 12 hour shifts, and often across more than one location. In some cases staff were not even told they were working with positive cases.

Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews has admitted that 80 per cent of cases have been spreading in workplaces, and that some people have been forced to work with symptoms because otherwise they will not have an income.

COVID-19 is spreading where there are large casual workforces that require work at close quarters for prolonged periods, like abattoirs and aged care homes.

Notably there are over 1000 cases of COVID-19 in private aged care homes, but only five in public ones. Public aged care homes have legislated nurse to patient ratios of 1 to 15 (with closer to 1 to 100 in private homes) and far fewer casual workers.

Aged care workers have only now been granted pandemic leave. Rather than celebrate this, Coalition Industri-

al Relations Minister Christian Porter complained it, “represents a cost imposed on businesses at a time when they can least afford that”.

Premier Andrews has claimed that the debate about insecure work can wait for another time. It can’t—failing to act will make it harder to control the virus and prevent future outbreaks.

His \$1500 payment for a four-night’s quarantine after a positive test, recognises the problem, but doesn’t solve it.

It is hard to access, with long delays, and is too low to cover lost wages completely. It also doesn’t stop bosses cutting shifts, or laying off workers who don’t come in because they are sick.

Imposing a lockdown does not solve any of these fundamental issues that have produced the surge in COVID-19 in Victoria.

### The lockdown response

The position of the hard right, for instance, Trump in the US, Bolsonaro in Brazil, Modi in India, has been to dismiss the seriousness of the virus, and insist that the economy comes first, and lockdown is to be avoided.

As the crisis in the US was beginning in March, Trump exclaimed, “Let’s lift the lockdown and pack the churches for Easter!” and talked of “liberating” states from lockdown.

The result is that the US leads the world in infections and deaths, with Brazil and India not far behind. There are now almost six million cases in the US and over 180,000 deaths.

There has been a reflexive response on the left to be enthusiastically and uncritically in favour of lockdowns. In Australia this has been the position of the ALP, the Greens, many union officials, NGOs and some of the far left.

Shutting things down further, harder and faster, from schools to

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**The terms of the lockdowns are set by those who run the system, whose primary concern is to keep capitalism intact**

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non-essential businesses, has been seen as taking an even more left-wing position.

This is a mistake. Whilst it should be self-evident that lining up with the right is madness, to simply be a cheer squad for lockdown is no alternative.

Lockdowns are a sign of failure. They are imposed because of governments’ lack of preparation, previous cuts to health care, and their complete opposition to radically restructuring society in the manner needed.

For instance there were only 14 contract tracing staff in Victoria in March. The state government’s outbreak squad visited the public housing towers in North Melbourne and Flemington for the first time in July, only one day before they faced “hard lockdown”. It took over two weeks to test the towers.

Testing results in Melbourne have taken over three days to come back. There has been insufficient capacity to test everyone at many schools and aged care homes with positive cases.

A proper response would centre on mass testing, to allow contract tracing and quarantine of known cases, alongside nationalised and properly funded health care and aged care, adequate provision of personal protective equipment (PPE), permanent jobs with paid pandemic leave, workplace redesign for safe work, and safe public transport.

Lockdowns are very blunt instruments. They may be needed when the virus is out of control but the terms of the lockdowns are set by those who run the system, whose primary concern is to keep capitalism intact.

Lockdowns work by attempting to limit the spread of the virus by reducing physical contact between groups of people. But it is always a political choice about what is actually locked down and what restrictions are imposed.

No lockdown can completely shut

workplaces, since activities like health care, aged care and food production are necessary to sustaining life.

This means some of the primary sites of spread in Victoria, such as abattoirs and aged care, have continued operating even under Stage 4 restrictions.

More importantly, lockdowns are not a long-term solution. Unless the necessary measures, in particular mass testing and tracing, are put in place, cases will eventually spread again when the lockdown is eased.

This has been acknowledged by the World Health Organisation, which argues:

“The prevention of transmission is best achieved by identifying suspect cases as quickly as possible, testing, and isolating infectious cases. In addition, it is critical to identify all close contacts of infected people so that they can be quarantined to limit onward spread and break chains of transmission.”

As *The Economist* has pointed out, “In the early days of the pandemic, almost all countries tried to ‘test, trace and isolate’ those infected in an effort to quarantine them and break chains of transmission.

“But many governments, such as Britain’s, abandoned this approach when case numbers grew rapidly and they did not have enough testing capacity and staff to do the job. Panicked countries in Europe and elsewhere imposed national lockdowns in an effort to prevent hospitals from becoming overwhelmed.”

“But the places that did best in the first months of the pandemic”, they add, “are those that never stopped contact-tracing” including, “South Korea, Denmark, Germany, Vietnam, Uruguay and Rwanda.”

### Authoritarian

As with lockdowns everywhere, Victoria’s lockdown has been put in place using authoritarian measures that strengthen the state and are in general directed at individual workers, with threats of massive fines, public shaming, or even jail.

The lockdown of the nine public housing towers is a good example. Five hundred police were used to seal residents in, with police on every floor, creating the very “cruise ship-like” conditions authorities claimed they were dealing with. The basic needs of residents, from food to medicine, were an afterthought.

Police are entirely the wrong response for a health crisis. Victoria



**Above: Victoria’s lockdown was a result of the failure of government health measures**

has handed out more than three times as many fines as any other state, but it did not stop the second wave.

It is obvious that we are not “all in it together”. The impact of lockdowns are determined by class divisions, and overwhelmingly falls on the working class. Domestic violence and mental distress has increased.

It is much easier to lockdown in a Toorak mansion, than in overcrowded public housing.

Workers have also borne the brunt of the economic consequences through sackings and lost wages.

As the second wave has spread, the Victorian government has tried to blame ordinary people for its own failures. Lockdown inevitably and intentionally leads to finger pointing about people who breach it.

The Victorian Labor government was happy to spread stories about security guards sharing lighters or sleeping with guests, whilst refusing to answer questions about its responsibility for the disaster at the quarantine hotels.

Daily there are media stories of outrage about handfuls of people in a KFC, or holding a party.

The spread of COVID-19 from Victoria into NSW was a result of a freight company employee travelling for work, but the media has focused instead on two women returning to Queensland who failed to disclose they had been in Victoria.

The racist shaming of these women will only lead to a wider reluctance to report symptoms to authorities. There has been no shaming or

penalties for the bosses of aged care, abattoirs or security firms.

### Lockdown and protest

Support for lockdown has strengthened the state’s power to shut down protest. It has also resulted in a reluctance to protest within union and social movements.

The crackdown on protest has been deliberate and systemic. There has been a concerted campaign to blame Black Lives Matter protests for the second wave, for instance by federal Health Minister Greg Hunt, and NSW Police Commissioner Mick Fuller.

Yet there is no evidence of any transmission occurring at a protest in Australia.

From car convoys to socially-distanced protest or pickets, the risk of spreading COVID-19 is small. Not protesting simply leaves us at the whim of government and employers, unable to respond to the greater COVID-19 failures that leave aged care, workplaces, public housing, and refugees vulnerable.

We need protests and strikes to fight for the measures that the state and business refuse to implement or pay for to deal with the pandemic. Protest is essential.

The pandemic has exposed the priorities of capitalism. Millions of lives are at risk because the system, and our rulers, put profit ahead of health and human needs.

We need to fight to mobilise all the social resources necessary to protect health, and maintain workers’ living standards in the face of the crisis.

# US-CHINA RIVALRY CREATING A DANGEROUS WORLD

**Phil Griffiths** looks at the escalating imperialist tensions between the US and China

WE ARE now faced with perhaps the most dangerous situation in the world since 1945.

The most powerful military in the world has declared its intention to destroy the government of its main rival. In pursuit of that objective, it is sending battle fleets to the South China Sea to challenge Chinese influence and escalate military tensions.

This is all backed up by one of the most shamelessly hypocritical propaganda campaigns ever waged.

The government that gave itself the right to assassinate inconvenient foreign leaders (Mossadeq of Iran, Ngo Dinh Diem of Vietnam, Trujillo of the Dominican Republic, Suleimani of Iran and many others), not to mention the many attempts it botched, condemns Chinese election meddling.

The government that invaded Iraq against all the tenets of international law, that has imposed sanctions on judges of the International Criminal Court in order to frustrate its attempts to investigate war crimes in Palestine, demands China obey international law.

But American hypocrisy is just the sideshow; it's the ramped-up military and economic rivalry that threatens our very survival.

How are we to understand it?

The defeat of the Soviet Union in the Cold War left the United States as the sole superpower, a position it resolved to maintain. Its National Security Strategy of 2002 explicitly stated that its "forces will be strong enough to dissuade potential adversaries from pursuing a military build-up in hopes of surpassing, or equaling, the power of the United States."

Even then, hawks in the American Establishment publicly raged against China's growing power.

Since then, China's economy has grown at a rate, rarely equaled in human history. American economic dominance has dramatically declined.

In 2001, when China joined

the World Trade Organisation, the American economy was eight times as big as China's. In 2019, it was just 50 per cent bigger, based on official exchange rates.

If you believe that China's exchange rate is held down by the government (a favourite Trump complaint), the comparison is even more disturbing for US bosses. The purchasing power of China's economy is now 30 per cent more than America's.

And with the criminal lunacy of Trump's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, that gap has grown rapidly in 2020.

While American manufacturers bleat about being out-competed by China, in Washington, China's economic development is a strategic problem, a military issue.

This "threat" was well summed up by John Mearsheimer, one of the world's best-known international relations academics and a conservative advocate for American dominance. In his 2014 book, *The tragedy of great power politics*, he wrote

China's economic growth is a strategic threat, irrespective of what the Chinese government or military actually do; because of the potential threat involved.

If China continues its striking economic growth over the next few decades, it is likely to end up in an intense security competition with the United States and its neighbours... [and] not just intense security competition but... also a serious chance of war between China and the United States.

Forget decades; that's the situation we confront today.

It was also the situation the world faced in 1914, when the great powers went to war to protect and expand their markets, and prevent their rivals gaining domination.

The unspeakable horror of that

.....  
**In Washington, China's economic development is a strategic problem, a military issue**  
.....

bloodbath created utter despair in society. Tens of millions demanded answers: how could this nightmare have happened?

## Understanding imperialism

The most powerful answer came from the Russian revolutionary socialist, Nikolai Bukharin, who argued that it was precisely the explosive growth of capitalist commodity production and finance that drove businesses to seek out raw materials and markets globally. But to secure their investments and contracts, they sought the protection of a strong military.

And the winners were the group of states who could together produce the most guns, the most bombs, the most warships.

Britain had the strongest military and the biggest empire. Germany's industries became progressively more sophisticated and productive, but they lacked the markets and reliable raw materials that empire had given their British competitors. The great power with a small empire wanted the world redivided at the expense of the great power with the big empire.

Bukharin saw modern (20th century) imperialism as the merger of the economic and military rivalry between great powers. Governments had an interest in the struggle of their own great corporations in the global economy. Germany was already protectionist; "free trade" Britain followed its lead.

In other words, the dynamic of ruthless competition that had long characterised the capitalist economy now took hold in the rivalry between states. The First World War was a war of capitalist competition and a product of the capitalist system.

With the rise of globalisation, many on the left dismissed the Marxist theory of imperialism as outdated. Rather than use its economic and military power to keep them down, American imperialism had assisted

the economic recovery of its former enemies, Germany and Japan.

In the 1990s, the World Trade Organisation set up rules for trade and commercial integration and a system for settling disputes. Trade and commercial disputes between states were to be “depoliticised”. But trade is always political, and American military and economic dominance was the precondition for the WTO.

American capitalists and the American state believed that while intensified global competition (central to the neo-liberal agenda) would benefit all the rich, advanced, western economies, it would benefit them the most.

They were only half-right. While American capitalists were big winners from globalisation, Chinese bosses and the Chinese state won far, far more.

China now produces half of all the steel in the world; the US less than 10 per cent. Two years ago, China produced 28.4 per cent of the world’s manufactured goods by value, compared with 16.6 per cent in the US. And as we have found out in the pandemic, China is the world’s producer of face masks and a lot of the world’s medical equipment.

Chinese bosses have done this by the most ruthless exploitation of the displaced rural poor, driven into massive new cities searching for work.

Just as in 1914, the dominant military power with the biggest empire faces a new rival with a dynamic economy and a much larger population. Just as in 1914, the logic of that challenge is war.

Alarmist? Even Kevin Rudd has started warning about the real possibility of a shooting war, most recently in a widely-read article in America’s *Foreign Affairs* magazine.

The American ruling class is particularly disturbed by the dramatic progress China’s industries have made in high technology. Its high-speed rail system (something way beyond the capacity of the Australian government) is bigger than all others in the world put together, and China is now designing its own next-generation trains.

Its people have been using smartphone payments for half a decade, way in advance of the US or Europe. And its facial recognition technology is notorious.

Made in China 2025 is a strategy aimed at gaining global ascendancy in ten areas of high tech production, including robotics, autonomous and electric vehicles, artificial intelligence, aviation, green energy and more.

Even if that strategy succeeds, it will still be a long way behind the



US and European industries, but it is catching up fast.

Alongside its economic rise, China’s rulers have launched an ambitious strategy, the Belt and Road initiative, to expand their own areas of influence. Washington is hysterical.

People outside the US can sometimes be mesmerised by the sheer narcissism of Trump; but on this issue he has largely got the support of the Democrats and much of the wider Establishment.

Scott Morrison, like Malcolm Turnbull, has marched largely in lock-step with Washington; and led the way with the ban on Huawei. Despite Australian companies’ economic dependence on Chinese markets, Australia’s rulers depend far more on US and British capitalists for investment and finance, and have long seen their strategic interests in the region as tied up with US dominance.

A measure of how serious the situation is can be gathered by the way Morrison introduced the government’s new Defence Strategic update, describing the current situation as just like the 1930s and boasting of the massive increase in money for weapons. Or the way *The Australian* newspaper greeted the update: “Australia must be up for conventional war” was the headline on their report.

A series of articles went on to demand even more money for the military: “If we’re sliding towards conflict then the money must flow”; “Australia’s best defence is a good offence as China flexes muscles in region”; “Pax Americana is still our best hope”; “Scott Morrison is right: we need to defend ourselves”.

We do need to defend ourselves; from Scott Morrison and the nasty bosses he rules for.

**Above: US military power still far surpasses that of rivals like China**

In 1915, in the midst of despair that workers were killing each other to advance the imperial ambitions of their exploiters and oppressors, socialists, argued that the way out from war was for ordinary people to turn against their bosses and their generals.

It was no pipedream. In the middle of the war, Australian workers twice voted against conscription, and launched one of the biggest strikes in our history. A mutiny by German sailors and an uprising by German workers unexpectedly ended the war in November 1918.

Today, nothing fundamental has changed. The Chinese regime is nasty, brutal and ruthless. But its global power is still dwarfed by that of American imperialism, and it’s American imperialism our government wants us to fight to defend.

Millions of ordinary Australians have long distrusted American imperialism. The Iraq War in 2003 was met by some of the largest demonstrations in our history, along with massive protests in the US and around the world.

That movement failed because it lacked sufficient determination to fight on; and too few understood the roots of American imperialism in the capitalist system.

Today, in the wake of the Global Financial Crisis there is enormously greater anger at the misery imposed by capitalism, especially in the US.

The inspiring Black Lives Matter movement, the growing resistance to vicious employers in the US, are all grounds on which an anti-war, anti-imperialist movement can be built there.

Our interests too lie in tearing down American imperialism and stopping the military build-up of our rulers; along with the rotten system that spawned them.

# HIROSHIMA 75 YEARS ON NUCLEAR ATTACK DONE TO PROVE US POWER

The atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki was not necessary to end the Second World War, it was designed to establish US control of the world, writes **Matilda Fay**

THE US'S use of nuclear weapons on Hiroshima and Nagasaki is one of the greatest war crimes in history. The cities were flattened. Within a few months, around 140,000 people died in Hiroshima and around 80,000 in Nagasaki, with about half those deaths on the first day.

But less well remembered is the US strategy behind the bombings. Since 1945 the US ruling class has maintained a farce that the use of nuclear weapons was the final blow that ended the war, forcing Japan to surrender and saving hundreds of thousands of lives that could have been lost in combat.

Otherwise, the US claimed, a bloody ground invasion of Japan would have been necessary to force its surrender.

US President Harry Truman claimed in 1945, "We have used the bomb in order to shorten the agony of war, in order to save thousands and thousands of young Americans." This narrative has served to justify monstrosities committed for the sake of imperialist interest.

In reality, Japan was already defeated before the bomb was dropped.

Its surrender was imminent. But as the Second World War was drawing to a close, with Germany defeated, the US was jostling with Russia for power.

It needed to demonstrate its military might, and the atomic bombs were a grotesque means to this end.

This August marks 75 years since the bombings, and the threat of nuclear weapons persists.

There are 13,000 nuclear warheads across the world, held by nine different nations.

This continued threat speaks to the absurd logic of global capitalism. Despite the consequences,

competing imperialist powers refuse to relinquish their nuclear arsenals, and continue to expand their nuclear capabilities.

The events that took place at Hiroshima and Nagasaki are a tragic reminder of capitalism's destructive force.

## The impact

On the morning of 6 August the US dropped the first atom bomb on Hiroshima.

Sixty per cent of the city was wiped out instantly, first by the blast itself and by the shockwave and firestorms that followed within seconds. Within 45 minutes a black rain began to fall—a mixture of nuclear fallout and the fire and smoke from the firestorms. Those who survived the initial blast were drenched in radioactive material.

Three days later, the US dropped a second atom bomb on Nagasaki.

The particularly horrific impact of nuclear weapons can't be overstated. American journalist John Hersey reported on the experience of one survivor, Reverend Kiyoshi Tanimoto:

"Mr. Tanimoto found about twenty men and women on the sandspit... he realized that they were too weak to lift themselves. He reached down and took a woman by the hands, but her skin slipped off in huge, glove-like pieces."

These scenes were so sickening that in the years after the bombings, the US censored photos taken of civilians in the aftermath. As information about radiation sickness began to emerge, US officials went to great lengths to suppress it.

Visiting Hiroshima just weeks after the bomb was dropped, Australian journalist Wilfred Burchett penned what he described as a "warning to the

.....  
**Truman wrote in his private journal that "the bomb might well put us in a position to dictate our own terms at the end of war"**

world".

He wrote of a mysterious "atomic plague" that was causing the death toll to climb:

"Many people had suffered only a slight cut from a falling splinter of brick or steel. They should have recovered quickly. But they did not. They developed an acute sickness. Their gums began to bleed. And then they vomited blood. And finally they died."

For months afterwards, survivors of the initial blast continued to fall ill and die of radiation sickness. They suffered bleeding, hair loss, purple spots on the skin, and extreme pain. Rates of cancers remain elevated among survivors to this day.

## Ending the war?

Brutal as the bombings at Hiroshima and Nagasaki were, this brutality was not isolated. Japan had been thoroughly beaten on every front.

The atomic bombs came after a relentless campaign of air raids on urban areas, indiscriminately bombing civilians.

In March 1945, Tokyo was fire-bombed in the most destructive air raid of the war so far. The city was burned, leaving over 80,000 dead and major damage to munitions production.

In the summer of 1945 alone, the US carried out 66 air raids with non-nuclear bombs. Every city that was bombed was at least partially destroyed.

Estimates point to 1.7 million people made homeless, 300,000 killed, and 750,000 wounded.

The bombing had shattered Japanese war production, destroying 600 major factories and practically eliminating its capacity to produce an airforce.

This assault was compounded by the loss of Japanese shipping routes. US submarines disrupted supply of food and munitions, creating scarcity issues, with prices of food and consumer goods soaring.

The US knew that surrender was imminent.

Admiral William Leahy, the US military Chief of Staff, later revealed, “By the beginning of September [1944], Japan was almost completely defeated through a practically complete sea and air blockade.”

Japanese codes had also been broken, allowing US President Truman to read all important Japanese cables. He knew that Japan had continually pleaded with Russia, which was not yet at war with Japan, to help negotiate a surrender.

The US Secretary of War Henry Stimson wrote privately on 6 June 1945:

“I was a little fearful that before we could get ready the Air Force might have Japan so thoroughly bombed out that the new weapon would not have a fair background to show its strength”.

The show of strength Stimson wrote about was directed at Russia.

With Germany defeated, the allied powers were in the midst of dividing up territory.

At the Potsdam conference in July, Truman, Churchill and Stalin convened to carve up the post-war world. Truman dropped hints to Stalin at that conference about “a new weapon of unusual destructive force”.

He wrote in his private journal that, “the bomb might well put us in a position to dictate our own terms at the end of the war.”

The US’s Target Committee, in determining which Japanese city might form an ideal backdrop for this show of force, wrote of the need to make, “the initial use sufficiently spectacular for the importance of the weapon to be internationally recognised”.

On 6 August, and again on 9 August, the people of Hiroshima and Nagasaki became the victims of this ruthless strategy.

The US still wanted Russia to enter the Pacific War by invading Japanese territory in China. But it was also anxious to check Russia’s ability to take control of vast new areas for itself.

Far from ushering in an era of peace, the atomic bomb marked the beginning of the cold war, and the



threat of nuclear conflict that continues to this day.

### **Nuclear threat today**

The estimate at the start of 2020 by the Federation of American Scientists is that there are about 13,400 nuclear warheads worldwide.

About 3720 are deployed with operational forces, and about 1800 are on high alert—ready for use on short notice.

These numbers are significantly lower than at the height of the cold war, but the situation is hardly stable.

Nuclear weapons are now held by China, France, India, Israel, North Korea, Pakistan and the UK, in addition to US and Russia.

And the destructive power of each nuclear warhead is far greater than the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, with the US funding research to “modernise” its nuclear arsenal.

Donald Trump’s presidency has been marked by multiple withdrawals from arms control deals: the Iran nuclear deal in 2018, the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces treaty in 2019, and in 2020 the Open Skies Treaty, which allows for observation flights between Russia and Western nations.

In February next year the New Start treaty between the US and Russia will also expire. This will be the last formal constraint on the two major powers, limiting strategic nuclear

**Above: The aftermath of the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima**

warheads deployed by the US and Russia to 1550 each. It remains to be seen whether Trump will let this treaty lapse.

Of course, intertwined with the threat of nuclear conflict is the threat posed by nuclear testing and accidents.

No amount of nuclear stockpile is safe. And in a world of increasingly unpredictable fires, floods and storms, these arms are more dangerous than ever.

In August 2016, President Obama spoke in Hiroshima of the task of nuclear disarmament, calling for: “a future in which Hiroshima and Nagasaki are known not as the dawn of atomic warfare, but as the start of our own moral awakening.”

But no amount of “moral awakening” can stop the imperialist appetite for nuclear weapons.

Competition drives a continuing arms race that simply cannot not stop to weigh up the risks. The obscene logic of capitalism hurtles humanity and the natural world towards destruction.

The need to rid the world of nuclear weapons seems obvious, but to the system it is impossible.

Much like climate change, nuclear weapons present an existential threat that capitalism simply cannot solve. The fight for a world where the horrors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki are never repeated must be a fight for socialism.



# CLOSE KANGAROO POINT: REFUGEE PROTEST DEFIES BAN

By Ian Rintoul

AROUND 400 protesters defied the strenuous efforts of Queensland's Labor government to ban a pro-refugee demonstration outside the Kangaroo Point hotel, which is holding around 105 refugees transferred from Manus and Nauru for medical treatment.

The protest called immediately for the free movement of the refugees being held in the Kangaroo Point hotel, and for the release of all refugees into the community by Christmas 2020.

In events reminiscent of the days of right-wing premier Joh Bjelke-Petersen, police staged late-night visits on presumed organisers of the planned rally serving Supreme Court notice-of-appearance documents on them.

The Supreme Court action, brought by the Labor Attorney-General, sought to ban individuals from, "attending or encouraging others to attend" the rally that had threatened to sit-in on the Story Bridge.

Despite Labor ministers publicly presenting COVID-19 restrictions as the excuse to ban the rally, a theme beaten up by the media, the court documents did not refer to COVID at all, only "public rights of way" ie blocking traffic.

It was an unprecedented use of the Attorney-General Act and the Supreme Court to issue injunctions in an attempt to stifle the right to protest.

On the day of the rally, despite scores of police being mobilised to intimidate the action, protesters suc-

cessfully took to the streets, marching around the Kangaroo Point hotel-prison. The police did manage to push protesters off the road outside the hotel, where the rally re-assembled to hear more speakers from both inside and outside the hotel.

With the refugees' daily protests on the hotel balcony continuing, the Kangaroo Point hotel will remain a central focus for the campaign in Brisbane.

## Close Christmas Island

Three days after the Kangaroo Point rally, an early morning rally marched through Brisbane streets to protest against the re-opening of the Christmas Island detention centre.

The re-opening of the main detention centre there, the most isolated of Australia's detention prisons, has been universally condemned, including by the island's residents. While the government has said that the Medivac refugees being held in detention and the Kangaroo Point and Mantra hotels will not be transferred to Christmas Island, the government cannot be trusted.

Opening Christmas Island expands the onshore detention regime and gives the government more detention options, when we want all the detention centres closed. The centre has the reputation as being one of the most brutal elements of Australia's detention regime.

Anyone sent there is cut off from family as well as community support. Although many being transferred

**Above: Refugees supporters rally outside the Kangaroo Point hotel in Brisbane on 19 July**

there have pending legal cases, the island's remoteness makes legal support more difficult. There is no wi-fi and the internet cannot be accessed on their phones.

The lack of medical facilities on Christmas Island is notorious. The inquiry into the death of Iranian refugee, Fazel Chegeni Nejad, who was found dead outside the detention centre fence in 2015, made particular recommendations relating to the mental health risks for people in detention on the island.

Meanwhile, despite the increased risk of exposure to COVID-19 associated with moving large numbers of guards and people from one detention centre to another, there have been at least three flights from Yongah Hill to Christmas Island, carrying around 48 people. Two flights from Villawood in Sydney, and one from Brisbane, have transferred people to quarantine in Yongah Hill before they are moved to Christmas Island.

Among those transferred to Christmas Island are refugees whose visas have been cancelled.

The government tries to justify re-opening Christmas Island with the claim that only non-citizens who have committed crimes will be transferred there. But it is a draconian aspect of the Migration Act that allows Border Force to impose extra-judicial punishment on non-citizens, including refugees, even though they have served any sentence imposed by the courts.

Immigration detention is the real crime. Christmas Island and all the detention centres should be closed.

**Among those transferred to Christmas Island are refugees whose visas have been cancelled**

**Solidarity**