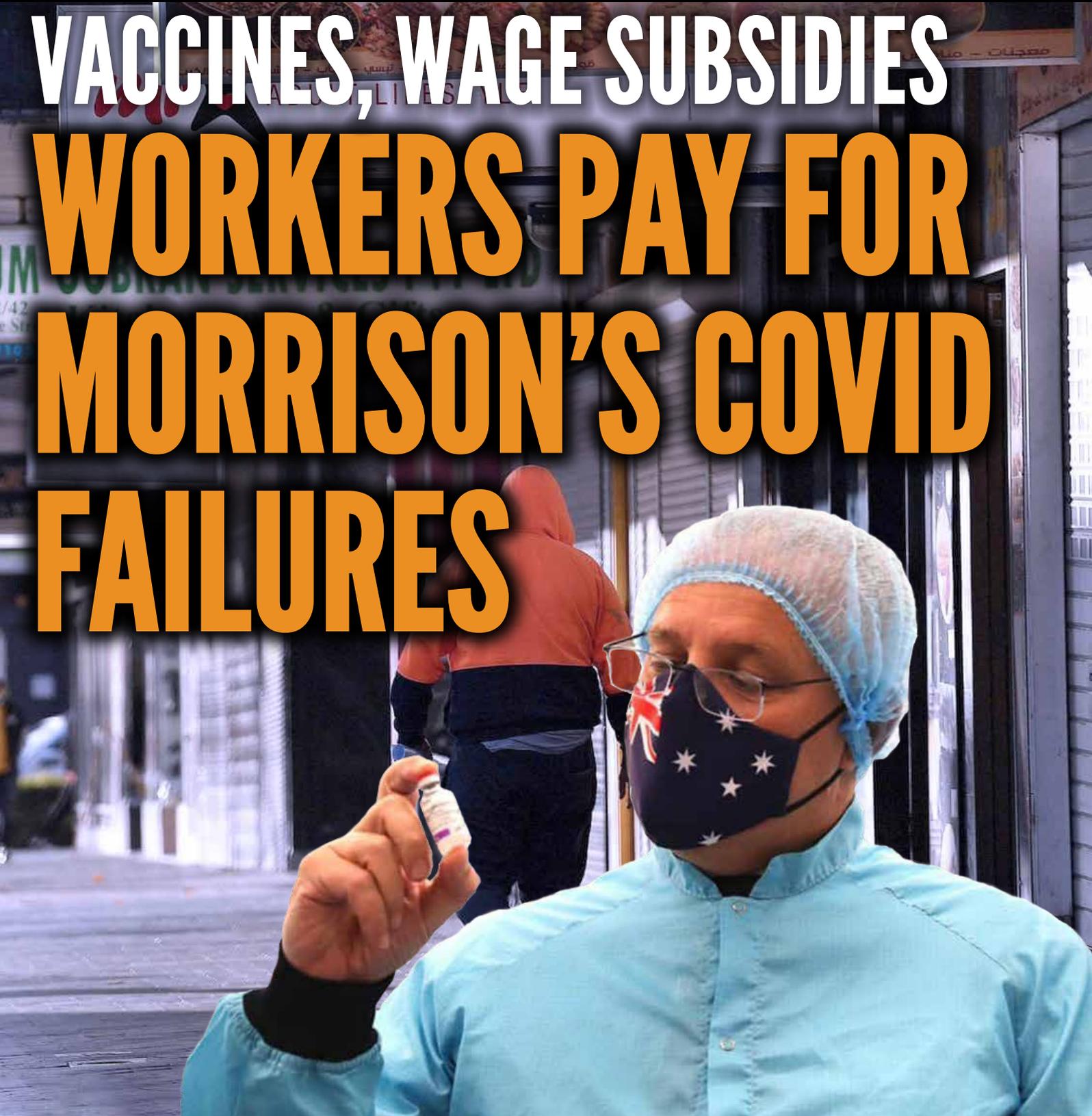


Solidarity

Issue No. 150 / July-August 2021

\$3/\$5

VACCINES, WAGE SUBSIDIES WORKERS PAY FOR MORRISON'S COVID FAILURES



CLIMATE

Queensland's renewables
plan isn't public power

AFGHANISTAN

Western troops
only brought terror

DARK EMU

Agriculture, racism and
Indigenous societies

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
See fb.com/soliaus/events for details or contact solidarity@solidarity.net.au

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Things they say

Awkward moment @ausgov refuse your citizenship application (again). Wearing the green and gold 70 times apparently is not enough these days
New Zealand-born Quade Cooper, who played for the Wallabies rugby team between 2008 and 2017, including two rugby union World Cups

Imagine a world where people of all ages, all backgrounds from anywhere, of any gender, or any ethnicity have equal access to space. And they will in turn, I think inspire us back here on Earth.

Richard Branson on Virgin Galactic

Anytime anyone challenges Daniel Andrews, including your colleague Leigh Sales, you get the bots and the Trots out of Trades Hall starting to troll her on social media

Treasurer Josh Frydenberg

Just shoot them

Trump's instruction to head of the US army General Mark Milley head of the US army to deal with the protests after cops killed George Floyd's

Well, shoot them in the leg—or maybe the foot. But be hard on them!

Trump's response when the general refused

Just go declare victory right now

Rudy Giuliani to Trump as key states were called against him on election night

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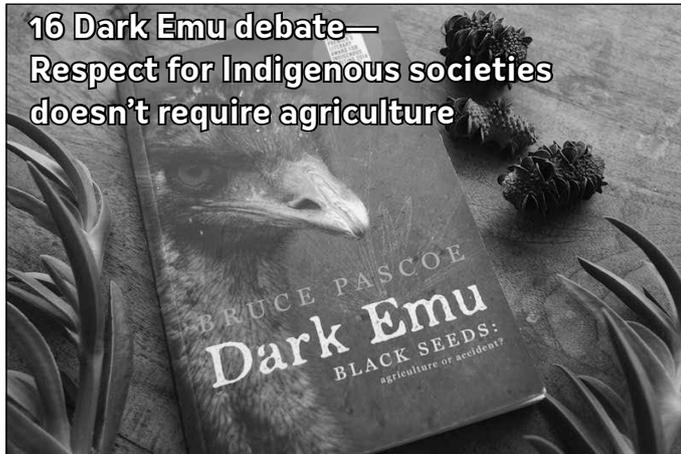
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Racist, homophobic police Facebook group exposed

A PRIVATE Facebook group of 3500 Queensland police officers is under investigation after it was exposed for racism and homophobia. Even the Queensland Police Commissioner Katarina Carroll said that its content was “deeply concerning, nasty, defamatory, and quite frankly beggars belief”.

There were posts attacking the Black Lives Matter movement, claiming women lie about domestic violence, claiming women recruited as police were incompetent and just there to fill quotas, and the use of homophobic slurs.

The “Defend the Blue” page also regularly saw posts defending Zachary Rolfe, on trial for murder over the killing of Walpiri man Kumanjayi Walker in Yuendumu in the NT, and attacking Queensland state government policies and MPs and other police officers.

But it was criticism of the level of support for police officer David Masters, killed when he was hit by a stolen car, that led to the page being shut down.

Morrison hands \$21 million for new gas wells in Beetaloo Basin

THE COALITION has announced \$21 million in funding for new gas wells in NT’s Beetaloo Basin, handed to a company with close links to the Liberal Party.

This is aimed at “speeding up investment, exploration and development” of the carbon bomb. The Beetaloo holds so much gas that developing it could release the equivalent of 22 per cent of Australia’s current emissions—enough to cancel out all reductions since 2005.

The funding will allow a subsidiary of Empire Energy to drill three gas wells. The company is packed with Liberal Party donors including its chair, Paul Espie, chair of the Liberal Party think tank the Menzies Research Centre. Espie has personally donated around \$400,000 to the Liberal Party and allied organisations in recent years, alongside a \$25,000 donation by the company itself. They are the first grants under the \$50 million program.

Hundreds die in record heat wave across western Canada and US



NEARLY 500 people have died in western Canada due to record heat. Experts said the scale of the heat wave at the end of June was “virtually impossible” without climate change. British Columbia’s chief coroner announced there had been 719 “sudden and unexpected deaths”, well above the 230 deaths usually expected in the period. “This was a true health crisis that has underscored how deadly an extreme heat wave can be,” Multnomah County health officer Dr Jennifer Vines said. Further south there were another 108 deaths in the US states of Oregon and Portland attributed to hypothermia.

Basic services in major cities in the US began to fail, not built to withstand such high temperatures. In Portland, Oregon, the light rail streetcar service was halted after power cables melted and the heat strained electricity services. In Washington state, school bus services were suspended, with the air inside the vehicles unsafe to travel in. Local officials across several cities were forced to set up “cooling centres” in air-conditioned halls to protect homeless and vulnerable people.

The United Farm Workers union condemned the failure to protect workers from the heat, tweeting that, “It’s the cherry season so conditions are incredibly dangerous. When it’s hot we CAN’T rest indoors.”

Lytton, one town in British Columbia, set new record temperatures for Canada three days in a row, hitting 49.6 degrees. The next day residents had to evacuate within minutes as a bushfire hit the town, leaving 90 per cent of buildings torched.

Fires have swept western Canada and the US all the way down to southern California. This comes just the year after California’s worst bushfire season on record in 2020. Unless there is urgent action to tackle climate change we can expect more—and worse—disasters into the future.

Israel uses AI drone swarm in Gaza

ISRAELI TROOPS made use of a “drone swarm” powered by artificial intelligence (AI) for the first time in combat during bombing operations against Gaza in May.

A drone swarm is a collection of drones that operates as a single networked entity using AI, requiring only a single human operator to fly it. The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) used small flocks of drones to try to locate rocket launchpads inside Gaza firing rockets into Israel. Multiple drones each monitored different areas of land, with AI used to help interpret surveillance images and identify targets.

Swarms of hundreds of drones operating through AI are considered a terrifying future weapon that could be used in targeted assassinations or military combat.

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

Crown’s Helen Coonan tries to heavy government over inquiry

CROWN EXECUTIVE Chairman Helen Coonan has tried to undermine a Royal Commission into fraud and mismanagement at the company’s Melbourne casino.

Writing to Victoria’s Gaming Minister, she warned it would be “huge problem for the government too” if there was a finding against it holding a licence to run the casino.

The former Minister in John Howard’s Liberal government only took over as head of the company in February, following the exit of its CEO when a separate inquiry in NSW found that Crown was not fit to hold a licence to run a Sydney casino at Barangaroo.

This was on the strength of Coonan’s ability to convince NSW inquiry head and former Supreme Court judge Patricia Bergin that, “her character, honesty and integrity had not been and could not be called into question”.

Coonan promised “root and branch” reform of the company, claiming, “We do not underestimate the scale of the problem”.

She is now facing calls for her own resignation after the letter became public and was read out at the Royal Commission hearing.

It has heard evidence that Crown underpaid up to \$272 million in tax by classifying free gifts and marketing costs as “winnings”, and created fake hotel invoices to allow the illegal use of overseas credit cards to gamble.

The company also allowed patrons to go on 34-hour gambling binges, in breach of its own limits because it employs just 12 gambling monitors to oversee its 2628 poker machines and 540 gambling tables.

“Wherever I look I see not just bad conduct but illegal conduct, improper conduct, unacceptable conduct, and it permeates the whole organisation,” the Royal Commission’s Ray Finkelstein said.

EDITORIAL

Morrison leaves workers exposed as outbreaks spread

MORRISON'S FAILURE on support for workers and the vaccine have left Australia dangerously exposed in the face of the new more contagious Delta variant of COVID.

The renewed outbreaks and lockdowns across the country show that the virus is far from under control.

Melbourne has experienced its fifth lockdown and Sydney is facing a lockdown of five weeks or longer. Workers at pubs, restaurants, cafes and sports centres have again been stood down.

Yet Morrison has refused to reintroduce JobKeeper, offering lower payments far below the minimum wage. For the first week of lockdown workers in Sydney were given nothing, then \$500 a week in the second and third week. Those who had lost less than 20 hours work a week received \$325.

The payment for both casual and permanent workers has now been increased to \$600 a week and will be paid for the first week of a lockdown. But this is still \$300 a fortnight less than JobKeeper was when last year's lockdowns began. Anyone already on JobSeeker or other income support is excluded. There will be still be workers taking a huge hit to their incomes, and at risk of missing rent or mortgage payments.

The failure to support workers has also increased the spread of the virus, forcing more people to continue going into work. Without the right to sick leave, casuals still face pressure to work when sick.

NSW's Chief Health Officer Kerry Chant has pointed to "a number of workplace clusters" as the key factor in the virus spreading into south-western Sydney. But the reason there is more chance for the virus to spread in Western Sydney is that most people can't work from home—unlike the professionals and officeworkers concentrated in wealthier areas.

Instead of supporting workers to stay home or demanding employers put in place more safety measures, we are again seeing government efforts to blame ordinary people, with NSW Premier Gladys Berejiklian declaring "The biggest problem we have is lack of compliance".

Now all construction sites in Sydney are closed until at least 30 July and workers in Fairfield, Canterbury-Bankstown and Liverpool will not be allowed to leave those regions for work (except emergency services,



Above: Scott Morrison has made a huge mess of the vaccine rollout

health, aged care and disability workers).

Berejiklian has singled out migrant communities in Western Sydney, launching a police operation with over 100 officers, mounted police and dog-squads to enforce restrictions there.

Instead of police harassment and intimidation there should be a surge in health workers and community workers, going door-to-door to encourage testing and explain the response—not more fines and heavy-handed policing.

Vaccine failures

For months, Morrison has shown little urgency to vaccinate the population, saying that it was "not a race".

But with Sydney now facing a major outbreak, there is fierce competition for vaccines. NSW Health Minister Brad Hazzard even described the situation as, "almost a sense now of *The Hunger Games*, of people chasing vaccine".

Australia is ranked last out of the 28 countries in the OECD, a club of the world's richest nations, on vaccination rates. Around 13 per cent of the population has been fully vaccinated, with an estimated 80 per cent needed to adequately protect from outbreaks.

Morrison has hopelessly failed to ensure aged care workers get vaccinated. Still only 40 per cent have had their first vaccine. Most have been forced to organise it in their own time. Around 50,000 council workers in NSW have been given paid leave to get vaccinated—something that should be extended to all workers, alongside sick leave to deal with side effects.

But the main problem is that, following health advice that only over

60s should receive the Astra-Zeneca vaccine, there is simply not enough vaccine to go around.

Morrison made an appalling mess of securing doses from Pfizer. He was four months behind the US, UK, Japan and Canada in striking any deal.

And the ten million doses initially ordered were nowhere near enough. It wasn't until February that the order was doubled—by then Pfizer was already swamped with demand. The continual changes in advice on who should use the Astra-Zeneca vaccine have also caused massive confusion.

But simply vaccinating Australians is not enough. The vaccine nationalism that has seen rich countries simply worry about their own populations is a disaster.

The virus is still running rampant, causing a COVID catastrophe through the largely unvaccinated global south. If this continues new variants, potentially including vaccine resistant strains, will emerge, and in turn threaten another deadly wave of the pandemic here.

Australia should be doing everything in its power to push for a global response, forcing pharmaceutical companies like Pfizer and Moderna to release patents, share vaccine technology and co-ordinate with governments around the world to scale up production. Australia is producing one million Astra-Zeneca doses a week, most of which are not being used here.

We need to keep fighting for the health measures and support for workers needed to control the virus—and to ensure no worker is left behind as a result.

.....
Morrison has refused to reintroduce JobKeeper, offering payments far below the minimum wage

Prison killed Wayne Fella Morrison, now prison guards derail inquiry

By Kelton Muir de Moore

A CORONIAL inquest has revealed a string of efforts by prison guards to obstruct investigations into the death of Wayne Fella Morrison.

On 23 September 2016, the Wiradjuri, Wirangu and Kookatha man was wrestled to the ground by prison guards outside his cell at the Yatala Labour Prison in Adelaide.

Twelve guards crowded around Fella, pressing him into the floor, handcuffing him, leg-cuffing him, and binding him in a spit hood.

Five minutes passed before the guards dragged him out of the hallway face-down, into a van for a 122 second trip to the prison's maximum security. By the end of this brief trip, Fella's face was blue and his body unresponsive. It took the guards almost three minutes after unloading Fella from the van to commence CPR.

Fella became the 376th Aboriginal person to die in custody since the Royal Commission into Deaths in Custody in 1991. The coronial inquest into his death has been plagued by delays. Although initially expected to be completed in 2018, final arguments are now expected on 4 August.

The prison guards and staff at Yatala Prison have roadblocked investigations into Fella's death at every opportunity.

Seven out of the eight guards who loaded Fella into the van refused initially to provide statements to police. One guard during the inquest stated that he "advised" another not to upload incident reports on the day of his death until they had sought legal advice.

Moreover, 18 guards and one nurse at the prison sought the removal of the Coroner from the case and have successfully claimed a legal protection called "penalty privilege".

Although the law has since changed in South Australia, this did not apply retrospectively, allowing "penalty privilege" to continue in this inquest. This has allowed guards to refuse to produce evidence or answer any questions that could subject them to a penalty in their jobs.

Of the few guards who have answered questions at all, most "could not recall" events. In fact, the words "I don't recall" appear at least 597 times in the transcripts of the hearings and



Above: Latoya Aroha Rule holds a photo of her brother, Wayne Fella Morrison, at a protest against spit hoods

the word "privilege" appears 1603 times.

The assistant general manager at the prison on the day told the inquest he believed that guards had colluded to "run interference" and obstruct the investigation.

Although there is shocking CCTV footage of a dozen guards crowding, piling onto and restraining Fella, there is no CCTV footage of what happened in the van. The inquest has been told that the footage did not exist as it was obstructed by the head of a guard who "would have been" physically holding Fella to the floor.

The management of the prison has also been shockingly exposed.

The guards at the time of Fella's death did not have current first aid training. None had current CPR. Despite having a duty to maintain an up-to-date defibrillator in the prison, Yatala's was broken.

The guards' lawyers have attempted to argue that Fella died due to "excited delirium", a condition where people act aggressively, have superhuman strength and are immune to pain. The condition, which is not recognised by the World Health Organisation, can supposedly cause heart failure. US law enforcement have often tried to use it to explain deaths in custody, including, unsuccessfully, in the case of George Floyd.

Prisons kill

Rates of Indigenous imprisonment and deaths in custody are an ongoing racist injustice.

In 1991, an average 2140 Indigenous people were in prison in Australia. In the December quarter of 2020 that number shockingly had risen to 12,344.

As Fella's sister Latoya Rule noted, "at the time of the 1991 Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, Aboriginal people accounted for one in seven deaths in custody. That number has now soared to one in four."

While penalty privilege no longer exists in South Australia, the collusion amongst guards shows a culture of contempt for inmates' safety. It shows why prisons are such a dangerous place for Indigenous people.

Wayne Fella Morrison's family have campaigned for justice all the way through the process, holding actions outside court and gathering 25,000 signatures on an online petition for an immediate ban on spit hoods. South Australia has now agreed to phase out their use over the next six months.

Governments in Australia are still spending billions of dollars building new mega-prisons in both Queensland and NSW. Inmates at Parklea prison in Sydney recently took to the roof to protest behind the slogan Black Lives Matter against the racism of the prison system.

Indigenous people are crying out for services, jobs and self-determination, not over policing and more prisons. A movement to make Black Lives Matter is crucial to secure these community-controlled services and end deaths in custody.

The prison guards and staff at Yatala Prison have roadblocked investigations into Fella's death at every opportunity

Cops swarm Western Sydney as migrants scapegoated for virus' spread

By Paddy Gibson

NSW HAS launched a major police operation in south-west Sydney, as the state government looks to scapegoat and punish workers and migrant communities for the COVID-19 outbreak.

More than 100 extra police have been deployed in the Fairfield, Liverpool and Canterbury-Bankstown areas, including dog-squads, mounted police and helicopters.

This follows a number of days of aggressive “high visibility” police operations in these areas. Premier Gladys Berejiklian pointed the finger at migrant communities directly for not obeying restrictions, addressing communities in the area who she said, “have a similar background to me”, pointing to her Armenian migrant parents.

The double standard is obvious. When the outbreak began spreading in Bondi and the wealthy eastern suburbs, these areas were not targeted with special police operations to enforce restrictions.

Yet in south-west Sydney police are being stationed outside shopping centres and places such as Kmart, rifling through people’s shopping bags to check if the items they have purchased are “essential”.

Assistant Commissioner Tony Cook said the only test for what is “essential” will be “whether you really need this item today and most often the answer is no”.

This leaves huge power in the hands of police to act on their own prejudices.

For weeks now, both Gladys Berejiklian and Chief Health Officer (CHO) Kerry Chant have encouraged people to get outside for fresh air and exercise, where there is far less risk of contracting COVID than indoors.

Despite this, police are combing through parks and other outdoor areas demanding to know if people have a “reasonable excuse” for being outside.

More than \$600,000 in fines were issued in the first ten days of the lockdown.

Analysis of data from fines during the 2020 lockdown showed clearly there was a disproportionate targeting of suburbs with high migrant and Indigenous populations in both Melbourne and Sydney.

These police operations serve to demonise and intimidate poor and



Above: Over 100 extra police were sent into southwest Sydney

marginalised communities to take attention off the catastrophic failures of policy that are driving the current outbreak.

There has been pointed criticism of the police operation from community leaders in western Sydney, with Labor MP Jihad Dib saying that police efforts to “strong-arm the community” would cause panic and fear.

Money currently being spent on police intimidation and harassment needs to be urgently redeployed to a community health response that rolls out testing capacity, vaccination and financial support for people to stay home.

Workers’ rights are key

Eighteen months into the pandemic there should be no need for lockdowns at all. It is government failure to vaccinate people and implement proper safety precautions that are responsible for the current mess. This Sydney outbreak began with the infection of an unvaccinated front line transport worker, dealing with international travellers.

The lack of support for workers to stay home when they are sick is directly responsible for the current spread. Berejiklian has drawn on the same racist tropes that Dan Andrews did in 2020, blaming supposedly uncaring or ignorant migrant families for transmission in western Sydney.

But, as epidemiologist Nancy Baxter told ABC news: “It’s not that people in these LGAs are not behav-

ing as well... the issue is there are a lot of essential workers there so they’re going to work, picking up the virus and bringing it home”.

Whereas almost 40 per cent of residents in Woolarah in Eastern Sydney identify as “professionals” or “managers”, jobs where people can often easily work from home, in Fairfield the number is only 8 per cent.

Testing facilities in the area have been overwhelmed, further discouraging people from getting tested. Thousands of workers were forced to queue for hours in Fairfield after the government announced a new rule that anyone travelling from the area to work elsewhere in Sydney requires a COVID test every three days.

Precarious workers living pay check to pay check often do not have the luxury of missing work if they are mildly symptomatic, or getting tested and taking a day off work.

NSW CHO Kerry Chant has stressed at press conferences that “all employers and businesses will be very understanding if you need to have a test and stay home”.

This is not the reality on the ground, where bosses constantly pressure casual workers not to miss shifts.

The NSW government cannot police their way out of this crisis. Financial support for people to stay home, proper PPE and health and safety regulations in workplaces, and massively increased levels of vaccination are needed to stop the virus spreading.

.....
These police operations serve to demonise and intimidate communities to take attention off the failures of policy driving the outbreak

Queensland spends \$2 billion on renewables, but not publicly owned

By Adam Adelpour

IN JUNE Queensland's Labor Government announced a renewable energy and hydrogen jobs fund with up to \$2 billion for government investments. But while welcome, the funding boost doesn't mandate government ownership of renewable energy projects.

Climate groups hailed the announcement, with the Australian Youth Climate Coalition calling it a "phenomenal win". This kind of significant government spending on renewables stands in stark contrast to the shameless climate vandalism of Scott Morrison. Morrison's "gas-fired recovery" is throwing billions at the fossil fuel industry. Australia was ranked last on climate action among 170 nations in a UN report in July.

The Queensland government's announcement came after tens of thousands hit the streets around the country to join climate strikes on 21 May. For the first time, School Strike 4 Climate demanded an expansion of public renewable energy. Allen Hicks, National Secretary of the Electrical Trades Union (ETU), addressed the Sydney rally and called for the government to "build some offshore wind" to create sustainable jobs, instead of spending \$600 million on the proposed Kurri Kurri gas plant.

The ETU Queensland and NT and the Queensland Community Alliance also organised a rally demanding publicly-owned renewable energy outside the Queensland ALP Conference shortly before the announcement. Unionists held signs saying "build public renewables storage", "our renewables future is not 4 sale" and "Queensland workers demand a just transition".

Queensland Premier Annastacia Palaszczuk said the fund would help establish "a job-generating clean energy industrial ecosystem". It is designed to support projects that involve everything from manufacturing clean energy technology, to hydrogen production, and the extraction of minerals used in renewable energy.

But it won't deliver the government-owned renewable energy we need. According to the Queensland Treasury it, "allows energy government-owned corporations to increase ownership of commercial renewable energy and hydrogen projects, as well as supporting infrastructure, including



Above: The Electrical Trades Union organised a rally outside the Queensland Labor Party conference in June calling for jobs in publicly-owned renewables

in partnership with the private sector."

ETU Divisional Secretary Peter Ong responded by saying, "we are on the right track with this investment". But he also pointedly stated that, "we strongly oppose the privatisation of renewables assets" and, "we will continue to push for majority public ownership of renewables assets alongside a just transition for workers and their communities".

The Queensland government's Clean Energy Finance Corporation (CleanCo) was set up in 2019 as a government energy company to invest in renewables. But the bulk of the projects it has supported are privately owned. Three of its four renewables projects to date are simply power purchase agreements, where CleanCo buys power from a private company. The other is a public-private partnership that is 10 per cent public-owned.

At a Federal level Chris Bowen has said the creation of tens of thousands of jobs in offshore wind will be a "top priority" for the next Labor government. But this is limited to "unlocking" private investment currently blocked by the lack of a regulatory framework.

Public renewables now

Only direct government investment and ownership of renewables projects can ensure a rapid and just transition.

The kind of drastic cuts in emissions needed to tackle climate change will require a comprehensive government plan to transition to 100 per cent renewable energy, not simply small increases of renewables in the "energy mix".

Despite considerable renewables funding, the Queensland government

continues to support the Adani coal mine and in June last year announced a multi-million dollar support package aimed at "the survival and revival" of Queensland's LNG industry. The Queensland government's CleanCo even owns the Swanbank E gas-fired power station.

And there can be no just transition if projects are run for profit.

Private sector control of renewables projects has been a disaster for workers. The largely un-unionised workforce routinely faces sub-standard wages and conditions, preventable injuries and deaths.

In February this year 230 workers were sacked via text message on the first major solar farm to be built in Australia by energy giant Shell. They were doing electrical work on the 120MW Gangarri solar project near Wandoan in Queensland and were stood down by contractor Sterling and Wilson after a contractual dispute.

ETU state secretary Peter Ong described the sackings as "brutal" and renewables as a "cowboy industry", saying: "Big businesses like Sterling & Wilson have exploited the loopholes in the Fair Work legislation, where they can let workers go at a whim, they don't care how the workers are treated, it's all about getting the biggest bang for their buck".

Despite their shocking record, Sterling & Wilson are currently building a CleanCo sponsored project, the Western Downs Green Power Hub owned by French company Neoen.

Nothing less than full public ownership of renewables projects can ensure a rapid and just transition where workers are prioritised over profit.

The bulk of the projects CleanCo has supported are privately owned

Economic recovery for some, millions still struggling

By David Glanz

TREASURER JOSH Frydenberg boasts that “Australia is leading the global economic recovery” and that living standards have risen by a “remarkable” 5.8 per cent over the past year.

Some people are doing very well indeed. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), company gross operating profits rose from 2.6 per cent in March 2020 to 11.9 per cent a year later.

Property speculators are making hay as house prices rocket.

But the headlines disguise the fact that millions of workers are doing it tough, whether they have a job or not.

The ABS reported that at the end of March there were 1.1 million people holding down at least two jobs—covering 7.5 per cent of all jobs. Both are record figures. The number of people with two or more jobs has grown by a third since the end of June last year.

This reflects years of slow wage growth that have left most workers struggling to cope with living costs.

A thinktank, the McKell Institute, has reported that the average Australian worker would be earning \$254 more a week if wages growth had continued at the rate achieved under the last Labor government.

Under Rudd and Gillard, from 2007 to 2013, wages grew by 4.6 per cent a year. But that rate plummeted to 2.5 per cent a year between 2014 and 2020 under the Coalition.

There are a range of factors at play here including public sector pay freezes, wage theft, modest minimum wage increases and, of course, anti-union laws that contribute to very low strike rates.

Another is the proportion of workers in full-time jobs with leave entitlements.

Alison Pennington at the Centre of Future Work reports that, in 2017, the number of such “good jobs” fell to just less than half of all employment for the first time on record.

She writes: “It’s still low, with around half (50.5 per cent) of all jobs full-time with paid entitlements at end-2020. This means, around half of employed Australians now confront one or more key dimensions of insecurity in their work (casual, part-time, marginal self-employment).”



Above: The pay freeze last year and low wage rises for public sector workers are holding down wages more widely

The number of people with two or more jobs has grown by a third since the end of June last year

Another reason workers are facing the pinch is revealed in inflation figures from the ABS that show the cost of basics has been rising twice as fast as the cost of luxuries.

The ABS is using a new method for calculating the level of inflation for necessities like food, housing, healthcare and transport separately from the inflation rate for discretionary items such as takeaway meals, alcohol and holidays. Together they make up the Consumer Price Index (CPI).

As Emma Dawson wrote in *The Age*: “Broken down this way, the figures released last month reveal that, during the ‘dog days’ before the COVID recession, the price of non-discretionary items increased by 14.8 per cent, while discretionary inflation was 12.9 per cent.

“Not too different—but when you take out the cost of tobacco ... discretionary inflation was just 6.4 per cent. As less than 15 per cent of Australians are regular smokers, this lower figure is a more accurate reflection of the typical household.”

JobSeeker

This is bad news for people on benefits such as JobSeeker, Parenting Payment Partnered, Special Benefit, Youth Allowance and Austudy, which are adjusted in line with overall CPI movements. (Age Pension, Service Pension, Disability Support Pension

and Carer Payment rates are only partly linked to CPI.)

When benefits go up in line with the CPI figure, recipients are falling behind, given that they spend all their income on essentials whose prices are increasing at a much higher rate.

Jobseekers are also facing a fresh Coalition attack. People making new claims will not get paid until they have signed a job plan, which takes on average ten days.

The result is, according to the government’s own figures, that this change will affect about 144,000 jobseekers each year, with each to lose \$450 in payments on average.

The Coalition are presiding over more poverty and misery. But we know there is an alternative.

In the middle of 2020, the Coronavirus Supplement meant poverty was briefly abolished.

According to the ABS, the share of disposable income going to the bottom one-fifth of households leapt from 4 per cent to almost 12 per cent.

People were able to pay bills, buy food and have the occasional treat without stress.

As a minimum, we need to fight for Jobseeker to be increased to \$80 a day, for higher pensions and for more public housing.

Poverty is imposed by capitalism. It can be abolished if we resist.

High school students march against sexism in Adelaide

By Robert Stainsby

THE YOUTH March Against Sexual Violence on Kaurna land (Adelaide) on 24 June saw a spirited crowd of up to 1000 take to city streets. Young women and non-binary school students took the lead, joined by numerous boys, along with a sprinkling of older supporters.

As organiser Martha lamented in her speech: “Violence and misogyny are rife within our schools... Young women aged 15 to 19 are reported to have the highest rate of sexual assault crimes committed against them per year... When we report it, to those who are meant to protect us, we are told that we are irrational, too emotional, over exaggerating or that we are blatantly telling lies...”

“I do not want to live my life in a society where my existence is rooted in objectification and the male gaze.”

The march followed a walkout against sexism a few weeks earlier at Adelaide High School. Students in the Call4Action activist group organised an online petition with a list of demands for action by the school, which has now attracted over 7500 signatures.

The *Adelaide Advertiser* quoted former Labor MP Kate Ellis’s apt description of the students as, “warriors who are not prepared to sit quietly and let this continue”, “at the new forefront of the battle for change”.

The students are building on the wave of revulsion against sexist abuse that manifested in the national March4Justice movement, and multiple youth marches around the country.

Sexism has deep roots in our society, with sexual objectification in the media and entertainment and bosses benefiting from pay inequality and women’s unpaid labour.

The Adelaide rally was dominated by chants for “Consent education—now!”, backed by speakers such as educator Karen Keavy. There is no doubt we need frank education in schools that equips students to recognise and call out abuse, and helps boys resist the conditioning that encourages abusive behaviour.

But the *Advertiser* earlier quoted Adelaide High student Rira pointing to a wider agenda, adding demands for “legal and economic support for survivors of sex-related crime and abuse, better funding for women’s



Above: High school students rage against sexism at the protest

services and sexist politicians out of parliament”. If students are prepared to argue for targeting sexism’s base in

the system, the anger and energy on display at the local march bode well for the struggles to come.

Nurses, paramedics force NSW Liberals to lift pay

STOPPAGES AND strike action by paramedics, nurses and teachers have forced the NSW Liberals to back down on their proposed public sector pay freeze.

The Coalition can be pushed for much more. Last year’s 0.3 per cent pandemic pay rise, a pay cut after inflation, was an outright insult for those who had been lauded as “front-line heroes” in COVID wards and patient transport. The proposed return to a 1.5 per cent pay rise cap has been raised to 2.5 per cent—a round one win for union action.

Paramedics, ambulance drivers and nurses have all defied Industrial Relations Commission (IRC) orders to stage industrial action. Paramedics are seeking a 4.7 per cent pay rise (2.5 per cent this year plus 2.2 per cent in arrears after the pay cut last year). They imposed further work bans for 24 hours on the day the NSW budget was delivered. NSW paramedics are the lowest paid in the country.

Hundreds of nurses have staged rolling walkouts across the state, striking for at least two hours across regional hospitals including Bowral, Shoalhaven, Port Macquarie and the Central Coast, demanding a better pay rise, nurse to patient ratios and

an end to understaffing. Nurses in Lismore stopped work for 15 hours while in Sydney two hour strikes have taken place at RPA, Liverpool and Campbelltown hospitals.

Wyong Hospital branch President, Kelly Falconer, said that staffing ratios in NSW are worse than across Queensland and Victoria, with the result that, “Too many nurses and midwives are now at breaking point”.

Teachers are also gearing up for action, after the union commissioned “Gallop inquiry” recommended a pay rise of 7.5 per cent per annum, to address increases in job complexity and workload.

More than ever, the pandemic has shown how much we all rely on frontline public sector workers. If the LNP can budget billions of dollars for infrastructure such as the Blue Mountains underpass tunnel, they also have the capacity to pay their workers.

Unions NSW and affiliated unions should call for a cross delegates meeting, to take advantage of the LNP shift over pay, and unite all of the struggles into a united campaign of militant action for significant pay rises, permanency and increased public investment.

John Morris

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The march followed a walkout against sexism a few weeks earlier at Adelaide High School

Cubans are right to protest, but US sanctions must end

THOUSANDS OF people have joined protests in Cuba over increasing prices of food, power shortages and rising cases of COVID.

People began taking to the streets in San Antonio de Los Baños in the west of the island, with protests following in the capital Havana when word spread.

One protester said, "I'm here because of hunger, because there's no medicine, because of power cuts—because there's a lack of everything."

The country is experiencing a severe economic crisis due to Donald Trump's tightening of US sanctions and the impact of COVID on the tourism industry.

The US imposed an economic blockade on Cuba in the wake of its 1959 revolution, and has sought to undermine the regime ever since.

It will try to use popular opposition to its own advantage.

But workers and the poor in Cuba have a right to protest the regime's failures and the growing economic instability. Inequality has increased in Cuba due to the government's response to the economic crisis. In an effort to attract foreign capital it has opened up large areas of the economy to private business.

Those who have families working abroad and receive remittances in foreign currency have privileged access to extra food and other goods.

Police thugs were sent in to crack down on the protests and a number of left-wing activists were arrested.

They included Frank Garcia Hernandez, a critical Marxist historian and academic. Also seized was Maykel Gonzalez Vivero, director of Tremenda Nota, an important online magazine in defence of LGTB+ rights. Both have since been released but confined to house arrest. Others are still in jail.

Cuba's ability to stand up to US bullying and economic pressure for over six decades should be a source of admiration for anti-imperialists everywhere.

But this does not make Cuba a model society, and it has never been genuinely socialist or democratic.

We should demand the end of US sanctions on Cuba, and oppose US efforts to extend its influence into the country.

But workers in Cuba also have a right to dissent and to determine their own future.



Above: Protest in the Cuban capital, Havana

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Inequality has increased in Cuba due to the government's response to the economic crisis

Major oil workers' strike shakes Iran

THOUSANDS OF workers in Iran's oil industry have joined a strike wave. The action has spread across at least 70 companies across oil and gas refineries, petrochemical plants and power plants in eight provinces across the country.

The strike began among contract workers, organised by strike committees co-ordinated through the Council for Organising Contract Oil Workers' Protests, shortly after the 19 June presidential elections.

Workers are increasingly employed by contract agencies on fixed term contracts instead of as permanent employees. They receive far less pay and worse conditions. There are around 150,000 contract workers in the oil sector.

The workers are demanding a pay rise from \$400 to at least \$650 a month and an end to payment of wages often months late.

Inflation in Iran is running at 50 per cent.

Workers also want the right provided under the 2010 labour law to ten days off for every 20 work days, currently applied only to permanent workers.

Many of the oil fields are in remote areas long distances from workers' homes and long periods off work are needed to visit families.

The action follows strikes in July last year that lasted more than a month across 15 companies. The new strikes have spread even further, as part of a co-ordinated effort the workers are calling "Campaign 1400", as the year is known in the Iranian calendar.

After the strike began, "some of our colleagues left their workplace and returned home, but some of us have remained in workers' dormitories," a statement from the Council for Organising Contract Oil Workers' Protests said.

"Ruthless employers are firing day labourers and preparing to hire new workers. Therefore, if we stay in the dormitories, the employers will not have a place to house the new workforce."

The US hopes to take advantage of protests and strikes in Iran to put a friendly regime in power. But US sanctions have increased hardship for ordinary people, and led to shortages of medical supplies to tackle COVID.

The US and other Western powers like Australia are no friends of Iranian workers.

Workers' revolt in support of their own demands holds the key to ending poverty and inequality both in Iran and all across the region.

West brought 20 years of horror and war to Afghanistan

By Ruby Wawn

AFTER A 20 year occupation spanning four US presidencies, Australian and US forces are finally withdrawing from Afghanistan. But there is little to show for 20 years of war.

The war in Afghanistan was launched as part of the US military response to 9/11, claiming the Afghan government was hiding Al Qaeda. The US wanted to be seen defending its imperial pride after the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington. But the war was part of a bigger plan to wield US military power and stretch its imperialist influence in the Middle East.

President Joe Biden claims that the military occupation has “achieved” its goals. But he admitted that, “the likelihood there is going to be one unified government in Afghanistan controlling the whole country is highly unlikely”.

Veterans Affairs Minister Darren Chester claimed the US and Australia had delivered, “education, health and improved conditions of life, particularly for women in Afghanistan” by removing the Taliban.

But the US-backed government relies on the support of brutal and corrupt warlords every bit as bad as the Taliban, while the lives of many Afghans have gotten worse.

Conservative estimates say at least 47,600 civilians have been killed, including incidents now being investigated as war crimes, and as many as 170,000 combatants. Summary executions, torture and the slaughter of civilians have left the reputation of the US, Australian and NATO forces in tatters.

The US has increasingly relied on air strikes which kill civilians indiscriminately, dropping a record 7362 bombs in 2019. According to the UN, Afghan and US forces killed more civilians in the first half of 2019 than insurgents.

Foreign troops have been so brutal they have produced renewed support for the Taliban.

The most recent election in 2019 saw low voter turnout and accusations of fraud, with both the incumbent President Ashraf Ghani and his political opponent Abdullah Abdullah claiming victory.

After Ghani was narrowly returned as President, he turned to the worst warlords to consolidate his power, awarding Abdul Rashid Dostum the country’s highest military honour.



Above: Australian troops in Afghanistan

Dostum, a former Afghan general who served as Vice President from 2014 to 2020, ordered thousands of Taliban prisoners to be suffocated and has been accused of ordering the rape of a political rival. The appointment horrified many Afghans, but Dostum is an influential figure able to garner ethnic Uzbek support for the government.

Dostum also has close ties in Central Asia and with Turkey, where he fled to escape prosecution in 2017. Turkey, which has more than 500 troops in Afghanistan, is reportedly stepping in to take over security at the International Airport in Kabul.

And as the US withdraws its troops, other regional powers with ties to the Taliban, including Russia, Iran and Pakistan, are beginning to circle to fill the vacuum.

Failure of reconstruction

The US has funnelled over \$900 billion dollars into Afghanistan, more than they have spent “nation building” in any other country.

Infant mortality rates have dropped, the number of children in school has risen and the Afghan economy has grown. But most of the money has disappeared through corruption, fraud and bribery while the schools, hospitals and roads have been left in disrepair.

Analysis from a forensic accountant who worked for the US military from 2010 to 2012 shows that of 3000 Defence Department contracts worth \$106 billion, at least 40 per cent

ended up in the pockets of warlords, drug traffickers and corrupt Afghan officials. His report was exposed in 2019 in the *Washington Post*.

The US chose as allies notorious militia and security officials accused of sexual assault, torture, corruption and murder, leaving ordinary Afghans disillusioned with the US-backed administration. Many of these men accused of human rights abuses still sit in parliament today.

Now the Afghan ruling class has been left in charge of an economy propped up by opium production, with efforts to eradicate it a total failure. Afghanistan produces 90 per cent of the world’s opium. But in a country where most people live below the poverty line, there are few alternatives for farmers. Opium production is the source of many livelihoods.

With the withdrawal of US troops, the Taliban has been moving to take over large swathes of Afghanistan, seizing important border crossings with Iran and Turkmenistan. They now claim to control 85 per cent of the country. As a result thousands of Afghan refugees continue to make the dangerous journey to Europe, while Afghan interpreters who worked for the allied forces make desperate pleas to be evacuated to safety.

The US and Australia are withdrawing in defeat. While Biden will continue to bomb the country from afar, ordinary Afghans have been left to suffer under the rule of an unstable, corrupt government facing ongoing civil war.

The US chose as allies notorious militia and officials accused of sexual assault, torture, corruption and murder

WAR CRIMES— WHY AUSTRALIAN TROOPS BRING TERROR

The ongoing reports of Australian war crimes in Afghanistan are the latest in a long history of terror. **Dani Cotton** explores why Australian troops carry out these atrocities

AUSTRALIA IS still reeling from reports of war crimes in Afghanistan, with more information continuing to emerge by the month.

In the “trial of the century”, Australia’s most decorated living soldier, Ben Roberts-Smith, is suing Nine newspapers over allegations he committed a series of war crimes and domestic violence.

Roberts-Smith is alleged to have kicked a handcuffed Afghan soldier off a cliff in 2012.

But calls for cultural reform and for the prosecution of the few “bad apples” fail to address the real cause of the war crimes. Australian troops have been responsible for similar atrocities in every major war they have fought.

The long and brutal history of Australian war crimes are a result of sending soldiers abroad in the service of Australia’s imperialist interests, to invade and bomb other countries in order to secure Australian power and profits.

This was the reason Australian troops went to Afghanistan in the first place. The war itself was a war crime. At least 47,600 civilians have been killed and more than double that number injured in Afghanistan during the 20 years of war.

The war in Afghanistan has long been promoted as a “good war”, promising to defeat the Taliban, and promote “nation building” and women’s rights.

But the war had nothing to do with protecting Afghans.

The Taliban was merely replaced by a corrupt US-backed regime, compared by leading US General David Petraeus to “a crime syndicate”.

The inevitable consequence of the war has been increasing support for the only group seen to be willing to resist Western imperialism, the

Australia was locked in a vicious cycle of increasingly brutalities in Uruzgan province

Taliban.

The US is now finally withdrawing its troops in military defeat. Last month Australia too withdrew its last troops from Uruzgan province where it was focused.

But they leave behind a trail of bodies. Australian soldiers were infamous, “known for their long beards and killing” according to one village elder.

One man, Lailai, describes making tea in his house, before Australian soldiers broke in, shot him, beat him with a rifle, and ravaged him with a dog.

He later told journalist Andrew Quilty, “I’m so grateful to Allah that I survived the attack. Many villagers came to me and said, ‘We can’t believe you’re alive. Because when the Australians capture you, you never come back alive.’”

Australia’s brutal war on civilians

US and Australian troops in Afghanistan became a brutal occupying army imposing control through violence and terror.

Australia was locked in a vicious cycle of increasingly brutalities in Uruzgan province.

Journalist Andrew Quilty describes the way Australia’s Special Operations Task Group (SOTG) became increasingly hated by and distrustful of the civilians caught up in their hunting grounds: “The more special forces killed unlawfully and abused, the more the population feared and reviled them, and the more they became inclined to sympathise with the Taliban, regardless of how they once regarded them. And, hence, the more the SOTG saw the entire population as its enemy.”

Australian soldier Brayden Chapman told *Four Corners*, “We try

and say we’re there to help and the Taliban are bad, but if we go in and we start destroying infrastructure or destroying their private vehicles and burning down their homes, it doesn’t really send the right messages”, particularly while, “the Taliban are not doing that”.

In 2012, soldiers executed Dad Mohammad in a wheat field, an unarmed 25-year-old man who was holding prayer beads.

Following the murder, his brother Jamshid became active in the Taliban, telling journalist Andrew Quilty, “They kill this innocent person with such brutality—what do they expect us to do?”

The cycle bred a repulsive military “warrior cult” culture. One anonymous soldier described an entitlement “to be treated almost as Roman gladiators”.

According to another, “Guys just had this blood lust. Psychos. Absolute Psychos. And we bred them”. The ABC obtained a photo of Australian soldiers flying a Nazi flag in 2007. A public Instagram page operated by current and former SAS soldiers was exposed for mocking war crimes investigations and selling “Make Diggers Violent Again” bumper stickers. Some soldiers used the hashtag #slaycation, and infamously produced a YouTube video set to music.

The practice of killing and cover-up continues to be uncovered by the media.

The latest revelation was the “tractor job”, where Australian soldiers killed as many as 11 civilians in the village of Sara Aw.

This included five civilians sheltering around a tractor transporting onions, one of whom was a young teenager hiding inside the tractor wheel.

According to an anonymous

FEATURES

SOTG officer, after one farmer was accidentally shot, soldiers “made the decision that they couldn’t leave anyone behind to tell... So, they decided to kill all of them.”

Soldiers told sociologist Samantha Crompton, who the Defence Department commissioned to investigate its internal culture, about one incident where SASR members stopped, searched and slit the throats of two 14-year-old boys who, “they decided might be Taliban sympathisers”. The rest of the troops were charged with “clean[ing] up the mess” by bagging the bodies and throwing them in the river.

In one act of intimidation, Australian troops executed a dog after handing it to a child, on a chain.

Brereton Report

Following a decade of agitation and reporting by locals, the extent of war crimes was revealed in the unprecedented Brereton Report released last November, which found credible evidence that up to 25 soldiers were complicit in 39 murders of non-combatants.

Now 19 soldiers are facing criminal investigations, an Office of the Special Investigator has been established to investigate the war crimes, and the SASR’s 2 Squadron has been disbanded.

The report is gruesome reading. It describes the way war crimes were tolerated and even encouraged. “Blooding” describes the practice whereby junior soldiers were, “required by their patrol commanders” to shoot a prisoner to achieve their “first kill”.

“Body count” competitions encouraged the same. In one instance, troops executed two prisoners to get a, “tally board total... from 18 to 20”.

Civilian and non-combatant murders were normalised. People running away as a helicopter landed were nicknamed “squirters” and designated legitimate targets. “Running became a death sentence, even for women and children.”

The widespread practice of cover-up helped breed a, “culture within which, ultimately, war crimes were tolerated”. Australian soldiers used “throwdowns” such as radios and weapon to disguise civilian casualties as legitimate targets.

Bradley Chapman said that soldiers, “used to joke about how the same serial number was in every single photo of dead Afghani”, indicating how commonly weapons were

planted on bodies.

Another joke was about, “the size of the rug that they’ve swept everything under”.

We still do not know the full extent of the brutalities. One incident in the report was described as, “possibly the most disgraceful episode in Australia’s military history”. This is no throwaway line, following a detailed 60-page summary of Australia’s history of war crimes. However, the entire case was redacted from the report.

New cases are also likely to emerge.

Andrew Quilty has revealed 25 previously unreported deaths. Since the report was released, the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission in Uruzgan has received reports of Australian atrocities totalling up to 122 deaths.

It takes an orchard to grow bad apples

Investigations have consistently limited the responsibility of higher ups in the military. The report lays criminal responsibility at the “patrol commander level”, saying that more senior army officials were only morally responsible.

But senior command was not blind to the brutalities of the war.

In a secret briefing in 2016, Major General Jeff Sengelman wrote of, “systemic failings across the command, primarily in leadership and oversight at all levels, including the headquarters”.

Joint Operations Command lawyers admitted they were concerned about “sanctioned massacres” and were sceptical that their alteration of legal “rules of engagement” would stop the behaviour, because Special Forces, “just got more creative in how they wrote up incidents”.

The Brereton inquiry found that complaints from the Red Cross or Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission were, “routinely passed off as Taliban propaganda or motivated by a desire for compensation” by senior officers.

Instead, Australia relied exclusively on the word of the soldiers, which the report describes as, “routinely embellished, and sometimes outright fabricated”.

The legal focus on individuals has generated dissent amongst SASR troops. One soldier “H” complained that the ADF senior leadership were unaccountable, telling the *Courier Mail*, “To me, they created the

War crimes have been a constant feature of Australia’s wars, from the Boer war, to the First and Second World Wars, and Vietnam

beast... They needed the capacity, they needed us to be the strategic tool for them.”

Soldiers facing war crime charges are believed to have circulated photos of the Command Sergeant Major Warren Letch, “right-hand man” to the head of the Special Forces, drinking beer from the prosthetic leg of a dead Afghani man.

The Australian described it as a, “normalised but inappropriate team-building activity”.

Brigadeer Jono Beesley, the former commander of SAS and then SOTG, has also stepped down from his position for unspecified reasons. He was in the role at the time where an SAS corporal infamously severed the hands of several dead soldiers, purportedly to retrieve “biometric material” in violation of war crimes.

Not only should the individuals who committed the war crimes be held responsible, but so too those who ran the war.

The invasion was supported by Liberal and Labor governments, and it was the top brass who signed off on bombs, drones and the military exercises that produced the war crimes. Responsibility is ultimately in the hands of Australia’s rulers who saw joining the invasion as necessary.

Not the first time

Labor leader Anthony Albanese said of the war crimes in Afghanistan, “this doesn’t represent who Australia is”. But Australia was founded by an equally brutal British invasion. And war crimes have been a constant feature of Australia’s wars, from the Boer war, to the First and Second World Wars, and Vietnam.

The famous case of “Breaker Morant” saw two Australian infantry soldiers executed for war crimes in the South African Boer War. After a British officer was killed in action, Morant launched a series of revenge killings. He captured and then executed a wounded prisoner of war, before killing eight civilians including four schoolteachers.

A Lutheran Reverend discovered the crime and attempted to return to his mission station, traveling alongside a white flag. To cover up the war crimes, Morant ordered Hancock to shoot the priest dead.

For decades nationalist mythology has recast them as heroic Australians persecuted as scapegoats for the British. As late as 2010, one Liberal MP argued in parliament that the men

should be pardoned, stating, “[w]e certainly need legends in Australian history”.

The First World War brought a fresh round of atrocities, from the rampage of drunken ANZAC soldiers in Cairo burning down houses and brothels and attacking firefighters in 1915, to the race-fuelled 1918 Surafend massacre of up to 137 civilians in the village of Surafend al Amar in Palestine.

In the Second World War, Australians were infamous for killing Japanese prisoners. Historian Mark Johnston writes that it “often proved difficult to prevent” Australian footsoldiers from killing captured Japanese before they could be interrogated, while a soldier Eddie Stanton described the war crime of killing survivors more simply, “Nippo [Japanese] survivors are just so much machine-gun practice”.

Australians massacred 350 shipwreck survivors in 1943.

In the Vietnam war, Australians murdered survivors, civilians and prisoners of war, while the practice of planting weapons on dead bodies was used to cover up the killings.

Imperialist wars, fought to impose foreign power and control, inevitably involve war crimes.

Australia is an imperialist power in its own right, and has supported first British imperialist adventures and more recently US imperialist wars in an effort to secure the support of the dominant imperialist power for its own designs in the local region.

The nature of these wars has pitted Australian troops against local population as part of foreign invading armies, there to impose foreign control.

These wars have frequently required racism to help justify them. The recent US-led wars in the Middle East were justified using racism depicting Muslims as backward, irrational and potential terrorists. This racism served to dehumanise ordinary Afghans and fuel the occupiers’ war crimes and violence.

Conclusion

Reforms, whether through cultural change in the SAS, “integrity training”, or helmet cameras, are unlikely to change anything about the nature of a wars Australia wages. In the long run they are designed to help reinforce the legitimacy of war and ensure Australian troops can be sent to fight in future conflicts.



Relatives holding pictures of Afghan victims killed by Australian troops during military operations in Tirinkot, Uruzgan province

But even steps like these look unlikely, with senior government politicians opposing even modest “cultural change”.

Defence Minister Peter Dutton told 2GB that he wants to get ADF and SAS soldiers to get, “back to business... not to be distracted by things that have happened in the past”.

The Brereton report argued that the war crimes carried out by Task Force 66 were “disgraceful, not meritorious” and recommended stripping the unit of Meritorious Unit Citation as a, “demonstration of the collective responsibility and accountability of the Special Operations Task Group as a whole for those events”.

Though the recommendation was accepted by the Defence Chief Angus Campbell, Dutton has overturned his decision, meaning the unit will keep its collective honour for “sustained outstanding service”.

Liberal MP Phillip Thompson, a former soldier, said the government was committed to, “bringing back our core values—we’ve gone a little bit woke over the past few years and we can’t afford to be doing that”, defending the necessity of, “unapologetic aggression and violence to get the mission done”.

Examples of this “wokeness” include the a directive in 2018 that soldiers should not wear “death symbolism” such as skull and cross-bone masks, or the “Punisher” symbol. Thompson previously posted on

social media in 2012 implying that he wanted to shoot Muslims.

Liberal MP and ex-SAS officer Andrew Hastie argued in the *Australian that*, “a positive warrior culture” is “what you need in an elite special operations unit.”

Hastie is right. The Australian SASR was inspired and trained by the British SAS, created by Winston Churchill in 1940 out of the stated need for, “specially trained troops of the hunter class, who can develop a reign of terror down the enemy coast... leaving a trail of German corpses behind them”.

For socialists, war crimes are not simply breaches of wartime discipline but an inevitable product of any imperialist war. They are outgrowths of a system that sends soldiers abroad to invade countries and impose Australian power.

Biden’s withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan is a tactical move designed to prepare the US for future wars.

He has declared that, “Rather than return to war with the Taliban, we have to focus on the challenges that are in front of us. We have to shore up American competitiveness to face the stiff competition from an increasingly assured China.”

As the Australian and US governments begin a new Cold War with China, we will need to campaign against our rulers’ efforts to beat drums of war, before they career us all into more atrocities.

THE DARK EMU DEBATE INDIGENOUS SOPHISTICATION WASN'T AGRICULTURAL

Respecting the sophisticated and success of Indigenous societies doesn't rely on pretending they were agricultural, argues **Ian Rintoul**

PETER SUTTON and Keryn Walshe's book *Farmers or Hunter-Gatherers?* has generated a storm of political debate. Many are concerned that the book is going to bolster the racist views of the likes of Andrew Bolt and Mark Latham and more generally set back the fight for rights and respect for Indigenous people in Australia.

Yet the problems with Bruce Pascoe's book *Dark Emu* were always there for anyone who was concerned to check Pascoe's claims and references. Before Sutton's book, others had already raised the problems with Pascoe's argument that Aboriginal society was agricultural, including historian Tom Griffiths and Russell Marks in *The Monthly*.

So why, despite *Dark Emu*'s flaws, has it been so widely accepted?

For many people *Dark Emu* was a welcome antidote to the prevailing racism that regards Indigenous society as "primitive" and culturally backward. It is not hard to believe Pascoe's argument that important achievements of pre-colonial Indigenous society have been suppressed, because so much of the history and present reality of Black Australia—the massacres, the stolen children, the stolen wages and the resistance—is still being hidden.

Pascoe's book was uncritically welcomed because it celebrated the knowledge, sophistication, ingenuity and skill of Indigenous people. But it does so by trying to present them as agricultural societies, where people lived in permanently settled villages and tilled and planted the soil.

Pascoe is wrong about this. At its worst, *Dark Emu* uses selective evidence and exaggerated interpretations to paint a picture of Indigenous people being established agriculturalists. Sutton has assembled a formidable array of evidence against *Dark Emu*'s overall thesis.

The use of the term "hunter-gatherer" to describe Indigenous societies is historically loaded. Descriptions of

hunter-gatherer societies have been tied up with the prevailing views that colonising powers were superior. But hunter-gatherer peoples across the world never just hunted or foraged. The traditional Indigenous way of life in Australia was always far more than "simply wandering from plant to plant, kangaroo to kangaroo in a hapless opportunism", as Pascoe seems to accept.

Sutton uses the terms "complex hunter-gatherer" and "hunter-gatherer plus" to describe the pre-1788 Indigenous way of life on this continent.

As Sutton correctly puts it, "Aboriginal people were practical and spiritual managers and modifiers of their environment, skilled hunters, adept fishers and trappers, and very botanically knowledgeable foragers who had long come to grips with the problems of making a living in a wide range of ecologies," and further, "They were ecological agents who worked with the environment, rather than, usually, against it."

The tragic irony is that, in *Dark Emu*'s attempt to celebrate Indigenous practices as "agricultural", Pascoe ends up denigrating the way traditional Indigenous societies actually worked as "primitive". Pascoe accepts and reinforces a social evolutionist conception of historical progress. This places hunter-gatherers at the bottom and capitalism at the top, along with all the politically discriminatory connotations of what is socially advanced and civilised. To that extent, Pascoe himself is both a victim and a booster of the prevailing ruling class ideology.

The politics of Sutton

To counter Pascoe's claim that the real history of Indigenous people has been hidden, Sutton has a chapter outlining books and documentaries produced over the last 50 years that have documented and celebrated Indigenous knowledge and sophistication.

Sutton has assembled a formidable array of evidence against *Dark Emu*'s overall thesis

But Sutton wilfully ignores the fact that the predominant view in Australian society is still that Indigenous culture is "backward".

These ideas justified the initial genocide that established Australia. They continue to be fed by ingrained systemic discrimination and the relentless effort by politicians, supported by sections of the media, to blame Indigenous people and their culture for the problems inflicted by European colonisation and on-going dispossession.

Sutton's book *has* been seized on by right-wing attack dogs such as Andrew Bolt and Mark Latham who thoroughly embrace ideas of white supremacy and see Western culture as superior. The blatant political agenda of *Dark Emu*'s conservative critics can be seen in Coalition candidate, and Bundjalung man, Warren Mundine's, attack on *Dark Emu*, not out of concern for the facts of traditional Indigenous society, but for being "woke."

Like Mark Latham, Sutton and Walshe have called for *Dark Emu* to be removed from schools.

It's striking that Sutton has never been motivated to campaign against the more fundamental failure of the school system to educate children about the impact of colonisation on Indigenous people and their lands, and the "black history of White Australia".

A review earlier this year found the current Australian curriculum failed to recognise that, "the First Peoples of Australia experienced colonisation as invasion and dispossession".

This was too much for Liberal Education minister Alan Tudge who told Sky News he was "concerned" about the use of the word "invasion" and would "seek some changes", saying "I don't want students to be turned into activists."

The idea that Aboriginal society is inherently primitive, violent and dysfunctional underpins the racist

stereotypes, the discriminatory laws, and drives the police harassment and victim-blaming of policies like the Northern Territory Intervention.

Disgracefully, Sutton himself was an influential apologist for the NT Intervention. He has done his own share of peddling negative stereotypes, blaming Indigenous culture for the levels of community violence in his 2009 publication, *The Politics of Suffering*.

In *Farmers or Hunter-Gatherers*, Sutton cites his close relationships with Indigenous people across northern Australia to establish his bona fides, but he is silent on the intense oppression their communities face.

In the conclusion to the book, Sutton in fact lauds Native Title for recognising “Aboriginal people as the previous owners of the land”. But the idea that Indigenous knowledge and connections to land are valued in Australia is a farce. Sutton ignores completely the insidious role of the Native Title in legitimising dispossession, dividing communities and extinguishing claims to land.

Some have reacted to Sutton’s argument against *Dark Emu* by suspecting that his book is itself an attempt to continue to deny the level of skill that Indigenous land-managers actually had.

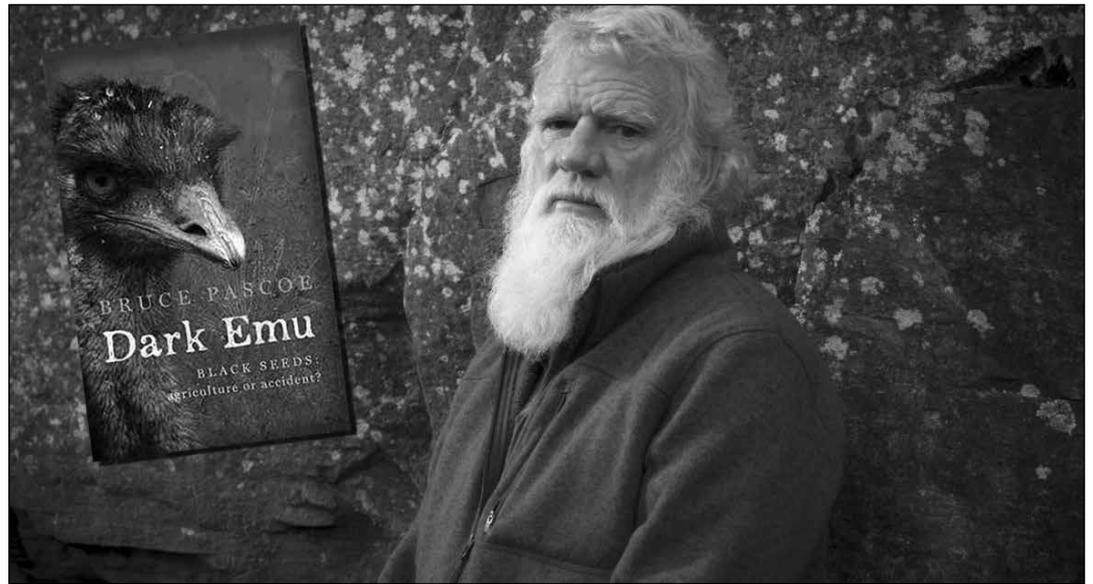
But recognising the skills of Indigenous society does not depend on portraying that society as agricultural. Pascoe’s argument actually gives political ground to the conservatives.

Pascoe goes so far to argue, “While we continue to think of Aboriginal people as having no construction skills it is easier to dismiss Aboriginal attachment to land. Moreover the insistence on using the hunter-gatherer label is prejudicial to the rights of Aboriginal people to land.”

Why “construction skills”, rather than the Indigenous societies’ intimate ecological knowledge and cultural connection with the land, should give Aboriginal people greater “claim” to the land can only be explained by Pascoe’s acceptance of social hierarchy—that being “more productive” (and more like the invader) is a basis for greater sympathy and greater political claim.

Pascoe asks, “Why don’t our hearts fill with wonder and pride,” when claiming that Indigenous people had domesticated grains for agriculture thousands of years ago.

But the real question is—why doesn’t *Dark Emu* think that our hearts should fill with wonder and pride at the ingenuity and intimate



Above: *Dark Emu* has been popular because it tried to explain the sophistication and skill of Indigenous societies

ecological knowledge developed by Indigenous peoples over tens of thousands of years to live sustainably with their land?

Agriculture and class society

For Marxists, what is significant about agricultural society is not any conception that it is more “advanced”, but that agriculture makes it possible for a society to produce a reliable, large-scale surplus of food which allowed a completely new way of organising society to develop. The beginnings of agriculture from around 11,000 ago have rightly been described as a revolution in social life that triggered rapid population growth, new forms of technology, religions and social attitudes.

This does not mean that traditional Indigenous societies existed in conditions of general impoverishment; those societies were egalitarian, and developed ways of resource management to improve the reliability of food supply.

The creation of a social surplus, however, is the necessary precondition for the development of social classes, and the beginning of the inequality and exploitation that inevitably emerges with the development of class society. A minority ruling class forms, that relies on, and has control over, the surplus.

Unlike many colonised societies that were agricultural, there was no Indigenous elite to be incorporated into the social structures established by the invasion of 1788. As an outpost of empire, Australian capitalism was initially based on the expansion of agriculture and farming; that expansion drove the genocide of the Aboriginal population as the colony relentlessly engulfed the continent.

The establishment of the Australian colonies and the subsequent development of Australian capitalism was founded on the violent and systematic dispossession of Indigenous societies. It is that stark reality and its bloody history that today’s ruling class cannot escape, and which gnaws at the legitimacy of the Australian state. The struggle for self-determination and land rights is an integral part of the struggle against Australian capitalism.

The problem with *Dark Emu*’s argument is that it ultimately undermines that struggle because it accepts and promotes the idea that the agricultural society brought by the invaders is indeed superior. Pascoe says, “to deny Aboriginal agriculture is the single greatest impediment to inter-cultural understanding”. Strangely, this seems to be tied up with Pascoe’s ideas that reconciliation can be advanced by the commercialisation of “Aboriginal food products”.

The European invasion smashed an egalitarian society and began a continuing process of environmental destruction. The on-going oppression of Indigenous people that denies them their land, and inflicts the poverty, the “gaps” in housing, health and education, and the deaths in custody is an on-going stain that marks the racist foundations of Australian capitalism.

The hope of ending Indigenous oppression and racism lies in a common struggle that links the struggle against oppression with the power of the working class to smash the chains of capitalism, and to forge a new egalitarian, socialist society.

Farmers or Hunter-Gatherers? The *Dark Emu* Debate
By Peter Sutton and Keryn Walshe

MARXIST CLASSICS

CAPITALISM—A SYSTEM

BASED ON EXPLOITATION

James Supple continues our series on Marxist classics by introducing *Capital*, Karl Marx’s masterwork examining the workings of the capitalist system

RECENT YEARS have seen renewed interest in Karl Marx’s *Capital*, the final product of his efforts to understand capitalism as an economic system.

Academic David Harvey’s books and videos, designed to guide newcomers through reading it, have been widely popular on the left.

Every time the world economy slides into recession Marx, as the capitalist system’s best known critic, receives another wave of interest. The near implosion of the global financial system in 2008 saw sales of *Capital* climb once again.

Capital is a monumental work that was the product of over three decades of effort, and was never fully completed. Marx was a perfectionist who found it hard to finish anything, continually writing and rewriting his drafts. Chronic health problems also slowed his writing.

Capital volume one, published just over 150 years ago in 1867, was the only part to appear in Marx’s lifetime, with the second and third volumes published by his collaborator Friedrich Engels from manuscripts Marx left at his death.

Capital is not an easy read. The first few chapters are famously difficult, as Marx begins by introducing a series of concepts that can seem quite abstract. But there are many useful introductions to Marxist economics that can provide a grounding in them first, as well as guides to *Capital* itself that can assist. The best of them is *A Reader’s Guide to Marx’s Capital* by Joseph Choonara.

Marx argued that capitalism is based on commodification. It treats everything from food and housing to education, entertainment and even human labour as commodities that can be bought and sold.

So he begins *Capital* by examining the commodity. Any commodity

has a dual nature, he says. It is an object that has some use to us by satisfying some need or desire, whether something vital like the basic food we need to survive, or a more frivolous desire like the latest model phone or smart watch. Marx calls this its “use value”.

But it is also a product that can be measured and exchanged for other products, with a certain “exchange value”.

This comparison of one commodity to another—one car might be equivalent to 10,000 loaves of bread, for instance—is necessary to exchange them on the market through buying and selling. Normally this is done using money to represent their value.

Marx sets out to uncover how the exchange value of different goods on the market is measured.

He argues that they represent the amount of labour required to produce them. As he puts it, all commodities represent “congealed quantities” of “human labour”.

This “labour theory of value” is fundamental to Marx’s analysis of capitalism. Most contemporary economists explain the exchange value of goods simply through supply and demand.

Marx accepted that this played a role in the short term fluctuation of prices. So the increased demand for cars during the pandemic has pushed up their price (as people try to avoid mixing with others on public transport). As life returns to normal and the supply of cars increases, prices will fall back again.

But no matter how many new cars are produced each year increased supply will not push their prices down to \$10 each. Any company that tried to sell them that cheaply would quickly go out of business.

Capital is a monumental work that was the product of over three decades of effort

This is because the labour required to build and assemble all the parts that make up a car, which might take several days, have a much higher value.

So behind the temporary movement of prices up and down each commodity has an underlying value determined by the labour it takes to produce it.

How much labour power is embodied in any commodity is determined on a social basis, across the whole economy.

Someone who has never built a table before and uses only their backyard tools is going to take much longer to construct one than an experienced worker in an up to date factory churning out dozens or hundreds of them each day.

No one is going to pay more for the same kind of table, simply because it took an inexperienced worker three or four times as long to make it.

So the labour value of a commodity is determined not by the actual time it took to make each object, but the average time it takes to produce such a product, using the average level of skills and technology that are in use at that point in time. Marx calls this average measurement of the labour embodied in a product, *abstract labour*.

Profits and exploitation

The drive for profits is central to capitalism. It is a system where businesses set up production not because they think a product is necessary or important, but based on whether it is likely to turn a profit.

Marx wanted to establish where profits came from.

He writes that “the secret of profit making” is found in the special properties of human labour.

All commodities are ultimately

the product of labour. Even the tools, factories and machines that workers use to create products were themselves put together by human labour. The raw materials like iron and steel that went into them had to be mined and processed.

The technology involved also required months or years of human labour time from scientists and engineers to develop.

But under capitalism, workers' labour, like everything else, is itself a commodity. There is a "labour market" where workers sell their capacity to work to a company in exchange for a wage.

Marx notes that when, "a capitalist pays for a day's labour-power... then the right to use that power for a day belongs to him". Crucially, this means that a capitalist can get workers to create new commodities with a greater value than what they have paid the worker in wages.

The extra value extracted from workers beyond what they are paid Marx calls "surplus value". This is the source of the capitalists' profits. And it explains the extraordinary accumulation of wealth and commodities under capitalism.

It also shows that capitalism is fundamentally based on exploitation. For even well-paid workers will have part of the value they create taken from them to produce their bosses' profits. The standard reason given for this is that the capitalist provided the tools, the factory or the workplace where the profits were created.

But how did they come to control this means of production in the first place?

The capitalists did not build the factories or workplaces themselves, they used other workers to do the job. The reason the capitalists own the factories is that they, or often their parents and grandparents, exploited earlier generations of workers to get rich.

Much of the first volume of *Capital* is dedicated to studying the methods that individual capitalists can use to increase the surplus value extracted from workers.

One method is simply forcing workers to work harder—such as through increasing the speed and intensity of work or lengthening the number of hours in the working day. This he called "absolute surplus value".

Here *Capital* begins to show how this plays out in the real world, with a



famous chapter on the efforts by capitalists to increase the length of the working day during the early period of Britain's industrial revolution.

Even today, bosses' efforts to control the working day—from the McDonalds retail workers denied breaks to the monitoring of how long warehouse workers take for lunch—show capitalists' continued efforts to extract the maximum labour from workers.

Accumulation

There is also constant pressure on capitalists to install new technology, equipment and production techniques and so to increase workers' productivity.

Doing so allows them to produce a greater number of goods with the same amount of labour. Marx called this increasing "relative surplus value".

One example is automation. In car manufacturing, robots and new machines have allowed the same number of workers to produce a far larger number of cars. So in the US, roughly the same number of cars were produced in 2015 as 15 years earlier, but with only 65 per cent of the workforce.

Companies that fail to introduce the latest technology face higher costs of production.

Above: Every crisis in capitalism brings people back to Karl Marx, the system's greatest critic

This means they will be undercut by rival companies able to sell their goods at lower prices.

This results in a constant pressure on companies to expand and accumulate profits. For without healthy profits they will not have the capital to invest in the up to date machines and technology needed to remain competitive.

Companies that fail to keep up are eventually driven out of business. This is one of the reasons for the dynamism and rapid economic growth under capitalism.

But it also means the system cannot survive without constantly squeezing more and more from workers. Exploitation and misery are structured into the system. Capitalism also produces environmental destruction and climate change, through capitalists' constant need to reduce costs and maximise profits.

The three volumes of *Capital* explore many more elements of the system, including the impact of the circulation of commodities, credit and banking, Marx's argument that the rate of profit would tend to decline over time and economic crisis.

But Marx was above all a revolutionary activist, dedicated to the overthrow of the system he studied. And the point of *Capital*, ultimately, is to show how this is possible.

OFFSHORE AND ONSHORE DETENTION EIGHT YEARS IS ENOUGH

By Ian Rintoul

THIS YEAR 19 July marks the beginning of the ninth year of Offshore Detention Mark II.

Eight years ago, then Labor Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, announced on 19 July 2013 that asylum seekers arriving by boat would be sent to Nauru or Manus Island, and none would ever be settled in Australia.

Eight years later, there are around 233 asylum seekers and refugees still held in PNG and Nauru. And 100 more (including the refugees brought under the Medevac legislation in 2019) are still being held in detention centres and hotels in Australia.

Rudd's announcement opened one of the darkest chapters in Australia's shameful history of immigration detention. The Liberals went further when they were elected in September 2013 (with Tony Abbott as Prime Minister and Scott Morrison as Immigration Minister). They called in the military to command Operation Sovereign Borders and added boat interceptions and turnbacks to the war against refugees.

In a recent report, the UN special rapporteur on the human rights of migrants estimated that Australia has turned back 800 asylum seekers on 38 boats since 2013, but few have ever been reported because of the government's policy of strict secrecy regarding "on water matters." In 2018, the UN working group on arbitrary detention condemned Australia's indefinite incarceration of refugees and asylum seekers, while previous reports accused Australia of violating the Convention Against Torture for holding asylum seekers in dangerous and violent conditions on Manus Island.

But the Australian Solution is spreading globally. In early June, Denmark passed a law enabling it to process asylum seekers outside Europe, having signed a memorandum of understanding with Rwanda, which is already housing refugees relocated from Libya.

Shortly after, Britain indicated its



Above: Refugees protest indefinite detention inside the Park Hotel in Melbourne

interest in teaming up with Denmark to establish a shared refugee processing centre in Rwanda. And now, Britain's home secretary, Priti Patel, has introduced a Nationality and Borders Bill (previously known as the Sovereign

Borders Bill) that mirrors the suite of Australia's anti-refugee policies.

The new laws will expand detention centres, provide for the removal of asylum seekers to offshore processing centres, establish prison sentences for illegal entry (read boat arrivals), and make it easier to remove asylum seekers who arrive in Britain unlawfully.

Patel is also taking her talking points from Tony Abbott, declaring the new laws will allow, "the British people... to take full control of its borders... crack down on vile, criminal smugglers who bring asylum seekers across the Channel, and break the business model of criminal trafficking and save lives".

The fight to end offshore detention has grown more urgent.

That fight, for the moment, is focused on the Medevac refugees still in detention in Australia. They need their freedom—they need permanent visas. But the dark chapter that opened in 2013 won't be over until all the asylum seekers and refugees brought from Nauru and PNG and living in community detention or on bridging visas become permanent residents, those remaining in PNG and Nauru are brought to Australia (or safely resettled), and Nauru is finally closed.

Medevac refugees start hunger strike

AS *SOLIDARITY* goes to press, around 12 Medevac refugees have re-started their hunger strike protest in the Melbourne Immigration Transit Accommodation (MITA).

The 12 were all part of the group of 14 refugees who staged a hunger strike in MITA in late June. Although that hunger strike ended on 3 July, one refugee is still not well enough to leave Northern hospital. 19 July will mark the beginning of their ninth year in detention too.

"We are very tired," one of the hunger strikers told *Solidarity*, "Next Monday [19 July], we are nine years in detention. No-one can tell us why. Since our last hunger

strike, we did not get any answers."

In late June, the High Court decision in ALJ20 put the possibility of legal action freeing the Medevac refugees further out of reach. The decision found that even if the government was not holding them for the "temporary purpose" of their transfer (ie they are not getting their needed medical treatment) or making any arrangements for their removal, their on-going, indefinite detention was lawful.

Protests are continuing at Brisbane's detention centre (BITA) where over 30 Medevac refugees are being held, outside Darwin detention, outside MITA, and outside the Park Hotel in Melbourne.

There are 233 asylum seekers and refugees still held in PNG and Nauru and 100 more in detention centres and hotels in Australia