

SEXIST COVER-UPS, VACCINE CHAOS, CLIMATE INACTION SACK THESE LIBERAL THUGS



CLIMATE

Myths behind push
to expand gas

SEXISM

Fighting sexual
harrassment at work

US POLITICS

Biden, socialism and
the fight for change

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

I will not respect a man who has the time to shake hands of men who have won a football match but is 'too busy' to attend the March 4 Justice.

Eels Sports Scientist Tahleya Eggers, who stood with arms folded as Scott Morrison shared a beer with Parramatta Eels players after a match in late March

There really isn't anything of substance under the political marketing veneer

Wayne Errington and Peter van Onselen's judgement on the Prime Minister in their new book *How Good Is Scott Morrison?*

But the ADF's core business will always be the application of lethal violence in the defence of our values, sovereignty and interests. We should never forget that.

Liberal MP and former SAS soldier Andrew Hastie with a helpful reminder on the military's role

There will be a time to talk about those things. Today is not that time.

Scott Morrison refuses to talk about Australian war crimes in Afghanistan as he announced troop withdrawal

It's being driven by the two Cs, China and COVID

Michael Shoebridge, a director of the right-wing think tank Australian Strategic Policy Institute explaining Morrison's proposal to build guided missiles in Australia

Mark McGowan's remarkable victory...tells us Labor is in good shape... If we pitch from the middle to the middle with assuredness and certainty, it's going to be a hectic year.

Northern Territory Labor Chief Minister Michael Gunner's hectic contribution to Labor's national conference

We are going to meet our ambitions with the smartest minds, the best technology and the animal spirits of capitalism.

Scott Morrison on his approach to climate action at the Business Council of Australia dinner

I can't believe we've got these left-wing teachers out there acting racist themselves by saying white lives don't matter. Well, they do.

NSW Police Minister David Elliot still can't understand the slogan "Black Lives Matter", displayed on posters by children at a school in Sydney

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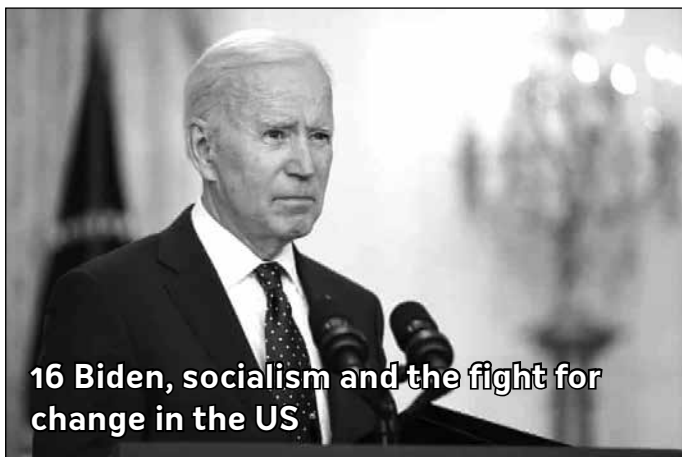


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Fossil fuel industry take-over at Climate Authority

AFTER PREVIOUSLY ignoring its advice, the Coalition has moved to stack the Climate Change Authority with a raft of fossil fuel industry figures.

Former Origin boss and President of the Business Council of Australia Grant King, its new chairman, has promoted the expansion of the gas industry, called for a reduction in the Renewable Energy Target and served on the board of the country's main oil and gas lobby group.

He will be joined by former Santos executive Susie Smith, chief executive of the Australian Industry Greenhouse Network, a fossil fuel lobby group that author Guy Pearse says referred to itself as the "Greenhouse Mafia". King and Smith worked together last year on a report promoting failed carbon capture and storage technology.

The Climate Change Authority was established under the Gillard government to provide science-based advice to government on emissions reduction targets. Under Tony Abbott the Coalition attempted to abolish it.

Women's refuges face funding cut

HOMELESSNESS SERVICES are facing a cut of \$56.5 million, with women's refuges and other services facing closure or reduced staffing.

"You cannot say in one breath that you are concerned about the mistreatment of women and then cut the funding to essential services and women's refuges," the Australian Services Union's Natalie Lang told Seven News.

Until last year, the federal government provided the funding to meet the costs of an equal pay order made in 2012 by Fair Work Australia, a historic decision that sought to address the low pay in a sector with a predominantly female workforce. But now homelessness services, funded separately through a partnership with state governments, face losing the funding.

Social Services Minister Anne Rushton was recently made Minister for Women's Safety. As the ASU put it, "Her first act will be to cut \$50m from women's refuges."

NT government to throw more Indigenous kids in jail



Abuse by guards in the old Don Dale detention centre

YOUTH IMPRISONMENT is set to increase in the NT, after the Territory Labor government announced new law and order measures to restrict the chances of bail for offenders.

This reverses changes made on the recommendation of the Don Dale Royal Commission into youth detention in 2017. The Territory Families Department even told the ABC that Don Dale detention facility in Darwin may need to be expanded.

It would mean "tougher than ever consequences" for breach of bail, Chief Minister Michael Gunner said. Juveniles would be automatically locked up for any serious brief of bail, whether reoffending or breaching monitoring conditions.

The NT has the highest proportion of children aged 10-17 in youth detention of any state or territory. And most days every single child locked up is Indigenous. The North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency's Priscilla Atkins condemned the changes, saying, "We need to back responses that work, such as continuing investment in community-driven solutions that support Aboriginal children and families."

The move came just weeks before the 30-year anniversary of the landmark report of the national Royal Commission in Deaths in Custody in 1991. Since then the proportion of Indigenous people in prison has doubled.

Coalition review backed cuts and sell-off at Australia Post

A SECRET review of Australia Post recommended privatisation and cuts to services, similar to those "temporarily" introduced under COVID.

The review recommended selling off its parcel delivery arm—the company's most profitable section, noting that this "would remove approximately \$150m-\$250m in annual net profit". Parcel delivery has since grown enormously during COVID as online shopping boomed.

It also recommended closing at least 100 post offices and reducing the frequency of letter deliveries, at a cost of around 8000 jobs. The review, by consulting firm BCG, was commissioned by the Coalition in 2019 but the government had refused to release it until ousted CEO Christine Holgate made it public at a Senate hearing this month.

Holgate says she opposed the review's findings—putting her at odds with Coalition Minister Paul Fletcher, although she also wanted services cut. Her time as CEO ended in November following the scandal over gifts of \$12,000 luxury watches to senior employees.

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

Billion dollar missile plan

SCOTT MORRISON has announced \$1 billion to manufacture guided missiles in Australia.

This is designed both to bolster Australia's preparations for war and grab a slice of the lucrative arms trade. Defence Minister Peter Dutton said the government would select an industry partner to set up "a sovereign capability to manufacture a suite of precision weapons that will meet Australia's growing needs and provide export opportunities".

The facility will be established in close collaboration with the US, with Dutton saying it would both supply Australia's needs and "the growing needs of our most important military partner".

It comes following a deal with the US in November to develop and test new hypersonic missiles designed to travel at up to eight times the speed of sound and capable of launching long-range strikes.

The move is part of a program of \$270 billion in military hardware over the next 10 years—aimed squarely at confronting China.

New Santos gas project a 'carbon emissions factory'

OIL AND GAS company Santos has announced it will proceed with the \$4.7 billion Barossa gas project off the coast near Darwin. It will drill gas with some of the world's highest carbon dioxide, which is likely to be simply released in a "carbon bomb".

The company said it would "investigate" ways to offset the emissions, without making any commitments.

The project has a life of 20 years and will produce for export. The mining and processing of the gas alone from this one project will produce 5.43 million tonnes of a carbon dioxide each year, equivalent to half the emissions of the Yallourn coal power station. That's before the gas is even burnt.

EDITORIAL

Morrison exposed by failures on sexism and vaccine rollout—step up the pressure to sack him

SCOTT MORRISON'S refusal to act on sexism and sexual assault is seriously damaging his support. Morrison's approval rating among women has dropped 16 per cent since February. And the two-party preferred poll has Labor ahead of the Coalition 52-48.

The new Women's Taskforce announced as part of his Cabinet reshuffle includes Linda Reynolds, who covered up Brittany Higgins' rape, and Amanda Stoker as Assistant Minister for Women. Stoker has shown no interest in standing up to sexism, dismissing claims of bullying against women in the Liberal Party as "pathetic".

She is a Christian right culture warrior who speaks at anti-abortion rallies and has contempt for transgender people, describing people's right to affirm their gender identity as a "dangerous and radical transgender agenda".

Taskforce chair Marise Payne, who Morrison labelled the "Prime Minister for Women", has been completely invisible while the revelations of rape, sexual assault and sexism in parliament have surrounded the Liberals.

Morrison is determined to keep Christian Porter and Linda Reynolds in Cabinet despite calls for their sacking. Although they have moved portfolios both will keep their \$360,000-a-year salaries.

Porter's decision to sue the ABC for defamation over the rape allegation against him guarantees Porter and sexism will be media headlines for months. And Porter will be back in parliament in May where he is sure to face questions.

But sexism and sexual assault are not just a problem in parliament and the Liberal Party; almost every woman has her own experience of harassment or assault.

The disgust at Morrison's inaction is so widespread because the Liberals actively entrench sexism and discrimination against women. The farcical consent videos commissioned by the government show just how out of touch they are. They have so little empathy and understanding that they will always be part of the problem.

The Liberals have cut JobSeeker to poverty levels, making it even more difficult for single mothers to survive. They have done nothing to make childcare more affordable, extend parental leave or fund services for women. Yet



Above: Scott Morrison's efforts to brush aside sexism in parliament ignited the huge March 4 Justice protests

they can find \$1 billion to build missiles.

Domestic violence services are facing unprecedented demand following the pandemic, yet face a \$150 million funding cut. Women's legal centres also face a "tsunami" of requests to deal with cases of violence against women but are desperately short of funding.

The Coalition has announced a women's safety summit for July to discuss a new national plan on violence against women. It is window-dressing on their sexist system.

As Hayley Foster, the head of peak body Women's Safety NSW argued, "We can't wait until 2022 to act. Hundreds of thousands of women and children need help now. We cannot turn our backs on them when they need us most."

Vaccines

After blustering last year that he had put Australia "at the front of the queue" to access COVID vaccines, Morrison's rollout has descended into chaos. Globally, there is a real vaccine shortage due to the rich countries refusing to waive patents that would have allowed countries to make cheap copies of the vaccines. Now the profit-hungry big pharma manufacturers are plagued by production delays.

This has intensified "vaccine nationalism" as the rich countries rush to secure doses for themselves.

Morrison gambled on the AstraZeneca vaccine as it can be produced in Australia (and guarantee CSL profits), turning down advice to develop the capacity to manufacture other types of vaccines based on the mRNA technol-

ogy used by Pfizer and Moderna.

Now shortages of Pfizer and the very rare but serious blood clot side-effect from the AstraZeneca vaccine means it is unlikely everyone will receive a dose by the end of the year.

The Coalition played the vaccine nationalism game, signing four vaccine deals in an effort to jump ahead of other nations. But it is now a victim of the political game it played—with developing countries, and workers in Australia too, paying a price for the Coalition's greed and short-sightedness.

Morrison is now behind in the polls and seriously vulnerable. Labor's small target strategy is letting him off the hook but a fightback for workers' rights, climate action and against sexism could help finish him off.

The union victory at McCormick sauce shows that strikes can win.

The women's March 4 Justice protests put huge pressure on Morrison. In Sydney, youth survivors of sexual assault have called another protest on 8 May to sack Porter, Reynolds, Laming and Morrison.

School Strike for Climate activists have also called their first climate strike since 2019 for 21 May—targeting Morrison's plans for a gas-fired recovery and further expansion of fossil fuels. The guilty verdict for Derek Chauvin in the US is a victory for the Black Lives Matter protests and shows the power of protest to challenge racism and sexism.

Large protests and strikes are the key to resisting Morrison and the bosses, and fighting for system change.

.....
Morrison is now behind in the polls and seriously vulnerable

Sauce workers taste victory after six-week strike

By David Glanz

WORKERS AT the McCormick factory in Melbourne have scored a tremendous victory, beating back their multinational employer after six weeks on strike.

As one striker told *Solidarity*: “We got everything we wanted without losing anything. It took us six weeks but we finally got what we deserved.”

The 71 members of the United Workers Union fought off management attempts to change their shift pattern from a four-day, 40-hour week to a five-day week.

Management capitulated on 7 April, conceding:

- no changes to conditions
- a 9 per cent pay rise across three years
- a \$5000 sign-on bonus

The factory in Clayton South makes the sauces and spices for fast food giants including McDonald's, KFC, Hungry Jacks and Nandos, plus supermarket products like Aeroplan jelly.

The workers have not had a pay rise in five years, despite the US parent company posting a \$US747 million profit last year.

At a series of mass meetings on 7 April, the strikers were in tremendous spirits as negotiators reported that management had dropped any changes to conditions.

They stood firm on the final element of the deal, the sign-on bonus. Management's first offer was a pathetic \$1500.

One worker called out: “Let's stick by our guns.” Another pointed out: “They can afford it.” By late afternoon, management had conceded.

Leading to victory

There are three main factors that led to victory.

First and most importantly, the workers stood absolutely united. Many of them have worked at McCormick for 15 or 20 years, with experience of strikes there and elsewhere. Being at the picket line felt like visiting one big family.

Workers maintained the picket 24 hours a day, with men and women sharing the cooking and cleaning. The picket brought the multicultural workforce together.

A week earlier, all union members and a number of non-union members voted down a management offer that



Above: Tired but happy McCormick strikers celebrate their win. Photo: UWU

would have ended the four-day week and cost workers hundreds of dollars.

As one worker said: “They're giving us a pay rise on the one hand, but then taking back a shitload on the other.”

Second, the strikers won solidarity. An online strike fund raised more than \$78,000. Even more could have been raised if the UWU had arranged for workplace collections.

The union organised a series of solidarity events addressed by high-profile speakers including Labor leader Anthony Albanese, Labor MP Tanya Plibersek, and Michele O'Neil and Sally McManus from the ACTU.

The VIP treatment reflected the fact that both Labor and the ACTU saw the dispute mainly as an opportunity to bash the Liberals over low wages. There was support on the picket line from Victorian Trades Hall Council and a range of unions, including ETU, IEU, ASU, CPSU, RAFF-WU, VAHPA, MEAA and MUA.

Third, management was vulnerable, despite their early hard line. The factory is the only one in Australia and by the end of the dispute, according to strikers, production was down to 20 per cent of normal and the warehouse was emptying.

In addition, management wanted to increase production by adding a night shift. They attempted to do it on the cheap by forcing workers on to a five-day week but ultimately they wanted greater production more than they wanted cost-cutting.

The UWU has agreed to a night shift of 12 workers, with any ad-

ditional crews by mutual agreement. Importantly, the new workers will be covered by the enterprise agreement – meaning McCormick workers should be able to increase union membership.

Lessons for future

Despite the victory, there were weaknesses that union activists can learn from.

There was no attempt to stop trucks entering or leaving the site. A serious attempt to control the gates, which would have meant defying the law, would have brought management to heel much sooner.

Solidarity from other unions was largely confined to appearances by officials and organisers. Mobilisation of workplace delegations would have laid the ground for bigger turnouts on mass pickets.

The McCormick distribution centre at nearby Moorabbin worked throughout the dispute—covered by a separate, inferior EBA which had conceded the five-day week.

None of this takes away from a clear-cut and important victory.

The McCormick strikers have shown workers around Australia that there is an alternative to copping low or zero pay rises. They chanted “Union, power” and “One day longer, one day stronger”—and they meant it.

By sticking together and slowly strangling the bosses' flow of production and profits, they defended their conditions and won a decent pay rise.

We need to see that fighting spirit rebuilt in workplaces around the country.

.....
The workers have not had a pay rise in five years, despite the US parent company posting a \$US747 million profit last year

Organising at work key to stopping wave of harassment against women

By Ruby Wawn

NEARLY A year after its release, Prime Minister Scott Morrison has finally responded to the Respect@Work report. His “Roadmap for Respect” agrees with or notes the 55 recommendations of the report but does not commit to fully implement them.

Workplace sexual harassment is appallingly widespread. Fully 39 per cent of women have experienced workplace sexual harassment in the last five years, and over 85 per cent of women over the age of 15 in their lifetime. Yet less than one in five people who experience harassment make a formal complaint.

The disgust at the Coalition’s failure over sexual assault in parliament, and the nationwide March 4 Justice protests, have forced Morrison to act.

The report recommended a series of legal changes including the extension of liability to people who aid or permit sexual harassment at work, longer time frames to lodge a legal complaint, and the possibility of dismissal for workplace sexual harassment. But the government has rejected its advice to place obligations on employers to prevent harassment, claiming these already exist in workplace health and safety laws.

The report also criticised inadequate funding for services, including the 1800RESPECT domestic violence hotline, where the Coalition has cut costs. It also called for funding for Working Women’s Centres and Community Legal Centres, whose funding was initially cut by the Liberals and then restored after an outcry over the effects on Indigenous people and survivors of domestic violence.

But they remain chronically underfunded with specialist women’s legal services needing an extra \$25 million a year to support women experiencing domestic violence. Morrison has failed to guarantee any extra money.

Sexual harassment is a product of the sexism that exists across society, but is more likely where women have less power at work.

The experience of women in the retail sector is one example. Workers here are often young and insecurely employed. So the risk of sexual harassment is even higher. Around half of women experienced sexual harassment seven times in a year, an Australian Human Rights Commission report found in 2019.

A 2020 survey by the Retail and



Above: Chemist Warehouse strikers won against harassment at work through their strike in 2019

Fast Food Workers Union (RAFFWU) found sexual harassment was rampant at JB Hi-Fi. Almost half of surveyed members had experienced discussion about hiring women on the basis of their appearance, comments about women’s bodies, or the use of gendered language such as “bitchy” or “bossy” to refer to women staff. More than half had also experienced unwelcome touching or sexual advances at work.

Sexual harassment is mostly committed by co-workers and supervisors, with customers also responsible in one-third of cases.

But less than 3 per cent of bosses are reported for sexual harassment. Even former NSW Liberal MP Pru Goward concedes that this reflects the power of bosses to hire and fire anyone who speaks out.

Casualisation

Alongside the rise of casualisation and insecure work, a 2018 survey by the Australian Human Rights Commission found that workplace sexual harassment has actually increased in the last 15 years.

Women make up 47.2 per cent of all Australian employees. But they are also more likely to be insecurely employed, making up 67.2 per cent of part-time employees and on average earn 13.4 per cent less than men.

Casualisation leaves women without the confidence of a secure job to speak up about abuse and harassment. And the Coalition’s efforts to encourage more workplace “flexibility” will

only make this worse.

For migrant women, precarious employment linked to their visa status makes it even harder, with one union member stating, “I’m worried that if I lose this job I won’t be able to find another permanent job in Australia. That makes it hard to say anything”.

Education campaigns and legal changes will do little to help. The reason so few women report their experiences is that few have any confidence in what will happen.

Union workplace organising is the key to building the power at work to address the issue, along with fighting the conditions that leave women vulnerable to abuse in the first place.

There are many examples of this. In 2018, workers walked out of McDonald’s franchises across the US after management refused to take harassment complaints seriously, as part of the Fight for \$15 an hour wage campaign.

And in 2019, a strike of 800 workers at Chemist Warehouse distribution centres in Melbourne and Brisbane united men and women workers behind a campaign against sexual harassment and bullying after workers reported that managers had offered shifts in exchange for sex. The industrial action forced one manager involved to resign and also won pay rises and permanent jobs for many workers.

To fight sexual harassment at work, we need to fight for secure and well paid jobs that give women the confidence to stand up to abuse.

.....
Casualisation leaves women without the confidence of a secure job to speak up about abuse and harassment

Derek Chauvin is guilty, and so is the whole rotten system

By Sophie Squire

RELIEVED CELEBRATIONS broke out as police officer Derek Chauvin was found guilty on all counts of murder and manslaughter in the death of George Floyd last year.

The verdicts are the result of the massive Black Lives Matter movement that swept the US after Floyd's killing.

The Floyd family's lawyers said the decision meant that "painfully earned justice has arrived for George Floyd's family and the community here in Minneapolis".

But nobody should think this verdict means the justice system works.

If tens of millions of people had not taken to the streets and defied the cops then Floyd's case would have been just another scandal covered up by a corrupt system.

Chauvin is just the second police officer in Minnesota to ever be convicted of murder for an on-duty incident in the state.

Protesters gathered in front of the Hennepin County Government Center where the trial was held. After the verdict was heard the crowd began to chant, "One down three to go," in reference to trials of other police officers accused of being complicit in Floyd's murder. A protester told the crowd, "Don't let anyone tell you protest doesn't work."

The verdict was heard as renewed demonstrations have spread across the US—continuing for more than a week in Brooklyn Center, only ten miles away from Minneapolis, after the police murder of Daunte Wright.

In other US cities activists have continued to protest the killing of Floyd, Wright and Adam Toledo—a 13-year-old who was shot by the police last month.

Killer cops are rarely charged with murder. Chauvin being charged with murder shows that the ruling class is terrified of the Black Lives Matter movement and how it questioned the present set up.

But now the people at the top will try to say that Chauvin was an exception to generally good policing. That doesn't fit the facts—US police still kill three people per day. The cops are trained to hold working class people in utter contempt and with that comes both sexism and racism.

Protesters must stay on the streets to demand true justice for Floyd and



Above: Black Lives Matter protesters back on the streets in the US

every other victim of a racist police force and to end a racist system that

protects the ruling class.
Socialist Worker UK

Labor's climate cowardice shows need for stronger movement

LABOR IS moving away from action on climate change, stepping up its support for the fossil fuel industry. The party is attempting a "small target" strategy, positioning itself as more supportive of climate action than Scott Morrison, while telling fossil fuel workers that major changes are decades away. Just like their approach at the last election, this risks pleasing nobody.

The party's Resources spokesperson Madeleine King has said she is "absolutely not supportive one bit" of calls for a moratorium on new coal mines, adding, "For so long as international markets want to buy Australian coal... then they will be able to." She even voiced support for coal exports continuing beyond 2050, despite the call for net zero emissions by then.

On the other hand, Climate spokesperson Chris Bowen says there are "economic opportunities" and new jobs in climate action—including in existing coal dependent regions.

But while he claims a Labor government would "ensure workers don't get left behind" he is relying on big business and the free market to fund the climate transition. The only commitments to government funding from Labor are for a vague manufacturing plan and electricity

transmission wires.

Bowen has condemned Scott Morrison's talk of a "gas-fired recovery", saying, "It's simply a fraud," that won't actually create jobs. But at the same time he backs the ongoing role of gas in the energy system, despite evidence it is not needed, saying, "Gas will continue to play a role in firming and peaking our grid".

Labor is still terrified of losing votes among coal workers in Queensland and NSW's Hunter Valley, after Scott Morrison used the Adani coal mine at the last election to swing votes. But instead of outlining plans for government spending to ensure workers are looked after during the transition, it is pretending nothing needs to change.

But the need for climate action is increasingly urgent. A new report from the Climate Council has sounded the alarm, arguing that keeping global temperature increases to 1.5 degrees is now "virtually impossible". Even a target of 2 degrees, beyond that considered safe by many, means Australia needs to get to net zero emissions by 2035, it said.

This shows why we need a much stronger climate movement, demanding serious government investment—and a plan to ensure workers' jobs and wages are protected.

James Supple

.....
Chauvin being charged with murder shows that the ruling class is terrified of the Black Lives Matter movement

Busting Morrison's myth: Why gas is not a transition fuel

By Niko Chlopicki

IN ANNOUNCING a power deal with South Australia in April, Morrison claimed that supporting renewables also requires “getting more gas into the market”. This serves to justify his “gas-fired” recovery and the plan to pay for a new gas power station in NSW.

However, not only is gas unnecessary, but new fossil gas-fired stations will also increase Australia's emissions, increase electricity prices and provide only tiny numbers of construction and ongoing jobs.

Morrison and Energy Minister Angus Taylor are marketing gas as a “transition fuel” that can provide power on days that solar and wind aren't available. Gas power stations can fire up rapidly and plug the gap, they claim.

Australia's Chief Scientist, Alan Finkel, has also backed this, arguing, “The adoption of more renewable electricity will be faster, more economical and more reliable if natural gas-fired electricity generation continues to be available.”

Labor has a more ambiguous position, with climate change spokesperson Chris Bowen admitting that “gas is not a low emission fuel”. But while he rejects calling gas a transition fuel, Bowen does accept it as “a very important part, nevertheless, of the transition, and ... for some time to come”.

Union debate

Some in the union movement have also been taken in. Daniel Walton, national secretary of the right-wing Australian Workers Union, has urged Labor to embrace gas in the name of manufacturing jobs, claiming that refusing to do so is to “callously play dice with blue collar lives”.

He claims that the gas plant Morrison wants to build at Kurri Kurri in NSW's Hunter Valley is needed to meet energy demands for the nearby Tomago aluminium smelter, as more reliable than renewable energy sources.

The smelter currently produces 595,000 tonnes of aluminium a year and is the largest user of electricity in NSW. The nearby Liddell coal-powered station will close in April 2023.

But there is no case for increasing the amount of gas in the energy system, let alone building new gas



Above: A local protest against government funding for the Kurri Kurri gas power plant

power stations.

The National Electricity Market (which covers all states except WA and NT) already has 11.4 gigawatts of gas power capacity, almost six times the size of Liddell. These plants have run at less than 30 per cent capacity for the past 18 months, an Australia Institute audit in February found.

With interconnector upgrades, battery and renewable projects already under way another five gigawatts of capacity are coming in NSW. Australian Energy Market Operator (AEMO) forecasts show there will be no shortfall in energy requirements, meaning that no new gas plants are needed to meet current energy demands, not even for Tomago.

According to the Electrical Trades Union (ETU), Tomago smelter management is in favour of the gas power station plan only because of its hope for cheaper government subsidised power.

The union points out that, “If the federal government is prepared to build a gas plant next door and provide a commitment of a long-term, low-cost power purchase agreement ... then it is hardly surprising Tomago is keen to see it go ahead.”

AEMO conducted a detailed analysis of future energy demands and failed to produce a single scenario where an increase in gas supply would be needed, pointing out that gas generation in 2020 was significantly down due to increasing amounts of large-scale wind and rooftop solar power.

It noted that in any case, “Gas is ... too polluting for the emissions reduction task [and] is also too expensive to compete against rival technologies, particularly those driven by cheap wind and solar.”

Importantly, battery projects are an increasingly economical means of storing power from renewable energy for when it is needed, eliminating the need for polluting gas power as a backup.

Jobs

Nor will gas create many jobs. The proposed Kurri Kurri gas-fired station, for example, would only employ 20 staff in ongoing operational and maintenance roles.

For NSW's Hunter region, the ETU argues that public investment in the renewable sector, rather than a new gas power station, would result in many more local job opportunities. These could include green steel, solar and battery manufacturing, mine rehabilitation and the conversion of the Tomago aluminium smelter to renewable energy.

Public money should be invested in zero emissions technology and providing secure union jobs as part of a just transition. This is essential if we are to achieve the action needed on climate change.

Doing so will require convincing unionists and the broader working class of the need for climate action and a mass climate movement fighting for a just transition.

Gas use in 2020 was significantly down due to increasing amounts of large-scale wind and rooftop solar power

Liberals' plan for NDIS cuts stalled—now stop them for good

NEW NDIS Minister Linda Reynolds has halted plans for compulsory independent assessments (IAs) for the NDIS.

This is a win against the Liberals' plan for cuts. The government is completely isolated in its push to introduce these degrading assessments. But it has only delayed their introduction until after further consultations and the second round of trials, not scrapped them completely.

IAs would see NDIS applicants' needs determined by a government contracted assessor, instead of doctors or therapists of their choosing.

It is not clear how the IAs would work. Critics warn that they could be conducted in just three hours and that results will be standardised check box assessments, with little regard for people's individual circumstances.

Instead of their personalised budget coming out of a consideration of the participant's goals and aspirations, IAs will see it determined by a crude assessment of their "functional capacity."

Currently NDIS participants can request a review of decisions made by NDIA staff (from the government department that runs the scheme). They can then appeal to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT), where the NDIA often loses.

But IA results will not be reviewable. Participants will still have the right to an AAT appeal to challenge NDIA decisions about their budget, but not the data that informs it. This makes winning a successful review harder.

When it was begun in 2013 the NDIS promised to expand funding to meet every reasonable need of people with disabilities. But IAs will be used to cut spending on NDIS participants.

Further draft changes to the NDIS Act leaked in late March revealed that the government considered excluding people with Foetal Alcohol Syndrome Disorder and Acquired Brain Injury from the scheme.

Other proposals included preventing NDIS participants spending their funds on "ordinary living expenses." Some participants have won the right to fund these at AAT appeals. For example, a man with Multiple Sclerosis living in North Queensland won the right to funding for air conditioning because his condition worsens in high temperatures.

When former NDIS Minister Stuart Robert decried the funding of sexual supports, it was these kinds of supports that he really had in his sights. The government wants to



Above: Protesting the plan for Independent Assessment at the Fairer NDIS for All rally in Melbourne Photo: Matt Hrkac

change the NDIS Act so that the Minister decides what can and can't be funded, rather than the courts.

The government defends IAs as a fairer and more accurate way to determine NDIS participants' support needs. These changes proposed in the draft Act show that fairness couldn't be further from their minds.

The stakes are high. Disability advocates have warned of devastating consequences if IAs result in budget cuts or NDIS participants being "exited" from the scheme.

In its submission to the parliamentary Joint Standing Committee, VALID, an advocacy organisation for people with an intellectual disability, explained that, "this will mean people returning to prison, people evicted into hospitals, more children in out-of-home care, homelessness and even preventable death."

Opponents of independent assessments need to press the advantage and take on the broader cost-cutting agenda. NDIS plans are already being slashed. The NDIA recently formed a "Sustainability Action Taskforce" to cut spending. This is separate to all the other government reforms.

Market logic

Opposing the agenda for cuts also means getting the market out of disability services. Competing NDIS providers are cutting workers' pay and conditions, leading to casualisation and insecure work. This damages the quality of disability services.

The sector is losing experienced

workers as online platforms like Hireup and Mable, which use entirely insecure workforces, "disrupt" the NDIS market by undercutting established providers.

Personalised budgets were sold to disabled people as a means of empowering them by promoting "choice and control."

In reality personalised budgets are a tool to limit NDIS participants' spending. They impose a cap on the goods and services participants can access. This is becoming clearer under the proposed reforms, which include the periodic release of funds instead of an annual budget for use at the NDIS participant's discretion.

Occupational Therapy Australia's submission to the Joint Standing Committee argues that, "International evidence highlights the risk of inequity inherent in personalised and individualised social funding models... people of higher socioeconomic status tend to benefit more from personalised approaches, as they typically have greater self-advocacy and negotiation skills to navigate complex systems."

As an alternative to independent assessments the Fairer NDIS for All campaign is demanding free medical and allied health services for NDIS applicants. This would reduce inequalities in obtaining the evidence needed to access the scheme.

But the ultimate goal needs to be a public disability service without strict eligibility criteria that exclude people who should be receiving support.

The campaign to stop IAs can be the start of a movement to win this.

Independent Assessments will be used to cut spending on NDIS participants

Myanmar: ongoing resistance defies military crackdown

By Mark Goudkamp

MYANMAR'S POLITICAL situation continues to rapidly evolve. On 16 April, the committee representing its dismissed parliament announced the formation of a national unity government including MPs from Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD), protest leaders and politicians from national minorities.

The government is seeking international recognition. But the Association of South-East Asian Nations, with its policy of "non-interference" into member states, instead invited coup leader General Min Aung Hlaing to its 24 April meeting in Jakarta.

The former parliament has adopted the protest movement's demand to scrap the undemocratic 2008 constitution. Protesters celebrated by publicly burning this document, which had guaranteed the military (Tatmadaw) 25 per cent of seats in parliament.

Despite the military's overwhelming election loss in 2015, the NLD was unwilling to challenge the Tatmadaw's power, corruption or oppression of minorities. In November 2019, Suu Kyi even defended the military's ethnic cleansing of the Rohingya in the International Court of Justice. But last November's even more humiliating defeat prompted the generals to launch the 1 February coup.

Given the scale of the revolt, Hlaing might regret shattering an arrangement that allowed him to profit via two enormous military-controlled business conglomerates (Myanmar Economic Corporation and Myanmar Economic Holdings Limited).

Three months on, inter-ethnic solidarity is propelling Myanmar towards a federal democracy in a way unimaginable before the coup. National minorities had felt betrayed by Suu Kyi and the NLD's tendencies towards Bamar chauvinism. Now they have pledged to fight the coup. Thousands of protesters (and some defecting soldiers) from the Bamar majority have sought refuge in ethnic rebel-held territory.

Meanwhile, Myanmar's civil disobedience movement is showing incredible defiance in the face of repression. As *Solidarity* went to press, almost 750 people had been killed by the junta. More than 3200 had been detained.

The Tatmadaw's crackdown has been especially severe in working class hubs of strike and protest activity. Yangon's townships of Hlaing



Above: A recent protest in the city of Mandalay

Thayar, Shwepyitha, South Dagon and North Okkalapa are all under martial law. Following the 14 March massacre of 60 workers and students in Hlaing Tharyar in West Yangon, home to around 300 garment factories, some 100,000 migrant workers fled to their rural communities of origin.

Armed Forces Day on 27 March saw 114 people slain across the country, while representatives of Russia, China, India, Thailand, Vietnam, Laos, Pakistan and Bangladesh watched an elaborate military parade in the capital, Naypyitaw.

That evening, in response to the Karen National Liberation Army seizing a military outpost, the junta used Russia-supplied planes to bomb Karen villages. Thousands fled to the Thai border, only to be pushed back by Thai authorities. The Tatmadaw subsequently conducted air strikes against Kachin-controlled areas bordering China.

The military is targeting protest and strike leaders. On 15 April, Wai Moe Naing, a leader at the Monywa strike committee, was run down while on a motorbike protest convoy and detained without health treatment. Daw Myo Aye, director of the Solidarity Trade Union of Myanmar, was arrested in her office while Moe Sandar Myint of the garment workers' union has a warrant out against her.

Nonetheless, civil disobedience continues under the slogan of "no recognition, no participation". Strikes by railways workers, bank workers, teachers and public servants continue to cripple the economy.

Western nations (but not Austra-

lia) have imposed sanctions against Myanmar's military heads, their families and army-linked businesses. On the other hand, Russia and China have been widely condemned by protesters as having supported the coup (China, which prospered under Suu Kyi's government, has denied this).

The left should unconditionally back the strikes and protests, support calls for an arms embargo and expose companies continuing to operate in Myanmar. APHEDA (the ACTU's international wing) and Amnesty International pressured Woodside Petroleum to cease operations. The South Korean union movement recently forced a similar commitment from steel-making giant POSCO.

Some critics in the West portray the resistance as beholden to Western funding and dominated by calls for Western intervention. Such demands have emerged, but they are marginal. Many movement leaders don't trust Western governments, remembering how they prematurely lifted sanctions during "democratisation" last decade so corporations could profit from Myanmar's natural resources.

Genuine socialists stand with the self-activity of Myanmar's workers, students and minority activists, whose bravery has encouraged defections, even among some journalists from state-run media.

According to a Tatmadaw officer who recently defected, three-quarters of the country's 400,000 soldiers oppose the crackdown. Convincing them to break ranks is no easy task but it will be crucial if the revolution is to win.

Strikes by railways workers, bank workers, teachers and public servants continue to cripple the economy

Biden's spending plans aim to prop up US capitalism

By James Supple

US PRESIDENT Joe Biden's spending plans have been hailed by some as a dramatic turn to the left. Bernie Sanders' campaign manager Faiz Shakir even praised his efforts as "investment in working people on a scale that we have not seen since FDR" and the New Deal of the 1930s.

But they are designed above all to restore business profits and the US's economic power, still hard hit from the COVID crisis that has produced more than half a million deaths. Even as vaccinations roll out and businesses reopen, there were still 8.4 million fewer jobs in March than before the pandemic.

Just as importantly, Biden wants to quiet discontent at the massive inequality that produced the explosive Black Lives Matter protests and the growth in support for democratic socialism and figures like Bernie Sanders.

The US never fully recovered from the previous 2008 economic crisis, with the bitterness it produced fuelling the rise of Donald Trump. Even sections of the billionaire class recognise this.

As the bosses' *Financial Times* admitted before last year's presidential election: "There have been times since the 2008 crash when popular resentment of inequality, especially among the young, has threatened to spill over into demands for total systemic change." Biden's spending plans, it wrote, might, "avert a larger reckoning further down the line".

His \$US1.9 trillion COVID relief bill, which passed Congress in March, may sound huge. But it is little different to the hundreds of billions of dollars Scott Morrison has pumped into the Australian economy during the pandemic to avoid economic collapse. Biden's measures include \$US1400 one-off stimulus cheques and \$US300 a week to fund unemployment payments until September, simply to avoid cuts to existing payments.

Also included were \$US70 billion to fund vaccination and testing and \$US170 billion to assist schools and universities to reopen.

Despite the talk of helping working class people, the measures are simply temporary cash injections to keep people's heads above water until the pandemic passes, not efforts to reduce entrenched inequality.



Above: US President Joe Biden is spending big because of the scale of the problems facing a US economy in the grip of the pandemic

The plan for a \$US15 minimum wage, which would have permanently lifted millions of workers out of poverty, was abandoned completely after opposition from within the Democratic Party.

Biden has also announced an enormous \$US2.26 trillion infrastructure and climate spending plan, designed to deliver millions of jobs.

And he wants to increase the corporate tax rate to pay for it, reversing tax cuts made by Trump, although only partially.

More spending on education, child care and welfare is still coming that could take his total plans to near \$US7 trillion over a decade.

But given the size of the US economy, the figure could be far larger. Democratic Socialist Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez says that \$US10 trillion is necessary to fund the climate transition needed.

There is money to boost the take-up of electric cars, rebuild crumbling bridges and roads, and retrofit housing for energy efficiency, among many other measures.

But while the package would upgrade the electricity grid, paying for renewable energy itself is being left entirely to business.

Brett Hartl of the Center for Biological Diversity called it an "industry-friendly plan" that "squanders one of our last, best chances to stop the climate emergency" and "won't even come close" to meeting climate goals.

How much of this actually goes ahead will depend on whether it can

get through the Senate—and even gain the support of conservative Democratic Party senators. Still, on paper it is the most ambitious plan of its kind since at least President Lyndon Johnson's "Great Society" programs of the 1960s.

But like Biden's stimulus bill, the spending is designed as a shot in the arm for US businesses. It would shovel billions in contracts to corporations and, as the White House's own fact sheet declares, aims to "position the United States to out-compete China".

Reasserting US imperial power after the embarrassment and unpredictability of Trump's presidency is among Biden's central aims.

After just a month in office, he launched his first bombing raid, killing 22 people in an attack on Iranian-backed militants in Syria. He has declared, "America is back, ready to lead the world".

Even as he announced the final withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan, ending one of the US's "forever wars" after 20 years, Biden made it clear this was "to focus on the challenges that are in front of us ... to shore up American competitiveness to face the stiff competition from an increasingly assured China".

His administration has continued military exercises in the South China Sea and gone out of its way to send a strong signal of its support for Taiwan against any Chinese efforts at a takeover. Biden and the Democratic Party remain loyal servants of US capitalism.

It would shovel billions in contracts to corporations and aims to "position the United States to out-compete China".

Vere Gordon Childe: the Australian activist who explained what happened in history

The Fatal Lure of Politics: The Life and Thought of Vere Gordon Childe
By Terry Irving
Monash University Publishing, \$39.95

RADICAL HISTORIAN Terry Irving's new biography of Vere Gordon Childe is an important contribution to understanding the Left in Australia. Irving uncovers Childe's two careers, the first as a labour intellectual in Australia and Britain, during the turbulent years of the First World War until 1924, and the second from 1925-1957 as archaeologist, prehistorian and linguist.

Irving's biography brings to life the whole person, exploring a complex intellectual and personal life, confirming Childe's place in the Left, an unorthodox Marxist, and a socialist, anti-war, and anti-racism activist.

Irving writes: "As the First World War was ending, Childe wrote to an academic mentor in Britain that he intended to return there 'to escape the fatal lure of politics' in Australia. Ten years later he was well into an academic career ... but throughout that career politics continued to lure him."

Childe was the first exponent of Marxist archaeology in the western world. In his writings he made archaeology more accessible to laypeople, starting with *Man Makes Himself* (1936) and *What Happened in History* (1942). Childe remains the world's most widely read archaeologist.

His archaeological work reinforced his anti-racism, as when he argued



Marxist archaeologist and labour movement intellectual Gordon Childe

that the West was: "indebted to the Orient for the rudiments of the arts and crafts that initiated man's emancipation from bondage to his environment and for the foundation of those spiritual ties that co-ordinate human endeavours ... But the peoples of the West were not slavish imitators; they adapted the gifts of the East and united the contributions made by Africa and Asia into a new and organic whole capable of developing on its own original lines".

A life on the left

Childe was born on 14 April 1892 in Sydney into a conservative Christian family. He studied at the University of Sydney, winning a scholarship to Oxford University (1914-17).

Childe cut his radical teeth in 1913 as a supporter of 2000 gas workers who took illegal unofficial strike action against the NSW ALP government. Rank-and-file rebelliousness combined with

political experience in the Left and labour movement would shape Childe's thinking.

In Oxford, Childe learnt about guild socialism, a movement advocating workers' control of industry and co-operatives, and joined the revolutionary wing of a socialist club. He defended jailed conscientious objectors during the First World War and supported strikes by 200,000 workers across Britain in May 1917.

Returning to Australia until late 1921, he

witnessed a massive strike wave during the 1919 influenza pandemic and became adviser to Labor leader John Storey, the NSW premier from March 1920.

In 1923 he published his authoritative analysis of parliamentarism and labourism, *How Labour Governs: A Study of Workers' Representatives in Australia*, which remains available today. It offers a forensic study of the ALP and trade union movement, showing the need for revolution to build a "proletarian democracy"—to end the "exploitation and enslavement of the workers"—because of the failure of "politicalism", a term he coined to criticise the actual experience of labour movement representation.

Childe developed his analysis further, arguing as Irving puts it that "it was fatuous to promise, as Labor did, to transform capitalism by evolutionary means". Even the most radical left-wing govern-

ments could not control the economy nor the state. The movement that created the ALP with the objective of eliminating exploitation "would have to go further".

How Labour Governs also opposed racial prejudice and the nationalism and jingoism of the times, which "found its natural political exponent in the Labour Party".

He argued for a non-discriminatory conception of progress, as illustrated when he wrote about Aboriginal Australia (which he did not formally study) in *Man Makes Himself* in 1936: "Why assume that, when the Arunta had created a material culture adapted to their environment, they at once stopped thinking altogether? They may have gone on thinking just as much as our own cultural ancestors, although their thoughts followed different lines."

Irving uncovers the life of one of the world's most important intellectuals, who challenged archaeologists, historians and socialists, and defied attempts by wartime states to deny civil liberties and academic freedom. Childe's attitude to both the Soviet Union and Stalinism was inconsistent. Childe felt he was in a different tradition and never used Stalinist jargon.

As the world once again moves toward reaction and social democratic parties disappoint, Childe's anti-determinist Marxism remains relevant for socialism in the 21st century.

Judy McVey
This is an adapted version an article in International Socialism Journal No. 169.

Childe was the first exponent of Marxist archaeology in the western world

SOCIALISM, BIDEN AND THE FIGHT FOR CHANGE IN THE US

Following the rise of democratic socialism and the explosive Black Lives Matter protests **Clare Lemlich** discusses the prospects for the left in the US under Joe Biden's presidency

THE MAIN question here in the US and around the rest of the world too is: can Joe Biden deliver?

We were told during the elections last year that this was going to be the most progressive administration in US history—a strange fantasy when Biden's record is extremely conservative as far as Democrats go and he's been an enthusiastic bipartisan compromiser throughout his career. And that's to say nothing of Vice-President Kamala Harris's record in racist law enforcement as California's "top cop" while the state's attorney-general (as she called herself).

What we're seeing from the Biden administration are high-profile policy proposals that sound progressive and even include measures that could help improve working people's lives.

But beneath the surface, everything Biden implements is a calculation about how best to restore the profitability of US capitalism, reassert the US as an imperial power and contain the enormous discontent that exists here and that made Bernie Sanders so popular.

Those are precisely the reasons the ruling class overwhelmingly backed Biden's campaign last year — and why the Democrats raised nearly double the amount in funding that Trump did. The capitalists knew they were making an investment in a president they could rely on after four years of Trump's instability.

Congress recently passed a new COVID relief bill that is a bit better for working people than Trump hurling money at corporations, which is what happened last year.

But the package's primary aim is to provide just enough relief to get everyone vaccinated and pull them just enough out of homelessness and poverty to get back to work. And it doesn't include the \$2000 stimulus

cheques Biden promised us all on day one.

Biden is also proposing an ambitious \$2 trillion infrastructure plan that goes further than any administration's spending proposal since at least the 1960s.

It includes some fine renewable energy proposals, but mostly implemented through the private sector rather than as state investment in renewables.

This again is designed to get the economy moving while appeasing concern about climate change. But Biden has made it very clear that he is opposed to a Green New Deal or any fundamental shift to a sustainable economy.

Immigration issues are also a live discussion right now because there's a surge of arrivals at the US/Mexico border and Biden has reopened Trump's infamous cages for children to detain unaccompanied minors. Biden promised no deportations in his first 100 days. We haven't even hit that mark yet and he's deported more than 20,000 people so far.

At the same time, Biden is proposing a significant overhaul of the immigration system that includes some of the best reforms we've seen in decades, in particular a pathway to citizenship for all 11 million undocumented people currently living in the US as second-class citizens.

But the bill also includes border enforcement measures like expanded definitions of what is considered a crime so that immigrants can get deported as "criminals" more easily.

Trump's border wall became a symbol of anti-immigrant racism over the last four years. Biden wants to pour money into a "smart technology strategy" along the border to turn people away. But a high-tech closed border is as much a border "wall" as a

The DSA's main strategy for turning the political tide in the US has been to either run or endorse left-wing Democrats

concrete one.

Another problem is that the pathway to citizenship in the bill is on an eight-year timetable, so what happens if Biden doesn't get re-elected in four years and the policy gets repealed?

Immigration policy is also a test case for how the left responds to Biden. The coalition I'm part of, the Alliance to Defend Immigrants, called a demonstration the week after the election saying: we're putting Biden on notice, he won the pro-immigrant vote and we demand he follow through on welcoming migrants.

Our demo was a couple of hundred people at most. But it was an example of the kind of politics I think the left needs to put forward under Biden. Mass movements holding this line and refusing to budge on it are the only way we're going to get the best parts of that immigration bill implemented.

But when the bill came out, the non-profits and mainstream pro-immigrant forces simply celebrated the policy and very few were prepared to acknowledge its limitations.

Worse, everyone backing the bill knows that it's unlikely to get passed in full, after negotiations with the Republicans. What eventually gets passed will water down the humane parts of it and beef up the enforcement measures.

This is an example of the larger process by which the Democrats systematically lower everyone's expectations about what is politically possible. Whatever limited policies they end up passing, we'll be told they were the absolute best we can get because of Republican intransigence. In this way, the Democrats get away with lurching rightward, all while knowing that ordinary people have no electoral alternative.

But if we can start to cohere an organised, fighting left then we can not

only win better policies around immigration and other issues, we can start to crack this vicious political logic.

The DSA

In a lot of ways, the kind of left that develops under Biden hinges on the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA).

With nearly 100,000 members it's by far the largest left-wing organisation in the country. And it's a big tent organization that includes everyone from social democrats to anarchists to revolutionary socialists.

Although it's been around since the 1980s its recent growth is associated with Bernie Sanders' presidential campaigns. But the biggest bounce in membership actually came when Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (AOC) ran as a progressive Democrat for Congress in New York.

And I would say for the bulk of members, she's the template for what the DSA is trying to do.

She unseated a corporate Democrat and is now one of the few federally elected politicians who says that we need to abolish Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), that we need a Green New Deal, Medicare for all, and so on.

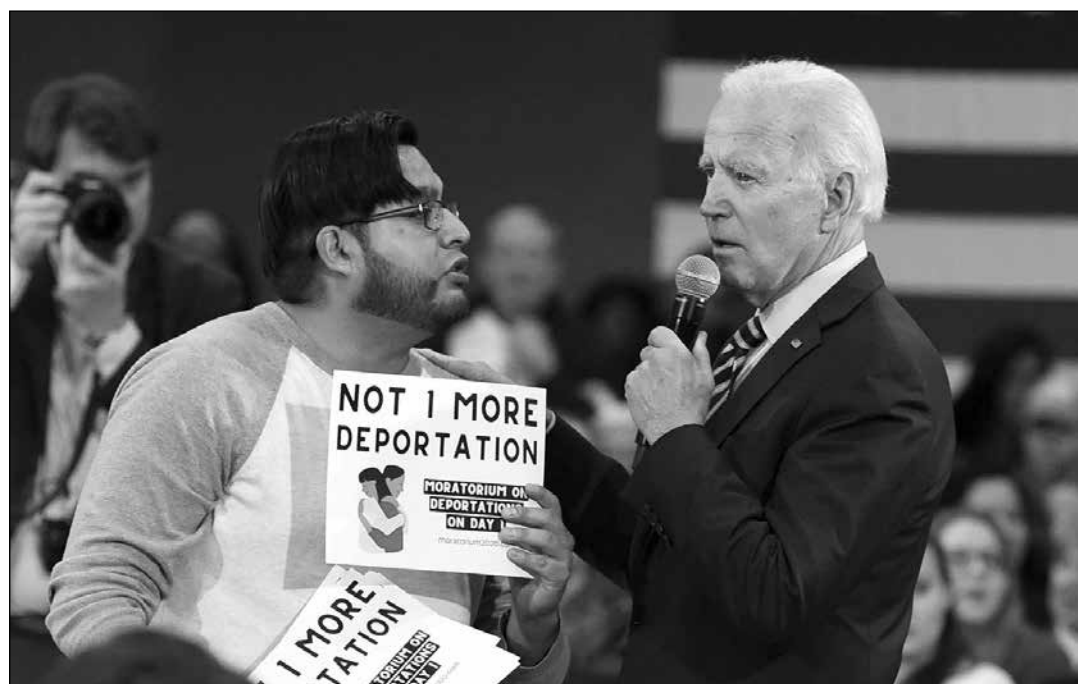
The DSA's main strategy for turning the political tide in the US has been to either run or endorse left-wing Democrats at all levels of government, from city councils to the presidency.

There are a number of problems with this strategy: the first being that DSA-backed candidates are not accountable to the organisation. There are no recall mechanisms.

Last year in Chicago a DSA member who had won a city council seat thanks to the DSA's campaign voted to give more money to the police—in the middle of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement calling to defund them!

The Chicago DSA put out a statement censuring that councillor but he's still a DSA member and there's nothing to stop this happening again. This is quite a pickle if your organisation is devoting the majority of its resources to election campaigns.

There's lots of other work that goes on in the DSA besides electioneering. There's the Medicare for all movement, strike solidarity, work at a local level in labour struggles and so on. But the electoral work is the most prominent nationally, is pursued by the elected leadership bodies across the organisation, and, in my first-hand



Above: A migrant rights protester confronts Joe Biden

experience in Los Angeles, this is the kind of work that's prioritised.

When I talk to DSA comrades, no one disagrees about the need for non-electoral organising. Everyone agrees we need to build a broad, mass movement in the streets for immigrant rights in the abstract. But it comes down to a question of political priorities and which priority disciplines the other.

I think there are three key tasks for the DSA, and the wider left, under Biden. We need to prioritise building movements against exploitation and oppression, and see any electoral work as supporting that, not as an end unto itself. We need to build serious movement coalitions, and work to shape and lead them.

And we need to fight for legislative changes without becoming absorbed into the legislative machine of the Democratic Party. Our independence from them is crucial.

What kind of left

I heard recently from a DSA comrade in another city that when the BLM revolt started last summer, his chapter really struggled to pivot to the uprising, partly because it was so enmeshed in getting out the vote at the time.

DSA members attended the protests everywhere across the country, for obvious reasons: it was the most significant anti-racist rebellion in recent memory, driven by the murderous violence of the police, but also taking place in the context of the COVID health and economic crises.

But as an organisation, the DSA didn't have a coordinated presence at the BLM protests. It hadn't built the political credibility to offer any leadership to the movement and it didn't forge the alliances necessary to create lasting organising spaces to push forward with defunding the police. As a result the movement has declined in most places, leaving behind a base of support for the demand to defund the police, but not a sustained movement to win that.

Similarly, we would be in a better position to fight the far right that Trump has left behind if the DSA and the broader left had done more to build up anti-fascist coalitions.

If we were prepared, we might have been able to call mass counter-demonstrations after the far right occupied the Capitol building in January. DSA voted in 2019 to create a national anti-fascist working group in recognition of the rise of the far right. But until very recently that working group existed in name only.

The DSA has a lot of resources. The organisation showed this very clearly in its impressive and organised campaign operation for Sanders in the primaries.

If even a fraction of that organisational energy was turned instead to movement building, I think we'd be a much stronger left, and much better prepared to fight this new Biden administration.

This is an edited version of Clare's speech to the Keep Left 2021 conference

CANCEL CULTURE— HOW THE RIGHT DEFENDS THE INDEFENSIBLE

The powerful who say they stand for ‘free speech’ are trying to snuff out resistance to oppression, writes **David Glanz**

ONE OF the key ways in which the ruling class maintains its control is to sow doubt and confusion among those fighting for a better world.

In 1996, newly elected Liberal prime minister John Howard launched a series of rolling “culture wars”, designed to put his enemies on the back foot. The battleground was the writing of history, with attempts to downplay the extent of frontier massacres as Indigenous people resisted colonisation, accompanied by an assault on multiculturalism and so-called “political correctness”.

Today the right’s intellectual warriors have a new target: “cancel culture”. Conservative historian Stephen Chavura defines it as “people being demonised and their careers ruined or threatened simply for stating views at odds with postmodern and critical theory dogmas on sexuality, gender and race relations”.

In reality, the right promotes the concept of cancel culture as a weapon to undermine the gains made by decades of struggle by the oppressed. Some reactionaries go further, arguing that cancel culture is a part of cultural Marxist conspiracy originating with Jewish Marxist intellectuals, a conclusion that can only encourage antisemitism.

The right will not tolerate any challenge to its power. As lawyer Nyadol Nyuon writes: “Political correctness, snowflakes and ‘woke cancel culture’ are the new justifications to reinstate the dominant viewpoint.”

Resentment

Chavura, who has written a new book, *Cancel Culture and the Left’s Long March*, argues that “the only remedy to cancel culture is courage culture”.

Who are these poor put-upon creatures who need to show courage? Their ranks include an array of the rich and powerful, including the Con-

servative Political Action Conference (CPAC) in the US, which in February rallied affluent Trump supporters and fellow reactionaries under the title “American Uncanceled”.

Rupert Murdoch’s *The Australian* newspaper thunders against cancel culture relentlessly while the conservative magazine, *Spectator Australia*, lauds politicians Matt Canavan (defender of coal), Craig Kelly (defender of crank COVID cures) and Amanda Stoker (defender of “men’s rights” activist Bettina Arndt) for their opposition.

What they all have in common is resentment that decades of campaigning by women, people of colour and LGBTI+ people and their supporters have made it more difficult to engage in oppressive actions or language.

As has-been comedian Daryl Somers moaned in February: “You probably could not get away with half the stuff you could on *Hey Hey* now because of the political correctness and the cancel culture.” Some of that “stuff” included hitting Malaysian-born singer Kamahl in the face with white powder and telling him “you’re a real white man” afterwards.

They cloak their reactionary views in concern for “alternative views” and “free speech”. It is a position riddled with hypocrisy.

Before the CPAC’s “American Uncanceled” conference had even begun, organisers cancelled a speaker, Young Pharaoh, for his antisemitic views.

Meanwhile Trump is calling on his supporters to boycott (“cancel”) dozens of corporations which have taken a stand against a law change in the state of Georgia that would make it much harder for people to vote, especially African-Americans.

Many of the same Liberal MPs who whinge about cancel culture want to prevent the industry super

The right promotes the concept of cancel culture to undermine the gains made by decades of struggle by the oppressed

funds from supporting *The New Daily*, one of the few online news sites not controlled by Murdoch or Nine.

The government is silent on the plight of Julian Assange, whose “crime” was to publish leaked information on the horrors of the US-Australian war in Iraq.

And the Australian free speech warriors had nothing to say when the Fair Work Commission banned the words “scab” and “rat” at the CUB strike picket line in Melbourne in 2016 and again at the Longford oil workers’ picket in 2017.

Balance of power

Some progressives have also been taken in. Last year 150 public figures, including Margaret Atwood, Noam Chomsky and Gloria Steinem, signed an open letter to *Harper’s Magazine* after *Harry Potter* author J.K. Rowling was criticised for denigrating transgender women.

The *Harper’s* signatories wrote: “The restriction of debate, whether by a repressive government or an intolerant society, invariably hurts those who lack power and makes everyone less capable of democratic participation.”

This statement gets the power relationship completely the wrong way around. It is those who rail against cancel culture who have power, not those fighting back against oppression.

It is the Liberal government that is refusing to properly fund women’s refuges or rape crisis centres, that denied JobSeeker to international students and refugees, and that fought until the last against marriage equality.

Historian Judith Brett has highlighted how the Liberals’ obsession with crushing the left on campus is wrecking university humanities courses.

“It is not identity politics but the shrinking of humanities and social science faculties and curriculum across

the country that is the biggest threat to our young people's education," she wrote.

The Liberals who decry cancel culture have no problems bullying those with less power.

Under pressure from right-wing commentators such as Andrew Bolt, the ABC decided not to broadcast comedian Tom Ballard's anti-Liberal set at the Melbourne International Comedy Festival.

When the student editors of the University of Sydney paper *Honi Soit* decided in April to unpublish a story concerning academics' links to the Chinese government "out of concern for the safety of academics mentioned in the article" they were set upon by a series of federal Liberal MPs.

Education Minister Alan Tudge used the might of his position to lay into the students, saying: "Left activists have forgotten what freedom of speech means in an era of woke culture."

Liberal minister Amanda Stoker used her access to the media to pillory Australian of the Year, Grace Tame, who had criticised her for supporting a "fake rape crisis" tour on university campuses.

Rather than address concerns about sexual assault on campuses, Stoker turned on her critic, saying: "I don't think the answer is shutting down and refusing the right to speak for people who share a different point of view to you."

Tame and even the *Honi Soit* editors have some resources to put up a defence against this bullying. But countless others do not.

People of African background suffered abuse as the Liberals in Victoria campaigned against so-called "African gangs" and Peter Dutton declared that Melburnians were too scared (pre-COVID) to go out to dinner.

The Liberals' rhetoric led to racist attacks surging across Melbourne by 50 per cent. As the Federation of Community Legal Centres reported: "Two Caucasian men seized a young African-Australian mother's pram and rattled it, with her baby inside, yelling racist abuse ... an African-Australian teenager was stabbed by a Caucasian man who told him to 'go back to where you come from'."

LGBTI+ people are also victims of the right-wing bullies. Nick Duffy wrote in *PinkNews*: "Many of Rupert Murdoch's most prominent outlets have developed an intense and hostile fixation on LGBT+ issues over the past few years as they appear to increase their focus on so-called 'cul-



Above: Cancel culture is a way of attacking the support for LGBTI+ people and other oppressed groups

ture war' issues."

Equality Australia lashed the newspaper's "disgraceful obsession with humiliating trans people".

This kind of campaigning feeds a situation where in the midst of lockdown in June 2020, 49 per cent of trans Australians reported thoughts of self-harm or suicide, more than three times the national rate.

Platform politics

Those who attack cancel culture say that its crime is to deny conservatives a platform for their views. This is total nonsense. The right has the backing—and the platform—provided by massively powerful institutions such as Murdoch's News Corp, the Liberal and National parties, and well-funded think tanks.

When the left protests against those who promote bigotry, we are challenging views that lead to real misery for many people. They have their free speech, but so do we.

Socialists are opposed to all forms of oppression and fight for a world free of racism, sexism, transphobia and homophobia. We build and join protests such as the recent campaign at the University of Melbourne against a transphobic web site.

In mobilising against oppression, we should acknowledge, however, that it is possible to win some people over through debate.

There was a time, for example, when most unions accepted or even promoted positions such as restric-

tions on the right of married women to work. But decades of campaigning by socialists and feminists turned things around and the union movement is now very much part of fighting for women's rights.

Socialists are, however, for "no platforming" Nazis. There is no possibility of debate with people who want to obliterate all forms of working class organisation and kill Jews, Muslims, LGBTI+ people and more.

We are for mass, militant mobilisations that shut down Nazi rallies or forums—and such mobilisations will likely include those who have a wrong position on trans rights or Palestine.

We can unite against an existential threat while not giving a centimetre on our principled positions on fighting oppression.

Hypocrites

When conservatives criticise cancel culture, they are in reality defending their "right" to promote reactionary ideas that they use to head off criticism of their real crimes – poverty, inequality, defence of fossil fuels and more.

In reality it is they who use their power in the mass media, in government and in universities to deny critics of oppression and the system democratic rights and a platform. They are hypocrites.

The narrative of cancel culture is a false one that must be resisted if we are to fight a class war for democracy and socialism.

MARX, ALIENATION AND THE WORKING CLASS

Lachlan Marshall examines Karl Marx's 1844 Manuscripts, where he analysed the alienation of working class life in the developing factory system

THE *ECONOMIC and Philosophic Manuscripts* were Karl Marx's first serious work on political economy and the capitalist system.

Written in 1844, they were published in German only in 1932 and English in 1959.

The *Manuscripts* were completed before his full political framework had been developed.

But they contained for the first time his analysis of the emerging struggle between the new class of waged workers and the capitalists who employed them.

A key concept that Marx examines in the *Manuscripts* is alienation. Marx takes the concept of alienation from the German philosopher Hegel. For Hegel, alienation was simply the result of understanding the world in the wrong way. His solution to this was intellectual and religious enlightenment.

But Marx saw productive labour in the real world as what was most fundamental to human life.

As he pointed out, the survival of any human society relies before anything else on its capacity to meet people's basic needs like food and shelter.

What distinguishes humans from other animals is our ability to consciously and collectively produce what we need to survive. This capacity for labour is what makes us human.

Marx applied Hegel's concept of alienation, or estrangement, to the way capitalism distorts this labour process and therefore "the essence" of what makes us human. His concept of alienation was therefore fundamentally *materialist*, concerned not simply with ideas but processes in the real, material world.

Marx outlines four ways that workers are alienated under capitalism.

The first is that we lose control of the products of our labour because they belong to the boss, not to us.



Above: Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels meeting with workers in the 1840s

"The worker cannot use the things he produces to keep alive or to engage in further productive activity... The worker's needs, no matter how desperate, do not give him a licence to lay hands on what these same hands have produced, for all his products are the property of another."

The second is alienation from the process of labour itself. The lack of control over the workplace and how it is run creates a sense of powerlessness among workers.

As a result, Marx writes: "Labour is exterior to the worker... Therefore he [the worker] does not confirm himself in his work, but denies himself, feels miserable instead of happy, deploys no free physical and intellectual energy, but mortifies his body and ruins his mind."

The extent of psychological distress under capitalism is one symptom of this kind of alienation.

Flowing from this is alienation from other people. Under capitalism

we're forced to compete with other workers for access to the products of our labour, employment, housing and other necessities.

"An immediate consequence of man's alienation from the product of his work, his vital activity and his species-being, is the alienation of man from man."

Finally, we are alienated from our human nature, or "species-being" as Marx calls it. This includes alienation from the natural world, of which humans are part.

"In estranging from man (1) nature, and (2) himself, his own active functions, his life activity, estranged labour estranges the species from man. It changes for him *the life of the species* into a means of individual life."

Crisis and revolution

Marx links this philosophical discussion of alienated labour, the way workers have lost control in the

production process, to economic crisis. Without production being under the conscious, democratic control of workers, market competition leads to crises.

“Produce with consciousness as human beings—not as *dispersed atoms without consciousness of your species*—and you are beyond all these *artificial and untenable antitheses*. But as long as you continue to produce in the present unconscious, thoughtless manner, at the *mercy of chance*—for just as long *trade crises* will remain.”

In the *Manuscripts* Marx fore-shadows many of the ideas he expands upon in later works. He describes capitalism as a system based on the conflict between capital and labour, and explains how this antagonism is inevitable, not just “an *accidental event*” as other political economists see it.

For Marx, class conflict is built into the system, and not just for workers: “The rent of land is established through the *struggle between tenant and landlord*. Throughout political economy we find the hostile contraposition of interests, struggle, warfare, recognised as the basis of social organisation.”

Marx describes how capitalism changes class relations in the countryside, which leads to growing polarisation between workers and capitalists: “The final result is therefore the disappearance of the difference between capitalist and landowner, so that thus there remain, on the whole, only two classes in the population, the working class and the class of capitalists.”

Marx concludes that this process “necessarily leads to revolution”.

This analysis of the working class introduced something new to the socialist movement: that the working class is not just a class that suffers but is a revolutionary class.

If private property in the hands of the capitalist class is the result of the products of labour being alienated from the working class, then the abolition of private property through revolution is the way to end alienation.

And because the subjugation of the working class is the basis for all other forms of oppression, the emancipation of the working class is the precondition for universal emancipation.

“From the relationship of estranged labour to private property it follows, further, that the emancipation

of society from private property, etc., from servitude, is expressed in the *political* form of the *emancipation of the workers*—not as though it is only a question of their emancipation but because in their emancipation universal human emancipation is comprehended; and this is so because the whole of human servitude is involved in the relationship of the worker to production, and all relations of servitude are only modifications and consequences of this relationship.”

Marx applied the concept of alienation to the way capitalism distorts the labour process

Marx wrote the *Manuscripts* before he came to a full appreciation of the revolutionary potential of the working class.

That came shortly afterwards and was confirmed in his experience of the 1848 revolutions and the Paris Commune in 1871, which showed that workers could build a socialist society based on workers’ power.

But the *Manuscripts* offer an insight into the early development of Marx’s revolutionary ideas.

Marx and the Silesian weavers uprising

JUST AS Marx was finishing his 1844 *Manuscripts*, an uprising of textile workers in Silesia, Germany, took place in June 1844. While the strike was small by French or English standards of the time, it represented the first serious collective action by workers inside Germany protesting against the social and working conditions imposed on them by the new system of factory production.

The workers smashed machines and even demolished several of their bosses’ mansions. The King of Prussia sent in soldiers, who fired into the crowd, killing at least 11 workers and injuring many more.

Marx championed this revolt and was shocked when some of his former friends from radical philosophical circles in Germany downplayed or ignored it.

The revolt confirmed Marx’s belief that capitalism and the industrial system it created would inevitably come to Germany—and in turn, would create a proletariat, a class that Marx hoped would lead a revolution of a new type.

Whereas Arnold Ruge, Marx’s one-time close friend and publishing partner, saw in the strike only poverty and desperation—pathetic servants with no social power—Marx saw life breathed into the theoretical sketches he had laid out in an essay about six months before called *Introduction to the Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right*. In this essay, he wrote:

Where, then, is the positive possibility of a German emancipation? Answer: In the formation of a class with radical chains... This dissolution of society as a particular estate is the proletariat.

Responding to Ruge in a German émigré journal, Marx wrote: “the proletariat proclaims its opposition to

the society of private property. This Silesian uprising begins precisely with what the French and English workers uprisings ended, with the consciousness of the nature of the proletariat.”

Referring back to his conception in the 1844 *Manuscripts* of communal labor being the core of human nature—or, as he called it, man’s “species-being”—Marx argues that working class struggle brings into question the whole nature of capitalist society.

Previous social revolutions—Marx was mostly thinking of the French Revolution of 1789—saw one sort of elite, the feudal landowners and royal bureaucracy, overthrown by a new sort of elite, the bourgeoisie. Once in power, they remade the economy to their liking. There were many changes in the forms of oppression and exploitation for the vast majority, but society remained, as it had before, divided into haves and have-nots.

Marx argues that there is no social class below the proletariat, and it can only come to power by socialising private property, thereby eliminating the principal means of exploitation of one class by another.

Whereas before the Silesian strike, Marx had only considered this in abstract terms, he now thought he saw it coming to life among the textile workers. He contends that even “a partial reaction, an uprising” against private property—and the rigid isolation it imposes on workers from their “essential nature”—carries with it a “universal soul.”

In other words, the very form of working class struggle tends toward unity, solidarity, the overcoming of isolation. It points toward the reunification of humanity with its species-being.

Todd Cretien
From socialistworker.org

Workers smashed machines and even demolished several of their bosses’ mansions

‘WE ARE NOT CATTLE’ MORE PROTEST CAN FREE THE REFUGEES

By Ian Rintoul

ON 15 April, Somali refugee Saif Ali was released from the Brisbane detention centre (BITA) to join his wife and son (Sabah and Sammi) living in the community in Brisbane. Saif had been in detention for almost eight years—six on Nauru, and two years in detention in Brisbane, first in the Kangaroo Point hotel prison, and then in BITA.

Saif was deliberately separated from his family in 2017, when Sabah and Sammi were brought from Nauru to Australia when Sammi became seriously ill shortly after his birth.

In June 2019, Saif was also transferred from Nauru to Australia, under the family reunion clause of the Medevac legislation, to join his family. But instead of family reunion, the government held Saif in closed detention for another two years. During that time, in October last year, in a moment of desperation, Saif attempted suicide in the Kangaroo Point hotel.

Saif is the only Medevac refugee to be released since February.

The day after Saif was released, the Kangaroo Point hotel prison was closed when the last 19 Medevac refugees there were hastily and forcibly moved to BITA. Three days later, 12 of the 19, along with another five Medevac refugees from BITA, were flown to detention in Melbourne.

The refugees had been held, without their property, in the BITA compound that is used for COVID quarantine accommodation for three days, before again being shifted to the Park Hotel in Melbourne.

“We are treated like cattle,” Mo, a Sudanese refugee now in BITA, told *Solidarity*.

The detention of the Medevac refugees has become a farce. While initially over 100 were freed, the releases stalled in February. Around 80 Medevac refugees, and another 33 people transferred from Nauru since the repeal of Medevac legislation, are still in detention.

In the High Court and the Federal Circuit Court, the government is strenuously defending the legal framework of the Migration Act,



Above: Serco guards forcibly move one of the refugees out of Kangaroo Point detention hotel

insisting that only those granted a visa have any right to live in the Australian community; and that unless the Minister grants a visa, the Commonwealth has an untrammelled power to indefinitely detain. To ram home its point, the government scheduled five refugees from Nauru to be forcibly removed from Australia on 15 April, although the flight was cancelled two days before the due date.

There is no “right to asylum” in the Migration Act. Successive Labor and

Coalition governments have declared that no one sent to Nauru or PNG would ever be settled in Australia. But protest action has forced the government to bring the vast majority of those imprisoned offshore to the mainland.

We need to keep up the protests to win freedom, full rights to Centrelink and resettlement services and permanent protection for all those still held in the hotels and onshore detention centres—and fight to bring those still in PNG and Nauru to Australia.

Home Affairs to face charges over Villawood suicide

IN AN unprecedented move, the Department of Home Affairs and detention medical services provider International Health and Medical Services (IHMS) will face charges in the Downing Centre Local Court on 27 April under the Workplace Health and Safety Act (WHS Act) as a result of an Iraqi man’s suicide in the Villawood detention centre on 4 March, 2019.

It is alleged that Home Affairs and IHMS failed, “to comply with [its] health/safety duty and that exposed an individual to a risk of injury or death/serious injury”. The case has the potential to expose the details of abuse and medical neglect

in detention that damages mental health and pushes detainees to take their own lives.

According to Monash University’s Australian Border Deaths Database, there have been 11 actual or suspected suicides in immigration detention since 1 January 2012 when the WHS Act commenced. There were another five suicides in Australia’s detention regime in just the few months between December 2010 and July 2011. The most recent suicide in Villawood was in December 2020.

The court case could run for years to tell us what we already know—the “factories of mental illness” have to close.

Refugees with wives, children and family in the community are being kept in detention, while others are freed

Solidarity