BLACK LIVES MATTER
FIGHT RACISM
FIGHT THE RIGHT

UNIONS
Smeaton Grange votes no to non-union deal

TRUMP
Fascism and the danger of the far right

INDIGENOUS
Chicka Dixon—unions and Black rights
Solidarity | ISSUE ONE HUNDRED AND FORTY FOUR JANUARY 2021

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.

SUBSCRIBE TO SOLIDARITY MAGAZINE

Solidarity is published monthly. Make sure you don’t miss an issue—pay by credit card online at www.solidarity.net.au/subscribe or send in this form with a cheque or money order and we will mail you Solidarity each month.

- 5 issues—$15  - One year (12 issues)—$36  - Two years (24 issues)—$65

Name ......................................................... Phone ..............................................................

E-mail ......................................................... Address ..........................................................

................................................................. .................................................................

Cheques payable to Solidarity Publishing. Send to PO Box 375 Strawberry Hills NSW 2012.

SOLIDARITY MEETINGS AND BRANCHES

National
Online meetings via Zoom
6.30pm every Thursday
See fb.com/solius/events for details or contact solidarity@solidarity.net.au

Sydney
For more information contact:
Adam on 0400 351 694
sydney@solidarity.net.au

Melbourne
For more information contact:
Chris on 0403 013 183
melbourne@solidarity.net.au

Perth
For more information contact:
Phil on 0423 696 312

Brisbane
For more information contact:
Mark on 0439 561 196 or brisbane@solidarity.net.au

Canberra
For more information contact:
canberra@solidarity.net.au

CONTACT US

Magazine office
Phone 02 8964 7116
Fax 02 9012 0814

Email
solidarity@solidarity.net.au

Website
www.solidarity.net.au

Facebook
Search for “Solidarity Magazine” or go to fb.com/solius

Twitter
@soli_aus
twitter.com/soli_aus

Solidarity No. 144
January 2020
ISSN 1835-6834
Responsibility for election comment is taken by James Supple, 410 Elizabeth St, Surry Hills NSW 2010.
Printed by El Faro, Newtown NSW.
It is unfortunate that we have seen the events at Capitol hill... similar to the race riots that we saw around the country last year.

Deputy Prime Minister and Nationals leader Michael McCormack thinks the historic Black Lives Matter protests across the US last year were just as bad as pro-Trump rioters in Washington.

I appreciate there are a lot of people out there who are being a bit bleeding heart about this, and who are conjecturing outrage, but they should know that those lives matter too. All lives matter.

Michael McCormack doubles down after his attack on the Black Lives Matter protests in the US.

We are a tolerant country and the most successful multicultural nation in the world.

McCormack responding to the Indian team’s complaints about racist abuse at the cricket.

Australia is a free country. There’s such a thing as freedom of speech in this country and that will continue.

Morrison on Liberal MP Craig Kelly’s claims the Capitol invasion was a “false flag” operation and repeated recycling of bizarre and untrue claims that head lice treatmentivermectin can cure COVID-19.

You know, when those 12 ships turned up in Sydney, it wasn’t a particularly flash day for the people on those vessels either.

Scott Morrison on why he wants to celebrate Australia Day... or something.

We definitely aren’t treated as one, & many sure as hell aren’t free.

Wiradjuri man Joe Williams’ response to Morrison’s one word change to the national anthem.

14 Trump’s Capitol riot shows danger of the far right.

10 Invasion Day rallies right to challenge COVID anti-protest rules.

Indigenous groups fight on against Santos.

Racist policing and imprisonment growing worse.

Invasion Day rallies right to challenge COVID anti-protest rules.

Chicka Dixon—unionist and mentor to a generation of Aboriginal radicals.

18 Ten years since the Egyptian revolution.

Racist injustice never ended—Black Lives Matter.

International

12 Australian war crimes expose reality of Afghan war.

13 Hoarding and profiteering hamper vaccine rollout.

11 Is the world finally acting on climate?
Australian billionaires’ wealth up 50 per cent through pandemic

THE COMBINED wealth of Australia’s billionaires grew by 52.4 per cent in the year to December 2020. The Bloomberg Billionaires Index recorded an initial drop in their wealth when the pandemic hit in March, followed by a surge through the rest of the year.

The super wealthy have done well worldwide, but Australia’s billionaires have done better than even their counterparts in the US and the UK, whose wealth expanded by 25 per cent.

It’s further proof of the jump in inequality due to the pandemic. The COVID crisis has seen almost one million Australians unemployed and hundreds of thousands more lose income and hours. Many have been forced to dip into savings, with more than one million people withdrawing money from superannuation. Cuts to JobSeeker will see it return to pre-pandemic poverty levels in March, and JobKeeper will cut out altogether. But the rich are still doing very well indeed.

US managers bet on workers getting COVID

MANAGERS at a pork plant in Iowa took bets on how many workers would fall sick from COVID-19, after the company ordered them to keep working through the pandemic, a lawsuit claims.

More than 1000 workers at the pork processing factory, one third of its workforce, contracted the virus. At least five died. The company, Tyson, did little to improve safety, keeping workers in cramped conditions for long hours without even supplying PPE, it says.

An upper level manager, John Casey, allegedly told the workers “everyone is going to get it” and “it’s not a big deal”. He even instructed a supervisor on their way to get a test to go back to work, saying that, “We all have symptoms — you have a job to do.”

The factory is Tyson’s largest in the US, with around 2800 workers. The family of one of the workers who died, Isidro Fernandez, is now suing the company for “wilful and wanton disregard for workplace safety.”

Morrison puts millions more into NT gas expansion

THE MORRISON government has announced millions more in funding to expand gas production in the Northern Territory’s Beetaloo Basin. The carbon emissions produced could cancel out all of Australia’s emissions reduction efforts combined.

At the end of December the government announced $50 million in grants for companies to carry out gas exploration in the area.

Then in January it tipped a further $173 million into road infrastructure in the area.

Federal Resources Minister Keith Pitt declared the area was, “expected to be one of the best basins in the world for gas”, claiming it would bring jobs in line with the government’s “gas-fired recovery” plans.

The Beetaloo Basin is one of five gas fields the government wants to begin production. But whether any jobs or development will actually result is far from certain.

There are serious doubts about whether anyone will want to buy the gas. Gas industry analyst Bruce Robertson told The Guardian big companies like ExxonMobil and Origin Energy were struggling to sell existing gas assets, and warned the Northern Territory’s remote location would mean the gas would be expensive.

In 2019 the government’s own Environment and Energy Department warned that the development could torpedo Australia’s efforts at emissions reduction. The NT government estimates it would produce as much as 22 per cent of Australia’s current emissions annually—seven times the emissions of the decommissioned Hazlewood coal-fired power plant.

Ivanka Trump’s security paid $3000 a month for a toilet

US SECRET service agents were forced to pay $3000 a month to rent a toilet after Ivanka Trump and Jared Kushner refused to let them use their own.

The security detail for Trump’s daughter and son in law were restricted from accessing any of the toilets in their six bedroom, six bathroom mansion in Washington.

An initial attempt to install a portaloo outside the house on the footpath was abandoned in the face of complaints in the exclusive suburb of Kalorama.

Efforts to use the toilets provided for security officers on Barack Obama’s nearby property and at Mike Pence’s house some distance away also failed. The solution has been to pay $144,000 to rent a basement studio including a toilet from a neighbour.

Free Julian Assange

A BRITISH court has ruled against the extradition of Wikileaks’ Julian Assange to the US. He faces charges under the Espionage Act which could spell up to 175 years in jail.

The US government wants to punish him for the release in 2010 and after of hundreds of thousands of leaked government documents and diplomatic cables. He is being targeted for exposing the brutality of the US wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, including the shocking “Collateral Murder” video showing a series of killings from a US helicopter in Iraq.

The court decision was made on the grounds that Assange’s mental health condition meant that extradition would be “oppressive”. But the judge rejected his legal team’s arguments that extraditing him would have consequences for all journalists.

This sets a terrible precedent that could see any journalist who encourages a source to share information charged with espionage.

The US would like to punish Assange in the same way it imprisoned and mistreated Chelsea Manning, who leaked many of the files to Wikileaks, for almost seven years before her sentence was commuted.

Scott Morrison has predictably done nothing to pressure the US or British governments, washing his hands of the issue and offering Assange only occasional visits by diplomatic staff. Assange should be freed.

Coalition adviser gets special $190,000 gig

A FORMER Howard government adviser won a $190,000 contract to produce videos for a government agency without a tender process.

Richard Forbes, a former adviser to the Nationals’ Mark Vaile, is being paid to document the recovery of communities hit by last summer’s bushfires. His company got the job after it, “provided an innovative proposal directly to the National Bushfire Recovery Agency”, a spokesperson said. With people who lost their homes still living in caravans, it must be sensitive work.

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

INSIDE THE SYSTEM

-
Morrison wants workers to pay for COVID recovery—let’s make the rich pay

WHEN HIS supporters rioted in Washington, invading the Capitol building, it showed where Trump’s racism, lies and encouragement of white supremacists had led.

But Scott Morrison could not bring himself to condemn Trump for inciting the far right violence. All he could manage was that Trump’s words were “incredibly disappointing”, but it was not for him to “provide lectures to anybody”.

It’s no surprise that he’s defensive. Morrison imitated Trump in dismissing action on climate change, and championing jobs in coal and gas as well as racist attacks against Muslims and refugees.

Trump’s brand of racism and lies is still alive and well inside the Liberal and National parties, with MPs like Craig Kelly and George Christensen openly parroting his conspiracy theories about the US election and COVID-19.

And Morrison is still doubling down on his farcical “gas-fired recovery” from the pandemic, rushing through approvals for Santos’s gas project at Narrabri and announcing over $200 million to encourage fracking in the extensive gas fields of the Beetaloo Basin in the NT.

That would be a disaster. Beetaloo alone would produce enough carbon emissions to cancel out almost all of Australia’s reductions pledged by 2030 under the Paris Agreement.

A climate-focused recovery could provide a serious plan for jobs in renewable energy, public transport, buildings and land management. But Morrison has refused to fund what is needed.

Instead he is pushing ahead with cutbacks to income support, slashing $200 a fortnight from both JobSeeker and JobKeeper payments in January.

Yet the renewed COVID outbreak over December and the New Year shows that the pandemic is far from over. Internationally, there is no V-shaped recovery in sight. With COVID ravaging Europe, and many countries imposing lockdowns, the European economy is predicted to contract by as much as 7 per cent this year—the largest decline since the Second World War.

While Australia is much better placed in regard to COVID, the economic impact is still enormous.

Many companies are using COVID as an excuse to deny workers a pay rise or attack conditions

Interstate border closures along with the temporary lockdown in Sydney’s Northern Beaches hit tourism and retail workers again. Thousands of others were forced into quarantine.

Despite the plan to roll out COVID vaccines beginning in February, Health Department Secretary Brendan Murphy has said that international travel restrictions will remain through most of this year. This will mean severe disruption in tourism as well as universities and education providers reliant on international students.

According to small business ombudsman Kate Carnell, there are still 30 per cent of businesses “in all sorts of trouble”.

Around 1.5 million workers are still on the JobKeeper payment—yet Morrison plans to scrap it completely at the end of March.

At that point, JobSeeker will also drop back to pre-COVID poverty levels of just $40 a day. So workers who lose their jobs when JobKeeper ends will be thrown onto as little as $660 a fortnight.

Workers shouldn’t pay

Instead of extending support to workers, Morrison wants to give bosses more “flexibility” through new industrial relations laws to allow them to cut workers’ pay and conditions. Companies claiming hardship would be able to introduce workplace agreements that undercut minimum Award conditions and force part-time workers to do extra shifts without overtime payments.

Already many companies are using COVID as an excuse to deny workers a pay rise or attack conditions.

After inflation, wages in the private sector rose just 0.5 per cent in the year to September. Deloitte Access Economics says it will take five years for wage rises to return just to 2 per cent a year.

After they were praised as heroes earlier in the pandemic for keeping supermarket shelves stocked, Coles has imposed a brutal three-month lockout on the workers at its Smeaton Grange distribution centre in Sydney.

But their determination has shown how to fight, after they continually rejected the company’s offer on redundancies despite Coles trying to starve them back to work.

The Liberals want workers to pay the costs of recovery through unemployment, wage cuts and laws that give more power to the bosses. But there is no reason workers should accept further sacrifice.

Company profits actually grew by 18.6 per cent in the year to 30 September, due to JobKeeper and Morrison’s business support payments to boost profits. The bosses can afford to pay.

Everyone needs to get behind the Coles workers struggle. A broader union fightback organised by the ACTU and our union leaders could to stop Morrison’s industrial relations changes and defend our wages and conditions.
Indigenous groups vow to keep fighting Santos gas plans

TRADITIONAL OWNERS, alongside local farmers and environmentalists, have vowed to keep fighting Santos’ coal seam gas project near Narrabri in northern NSW.

In November the federal government gave the final approval for the project, after the NSW Independent Planning Commission had earlier given it the go ahead.

It is a key part of Scott Morrison’s plans for a “gas-fired recovery” from the pandemic, threatening to expand fossil fuel emissions when they need dramatic cuts. It would see up to 850 gas wells dug up to a kilometre deep through the Pilliga forest over 20 years, threatening to pollute the Great Artesian Basin with toxic chemicals.

In December, hundreds joined the local Gomeroi people for a series of protests under the slogan “Gamil means no” in Sydney, Melbourne, Canberra and Brisbane.

Tameeka Tighe of Gamilaraay Next Generation, which organised the rallies, said, “It’s destroying sacred sites across Gomeroi country, it’s impacting on our wildlife and will cause damage to the Great Artesian Basin which will have a great impact on the rest of the country as well.”

There were nearly 23,000 submissions to the NSW inquiry, overwhelmingly opposing it.

Gomeroi traditional owner Gwenda Stanley told the rally in Canberra, “We’re going to fight this gasfield because it threatens to poison our people, our country.”

Morrison’s IR laws deliver wage cuts to fuel COVID recovery for business

SCOTT MORRISON and the Liberals are determined to use the COVID crisis to strip away workers’ rights. Their new industrial relations changes are being justified as measures to “create and keep jobs”. But the real aim is to make workers pay for the economic recovery through lower wages and less rights.

Unveiled in December, the laws have been delayed in the Senate until March. Among the serious changes is their plan to allow new enterprise agreements that fail the “better off overall test”, or BOOT, and impose pay and conditions worse than the minimum standards in Awards. This will have long-lasting effects.

While these agreements will nominally expire after two years, they can continue on as “zombie agreements” for years afterwards. Most of them will be struck in non-union workplaces, because they require workers’ support for approval.

ACTU Secretary Sally McManus has labelled the move “the worst attack on workers’ rights since WorkChoices”—when bosses were also allowed to push agreements without any “better off overall test”.

This saw workers bullied into giving up penalty rates and wages. WorkChoices-era agreements did not automatically disappear when they expired. More than a decade after the laws were repealed, there are still “zombie” WorkChoices-era agreements in place.

Hotel chain Merivale kept its 3000 staff on a long-expired 2007 agreement until it was finally terminated in the Fair Work Commission in 2019.

Some workers were paid rates 20 per cent below the Award, with reduced penalty rates on evenings, weekends and public holidays.

Morrison’s changes would also allow bosses in retail, food and accommodation to refuse overtime rates to part-time workers rostered on for extra shifts. This too is being justified as a “flexibility” measure to assist bosses’ recovery from COVID—with workers expected to pay through lower wages.

There would be special “greenfields agreements”, negotiated between unions and employers to cover newly established construction sites, lasting for eight years. This would deny workers any chance to renegotiate conditions or strike for the whole period.

Casuals working the same, regular work hours would have to be offered a permanent position after a year—but bosses could simply refuse on “reasonable grounds”.

Not in this together

The ACTU has vowed to oppose the changes. The Liberals are suggesting they could negotiate to get them through the Senate. We will need more than lobbying MPs. There should be a campaign of protests and stop work action to force the Liberals to retreat.

But many union leaders, including the ACTU, have helped prepare the ground for Morrison’s changes. In response to the pandemic, they accepted pay cuts in exchange for promises from employers to “save jobs”, through variations to workplace agreements.

This meant accepting the idea that workers should sacrifice in order to keep their jobs. One example was the NTEU leadership’s disgraceful “Job Protection Framework”.

But we were never “in this together”. Business has always been determined to exploit the crisis to drive down conditions and pay. Workers should not accept that.
Injustice goes on as racist policing and imprisonment grows

By James Supple

AFTER SCOTT Morrison changed the national anthem, his Indigenous Affairs Minister Ken Wyatt claimed that, “we as a nation stand more united and together today than we have at any time since 1788”.

It’s a lie. The overpolicing, imprisonment and poverty Indigenous people face is growing worse.

The Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement’s calls to defund prisons and police are nowhere more relevant than here.

Aboriginal people face the highest rate of imprisonment in the world. They make up almost 30 per cent of those in prison yet are 3 per cent of the population. This is the result of a war on self-determination that has seen Aboriginal-run services closed or starved of funds, while spending on police and prisons has surged to more than $16 billion a year.

A NSW parliamentary inquiry into deaths in custody, established following the BLM protests, has heard deaths in custody families and Aboriginal organisations put forward demands for change.

Despite 441 deaths since the landmark Royal Commission into deaths in custody in 1991, no police officer or prison guard has ever been held criminally responsible.

NT police officer Zachary Rolfe will finally face trial for murder in July over his 2019 shooting of Warlpiri man Kumanjayi Walker in Yuendumu. But unlike the Aboriginal people routinely jailed for minor offences, Rolfe was immediately granted bail and allowed to live in Canberra on full pay. His lawyers have successfully had the trial moved to Darwin, 1500 kilometres from Yuendumu.

Most police do not face any consequences. In December, Victoria Police confirmed that both officers involved in the death of Tanya Day in 2017 had escaped any internal disciplinary action. Prosecutors also failed to bring charges.

Tanya Day was unnecessarily arrested for public drunkenness, and hit her head in a cell and died after officers failed to check on her.

Numerous groups at the NSW inquiry called for independent investigations into deaths in custody—instead of the current system where the Coroner relies on police investigators.

As the Aboriginal Legal Service’s Sarah Crellin put it, families are deeply suspicious, “when they see police investigating police or Corrective Services investigating Corrective Services”.

Investigations should also involve an Aboriginal commissioner to help direct proceedings, the inquiry heard.

Aboriginal people have consistently called for less police involvement in their communities and more Aboriginal control. Imprisonment only entrenches disadvantage for those put through prison.

One proposal is the Walama Court. This would see “members of the Aboriginal community and Elders” work with a judge to, “provide offenders with an opportunity for change”, as Sarah Crellin told the inquiry. This is designed as an alternative to prison.

Another Aboriginal-run program is the Maranguka Justice Reinvestment Initiative in Bourke, a town in NSW’s northwest. An assessment in 2018 found it had significantly reduced domestic violence, juvenile offending and time spent by Aboriginal people in custody.

But the NSW government has failed to provide funding to extend this approach elsewhere.

Instead it has boasted of a record budget for the police, as it begins spending $583 million for another 1500 officers.

Speaking at the NSW inquiry, Assistant Police Commissioner Anthony Crandell refused to acknowledge that racism in the police force contributes to the over-imprisonment of Aboriginal people. Instead he promoted “pro-active policing strategies” such as the notorious Suspect Target Management Plan, which has seen police monitor and harass people identified as likely or repeat offenders.

The secretive program, which often targets children, was slammed by the police watchdog in January last year as involving “unreasonable, unjust and oppressive” tactics to target individuals. It estimated that 72 per cent of the 429 children targeted were Aboriginal.

The police are a violent and racist institution.

Police are far more likely to arrest and charge Aboriginal people with offences. In NSW over 80 per cent of Aboriginal people found with a small quantity of cannabis are taken to court, compared to 50 per cent for non-Indigenous people.

Deaths at the hands of police are routine—and not just for Aboriginal people. In early December Queensland police shot dead 22-year-old Somali man Raghe Abdi, claiming he had lunged at them with a knife during a mental health episode. They later alleged that he had killed an elderly couple and was a terrorism suspect, even though this was rejected by the Federal Police.

Later that month 20-year-old Bradley Balzan was chased by four plain clothes police in Western Sydney, who failed to identify themselves as police before they shot him dead when he tried to defend himself.

It was the mass Aboriginal rights movements of the 1970s that won gains over land rights and self-determination. As the BLM movement’s successes in defunding the police in the US show, it is movements on the streets that can win change.
Calls for Sydney lockdown ring hollow as outbreak contained

By David Glanz

THE COVID-19 cluster on Sydney’s Northern Beaches (which spread to Melbourne) and the “leak” of the virus from a Brisbane quarantine hotel is a reminder that the pandemic continues to be a very real threat.

Globally, confirmed deaths have hit two million. Even countries where the pandemic seemed under control have experienced new outbreaks—in Germany, the daily per capita mortality rate since mid-December has often exceeded that of the US. In China, authorities are scrambling to control an outbreak in Hebei province.

According to Bloomberg, more than 34.5 million vaccine doses had been administered across 49 countries by mid-January—a drop in the ocean compared to the global population of 7.8 billion. In any case, evidence so far indicates that vaccines limit the severity of COVID illness rather than stopping the virus’s spread.

So the question continues to be: what is the best way of containing virus outbreaks in Australia?

Many argue that lockdowns are the main weapon to stop a cluster spreading. But some of the recent lockdowns have been little more than political theatre—South Australia instituted a lockdown in Adelaide in November, only to lift it in the light of better contact tracing information. The Queensland government locked down greater Brisbane for three days in January, only to record zero new cases for three days.

If public health teams are properly staffed and resourced to undertake mass testing with fast turnaround of results to allow for swift and effective contact tracing and self-isolation, breakouts can be contained.

Melbourne’s 112-day lockdown was imposed because the underfunded public health system was incapable of rising to the challenge. The Department of Health and Human Services had only 14 contact tracers by the time coronavirus took hold in Australia in March. There had been no preparation for mass, mandatory quarantine.

As Peter Collignon, a professor of infectious diseases at the ANU Medical School, told Nine newspapers, the taming of the most recent Sydney and Melbourne clusters “show current interventions and advice from health departments in NSW and Victoria have been effective at stopping spread without the total lockdowns many advocated”.

He continued: “If we look at past outbreaks in Australia—Adelaide, Logan in Brisbane, Sydney’s Crossroads Hotel—they, like the current clusters, have all been controlled by a combination of good testing, contact tracing, quarantining of close contacts and limits on the size of indoor events.

“Melbourne’s devastating second wave last winter was our major exception, but many important factors were poorly managed and these have now been markedly improved.”

Residents on the Northern Beaches were locked down to contain the recent outbreak, after “super-spreaders” events at the Avalon RSL and Avalon bowling club saw dozens of people at the venues infected at the same time.

Testing shortage

But the relatively quick smothering of these recent clusters still hides a raft of problems. People on the Northern Beaches were threatened with fines for leaving the house, but were allowed to leave home and move across Sydney for work.

A media report detailed how a hairdresser travelled 40km from the Northern Beaches to Paddington in inner suburban Sydney, where one of her clients was a woman who worked at a local cafe. By the end of the appointment, the client had contracted COVID-19 and taken it back to her workplace.

There was a clear need for paid leave for workers to stay home—yet neither the ACTU nor Unions NSW issued such a call

There was a clear need for paid leave for workers to stay home—yet neither the ACTU nor Unions NSW issued such a call.

Even NSW’s supposed “gold standard” contact tracing system wobbled, failing to scale up testing quickly enough. In Wollongong, St Nektarios Greek Orthodox Church committee vice-president Kathy Tzanis said: “People have been obliging; the problem is it’s taking forever (to get tested), the lines are so long. There’s not enough testing stations.”

Yet it’s clear that effective contact tracing can get clusters under control if properly resourced. NSW Chief Health Officer Dr Kerry Chant said: “We’ve been having ... upwards of 5000-6000 people that have been contact traced in any one time.” Public health staff were able to contact 1000 people who visited the BWS in Berala on New Year’s Eve and bring the outbreak to a close.

Public health workers know how to contain pandemics without resorting to lockdowns. But they are held back by years of neo-liberal budget cuts. It’s only 15 months ago that the NSW government told the state’s health services to find “savings” of $252 million.

In the era of COVID, calls for lockdown point us in the wrong direction. There is an urgent need for a massive investment in public health, including an end to casualisation and privatisation. Public health workers can control outbreaks but we all need to join the fight for the resources they need.
Smeaton Grange Coles workers vote NO to non-union ballot

By Matt Meagher and Ian Rintoul

IN A fantastic show of determination, workers at the Coles Smeaton Grange Distribution Centre in Sydney voted down a non-union agreement on Friday 15 January.

This was followed up five days later with a unanimous vote against a proposal put by the United Workers Union (UWU) leadership to apply to the Fair Work Commission to terminate the lockout on hardship grounds. But as we go to press UWU officials have launched a further disgraceful effort to ram through a new offer from Coles, just as the stage was set for UWU workers to step up their fight.

The non-union ballot was the fifth time UWU members at Smeaton Grange had rejected the conditional offer put by Coles. They are fighting for job security, an improved redundancy package, and an end to victimisation threats and bullying on the job.

Workers were particularly angry with Clause 9 of the Conditional Offer put on 30 December that would allow Coles to discipline workers for participating in pickets during the dispute. Under Clause 9, workers would have been subject to disciplinary action including “first and final warnings” and could be targeted and given the sack, denying them a redundancy payout. The new offer removes that immediate threat, but still holds out the prospect of using any actions between the vote and a return to work as the basis for disciplinary action.

In a disgusting video, Coles boss Matt Swindells arrogantly said the company might only be “looking at about ten people to have a conversation about behaviour”. Fourteen workers at Woolies’ Wyong distribution centre got “first and finals” for picketing the Minchinbury distribution centre during their dispute last year.

Coles bosses combined the non-union vote with a threat to extend the three-month lockout beyond 11 February.

Their attempt to force through a non-union endorsed agreement brought widespread condemnation from across the union movement.

Astonishingly the UWU union leadership took an unheard of “neutral” position to the non-union agreement. But workers at Smeaton Grange saw the move by Coles bosses as an open attempt to undermine the strength of the union and successfully campaigned for a No vote.

Rank-and-file workers produced a “Vote No” leaflet and video that were widely shared among the workforce.

The majority No vote puts the lie to Coles boss Matt Swindells’ desperate last minute claim, that the No campaign was, “a minority running their agenda”.

Shamefully, as the vote got under way, the UWU leadership also put around an “information video” explaining (read “selling”) Coles’ offer, and how to vote.

Workers are demanding an increase in redundancy pay, with the Smeaton Grange centre closing in 2023. Swindells says that there “are no plans to terminate people” before this happens. Yet the company is still refusing to extend its offer of redundancy pay capped at 80 weeks to anyone who is terminated early.

And its offer of four weeks’ pay per year’s service remains less than the union demand of five weeks, capped at 104 weeks’ pay.

It also refuses to offer pathways for redeployment at Coles’ new warehouses to guarantee some workers at least an ongoing job when the site closes.

Coles has posted record profits during the pandemic, with CEO Steve Cain getting a 29.8 per cent increase in his pay to around $7 million a year. Yet it refuses to extend the same generosity to the workers who made this possible.

Around 3000 Coles workers will be directly affected by the deal that can be won at Smeaton Grange, as Coles moves to automate all its distribution centres. Woolies warehouse workers recognise that they will be next.

Missing in action

Shamefully, the UWU leadership has been “missing in action” and has not provided the support for the action that could have won this dispute weeks ago. Workers were locked out on 19 November, but there has been no on-going strike fund set up, and Smeaton Grange is at risk of being starved back to work.

A properly resourced strike fund, backed by a levy on UWU members at other workplaces, would make an enormous difference as the Smeaton Grange workers face down Coles.

Nor have the UWU officials called for solidarity action. They have argued against organising hard pickets of the pop-up distribution centres, and in particular of the important Eastern Creek warehouse, so Coles’ operations have proceeded as normal.

Coles can be beaten. In 2012, the NUW (the forerunner of the UWU in warehouses) organised solidarity action at Goulburn and Eastern Creek distribution centres in support of Coles workers in Somerton, Victoria. Solidarity action can increase the pressure on Coles.

A day of action was planned at the Eastern Creek distribution centre as we went to press. Stepping up the pickets and solidarity action is the best way to guarantee workers win certainty about their futures.

Above: Smeaton Grange Coles workers on the picket line

Coles bosses combined the non-union vote with a threat to extend the three-month lockout beyond 11 February

Solidarity | ISSUE ONE HUNDRED AND FORTY FOUR JANUARY 2021
Invasion Day rallies are right to stand up to COVID anti-protest rules

By Paddy Gibson

IN EARLY January, more than 500 people rallied in Melbourne calling for freedom for refugees confined in the Park Hotel.

The rally was clearly in breach of COVID-19 regulations, which limit protests to 100 people in Victoria. Despite threats by police to arrest organisers, and a huge mobilisation of force, the rally went ahead without incident.

Broad political support for the rally, which was attended by Iranian and Tamil community groups, unionists, churches and others, undoubtedly helped to dampen police confidence to attack the crowd.

Mass protests planned for Invasion Day on 26 January are shaping up to be a more serious confrontation with anti-protest COVID-19 regulations. Thousands of people are expected to attend in Melbourne, Brisbane, and also in Sydney, where protests are currently limited to 500 people.

Building defiant actions that break protest restrictions is a crucial task facing the left. In 2020, large-scale demonstrations largely disappeared in Australia in the face of lockdowns and restrictions. One key exception was the huge Black Lives Matter rallies in June, which made regulations unworkable.

Smaller student-led actions against attacks on universities, with some NTEU support, also consistently pushed the boundaries of regulations in Sydney in the second half of 2020, leading to scores of arrests and fines.

The ruling class backlash to the successful BLM rallies was fierce, with overwhelming numbers of police and pre-emptive arrests used to stop further attempts to rally.

Senior Coalition government figures blamed the “second wave” in Melbourne on the protest, despite no evidence whatsoever that the virus had been transmitted there. This was a deliberate attempt to generate hostility against Aboriginal people and against protest movements generally.

But there is no evidence that COVID-19 has ever been transmitted at a rally in Australia. The nature of protests means that, with vigilance on the part of attendees, there can be very minimal risk of transmission.

Rallies take place outside, far safer than indoor gatherings, and participants can spread out to allow plenty of room for social distancing.

Protest restrictions have been hypocritical throughout the entire pandemic. While only 500 are currently allowed at protests in NSW for example, beaches, shopping centres and sporting events still attract thousands of people. Even at the height of “lockdown”, many large indoor workplaces continued to operate with far higher transmission risk.

Sadly, however, much of the left has accepted the idea that mass rallies during a pandemic are irresponsible.

The pandemic period has seen sweeping attacks on workers’ rights, with huge lay-offs and cuts to wages and conditions. Despite this, there has not been a single major union mobilisation challenging these cuts.

The climate movement has also failed to organise a single major protest. This failure dealt a disastrous blow to the momentum built up through mass climate strikes in 2019.

While activists have stayed at home, climate breakdown is accelerating. Indeed, the Morrison government is taking advantage of the pandemic to upscale fossil fuel extraction, promising a farcical “gas-fired recovery”.

Mass, in person demonstrations are needed to build collective power and force issues onto the agenda

Protest is essential

Attempts at “online rallies” throughout the COVID-19 crisis have failed to have any meaningful impact. Mass, in person demonstrations are needed to build real collective power and force issues onto the agenda.

In a press release encouraging supporters to come out for the upcoming Sydney Invasion Day rally, Lizzie Jarrett, a Gumbaynggirr, Bundjalung and Dunghutti woman argued:

“Unlike COVID-19, the virus of colonial racism that came to these lands in 1788 cannot be defeated by self-isolation or quarantine. We need to come together and fight back. Throughout the pandemic our people are still being locked up and killed and our children are being taken at ever increasing rates”.

We need this same militancy and urgency across all struggles for justice.

In Argentina, a long-standing campaign to legalise abortion had a decisive victory in December, with new legislation passed through parliament. This was the result of mass demonstrations and street occupations that continued through one of the worst COVID-19 outbreaks in South America.

In Greece, which also experienced a new COVID-19 surge in December, trade unionists defied a ban on protests to hold major strike rallies in city squares in opposition the conservative government’s austerity budget.

Health unions were at the forefront of the Greek protests, which observed strict COVID-19 safety measures. Health workers pointed to the hypocrisy of the government trying to ban protests on grounds of COVID-19 safety, while they cut hospital budgets.

There will almost certainly be outbreaks all year and continuing attempts to ban large protests. But we cannot afford for 2021 to be another year where we allow COVID-19 regulations to keep us off the streets.
As Morrison backs fossil fuels, is the world finally acting on climate?

By Caitlin Doyle

SCOTT MORRISON’S pathetic failure to act on climate change has left him increasingly isolated globally. Even right-wing UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson demanded “bold action” from the Australian government in a phone call between the leaders.

To his embarrassment, Morrison was refused an invitation to speak at Johnson’s climate ambition summit in December, with the 50 spots reserved for countries prepared to announce “ambitious” new plans for cutting carbon emissions.

With his pitiful reduction target of 26 per cent by 2030, it is little wonder that Morrison was not offered a seat at the table. He was alongside climate criminals like Russia, Saudi Arabia and Brazil in being excluded.

But while Australia is increasingly isolated, the rest of the world is still far from reducing emissions to the extent needed to prevent catastrophic climate change.

Current pledges and targets would still see global temperatures rise by 2.6 degrees by the end of the century, according to the UN Emissions Gap report, and many countries are not even meeting their targets.

Even between 2010 and 2019, global emissions rose by almost 10 per cent. Global temperatures have already risen by just over 1 degree. And the trend is accelerating.

Not on track

The 2020 Production Gap report, compiled by leading research institutions and the UN Environment Programme, shows that the world is nowhere near on track to meeting the target set at the Paris climate talks five years ago, which aimed to limit warming to 1.5 degrees above the pre-industrial average.

“To follow a 1.5°C-consistent pathway,” it says, “the world will need to decrease fossil fuel production by roughly 6 per cent per year between 2020 and 2030. Countries are instead planning and projecting an average annual increase of 2 per cent, which by 2030 would result in more than double the production consistent with the 1.5°C limit.”

Much has been made of the fact that global emissions fell by around 7 per cent during 2020 as a result of the pandemic, when shutdowns saw reduced travel, lower industrial activity and lower electricity generation. But a temporary reduction means little. It translates to a mere 0.01 degree reduction of global warming by 2050.

And the dip will be more than offset by the response of governments around the world to the pandemic-induced recession, which has been to ratchet up investment in fossil fuels, locking in decades worth of emissions. Morrison’s “gas-fired recovery”, handing millions to gas companies and projects, while renewable energy was almost entirely overlooked, is consistent with the global trend.

The Production Gap report found that the wealthy G20 governments have committed around $300 billion in COVID-19-related funding to fossil fuel production and consumption to date, compared to $195 billion to clean energy. This is despite the fact that, in order to meet the Paris target, experts say that global coal, oil, and gas production must fall by 11, 4, and 3 per cent respectively every year between 2020 and 2030.

Joe Biden

Much hope has been pinned on the election of Joe Biden bringing the US “back into the fold” after Trump withdrew from the Paris Agreement. Biden has signaled that he wants the US to rejoin and has committed to holding a US climate summit within his first 100 days of office.

But he is not willing to challenge the fossil fuel industry, commenting that, “we’re not getting rid of fossil fuels for a long time”.

Some of Biden’s biggest election backers were fossil fuel corporations. In September he joined a fundraiser organised by Andrew Goldman, co-founder of fracking firm Western LNG. Goldman is a former Biden adviser and was a director of finance for his 2008 campaign.

Biden has now appointed Democratic Congressman Cedric Richmond, friend of the fossil fuel industry, as head of the White House Office of Public Engagement, where he will “serve as a liaison with the business community and climate change activists.” In his ten years in Congress, Richmond has pocketed over $452,000 in donations from oil and gas firms.

Biden has also long been a supporter of the fracking industry. And while he has now suggested he may ban fracking on federal land, 90 per cent of it takes place elsewhere, so this would have little impact.

He also refuses to support the Green New Deal, a program conceived of by climate activists and scientists to deal with unemployment and climate change simultaneously, supported by left-wing sections of the Democrats. Instead he has offered a series of far less ambitious proposals to encourage jobs in renewable energy and new technologies like electric cars.

Only mass movements capable of confronting the destructive, profit-driven logic of capitalism will be able to win the action we need to stop climate change in its tracks.

G20 governments have committed $300 billion in COVID-19-related funding to fossil fuel production

---

Above: Scott Morrison is failing on climate action, but other world leaders aren’t much better
Australian war crimes show bloody reality of Afghan war

By Tom Orsag

THE BARBARITY of Australia’s role in Afghanistan was laid bare last year, with the release of the Brereton report into war crimes by Australia’s much-vaunted elite SAS regiment.

Twenty-five current and former soldiers are alleged to have perpetrated 39 cases of war crimes against civilians or prisoners. Some 19 soldiers will be referred for possible prosecution. The report is deliberately based on evidence SAS members were compelled to give, so that it is inadmissible in court.

Practices included allocating junior officers a “first kill” where they would execute a civilian in a practice called “blooding”, and the planting of evidence on slain civilians to make out they had been armed or aiding the Taliban, using weapons known as “throw downs”.

Two 14-year-old Afghan boys had their throats cut and bodies dumped in a river; a man known as Dad Mohammed was shot while lying down in a wheat field in 2012; and an intellectually disabled man in his 20s was executed in what became known in SAS circles as “the village idiot killing”.

Confirmation of the atrocities is a tribute to Afghan village elders and the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission for continuing to document and raise the issue of civilian deaths.

The evidence was dismissed for years by Australian military commanders.

An Australian army lawyer who raised the issue publicly, David McBride, still faces life imprisonment as a whistle-blower. Morrison had the Australian Federal Police raid the ABC and threaten journalists with jail for exposing the war crimes.

All this horror is a direct result of the imperialist occupation of Afghanistan by the US and its allies, including Australia.

While the chief of the Australian Defence Force, General Angus Campbell, apologised to the people of Afghanistan and Australia, he maintained the fiction that, “Afghans asked us to help them.”

This is clearly not the case. The US invaded Afghanistan in 2001 and installed a stooge government, under Hamid Karzai, who then gave approval to the US to remain in the country, after the fact.

The war was justified as a “humanitarian intervention” for democracy and women’s rights against the Taliban government, who were accused of harbouring Osama bin Laden in the wake of 9/11. But the US supported Afghan warlords who were every bit as brutal in their effort to oust them.

The occupation has made life hell for ordinary Afghans, bringing terrible violence and death.

In the last ten years alone there have been over 100,000 civilians killed or injured. The UN recorded 5939 civilian casualties in the first nine months of 2020.

The occupying forces were so brutal that the Taliban was able to rebuild their support. The Australian government also turned its back on refugees from the country, torturing them on the prison islands of Manus and Nauru.

Imperialism

The war was only ever about power and imperialism. Afghanistan became an open-ended occupation because of its geo-political importance to the US, situated alongside its imperial rivals Russia and China.

Afghanistan has the misfortune of lying on one of the fault-lines where the rivalry between great powers is concentrated.

In the 19th century Lord Curzon, British Viceroy of India, coined the term “The Great Game” to describe the rivalry between Britain and Russia over the region. The British invaded Afghanistan three times in 1839, 1879 and 1919.

The 2001 invasion provided the US with an opportunity to create a string of military bases in Central Asia, in a region dominated by Russia during the Cold War.

General Colin Powell, US Secretary of State under George Bush Jnr, boasted in February 2002, “America will have a continuing interest and presence in Central Asia of a kind we could not have dreamed of before.”

But apart from its bases inside Afghanistan, the US has now surrendered the rest.

Australia joined the war not as a lackey of the US but as part of advancing our rulers’ own imperialist interests, both in dominating the local region and in protecting the investments of Australian companies worldwide.

Australia’s rulers have long sought to lock in the US as an imperial partner in furthering these aims.

As Paul Kelly, editor of The Australian, wrote in August 2002, “For half a century, the Australian way of war has been obvious: it is a clever, cynical, calculated, modest series of contributions as part of US-led coalitions, in which Australians bore the main burden. This technique reveals a junior partner skilled in utilising the great and powerful in its own interest, while imposing firm limits upon its own sacrifice.”

The West is not part of the solution in Afghanistan. The atrocities are further evidence of why it should leave.
Vaccine hoarding and profiteering compromise rollout

By Ruby Wawn

THE DEVELOPMENT of working COVID-19 vaccines within just ten months shows medical research can achieve when there is significant state investment and scientific focus. Previous vaccines have taken ten years on average to develop. But under capitalism we can expect that the vaccine won’t be distributed fairly.

The coronavirus crisis is continuing into 2021 with infection surges in many parts of the world and the emergence of two new highly contagious strains of the virus.

In the UK, a more contagious strain of the coronavirus is wreaking havoc on their already overstretched National Healthcare System. One in 50 people there are now infected, with the infection rate jumping to one in 30 people in London. More than 60,000 cases a day are being reported and the country is once again under strict lockdown orders.

In the US, records are being broken daily with the total number of cases now near 25 million, the highest anywhere in the world. Around 400,000 people have died of COVID across the US.

India is still reporting 20,000 new cases per day, with the third highest death toll after the US and Brazil.

Across the globe a race is on to immunise populations, to achieve herd immunity and to beat the virus.

The UK aims to vaccinate the 15 million people deemed most vulnerable by mid-February, and the rest of the country later in the year.

Israel, with a much smaller population, aims to vaccinate 70 or 80 per cent of people by April or May—all although it has refused to vaccinate Palestinians living under Israeli military occupation.

Vaccinations in Australia will begin in mid-February using Pfizer’s vaccine for five million people, with everyone else to get the Astra-Zeneca vaccine later this year.

For a vaccine to prevent the spread of the virus it will require at least 70 per cent of the population to be immunised.

The vaccines could require future tweaks to keep up with mutations, similar to the annually updated influenza vaccination.

Producing the number of vaccine doses needed will take some time. While vaccine developers claim that they will be able to produce enough for more than one-third of the world’s population by the end of the year, vaccine supplies are being hoarded by the richest countries.

Some countries such as Canada will have enough to vaccinate the population five times over, while poorer countries will miss out.

A group of wealthy countries including the UK, the US and Australia, have already pre-ordered over half of the future supply of promising vaccines.

These countries account for only 13 per cent of the global population, with most of the rest of the world now having to wait until at least 2022 to get their hands on a vaccine.

It may take until 2024 for enough doses to be produced to fully immunise low-income countries, according to the Duke Global Health Innovation Center in the US’s estimate.

Many low income countries are relying on COVAX, a joint fund for the equitable distribution of vaccines backed by the World Health Organisation, to secure their vaccine supply.

But COVAX has only managed to purchase 700 million doses so far, despite aiming to deliver two billion vaccines by the end of 2021. Even this would only be enough for 20 per cent of each member country’s population.

Globally, governments have bank rolled vaccine development to the tune of nearly $11.5 billion.

Australia has entered into four separate agreements, including with Astra-Zeneca and Pfizer, to ensure vaccine supply at a cost of more than $3.3 billion.

Profiteering

Big Pharma is expected to make a big profit. Developers Moderna and Pfizer are predicted to make billions of dollars in the first year of vaccinations alone.

All have rejected calls from the World Health Organisation, as well as organisations like Human Rights Watch, Oxfam and Amnesty, to waive their intellectual property rights to the vaccines so that countries worldwide could produce them freely. South Africa and India presented a similar proposal at the World Trade Organisation in December.

While some vaccine developers have promised to sell doses at cost price, others have not. Moderna are pricing theirs at $37 a dose in the US, bringing in a big profit for their shareholders.

Astra-Zeneca has pledged to sell their vaccine at cost price until the pandemic is over, but has cynically reserved the right to determine when that is, meaning the company could start profiting from the vaccine as soon as July this year.

Shares in Astra-Zeneca owned by CEO Paul Soriot have already increased by nearly $15 million in the last year.

Like the broader response to the coronavirus pandemic, the race to immunise the world has been distorted by the competition for profit that is built into the capitalist system.
TRUMP’S CAPITOL RIOT SHOWS DANGEROUS RISE OF THE FAR RIGHT

The Trump protest in Washington shows that there is a real danger if the left does not seriously organise against racism and the right, writes James Supple

THE INVASION of the US Capitol building showed the dangers of the movement that Donald Trump has created. But rallying around the Democrats or Congress as the defenders of democracy will do nothing to stop the rise of the far right.

Trump had called on his supporters to descend on Washington on the day the election result was scheduled to be certified, for what he said in advance would be a “wild” rally. Earlier on the day he spoke at a protest of thousands of supporters.

The Capitol riot was not a serious coup attempt. Despite his contempt for democracy, Trump never had the support in the army or the National Guard that would be needed to attempt one.

As the National Guard was mobilised and protesters were cleared out, Trump backed down, urging his supporters to “go home”, while continuing to deny he had lost the election. As the backlash grew, he released another video a few days later condemning the violence and urging his supporters not to repeat it.

But neither Trump nor his supporters are going away. He told the rally on the day he would “never concede” and that the election had been “stolen” by emboldened radical Democrats.

His actions are further radicalising a hard core of supporters, who will view Joe Biden’s presidency as illegitimate and some kind of threat to the country.

This sets the stage for further right-wing protests against Biden’s every move in office. There were similar right-wing mobilisations under Obama’s presidency through the Tea Party movement.

But Trump has spent the last four years encouraging white supremacists and the far right at every opportunity. Fascism is not the immediate danger. Trump himself is not a fascist, but he is creating an environment where these groups can grow.

There is the potential for the emergence of much more powerful fascist and far right groupings in the US.

US politics has become increasingly polarised as a result of decades of increasing inequality and desperation for sections of the working class, following the neo-liberal offensive from the 1980s.

The renewed surge in COVID-19 infections has seen unemployment climb again, with 965,000 people in a week filing for unemployment benefits in January.

A radical program to fund jobs and support workers’ living standards is urgently needed, with the economy expected to take years to recover.

But the political establishment, both Republican and Democrat, have consistently governed for the rich. Joe Biden is another centrist politician who is not about to break with this approach.

He spent his whole election campaign distancing himself from the left-wing of his party and rival Bernie Sanders, rejecting policies like Medicare for All and a Green New Deal.

Disappointment with the Democrats will provide further opportunities for Donald Trump and the far right to take the offensive.

Trump and the far right can be driven back. In the aftermath of the white supremacist mobilisation in Charlottesville in 2017, far right protests across the US became impossible, after tens of thousands mobilised for counter-demonstrations against them whenever they tried to meet.

Building such a movement on the streets is the key to both stopping the right, and to constructing a socialist movement independent of the Democratic Party capable of fighting for working class demands that can challenge the power of the rich.
Fascism is more than a racist movement

More than simply hard right or viciously racist, we must grasp that fascism has specific characteristics, says Tomáš Tengely-Evans

A SINISTER collection of Trump supporters, far right conspiracy theorists and outright fascists were in the crowd that broke into the US Capitol building. There is no doubt Nazis were at the core.

They included men with hoodies reading, “Camp Auschwitz” and “6MWE”—six million wasn’t enough—references to the mass murder of Jews in the Holocaust.

To confront it, it’s necessary to understand the nature of the threat.

Having a clear definition of fascism isn’t about having a tick box list—or playing down how dangerous other right-wingers and racists are. It’s about understanding what makes fascism unique in order to better fight it.

Fascism isn’t just a nasty form of authoritarianism, racism or bigotry. It strives to build a mass movement on the streets that can inflict violence and terror on political opponents and minorities.

And, ultimately, fascism’s aim is to destroy all democratic rights.

Fascism was born out of the profound social crisis that followed the First World War. In “normal times”, the capitalist class can rely on their state and the police to keep threats in check.

They justify their rule through the facade of parliamentary democracy, a media that pushes ruling class ideas, and “safe” opposition parties that act as a safety valve when anger erupts.

In times of crisis, the usual methods aren’t always enough. In the decades after the war, ruling classes faced militant, mass workers’ movements and the threat of revolution. Sections eventually looked to another mass movement—fascism—to crush the workers.

Fascists contest elections to gain legitimacy, but they have never won state power through democratic elections. Whether it’s Adolf Hitler in 1930s Germany or Benito Mussolini in 1920s Italy, the ruling class has handed them power in the hope of restoring order and stability.

This doesn’t mean that fascism is just an appendage to the ruling class or a ruling class movement. It has its own mass roots and dynamic and uses fake “revolutionary” or “anti-establishment” language.

Fascism’s social base is rooted in the “petty bourgeoisie”. These middle class layers include small capitalists, shop keepers and some professionals who run their own businesses.

The US Capitol riot was the last gasp of the Trump presidency. But it also a clear declaration that the fascists and far right are not going away.

Solidarity | ISSUE ONE HUNDRED AND FORTY FOUR JANUARY 2021 15

Why did the police let Trump protesters in?

THE POLICE response to the Trump protest has shown where their sympathies lie. If it had been Black Lives Matter protesters trying to invade the Capitol building, there would have been mass arrests at least, if not a massacre.

There were examples of police officers letting Trump supporters through barricades, and posing for photos with them.

Some police did try to stop the crowd getting into the Capitol building. But they were heavily outnumbered, with only 1400 police against a crowd of 8000 or more. A decision had clearly been made to go easy on the Trump rally.

Capitol Police Chief Steven Sund, who resigned after the events, claimed that security officials for the House and the Senate had refused to put the National Guard on standby. Some FBI officers warned that there were groups talking of violence and “war” at the protest. This too was ignored.

Police routinely protect right-wing or far right protesters because many of them sympathise with their ideas. Police encouraged 17-year-old white supremacist Kyle Rittenhouse when he turned up to a Black Lives Matter protest in Kenosha with an assault rifle, before shooting two people dead. “We appreciate you guys, we really do,” one officer told him.

Active duty police officers from across the country are facing investigations after they were identified as part of the Capitol invasion.

The role of the police is ultimately to protect property and the capitalist order. So many of them end up adopting extreme racist and right-wing attitudes. We can’t rely on the courts and the police to stop the rise of the far right. It is only mass movements on the streets that can drive them back.

The US ruling class is not looking to a fascist movement to restore order. But that doesn’t mean fascists aren’t dangerous.

They lack the wealth and power of capital and the working class’s ability to fight back collectively. When crisis hits, these layers are often badly squeezed. If there’s a strong workers’ movement, they can look leftwards. But without it, they can lurch to the right, which provides scapegoats for their distress.

This was the case with the Nazis in 1930s Germany. But it has held true more recently. In Hungary, for instance, the fascist movement Jobbik grew in the wake of a heavily-indebted middle class being smashed in the 2007-8 financial crisis.

Fascist movements gain their strength through street mobilisations—and that means they have to be confronted.

Movement

Today the US ruling class is not looking to a fascist movement to restore order.

But that doesn’t mean fascists are not dangerous. And Trump openly courted fascists in the White House at the beginning of his term.

He has given succour to far right conspiracy theories, and during the election hinted at them being useful boot boys.

He has also pulled a section of the Republican base further to the right, giving fascists a substantial audience. Within a far right or racist movement, there is often a Nazi core surrounded by softer racists.

These sorts of right-wing movements can be pulled in a more “mainstream” direction or the Nazi core can grow and seek to harden up the movement politically. That’s what fascists in the US are seeking to do.

The scenes in Washington were not a serious effort to seize state power.

But to build their movements, fascists have sometimes opted for bold, declarative actions. Mussolini’s fascists, for instance, smashed up socialist newspaper presses and murdered 39 people in Milan in 1919.

At that point the fascists were a small force. But the violent action was declaration of intent and propaganda for the movement, with Mussolini hailing it as the “first incident of the civil war”. The US Capitol riot was the last gasp of the Trump presidency. But it also a clear declaration that the fascists and far right are not going away.

Socialist Worker UK
THE BLACK Lives Matter movement has exposed the ongoing, systemic racism in both the US and Australia. The rich history of resistance to racism here has been shaped by numerous Indigenous activists.

Charles “Chicka” Dixon was born in May 1928, on Wallaga Lake Station, near Bermagui, on the NSW South Coast. He later lived at the Wreck Bay Aboriginal Reserve, near Jervis Bay, where traditional language and cultural practices remained strong despite constant attempts to suppress them.

The misnamed Aborigines Protection Board ran Aboriginal Reserves. The state appointed managers who controlled people’s work, movement to and from the reserve, and even how people’s houses were kept. Children were taken from their families by police and “welfare” officers and put with white families or institutions. Notorious places like the Kinchela Boys Home subjected Aboriginal children to horrific abuse, including Chicka’s father Jimmy Dixon.

Jimmy Dixon worked as a wharfie, and Chicka followed in his father’s footsteps, getting a job on the docks at Port Kembla when he was just 14 years old.

**Leading activist**

In 1945, Chicka moved to Sydney and became a builders’ labourer. Later on, he gained work on the Sydney waterfront through connections with the Waterside Workers Federation (WWF), whose officials were from the Communist Party of Australia (CPA).

Chicka wrote of the CPA, “That’s where I learned the politics. The Communist Party... were masters at organising. And I learned a lot about other people’s struggles... I thought we were the only people in the world discriminated against. They taught me how to organise. We’d be talking about politics all the time. It was second nature”.

In 1946, on the day he turned 18, Chicka heard the legendary Aboriginal activist Jack Patten speak at the Foundation for Aboriginal Affairs. Inspired by him, Chicka decided to devote himself to gaining justice for Aboriginal people. Patten was one of the organisers of the 1938 Day of Mourning in Sydney, along with William Cooper, Bill Ferguson, and Pearl Gibbs.

Chicka became a spokesperson for the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders (FCAATSI) after it was set up in February 1958.

Chicka was an important leader of FCAATSI’s decade-long campaign for a referendum on citizenship for Indigenous people. By the time the referendum was held in May 1967, with Chicka aged 39, he had become a national figure.

Prior to the referendum, Aboriginal people were not counted in the national census, denied many citizenship rights and remained under the control of different racist state-based “welfare” acts and special boards.

The referendum sought to break the control of these boards by shifting the power to legislate for Aboriginal people to the Commonwealth. The failure of the Commonwealth to use these powers to drive any real change spurred further radicalisation of the movement.

While FCAATSI was lobbying for the referendum, Black student leaders like Charles Perkins wanted to organise Sydney university students to take more direct action. In 1963-65, they toured northwestern NSW by bus on a Freedom Ride to disrupt the racist, segregationist practices of small country towns in swimming pools, cinemas, shops, clubs and pubs.

Chicka was drawn to the Freedom Rides. He wrote, “Looking back on the movement, from the time we went on the 1963 Freedom Rides to Moree and Walgett, things have changed tremendously. In those days you could only get two Blacks involved—me and Charlie Perkins—with a lot of white students on a bus.

“Today, when you ask Blacks to move on a certain issue, you can get a heap of them. But not then... Now we can muster 600 or more, so the pendulum has swung.”

The Aboriginal community in Sydney numbered about 2000 people before 1967. After the collapse of the Welfare Board regime on Aboriginal reserves, there was a mass migration from country areas. Within a year there were 35,000 Aboriginal people in Sydney. They wound up in the poorest suburbs of Sydney—Alexandria, Newtown and Redfern.

Chicka compared the lot of newly-arrived migrants from overseas to Aboriginal people, “Aboriginal migrants, who because of the lack of job opportunities, migrate from dirty government missions, river bank dwellings, reserves and fringe dwellings, to seek a decent way of life in the city. You may think the Aboriginal migrant differs from the overseas migrant, but I say my people have similar problems to overseas migrants.”

The NSW Police response to an increase in the Black population of the inner suburbs was as obvious as it was time-honoured in Australia—a campaign of intimidation and harassment.

This led Chicka and others to set up the first Aboriginal legal service in Redfern in 1970 to defend people against police brutality and incarceration. He and others also set up the first medical service for Aboriginal people, who faced chronic discrimination from health services.

Chicka was an important mentor for younger Aboriginal activists like Billy Craigie, Gary Foley and Isobel Coe and a key a link to earlier generations of Aboriginal leaders.

**Tom Orsag** examines the life of Aboriginal activist Chicka Dixon, a wharfie, unionist, and bridge between the activists of the 1930s generation and the 1970s radicals.
Under Chicka’s guidance, young activists established the Aboriginal Tent Embassy on Invasion Day 1972, after Liberal PM Billy McMahon publicly ruled out granting Aboriginal land rights. Chicka had originally proposed they take over Fort Denison, in Sydney Harbour, and defend it in the style of the American Indigenous people in their 18-month takeover of the decommissioned Alcatraz prison in San Francisco Bay from 1969-71.

In July 1972, after the McMahon Liberal government ordered police to tear down the Aboriginal Tent Embassy, Chicka spoke at a rally of 400 Aboriginal people and over 1000 white supporters. He appealed to white Australia to vote the Liberals out of office in the election due in December saying, “If you are not part of the problem, then you must be part of the solution.”

Like every good militant unionist and socialist Chicka garnered himself an ASIO file. His file read, in part, “He is a ‘popular, well-dressed and strongly anti-European dissident.” And as almost an afterthought, “He is an Aborigine.”

Union power
There is a rich tradition of Aboriginal activists organising strikes and other forms of union solidarity to build power beyond the struggle against racism.

Chicka’s grand-daughter Nadeena Dixon has spoken about the long history of her family working in industrial jobs, living amongst the working class communities in Sydney and the Illawarra. While racism pervaded all levels of society, the experience of common hardship amongst the working class was an important foundation for anti-racist union solidarity:

“In the early days there was no OH&S protection… it was the man you were working beside every day that was the only one ensuring you went home safely to your family. And sometimes that man happened to have Black skin. This is how people came to see we have to stand together as a class, regardless of colour. This is how families and communities survived, by working together”.

Political and economic discrimination against Aboriginal people is intertwined in Australia because the state and bosses benefit from it.

In the generation of activists before Chicka, Pearl Gibbs organised strikes in the fruit and vegetable industry demanding equal wages with white workers, including a major 1933 strike by pea-pickers.

Bill Ferguson drew on his experience as an AWU organiser to build the Aborigines Progressive Association’s campaign for full citizenship in the 1930s, winning important support from the NSW Trades and Labour Council and many other unions and ALP branches.

A strike by WA Aboriginal pastoral workers against slave-like conditions in 1946 lasted three years. They won significant increases in cash wages despite police repression. Solidarity actions by unions, including extended bans by the WWF on the export of wool, were crucial for this victory.

Struggle by Aboriginal stock workers captured national headlines again in May 1966, when the Gurindji went on strike at Wattie Creek (Daguragu) in the NT, demanding payment of Award wages from the Vestey beef empire, rather than poor-quality rations. This struggle soon raised demands for the return of Daguragu to Gurindji control.

Chicka used his connections with the union movement to build an unprecedented level of support in the organised working class for the Black struggle.

When Vincent Lingiari and Mick Rangiari from the Gurindji came to Sydney in late 1971 to promote their struggle, Chicka played a central organising role in their speaking tour. His union, the WFW, donated $10,000.

As Harry Black, from MUA Veterans, said of Chicka, “He played a very significant role on the wharves continuously putting forward the Aboriginal cause and working closely with the union to bring about support.”

Rhonda Dixon, Chicka’s daughter, played a key role leading the huge Black Lives Matter rallies in Sydney in June and July in 2020. Rhonda and her daughter Nadeena addressed MUA members at Port Botany on a smoke break in the lead up to the July rally.

Both women spoke about the huge gains made by Aboriginal people in the 1970s with the support of unions, and encouraged the workers to join today’s BLM demonstrations.

Rhonda told a story of Chicka and other Black workers being refused service at a pub in Sydney. In response, Chicka threatened to mobilise hundreds of unionists to protest and put black bans on the pub. Actions like this broke down many racist barriers.

When Chicka passed away in March 2010, aged 81, it was from a very working class disease—astenosis, contracted from his time as a wharfie. Thousands attended a state funeral, where Aboriginal activist Gary Foley rallied the crowd to continue Chicka’s legacy of struggle and Chicka’s wharfie mates formed a guard of honour.

Dixon organised in an era where radical Black politics, socialism and a rise in working class struggle intersected to win many victories.

As a new generation of activists comes into the struggle through Black Lives Matter and the fight for climate justice, learning from Chicka’s incredible success will be crucial for the victories we urgently need today.
THE EGYPTIAN REVOLUTION—18 DAYS THAT SHOOK THE WORLD

A revolution in Egypt in 2011 overthrew a brutal dictator and gave a glimpse of how society could be run differently. Egyptian revolutionary Hossam el-Hamalawy tells the story.

TEN YEARS ago this month, millions of Egyptians took to the streets in a revolution against the country’s dictator.

The uprising lasted for 18 days, before it forced Hosni Mubarak to step down.

He had ruled the country with an iron fist for roughly three decades. The revolution should be celebrated and remembered.

The Egyptian Revolution was largely presented in the media as a revolt by “internet savvy” youth using social media and smartphones to organise a sudden revolt. This was mistaken, but it suited some groups in and out of Egypt.

It suited the Egyptian middle class, which was suffering under Mubarak’s neo-liberal reforms. It wanted a limited revolt to change the head of the regime, and hopefully introduce some liberal political reforms to allow it a bigger say in how the country was run.

It suited the Egyptian army generals, who were shocked by the revolt. They wanted a quick end to the unrest in the streets, with cosmetic political changes.

These would leave power structures largely unchanged and safeguard the privileges of the military institutions.

It suited the Western backers of the Egyptian regime, who for three decades had armed and financed Mubarak.

They saw him as an essential force for regional stability, the continuous flow of oil, and protection of the Israeli state and Suez Canal. The Western imperial powers were concerned a radical change in the most populous Arab country could threaten their class interests.

The reality, however, was different from their narrative of a “Facebook” revolution.

The January 2011 revolution was a product of an entire decade of struggles that were brewing in Egypt.

They started with pro-Palestinian protests that swept the country in autumn 2000.

The movement revived street politics, and won a limited margin that had not existed previously, within which it could organise against the regime.

After three years of continuous mobilisations, the Palestine solidarity and anti-Iraq war movements morphosed into Kefaya, Arabic for “Enough”. This took on Mubarak and his plans to have his son Gamal succeed him.

Electrified

Kefaya’s protests did not go beyond a few thousand. But they electrified the country. The rise of satellite television channels, which took its slogans and messages to large sections of the population in Egypt and abroad, helped.

Among those who followed the gradual erosion of Mubarak’s grip on society were the Egyptian workers. They had borne the brunt of the neo-liberal reforms implemented by Mubarak and his son’s associates and cronies.

In December 2006, thousands of women workers in the Nile Delta town of Mahalla, which housed the largest textile mill in the Middle East, struck over pay. They called on their male colleagues to join action.

The mill struck and forced the government to concede, triggering a wave of mass strikes across the country’s textile sector. Strikes then spread to virtually all other industrial and service sectors.

Mass strikes within the factories’ compounds soon developed into local uprisings in the streets of Mahalla, and later other smaller towns in the north. Farmers’ clashes with the police over land escalated. Protests by the urban poor in the capital and the provinces over housing issues became almost daily news. Anti-police brutality riots fuelled a vibrant human rights movement.

The Coptic Christian minority held a series of mass demonstrations against religious sectarian violence, and demanding an end to discrimination.

On the eve of January 2011, Egypt was a classic case of what Russian revolutionary Vladimir Lenin described as a “revolutionary situation”.

Lenin said this occurs “when it is impossible for the ruling classes to maintain their rule without any change; when there is a crisis, in one form or another, among the ‘upper classes’, a crisis in the policy of the ruling class, leading to a fissure through which the discontent and indignation of the oppressed classes burst forth. For a revolution to take place, it is usually insufficient for ‘the lower classes not to want’ to live in the old way; it is also necessary that ‘the upper classes should be unable’ to rule in the old way.”

Fear of Mubarak and his police was largely gone. The torture and murder of an middle class young man, Khaled Said, was enough to spark an uprising.

Torture

Had the murder of Khaled Said happened in 2000 or 2007, it would not have triggered an uprising.

In fact, Mubarak’s torture machine had been producing victims and dead corpses regularly, almost on a daily basis.

But only after a decade of ac-
Cumulating dissent and anger did the Egyptian people feel the courage to take on the regime and its security apparatus.

They did so on 25 January, the National Police Day.

The 18-day uprising witnessed heroic fights in Tahrir, whose images were aired to the rest of the globe. Despite the heroism in the squares, however, it was largely the factories that brought down the dictator.

The protests that started in Tahrir soon spread to workplaces. Every single sector went on strike. The military junta had to rush to force Mubarak out, or else the entire regime might collapse.

The overthrow of Mubarak was enough to end the protests—temporarily—in the public squares. But the strikes in the factories and the ministries’ civil service were only starting.

The strikes had common demands—for job security, independent trade unions and the impeachment of corrupt bosses who were part of Mubarak’s ruling National Democratic Party.

The military junta denounced the strikes, but so did sections of revolutionaries. They regarded the workers as “selfish” instead of seeing the strike wave as the embodiment of the fight for social justice slogans raised in Tahrir.

A genuine mass revolutionary party, that could provide leadership for the strike wave, didn’t exist. So the revolution was dominated by the reformist opposition. It pushed for a polarisation in the political scene along secular/Islamist lines, instead of polarisation over class.

This opened the door for agents of the Mubarak regime to rebrand themselves as a dissident revolutionary force against the mainstream Islamists (the Muslim Brotherhood) and the Salafis.

The army generals were happy to ally themselves with the Islamists in the first two years of the revolution. The Islamists promised to end the revolt in the streets and protect the military’s share of the cake.

Yet the alliance became shaky when it became clear the Muslim Brotherhood could neither co-opt the revolt nor diffuse it.

Secret

The military in secret reached out to the secular opposition (leftists, Arab nationalists, liberals), and secured its backing for a coup in July 2013.

What followed were the biggest massacres in Egypt’s modern history, amid the cheering of the Egyptian leftists.

They dubbed the counterrevolution, led by General el-Sisi, a “war on religious fascism.” It was only a matter of time before el-Sisi finished off the Islamists and turned his attention to the left and liberals.

The picture in Egypt today, a decade after the uprising, is bleak. El-Sisi’s prisons house roughly 60,000 political prisoners of all shades, including socialist comrades.

All independent unions have been crushed.

Youth movements and political parties have either been co-opted, besieged or paralysed.

Wildcat strikes break out every now and then, in addition to sporadic unrest over home demolitions. The Egyptian security services, with the full backing of the West, are embroiled in a dirty war, in the name of fighting terror.

Summary executions, arrest of suspects’ families, torture—all have become normal again.

Counter-revolutions do not simply restore the status quo. They regress society to a lower bar on all levels and fronts.

It is not wishful thinking to say there will be another Egyptian Revolution in the future. The underlying demands that ignited the 2011 revolt (bread, freedom and social justice) have not been met.

And the military dictatorship cannot provide solutions for such structural problems. El-Sisi’s policies are only making matters worse.

But a revolution will not simply break out because the people are suffering, or the economic situation is bad.

There has to be hope that, if the Egyptian people take the risk and confront the regime, there will be a positive outcome.

Regaining confidence in actions from below will take time. And it may require a long chain of smaller struggles that will eventually accumulate and snowball.

This must go hand in hand with trying to rebuild the organisations that could sustain the mobilisation—indepenedent trade unions and revolutionary parties.

Such recovery from the defeat will not take a short time. But the next time we will be more ready, and hopefully we will have learned lessons.
THE COALITION government has been forced onto the back foot by the refugee movement. After almost eight years in detention, including two years in hotel prisons, 48 Medevac refugees have now been released.

On Wednesday 20 January there were 26 released from the Park Hotel in Carlton and two from Melbourne Immigration Transit Accommodation (MITA) detention centre in Broadmeadows. Then the next day a further 20, including well know activists Mo-stafa Azimitabar (Moz) and Ramsiyar Sabanayagam, got out. More releases are expected.

This leaves 14 refugees in the Park Hotel in Melbourne, another 100 in the Kangaroo Point motel in Brisbane and small numbers in Darwin, Villawood in Sydney, Brisbane Immigration Transit Accommodation detention centre and MITA detention centre. They should not have to wait another day. Already one of those remaining in the Park Hotel has attempted self-harm, fearing he would not be released.

The immediate trigger for the releases was legal action many refugees lodged before the Federal Circuit Court. Home Affairs Minister Peter Dutton confirmed this, telling 2GB radio they had been released, “while the legal battle is ongoing”.

Dutton added, “It’s cheaper for people to be in the community than it is to be at hotel, or for us to be paying for them to be in detention”. But if that had been the real reason he would have released all refugees from detention into the community years ago.

Refugees are being dumped into the community with almost no support—just two weeks’ accommodation and three weeks’ financial assistance.

They are being released on insecure “final departure bridging visas”. The movement will need to fight for their right to access JobSeeker, and for permanent visas.

Border Force released a statement claiming the refugees could go to the US, back to Papua New Guinea (PNG) or Nauru, or their home countries. But the US deal is exhausted (with just handfuls of refugees still in the pipeline to go). PNG and Nauru are not taking back Australia’s refugees. Those brought here via Medevac have overwhelmingly been legally determined to be refugees, which means they also can’t be returned to their home countries.

The Coalition government has refused the NZ offer of 150 places per year. That means they have nowhere to go except Australia—and we should make them welcome here.

Protests
Whilst the trigger for the releases was the legal action, the protests inside and outside detention have played a crucial role.

Protests
Whilst the trigger for the releases was the legal action, the protests inside and outside detention have played a crucial role. Protests by refugees in the Mantra and Park Hotels, and at Kangaroo Point in Brisbane, galvanised refugee supporters.

The Refugee Action Collective in Melbourne kept up protest action throughout the pandemic, because protesting for refugee rights was essential.

This led to new activists getting involved who initiated the daily protests outside the Mantra hotel. This culminated in a rally to free the refugees of 700 on Saturday 9 January, defying anti-protest laws that limit gatherings to 100 people.

At the same time over 10,000 are allowed to attend sporting events. But the risk of COVID-19 is 20 times less outside, and there has never been transmission from a rally in Australia. The rally successfully broke the 100 person limit without incident, because it had broad support, with speakers from the Greens, Labor and unions.

The protests, and the ongoing participation of tens of thousands in the wider refugee movement, meant that the Coalition’s legal problems could not be hidden away from view.

It was also the strength of the refugee struggles that first closed the original Manus detention centre in 2017 and then brought 200 refugees to Australia under the Medevac legislation.

Now is the time to press home the movement’s advantage, to fight to free the rest of the Medevac refugees, to end offshore processing, and to dismantle all of the architecture of deterrence.

Another major rally in Melbourne is planned for 2pm Saturday 13 February to welcome the freed refugees, to free the rest, for permanent visas, and to bring the 300 remaining in PNG and Nauru here.