It’s time to fight for system change

LIAR LIAR, THE PLANET IS ON FIRE

STRIKES
US workers flex some industrial muscle

NUCLEAR
Why nuclear power isn’t clean or green

CLIMATE
COP26 summit ends in failure
Solidarity | ISSUE ONE HUNDRED AND FIFTY FOUR NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2021

WHAT WE STAND FOR

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

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

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

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

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

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

We oppose imperialism and support all genuine national liberation struggles. We oppose Australian nationalism.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Things they say

We won’t be lectured by others who do not understand Australia. The Australian Way is all about how you do it, not if you do it. It’s about getting it done.
Scott Morrison tries to clarify his “Australian way” of tackling climate change

He’s lied to me many on many occasions... Scott has always had a reputation for telling lies
Former Liberal Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull

It is a proven failure and it keeps getting run up the flagpole by the fossil fuel sector as a way to defer action.
Turnbull again, on carbon capture and storage

They are damaged, lacking in trust and discipline, and highly self-interested.
Pru Goward showing her born-to-rule prejudice in discussing “the underclass” in Australian

I have applied a Marxist analysis which some might say is old fashioned but which explains to me why people judge others as unworthy
Pru Goward tries to justify her article

MI5 were tapping our phones, watching our houses, all sorts. We weren’t planning the revolution, but if the revolution happened, we knew what side we were going to be on.
UB40’s drummer Jimmy Brown, on the band whose member Astro died recently

The board is particularly concerned that a continued loss of capability and experience will materially inhibit the groups’ ability to deliver key outcomes required for success beyond the pandemic.
Qantas remuneration chairperson, Paul Rayner, explaining the $250,000 pay rise for Qantas CEO Alan Joyce, who takes home almost $2 million.
No mention of the 9000 workers Qantas has sacked or stood down.

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Australia buys Pacific telco to keep out China

TELSTRA HAS been handed control of phone services across the Pacific Islands by the Australian government, in an effort to muscle out China. The government has put up $1.9 billion of taxpayers’ money to foot the bill for the bulk of Telstra’s $2.1 billion purchase of Digicel Pacific, the leading telco across Papua New Guinea, Nauru, Samoa, Tonga, Vanuatu, and Fiji.

The play comes following reports that China Mobile was also interested in a takeover, after its owner put it on the market. Telstra, which is guaranteed full repayment of its $360 million investment within six years, has been more than happy to play along.

Berejiklian doled out millions for political benefit

FORMER PREMIER Gladys Berejiklian’s appearance at ICAC showed the corrupt and self-serving way that politics is run in NSW. The NSW Liberals have doled out millions in taxpayers’ money to advantage their own MPs and to win seats.

Berejiklian claims that there was no reason to suspect bias or conflict of interest in decisions she made to pour money into her then boyfriend Daryl Maguire’s seat are hard to believe. Not even Coalition figures like former Premier Mike Baird or Deputy Premier John Barilaro would back them.

She even claimed that, despite a phone call being played where Maguire told her about his links to Chinese developers that she “wasn’t concerned” that he could be involved in corruption. Maguire was later in a phone call Maguire complained to her that a hospital in his electorate needed more funding, and she was told “I’ll deal with it, I’ll fix it”. In a later call Berejiklian told him, “I’ve now got you the $170 million in five minutes”.

Then after Maguire resigned in disgrace, forcing a by-election, Berejiklian told him that, to make sure the Liberals held the seat, “I’ll throw money at Wagga, don’t you worry about that. Lots of it.” Berejiklian tried to pretend this was all just about serving the public. That’s a joke.

Right to protest threatened as Victoria Police deploy new weapons

VICTORIA POLICE have used anti-lockdown protests in Melbourne as an opportunity to deploy riot police and new weapons.

A report issued by Melbourne Activist Legal Support (MALS) details the events between 18 and 26 September. It acknowledges that many protesters were motivated by conspiracy theories or far-right ideas but correctly argues: “Notwithstanding this, MALS is concerned about the encouragement of police violence or even calls for greater force to be used against protesters from some sections of the media and community.

“This creates a very dangerous trajectory and assists in this sort of policing becoming more normalised.”

The report describes how police deployed the heavily armoured Public Order Response Team (PORT), the Critical Incident Response Team (CIRT) and projectile weapons.

It lists the range of weapons used:
• 12 gauge shot-gun style weapons firing baton rounds, and single and multi gas round launchers
• capsicum canisters that detonate to release a cloud of capsicum
• 40-millimetre rubber bullet launchers
• the VKS Pepperball firearm, a 175 shot semi-automatic rifle that fires blunt force capsicum pellets the size of marbles or dye markers
• stinger grenades that release nine 32-calibre rubber pellets to waist height with a range of five metres
• stun grenades, which are routinely used in Israel/Palestine and other conflict zones.

These weapons can cause serious damage or death. Stun grenades, “have maimed children, can burst ear drums, dismembered fingers and hands if reached for prior to exploding”.

The report also notes Victoria Police used an armoured personnel carrier to control a protest for the first time.

Importantly, it also takes up the right to COVID-safe protest. The report notes: “Directions not to gather in public in groups have formed a key plank in COVID laws and policing. This has intensified the power of police to define legitimate protest as well as criminal consequences for participation and organisation.”

Refugee supporters have run up against the arbitrary use of police powers throughout the pandemic.

MALS rightly call for the militarised police and their weapons to be withdrawn from frontline protest policing and for the Victorian Government to completely ban explosive devices such as stinger grenades and flash-bangs.

Activists need to fight any moves to increase police powers and cannot allow police to determine the right to protest.

INSIDE THE SYSTEM

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

Avocado market boom sees farmers dump crop

FARMERS IN Australia are dumping avocados due to record production levels. The increase in crop size has seen the market price drop to just $18 a tray, meaning some farmers would pay more to ship them for sale than they would get paid.

“We’ve had to dig a hole to bury a lot of the avocados we can’t sell,” one grower, Vic Grozotis, told the ABC.

Only a few years ago smashed avocado was dismissed as luxury spending for millennials who refused to save to buy a home. Now the anarchy of the market has seen too many farmers start producing them. And only half of the avocado trees they have planted nationwide have matured enough to produce fruit.

JobKeeper paid $38 billion to companies that didn’t need it

THE FEDERAL government paid out $38 billion in JobKeeper payments to companies that suffered no sustained drop in turnover, the Parliamentary Budget Office has found. That’s over 40 per cent of the money spent on the program. The money was paid to companies that never saw their turnover drop below the 30 per cent reduction that was the threshold to get the subsidies.

This corporate welfare was the result of relaxed rules that allowed companies to access JobKeeper based on an estimate of reduced turnover, even if they never lost money.

Once they were on the scheme they were automatically granted subsidies for six months, even if business recovered. Many companies never suffered the revenue decline they anticipated. In fact $1.3 billion went to companies who ended up tripling their income in the quarter where they took the money. But none of them have been required to pay back the money. Businesses including Harvey Norman, Nick Scali, Tabcorp and Mirvac have all held onto millions in subsidies despite seeing their profits boom.
Morrison lies as the planet dies—drive him out

SCOTT MORRISON’S approval rating has hit its lowest point since the 2020 bushfires in the wake of his humiliating trip to Glasgow for the COP26 climate summit.

Australia was widely seen as blocking climate action, refusing to lift its 2030 target beyond the figure Tony Abbott set six years ago. The government refused to join either the agreement of 40 countries to phase out coal power, alongside other major coal users like Canada, Poland and Indonesia, or the pledge to cut methane emissions by 30 per cent in ten years.

Embarrassing video footage showed Morrison struggling to find another world leader who would even shake his hand.

And Morrison was blasted as a liar by French President Emmanuel Macron over the decision to acquire nuclear submarines from the US or Britain, cancelling the contract to build submarines with France. Former Liberal Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull added fuel to the fire by volunteering that, “Scott has lied to me many times.

But the real scandal is not deceiving France but spending tens of billions of dollars on nuclear submarines that will deepen the arms race and cold war with China. The estimated $100 billion being thrown at these weapons of war could deliver a dramatic shift to renewable energy and climate jobs.

All this comes as the government prepares for an election between March and May.

Morrison now trails Labor by almost 54 to 46 per cent in two-party terms. His long-delayed adoption of the net zero by 2050 target is a fraud. The “plan” to reach the new target contained no new funding or policies to get us there. There was literally nothing more than the vague hope that new technologies would fix the problem.

The Coalition has spent years denying the reality of global heating. Morrison himself famously paraded a lump of coal in parliament.

But it now fears losing inner city Liberal seats over its climate failures and is even under pressure from the Business Council of Australia, which is worried companies will miss out on business opportunities in low-emissions technologies.

Yet even as he pretends to want action, Morrison insists he will be “preserving our existing industries”.

And he is doing all he can to expand fossil fuels, using millions of taxpayer dollars to help open new gas fields at Narrabri in NSW and the Beetaloo basin in the NT, alongside new gas power plants.

In coal-dependent communities in Queensland and the Hunter in NSW the fear of job losses remains potent. Morrison and Nationals MPs want to repeat their efforts at the last election to win votes through supporting coal mining.

But it is now clear that Morrison is caught straddling conflicting demands—while pretending to support climate action, his solution is “can-do capitalism”

**Labor’s weakness**

Climate change is now a major weakness for Morrison.

Yet Labor is still hopelessly timid. The possibility of creating thousands of jobs in renewable energy, from solar power to offshore wind, becomes clearer every day. But instead of guaranteeing jobs, Labor has adopted a small-target policy.

It says the government should do more but has released little policy of its own. It even supported Morrison’s refusal to sign the pledges to phase out coal or reduce methane emissions. And it won’t clearly oppose his plans to expand gas fields either.

Serious government investment in publicly-owned renewable energy, and electrifying transport, manufacturing and heating, could provide good-quality jobs and rapid action. But Labor still wants to rely on business and the market instead.

The climate movement needs to go on the offensive. Pre-election rallies to demand climate action and jobs can help drive Morrison out. But the fight for climate justice won’t end at the election. Protests now can start putting pressure on Labor and build the basis for the protests and union action that can stop expanding gas fields and millions more being wasted on the Kurri Kurri gas power plant.

“System change, not climate change” was the call from the climate protests in Glasgow. Every strike and union campaign between now and the election will help build the struggle for real change from below.

Delivery drivers at Toll, LinFox and others have already won improvements on job security. Warehouse workers at Country Road are on indefinite strike to win a pay rise.

On the docks at Patrick, the maritime union has postponed industrial action over fears of the company using the law to ban strikes. But now is not the time to retreat.

Workers here can take inspiration from “Striketober” in the US, where essential workers have begun to use their increased bargaining power due to labour shortages to demand better conditions.

The Liberals have presided over a decade of record low wage growth. Building every bit of struggle can help to throw them out and lay the basis for the system change and the socialist alternative we really need.
Racist cops gun down more Aboriginal people

By Paddy Gibson

ON TUESDAY 9 November, NSW police shot dead Gomeroi man Stanley Russell in his Aunt Pam’s house in Western Sydney. Stanley was 46, a father and a grandfather.

The police had come to arrest Stanley on outstanding charges but Pam says they never produced a warrant before the four officers barged into her house.

According to reports on National Indigenous Television (NITV), Pam was ordered out of the house by police and then heard four or five shots. She was not allowed back into the house.

Police claim Stanley was armed with a knife and an axe. But they have refused to confirm whether any bodycam footage exists to support their story that they shot in self-defence.

Stanley’s death has devastated his family and community.

Stanley’s brother Edward died in custody in Long Bay jail in 1999 and had suffered badly at the hands of the police.

Stanley’s parents Ted and Helen Russell led a long campaign calling for justice for Eddie.

They travelled from Walgett to Sydney in July 2020 to speak at a Black Lives Matter rally.

The Russells learned of Stanley’s death after seeing a report on the news and recognising Pam’s house.

In a statement to The Guardian they said: “We have already been to hell and back during the investigation into Edward’s very avoidable death in custody. Now we have to go through the same pain and trauma all over again.”

The Russells have also taken on care of many other Aboriginal children over the years.

As family friend Dr Roderic Pitty told NITV: “Two parents who have struggled for decades to try to help Aboriginal youth come out of the clutches of the criminal justice system, and they’ve lost their two biological sons to that system now.”

Stanley was the second Aboriginal person to die in custody in NSW in just three days.

On 7 November, Corrective Services said that a 26-year-old man had been found dead in his cell in Cessnock prison.

Perversely, his death was announced at the opening of a new multimillion-dollar wing built on the prison.

Stanley’s brother Edward died in custody in Long Bay jail in 1999 and had suffered badly at the hands of the police.

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Stanley’s brother
Edward died in custody in Long Bay jail in 1999 and suffered badly at the hands of the police

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Above: Rally in Sydney against Aboriginal deaths in custody

Trigger happy cop acquitted in WA

Just a fortnight before Stanley’s death, Aboriginal activists and supporters were rallying across the country to protest the acquittal of a WA police officer on trial for murder. The officer, whose name remains suppressed by the courts, shot dead Yamatji woman JC in 2019.

The last time a police officer was charged with murder in WA was following the Forrest River massacre in 1926. Back then, not a single Aboriginal person was on the jury and the officer walked free.

The situation changed when the acquitted officer pulled up in a car.

Trigger happy cop acquitted in WA

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The situation changed when the acquitted officer pulled up in a car.

Within 16 seconds JC had been shot.

The officer argued JC lunged towards him and he was acting in self-defence. But both CCTV footage and testimony from other officers shows there was never any lunge.

The same week as this acquittal, Channel 7 broadcast a disgraceful documentary defending Zachary Rolfe, the NT police officer currently on charges of murder for shooting Warlpiri man Mr Walker in Yuendumu in 2019.

The Spotlight program included leaked bodycam footage of the killing, in open contempt of harsh suppression orders.

The prime-time broadcast sought to justify the shooting death of an Aboriginal man in his grandmother’s house by a militarised police force.

It drew on all the same racist stereotypes about violent and dysfunctional remote communities used to prepare the ground for the NT Intervention in 2007.

Rolfe was charged only due to mass protests in Central Australia and solidarity actions across the country. Only a mass movement on the streets stands any hope of winning justice from this racist system.
COP26 summit—capitalism again fails the climate

By James Supple

WORLD LEADERS promoted the Glasgow COP26 summit as a “last chance” to hold warming to the 1.5 degree limit agreed at the Paris summit in 2015. Yet it has ended in failure.

Early on there was talk of progress, as some countries announced new targets. Some claimed that the new pledges might keep warming to 1.8 degrees. But an assessment by Climate Action Tracker found that things were still far worse if near term targets are factored in, rather than just aspirations for 2050. Emissions will be twice as high in 2030 compared to what’s needed to keep warming to 1.5 degrees.

And beyond targets, the policies countries are actually implementing would take heating to 2.7 degrees, it found.

As climate activist Greta Thunberg put it, “Unless we achieve immediate, drastic, unprecedented, annual emission cuts at the source then that means we’re failing when it comes to this climate crisis. ‘Small steps in the right direction’, ‘making some progress’ or ‘winning slowly’ equals losing.”

Climate change is already bringing more extreme weather events, from record floods to extreme heat and bushfires, including Australia’s record Black Summer fires in 2020. Even at 1.5 degrees, climate disasters will be worse and more frequent.

There is already the risk that the world is close to tipping points that will accelerate global heating so that it becomes unstoppable.

But our rulers are still not prepared to act.

Global heating is caused by the burning of fossil fuels. Yet the summit could not even agree on the aim of phasing out coal. This was replaced in the final agreement by a call to simply “phase down” the use of “ unabated coal power”, accepting the idea that mythical technologies like carbon capture and storage might allow coal use to continue. This just means more delay and inaction.

There was even a push to remove the goal of limiting warming to 1.5 degrees from the agreement.

Kenyan Environment Minister Keriako Tobiko condemned the negotiations, warning, “For Kenya and Africa, 1.5 degrees is actually 3 degrees-plus, since the planet does not warm evenly.

“In Kenya and Africa, we bleed and we cry,” he said. “We bleed when it rains, we cry when it doesn’t rain. For us, 1.5 degrees is not a statistic, it is a matter of life and death.”

Capitalism v the climate

The failure of the COP26 summit is no surprise. Governments around the world have continually failed to take the action necessary to curb emissions. This summit was only the most recent in 30 years of global summits that have failed to act.

Our rulers are far too committed to maintaining profits to do what’s necessary. Capitalism is a system based on competition. The governments more reliant on fossil fuel profits have again set out to defend the companies that profit from pollution. They fear that stronger action would damage their own economies more than those of rival states.

So Saudi Arabia, Russia and India, backed by Australia, demanded the removal of a call for an accelerated phase out of coal and fossil fuel subsidies.

And while the developed nations of Europe and the US talked about stepping up action, they still refuse to provide funding to compensate poorer nations for the costs of climate change. This is despite rich nations being responsible for the bulk of historical emissions that have caused global heating.

Rich countries have still not delivered the US$100 billion a year in climate finance for the Global South that they agreed to 12 years ago at the Copenhagen summit. A UN report said around US$400 billion a year would be needed by 2030.

Shortly before the summit’s conclusion, China and the US announced plans to put aside geopolitical rivalries to work together to tackle climate change. But there were no new commitments to action announced, just plans for more talks.

Both countries have shown that their primary concern is the economic competition to dominate the 21st century. Neither is about to put this aside to share the technology and manufacturing needed to cut emissions.

Scott Morrison epitomised the problem when he claimed that “can do capitalism” was the only way to deal with climate change. In other words, he is only willing to see action if it can be made profitable.

In the meantime, his own projections out to 2050 show he wants to expand the burning of fossil fuels by exporting more gas, and keep digging up coal past 2050.

Those who run the system have shown they will not take the action needed. It is going to require a much more powerful movement from below, mobilising the power of organised workers, to fight for the action needed. The future of the planet depends on it.
Effort to vaccinate the world failing as hoarding of doses continues

By Ruby Wawn

As rich countries begin delivering booster shots, 98 per cent of people living in poor countries remain unvaccinated against COVID-19.

NSW has passed the 90 per cent double vaccinated milestone but some countries, such as Burundi and Congo, have less than 0.1 per cent double vaccinated. And fewer than 10 per cent of countries in Africa have met their vaccination goal of 40 per cent double vaccinated in 2021.

Wealthy countries have received more than 16 times more vaccines per person than poor countries, according to analysis by the Financial Times.

Low-income countries have been relying on Covax, a global vaccine-sharing initiative backed by the World Health Organization (WHO), to secure vaccines. But the initiative has been marred by supply issues, delivery delays and poor organisation.

Covax has so far managed to deliver only 400 million of an already reduced projection of 1.4 billion doses.

To meet its 2021 targets, Covax will need to distribute 1.1 billion vaccines before the end of the year. But there are fears that even if 14 million doses were to be delivered per day, they would overwhelm local health systems and lead to vaccines going to waste.

Vaccine supplies

Rich countries have pledged to donate 785 million doses to Covax, but by September only 18 per cent of these donations had arrived, many just weeks before expiry.

Covax estimates over-supply in rich countries could provide between 1 and 5 billion doses to donate. But Canada, which purchased enough doses to vaccinate its population five times over, shipped its first donation of 3.4 million doses only last month.

The US has pledged 500 million doses to Covax in 2022 but has already begun donating doses to Indonesia and Vietnam where it is vying for influence against China.

As the Pacific reckons with its third wave of the virus, Australia’s closest neighbours Papua New Guinea and Indonesia have vaccinated only 1 per cent and 33 per cent of their populations respectively.

Australia has promised Jakarta 3.5 million doses of AstraZeneca but just 8 per cent of the 60 million vaccines pledged by the Australian government to countries in the Pacific have been delivered.

Instead of committing to produce vaccines for the region, Australia plans to suspend local production of AstraZeneca once the contracted 50 million doses have been delivered.

And as supply issues create chaos for Covax, wealthy countries have been pilfering the stockpile. At the height of its Delta outbreak, Australia bought 500,000 Pfizer doses from Covax.

Boosters

Now rich countries are looking to deliver booster shots. While most scientists agree that booster shots within six months will benefit the elderly and immunocompromised and can reduce transmission, it is not clear that healthy young people need them to avoid serious illness.

The US has approved booster shots for the elderly, immunocompromised, people with underlying conditions, and against the advice of its own advisory group, for people working in “high-risk” jobs.

Israel has approved boosters for everyone aged 12 and over after five months but just 29.8 per cent of Palestinians are fully vaccinated. And Australia will give additional Pfizer doses after six months while most of the Pacific remains under 10 per cent fully vaccinated.

The WHO has called for a global moratorium on booster shots until the end of the year. “We’re planning to hand out extra life jackets to people who already have life jackets while we’re leaving other people to drown without a single life jacket,” said WHO health emergency director Mike Ryan.

Wealthy countries have an interest in vaccinating the world as low vaccination rates in poor countries could lead the emergence of new, more virulent and vaccine-resistant strains of the virus. But the drive to profit is a barrier.

Billions in public funds have supported the development, purchase and distribution of vaccines. But instead of sharing their technology in order to expand production as quickly as possible, pharmaceutical companies have patented the process in order to profit massively from the pandemic.

Vaccine manufacturers Pfizer and Moderna are expected to record $92.2 billion in combined sales in 2022, almost double the projected profits for 2021. These two mRNA producers alone will control three-quarters of the non-Chinese vaccine market in 2022.

Other vaccine producers AstraZeneca, Johnson & Johnson, Sputnik V and Novavax are also forecast to double in value to a combined $124 billion in 2022.

Vaccine-hoarding rich governments and profit-hungry big pharma are gambling on public health. Should a new vaccine resistant variant emerge, it would take Pfizer and Moderna nearly three years at the current rate of production to produce enough new doses.

Vaccine manufacturers must be forced to give up their patents to rapidly increase vaccine production.
Nurse speaks out: ‘Our health system is understaffed’

Damien Davis-Frank works as a nurse in the emergency department at St Vincent’s hospital in Sydney and is the Vice-President of the NSW Nurses and Midwives Association branch there. He spoke to Solidarity about the impact on hospitals of Sydney’s recent COVID outbreak and why the strain on the health system is not over.

THE EPICENTRE of the COVID outbreak was in Western Sydney. Their hospital systems were being overwhelmed as they filled up with patients.

As people began to get sick in the special hotels set up to house people that couldn’t isolate, they were divvied out to major city hospitals.

So our ICU at St Vincent’s became overwhelmed and we had makeshift ICUs to house sick COVID patients.

How it should work is, people that come into emergency with COVID should then be admitted and sent up to a COVID ward within four hours. But we were so clogged upstairs that people were sitting in the emergency department with COVID for 12 to 24 hours.

At times that meant that you had to ‘three and four patients with COVID in an open bay, which was scary because you’ve got non-COVID people coming in at the same time. The risk of contamination to other patients but also the risk of infection for staff climbed.

Ambulances coming in with people that had COVID would have to wait because there wasn’t space available.

Patients were sitting in an ambulance for three or four hours waiting to get a bed, and paramedics were sitting with the patient in a confined space, which puts them at risk.

At the height of this last outbreak, it was quite scary.

The one thing that gave a sense of safety to nursing staff was we were all vaccinated, unlike during the first outbreak.

We do still have COVID circulating in the community. And there is the fear that with people out and about that we will get an uptick of cases. That’s happened in Europe, it’s happened in the US.

It felt incredibly busy and overwhelming pre-COVID, because our health system at the moment is understaffed. Our hospital is always driving to close beds so they don’t have to fund staffing. If you have patients that are going to start coming back into hospitals with COVID, the risk is great.

We’ve lost an incredible amount of staff over the pandemic because they’re just fed up, sick of working back-to-back overtime shifts. They’re sick of working in departments which are understaffed.

We’re being let down by governments in NSW and federally. They’ve battered nurses by cutting pay and subjecting nursing staff to working in situations which are not safe.

The one nurse looking after seven or eight patients.

We’ve seen some amazing actions earlier this year—nurses stopping work, jumping onto the streets and demanding that we are listened to.

These staffing ratios are what’s proved to be safe in Queensland and Victoria. In NSW, we don’t have legislated safe staffing ratios. So you can work in a ward where you can be one nurse looking after seven or eight patients.

The government in NSW is holding off putting them in because they do not want to fund our public health system.

In the Emergency Department we often work short, because of unfilled sick leave, and you’re being expected to manage a patient load outside what is safe.

The government is not listening to what is needed.

Our job is to advocate for the safety of the community and the safety of patients.

We’re being expected to care for unsafe levels of patients and we’re going to continue to get onto the streets and say that we demand better. Our communities demand better, and our health system demands better.
Victorian teachers begin industrial action over workload demands

By Hamish McPherson
AEU member and sub-branch delegate

TEACHERS IN Victorian public schools have commenced industrial action to secure a new agreement that reduces excessive workloads and delivers wage justice for the lowest paid staff.

The pandemic and shifts between onsite and remote learning heightened already unsustainable workload pressures. A survey of over 10,000 educators found that teachers are working an average of 53 hours per week, or 15 hours of unpaid overtime.

A concerning 86 per cent of teachers reported their workload was not usually manageable.

School staff have spent 18 months ensuring education continues for students remotely. This has led to new demands and pressures which have challenged meaningful work and home life balance.

Workload pressures are also driven by increased managerial and data driven demands from the Department. Teachers want more time to focus on core teaching and learning with their students.

The Australian Education Union (AEU) is demanding a reduction in face to face teaching hours to enable time for teacher planning, time in lieu for attending out of hours activities, and smaller class sizes.

We are also calling for the lowest paid ES staff (teacher aides and administrative staff) to have substantial wage increases, access to laptops and a paid lunch break.

Despite many negotiating meetings, the Andrews Government has been slow to respond meaningfully around any of the key issues. After 18 months of “doing somersaults” in work practices, school staff are in no mood to be patronised with empty words of gratitude.

In the recent Fair Work ballot to enable industrial action, an impressive 97 per cent voted in favour of action. Over 2100 people have joined the union since the start of term three.

Industrial action work-bans are now being implemented in schools state-wide. Key bans include not attending any more than one hour of scheduled meetings per week, ES members refusing to undertake duties during unpaid lunchbreaks, and a ban on key steps in the NAPLAN online transition program.

The ball is now in the court of the Andrews Government. They have the opportunity to do the right thing by the staff and students of public schools, and improve the conditions of teaching and student learning. The AEU needs to prepare to escalate industrial action through strikes and stopwork action in the new year if the government chooses not to.

Rank-and-file teachers will need to push the union to keep fighting until we win our key demands around workload.

Transport strikes win gains on job security

AROUND 3000 workers at FedEx are planning rolling four hour stoppages nationwide, in response to the company’s refusal to improve job security as part of enterprise bargaining.

It follows a second 24 hour strike at FedEx on 25 October, after the company tore up an in principle agreement.

Workers at FedEx deliver products for massive retail companies including Amazon, Apple and Sony.

During the pandemic the company’s profits have surged on the back of the boom in online shopping and deliveries, seeing its global profit up to US$5 billion. The union agreed to pause bargaining with the company during the pandemic last year. As a result workers have not received a pay rise this year.

“We work hard and we just want what’s owing to us”, Nisa, who has worked for the company for six years, said. “We worked in the pandemic and did everything that we possibly could. I’m sick of the way we’re treated at worked, [with management always] putting pressure on take out more freight. FedEx are making money, just give us what you owe us.”

It is the only major company yet to settle after months of limited industrial action across the sector.

After threatening co-ordinated national strike action across the industry, Transport Workers Union (TWU) members across seven major freight and parcel delivery companies including Toll, Linfox and Global Express have now settled on new agreements with improved job security provisions and pay rises.

The union has been seeking caps on outsourcing of work and requirements to offer any extra work to existing staff before bringing in labour hire workers.

The latest agreement is at StarTrack, where workers will receive 3 per cent annual pay rises and the same pay rate for labour hire workers in an effort to restrict outsourcing.
Stop Daniel Andrews’ pandemic power grab

By David Glanz

THE VICTORIAN government has proposed legislation to cover the management of pandemics, replacing current emergency powers.

It’s been touted as a way to make measures more transparent and democratic but the new law would entrench the authoritarian response that has characterised the state’s handling of COVID-19.

The Public Health and Wellbeing Amendment (Pandemic Management) Bill 2021 has been criticised by Liberty Victoria, the Victorian Bar and by 60 of the state’s leading lawyers.

It has also provided a new focus for the anti-vax conspiracy movement, which has mobilised rallies of thousands through central Melbourne.

The Bill, which has passed the Labor-controlled lower house, would shift the power to declare a pandemic from the health minister to the premier, acting on the advice of the Chief Health Officer (CHO) that there is a serious risk to public health.

There are some new, minor democratic measures, such as an obligation on the premier to report on their decision to parliament. There will be lower fines for those on pensions.

But overall, the Bill cements in place the idea that fighting pandemics requires substantially strengthening the power of the state.

As the 60 lawyers put it: “The Bill, if passed, may allow the Victorian government effectively to rule the State of Victoria by decree for the foreseeable future, without proper Parliamentary oversight or the usual checks and balances on executive power …

“It is one thing to allow temporary rule by decree to deal with an unforeseen and extraordinary emergency in circumstances of extreme urgency. It is something else altogether to entrench rule by decree as a long-term norm.”

Direction

The new legislation, for example, allows unelected “authorised officers” to “take any action or give any direction, other than to detain a person, that the authorised officer believes is reasonably necessary to protect public health”.

As the lawyers wrote: “An individual authorised officer will single-handedly have the power to shut down a political protest if the officer subjectively believes that this is ‘reasonably necessary to protect public health’. ”

Their alternative to the current Bill is for ministers to be given “specific powers to do specific things” (such as border closures or mask mandates), subject to a parliamentary veto.

Liberty Victoria has not rejected the Bill outright but has raised a series of concerns, including about the right to protest.

It states: “COVID-safe forms of protest should be encouraged, with the 2020 BLM [Black Lives Matter] protest and the [Refugee Action Collective] Mantra Car Convoy being examples of peaceful protest and assembly where the risk of spreading infection was limited through actions taken by protest organisers.”

The Victorian government has relied on repression throughout the pandemic, prioritising lockdowns and huge numbers of fines over public health measures.

In total, Melbourne was locked down for 262 days. Police issued nearly 39,000 COVID-19 fines up until mid-June this year, with Indigenous people and new migrants the worst hit.

One of the worst incidents, residents of nine public housing towers in Kensington and North Melbourne last year found themselves in “hard lockdown” without warning, surrounded by dozens of police who stopped people shopping for urgent supplies.

And last month, the government announced the country’s toughest vaccine mandate, covering more than one million workers.

The new legislation would not stop any of this happening again.

Rather than putting millions more dollars into a public health system under enormous stress, the Andrews government is beeping up the legal basis for a police response.

The fate of the Bill in the upper house rests in the hands of three MPs—one each from the Greens, Animal Justice and the Reason Party.

They have previously criticised the use and extension of emergency powers and the restrictions on COVID-safe protest.

They want amendments but have already indicated that they are almost certain to deliver Labor the votes it needs, given they share the view of most on the left that top-down state measures are needed to defeat COVID. Those measures have recently included the unprecedented deployment of riot police with vicious new weapons to break up anti-lockdown protests.

The far right is trying to take advantage of the anti-lockdown and anti-vax movement. But most of those concerned by the proposed Bill are not fascists or scabs.

The failure of the left to respond to the crackdown on democratic rights during the pandemic has ennobled Andrews to entrench greater state powers. It is shocking that the Greens are supporting this Bill.

The left’s failure to challenge Andrews will only mean that the right gets a greater hearing.

The left needs to oppose this Bill and launch a fight for more money for public health, a rolling back of casualisation, sick pay for all, free rapid antigen testing and other measures that can help us fight the virus.
US workers use essential standing to strike back

By Tom Orsag

AMERICAN WORKERS were on strike in their tens of thousands in October. Such were the numbers, organisation and visible picket-lines that even the mainstream media dubbed it “Striketober”.

Over 185 strikes have taken place in 2021 at around 255 workplaces across the US.

White-collar and blue-collar workers in a range of industries and states walked out against corporate greed, low pay, long hours, two-tier wage rates and job insecurity.

At farming equipment manufacturer John Deere, 10,000 workers across 14 plants in Illinois, Iowa and Kansas are striking for the first time in 35 years, while 1400 workers at Kellogg’s breakfast cereals in four states went on strike after working 16 hour days, seven days a week, for 30 days in a row.

Over 24,000 nurses and allied health staff who work for Kaiser Permanente in California and Oregon are also set to strike for a decent pay rise and to stop a two-tier wage system.

The ongoing working class revolt includes another 1100 coal miners at Warrior Met in Alabama out since April, and a threatened strike by 60,000 film and TV workers in Los Angeles that was called off at the last minute, with union branches set to vote on an improved offer.

A Kellogg’s striker summed up the mood on the picket-lines, “The main issue is our future. Our future is not for sale.”

Essential workers

The strikes have been called the “revenge of the essential worker”. Many of those who were praised as essential when the pandemic began are sick of long hours, low pay, and ever increasing demands from management.

Some have received derisory pay offers—such as 1 and 2 per cent for contracts as long as six years at John Deere.

Yet John Deere’s CEO got a 160 per cent pay rise last year to $16 million. The company is set to make $5.7 billion in profits, Kaiser Permanente, nominally a not-for-profit, netted SUS 6.4 billion last year.

Indeed, a recent analysis of wealth in the US found that the billionaire class saw their collective wealth increase by 70 per cent during the pandemic. The SUS 5 trillion in wealth now held by 745 billionaires is two-thirds more than the combined wealth of half of all US households.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also produced a labour shortage which is boosting workers’ bargaining power, as it has across parts of Australia.

Many American workers have responded by quitting low paid or stressful jobs, since they can easily pick up other work.

In August, 4.3 million workers—or nearly 3 per cent of the workforce—resigned from a job. This is the highest figure in the two decades that the Department of Labour has been collecting the data. It follows similar figures from April through July, in what has been dubbed “the Great Resignation”.

Others have decided to stay and fight for better pay and conditions in their existing jobs. An opinion poll in September found 68 per cent of Americans support unions, up notably from a decade ago and the highest since 1965.

Struggling to find workers, many companies such as Walmart, McDonalts and CVS, a pharmacy chain, are raising pay, fuelling the biggest increases in wages in years.

The roots of the strike wave also go back to the early years of the Trump presidency.

The West Virginia teachers strike in 2018 against a Republican state government, driven by the rank-and-file in opposition to their union leaders, sparked a strike wave among teachers across the country.

Nearly half a million workers were involved in work stoppages in both 2018 and 2019, the most in more than three decades.

May 2020 also saw the Black Lives Matter revolt over George Floyd’s murder, driven both by rage at police shooting and racialised inequality in the US.

Trump’s mammoth tax cuts for the rich and repeal of Obama’s limited healthcare plan added fuel to the fire of ongoing class divisions and poverty. But this was only the latest act in four decades of neo-liberal attacks on the working class.

The scale of the strikes is still low by historical standards. Union leaders have continued to undermine strike action and argued to accept concessions to management.

United Auto Workers (UAW) officials were reportedly “surprised” by the 90 per cent vote against a new contract by John Deere workers, which they had tried to sell as delivering “significant economic gains”.

While the full effects of “Striketober” on American workers’ willingness to fight are yet to be seen, it is a powerful reminder that the rolling back US capitalism’s attacks on living standards can’t be left to the Democrats and President Joe Biden.

Workers in both the US and Australia have to take matters into their own hands.
Sudanese revolutionaries resist military coup

By Adam Adelpour

ON 25 October the Sudanese military seized power from the transitional government, attempting to reverse the gains of the revolution in 2019. General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan declared a state of emergency, dissolved the government and arrested Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok.

But the power grab has been met with a huge wave of protests and strikes that have declared “revolution until victory”.

The transitional government was formed in 2019, in the wake of the revolution that toppled the 30-year dictatorship of Omar al-Bashir. But the transitional government was a compromise with the military; effectively a “power sharing” agreement between the military and civilian figures.

Sudan’s military and security forces have a history of murderous repression. Bashir, the former dictator, was charged with genocide by the International Criminal Court for his role in mass killings in the Darfur region. During 2019, 100 were reported killed in a single crackdown on protest.

Resistance and repression

The popular response to the coup has been incredibly courageous. The country has been rocked by protests, civil disobedience and strikes.

On 30 October tens of thousands took to the streets across the country, reviving chants from 2019 such as, “We are revolutionaries, we are free, and we will go the distance.” In Khartoum and Omdurman protesters chanted “revolution, revolution” and “Give it up, Burhan”.

Protests also broke out in North Kordofan province, Kassala, Obeid and the Red Sea city of Port Sudan.

The protests were called by the union federation, the Sudanese Professionals’ Association, and the Resistance Committees. Both organisations were at the heart of the 2019 revolution.

Security forces have responded with beatings, arrests and killings and tried to stifle the protests by shutting down the internet. Since the coup at least 19 have been killed and hundreds wounded.

Revolutionaries have refused to be intimidated. On 7 November they declared two days of strikes and civil disobedience across the country.

In the days leading up to the strike, protesters amassed bricks and concrete to build barricades across Khartoum. Some hospitals have been shut down by the strikes and many shops are shuttered. School teachers occupying the education ministry building for Khartoum State were attacked with tear gas and 87 arrested.

The Sudanese Professionals Association has again been at the heart of the mobilisations, saying on Twitter, “The Sudanese people have rejected the military coup,” and declaring that with the military there could now be “no negotiation, no partnership, no legitimacy”.

Neo-liberal policies

The new revolt holds the possibility of deepening the revolution. In the fight ahead it will not only be vital to reject any compromise with the bloodstained military forces, but also any return to the neo-liberal and pro-imperialist policies of the transitional government itself.

In 2019, the Forces of Freedom and Change (FFC) led the revolution as an umbrella group for different sections of the movement. But its leaders channelled it into the failed compromise with the military.

And before the coup, discontent with the transitional government was growing. In June it began to implement a package of IMF backed “economic reforms” that included the cutting of fuel subsidies and floating the Sudanese currency. This helped drive an increased cost of living and an inflation rate of 400 per cent a year.

Securing IMF financing also meant bowing to US pressure to normalise relations with Israel. In April the Sudanese cabinet dispensed with a law dating back to the 1950s that imposed a boycott on the Israeli state.

The US has condemned the coup and called for a restoration of the transitional government. But to avoid the mistakes of the past, the struggle against the military must be fused with demands that represent the interests of workers and the poor—for wages, union rights, women’s rights and food supplies. Deals with Sudanese capitalists and Western imperialism cannot solve the crisis in Sudan.

The power for real revolutionary change lies in the streets and workplaces. Mohamed, an activist speaking to Socialist Worker from Khartoum said: “we are drawing on our experience of 2019 when the sit-ins showed we could set up structures that were both a form of protest and a form of running our lives ourselves.”

“Disobedience committees” are organising protests and daily life amid the revolt—from food distribution, to medical needs, communications and repairs to people’s homes.

This kind of control from below needs to fuse with the strength of workers organising and striking in oil fields, airports, schools, hospitals and universities. Workers and the poor need to take control of their workplaces and run them themselves. An uncompromising revolutionary movement in Sudan can appeal for solidarity to workers and the poor all across the Middle East and north Africa.

Above: Mass protests have taken back to the streets following the military coup in Sudan

The struggle against the military must be fused with demands that represent the interests of workers and the poor
NUCLEAR POWER—
NOT NEEDED, NOT SAFE

Nuclear power is no help in tackling climate change and remains linked with nuclear weapons development, writes Sarah Thorne

NUCLEAR POWER is once again being raised as a solution to the climate crisis. Bill Gates and Warren Buffett are building a new nuclear reactor in the US, while in the aftermath of COP26, French president Emmanuel Macron declared that France will, “for the first time in decades relaunch the construction of nuclear reactors in our country.”

The nuclear submarines the Australian government wants to acquire would each be powered by a small nuclear reactor using highly enriched uranium. This has produced another push to expand the nuclear industry here.

Not surprisingly, Barnaby Joyce is in favour. More worrying is that some environmentalists, like British environmentalist, George Monbiot, are in favour.

Greenhouse gas emissions must be cut—and fast. To limit temperature rises to less than 1.5 degrees, emissions must be cut by at least 50 per cent below 2005 levels by 2030—more probably a 75 per cent cut is needed; with zero emissions achieved by 2050.

New nuclear power stations could not contribute in time to assist the rapid electricity transition needed.

Introducing nuclear power to Australia, even if the public could be convinced, would take at least 15 years, while taking financial resources away from renewables. Taking into account planning and approvals, construction, and factoring the carbon dioxide used in construction, it would be a 25 years or more before nuclear power could even begin to reduce greenhouse emissions in Australia.

The International Atomic Energy Agency, whose mission is to promote nuclear power stated, “Nuclear power is not a near-term solution to the challenge of climate change. The need to immediately and dramatically reduce carbon emissions calls for approaches that can be implemented more quickly than building nuclear reactors.”

Additionally nuclear energy is not renewable. If nuclear power were expanded to half the world’s current energy supply, known high-grade uranium ores would last less than a decade.

Nuclear energy was born out of the Cold War arms race and the drive for nuclear weapons after the Second World War. Nuclear bombs and nuclear power remain intrinsically linked.

Following the US atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, by 1947, Britain had two nuclear reactors, not to produce electricity but to make plutonium for nuclear weapons. Nuclear power for civilian use was a spin-off from the needs of the military.

The technology and expertise required to operate a nuclear energy program provides the essential requirements for the construction of nuclear weapons. The arms race after the Second World War saw nuclear weapons spread from US to Russia to Britain, to France and China.

“Atoms For Peace” was initiated by the US in 1953 to greenwash nuclear power. Since then, Israel, India, Pakistan, South Africa and possibly North Korea have used civil nuclear energy programs to develop their own nuclear weapons.

Not clean, green or safe

Nuclear power stations run on enriched uranium. The heat from the nuclear reaction is used to create steam, which then drives a turbine to create electricity.

Unlike coal and gas, no greenhouse gas pollution is created in the operation of the nuclear reactor. However, all other steps involved in producing nuclear power, from mining, to construction, decommissioning and waste management, result in greenhouse gas pollution.

More than one tonne of uranium ore is needed to extract one kilogram of reactor grade uranium. A study done in 2000 found that using low-grade ores, nuclear power releases levels of carbon dioxide equivalent to that of a combined cycle gas-fired power station.

Nuclear radiation is deadly. Exposure to radiation, which happens at virtually every stage of the nuclear fuel cycle, is a health hazard.

The weight of scientific opinion holds that there is no safe level of radiation exposure. Even at low doses there is clear evidence of increased risk of cancer and cardiovascular disease.

It is estimated that between 16,000-93,000 people across Europe died from radiation related cancers as a result of the Chernobyl disaster.

Uranium mining is not safe either. Every mine has a history of leaks, spills and accidents. A 2003 Australian Senate investigation found the sector is characterised by a pattern of under-performance and non-compliance, an absence of reliable data to measure the extent of contamination or its impact on the environment, and an operational culture that gives greater weight to short term considerations than long-term environmental protection.

Australia has around one third of the world’s uranium reserves and currently supplies around 13 per cent of the global market, exporting around 10,000 tonnes of uranium oxide (yellowcake) each year.

Cost

Nuclear energy is also hugely expensive and inefficient—in fact, it couldn’t exist without government subsidies.

The Hinkley nuclear power station under construction in the UK will cost $36 billion to build. Wind and solar are far cheaper.

While the cost of renewables keeps falling, nuclear is only the energy source that keeps getting more and more expensive.

The independent World Nuclear Industry Status Report puts it even
more bluntly, stating that new nuclear energy “is simply not competitive under ordinary market economy rules anywhere.”

The CSIRO and Australian Energy Market Operator crunched the numbers in 2020 and found nuclear energy would be far more expensive than current renewables technologies including storage.

Safety costs add an enormous amount to the cost of nuclear reactors. No insurance premium covers the cost of nuclear accidents. The total cost of the clean up after the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster in Japan, so far, has been estimated at over US$500 billion, while the nuclear power station was insured for only US$1.5 billion.

A 2009 Citibank report, “New Nuclear: The Economics Say No” noted that “the risks faced by developers [of new nuclear plants]...are so large and variable that individually, they could each bring even the largest utility company to its knees financially.”

Aside from risks of leaks, melt-downs, and radiation-caused cancers, every stage of the nuclear fuel cycle, from uranium mining to processing used fuel, produces radioactive waste. And all radioactive waste is dangerous to human life; even low-level exposure can cause leukemia and other cancers.

One of the most dangerous radioactive isotopes, plutonium-239, with a half-life of over 24,000 years, remains dangerous for half a million years.

Not a single permanent waste repository exists anywhere in the world. The nuclear industry has already created of a toxic mass of waste and pollution.

The safe, long-term storage of nuclear waste remains a problem for both the civil and military wings of the nuclear industry.

Australia has nowhere to store waste from its one nuclear reactor at Lucas Heights.

The struggle against nuclear waste dumps has always been linked with the struggle for Aboriginal land. It took seven years to defeat the proposal to put a waste dump on Aboriginal land at Muckaty station in the Northern Territory. The government is now planning a dump at Napandee in South Australia.

Australia’s nuclear ambitions
Australia is also a part of the imperialist rivalry that has driven nuclear proliferation around the world.

There is a long history of the Australian ruling class harbouring nuclear ambitions. The Australian government allowed Britain to carry out 12 nuclear tests in Australia between 1952 and 1957. In 1961, then Liberal Prime Minister Robert Menzies wrote to the British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan asking for Australia to be supplied with manufacturing data or “ready-made nuclear weapons.”

The growing tensions with China has spurred Australian militarism and a massive boost in military spending.

In 2019, the right-wing think tank Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) argued for Australia to build its own nuclear arsenal saying, “It would be easier to build nuclear weapons if we had in place a stronger core of nuclear skills in our workforce, some capacity to produce fissionable materials, and a suitable delivery vehicle.”

Morrison’s recent announcement of the AUKUS pact with the US and the UK, and the deal to acquire nuclear submarines, has again fuelled the push for developing a civilian nuclear industry.

BHP’s vice-president, Fiona Wild, quickly followed the submarine announcement, arguing, “Nuclear power can play a significant role in providing low greenhouse gas emissions power”. It is no coincidence that BHP owns the Olympic Dam mine in South Australia that is the site of one of the world’s largest uranium deposits.

The argument about nuclear power is a complete distraction from the action that is needed to avert runaway climate change. To stop climate change there will have to be a complete transformation of the economy, and how society is run.

Everything about nuclear power is about maintaining the status quo and entrenching the ruling class.

Nationals Senator Matt Canavan who called for an end to Australia’s prohibition on nuclear power is at the same time calling for government funding for new coal–fired power stations.

Nuclear power is dangerous. It carries a permanent threat to the lives of workers involved in the nuclear industry, while the threat of nuclear “incidents” like Chernobyl and Fukushima carry the threat of killing hundreds of thousands. More than that, nuclear power is inextricably linked to global imperialism and the military terror of nuclear weapons.

There is a long history of opposition to nuclear power in Australia. Decades of campaigning against uranium mining and for nuclear disarmament have helped stop the expansion of the nuclear industry here. They have helped cement opposition to nuclear power within the population. Nuclear energy is not green or renewable, and has no role in the climate transition we need.

We have to oppose the purchase of nuclear submarines, as well as any efforts to expand uranium mining or nuclear power in Australia.
WHY STANDING UP FOR PALESTINE IS NOT ANTISEMITIC

Antisemitic incidents are on the increase in Australia. The Executive Council of Australian Jewry’s latest report on antisemitism records 331 incidents in 2020, well above the average for previous years.

Reported incidents of physical assault doubled, along with increases in direct verbal abuse, harassment, and intimidation and threats by post and phone. Socialists are fierce opponents of all forms of racism whether against Indigenous people, migrants, Muslims or Jews. Prime Minister Scott Morrison declared in October that “antisemitism has no place in Australia. It has no place anywhere in the world”. But he was doing so as he announced that Australia would “embrace the definition of antisemitism adopted by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance” (IHRA).

Far from helping the fight against antisemitism, the IHRA definition has been weaponised to outlaw serious criticism of Israel, and to smear those who support the Palestinian struggle.

Rob Ferguson is an anti-racist activist and a member of the Socialist Workers Party in Britain who has written widely on the background of the financial crisis of 2008, the impact of the pandemic, and decades of austerity and neoliberalism.

This has led to political polarisation. Ferguson’s project was to detoxify the Front National. Rally, beforehand the Front National. Pen, and what is now called National Rally, beforehand the Front National. Her project was to detoxify the Front National and establish a respectable electoral platform for fascist organisations.

They’ve pulled the whole of the mainstream to the right, into Islamophobia and anti-migrant narratives. The political centre, not least Macron, has led a charge against Muslims over the veil, banning Muslim organisations, some of which have been political.

We’ve now seen the emergence of [Presidential candidate] Eric Zemmour, openly espousing the most foul fascist and neo-Nazi positions—the idea of the “great replacement”, of the French nation being undermined by globalists bringing in Muslim migrants.

Opposition to antisemitism is important in and of itself. But the threat of antisemitism is part of the wider threat of racism and oppression in society as a whole.

The so called “great replacement theory” uses code terms which encourage overt antisemitism. This brings us back to the IHRA’s definition of antisemitism, which is rapidly becoming the establishment’s common sense view.

It’s important to look at the IHRA in context. It was adopted in 2016, but against the background of an ideological offensive that took off in the early 2000s against what was called the new antisemitism.

Its premise is that a new threat to Jews has now emerged, equivalent to if not greater than the threat from the right, in the anti-imperialist left. In
the 1960s the narrative was directed at the anti-imperialist wing of the anti-Vietnam War movement, the New Left and the anti-colonial Black power movement.

From the early 2000s the main target across Europe and North America were Muslims.

After 9/11 and the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, the war on terror came home, in the idea that Muslim communities were a suspect population. The left were presented as the allies of the Islamists in what was called a Red-Green Alliance.

The IHRA definition has never been invoked against examples of right-wing antisemitism. Indeed, a good number of its signatories are governments who are notoriously antisemitic, Hungary being one.

The IHRA definition itself is only three lines or so. Then it lists 11 examples. A couple are uncontroversial, opposing calls for aiding or justifying the killing or harming of Jews, for example.

But one key example is: “denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination by claiming that the existence of a state of Israel is a racist endeavour.”

This clearly aims at discrediting a whole body of historical work, and the narrative of Palestinian freedom, that defines Israel as a settler colonial state, and therefore whatever the intentions, inevitably a racist endeavour.

A second is, “applying double standards by requiring of Israel a behaviour not expected or demanded of any other democratic nation.”

The accusation is continually levelled whenever criticism is made of Israel, of why are you singling out Israel? What about all the other states that oppress populations in different ways? This is really a sleight-of-hand. The argument echoes the responses made by those who defended apartheid in South Africa: “What about all the Black dictatorships across our borders, why don’t you attack them?”

The left and the anti-colonial movement has always focused on those anti-colonial, anti-imperialist struggles that act as a focus for the wider struggle for opposition, and for national freedom: Algeria, Vietnam, South Africa.

This is part of a focus on the struggles that not only demand solidarity in themselves, but focus opposition against our own rulers and against the wider system of national oppression on which imperialism depends.

The revolt across the entirety of historic Palestine last May evoked demonstrations and protests in solidarity with Palestine on a global scale.

It came against the backdrop of the Israeli human rights organisation B’Tselem bringing out a report in January that labelled Israel an apartheid regime, followed by another report by Human Rights Watch also using the label of apartheid.

This is important in understanding the drive behind the IHRA definition. The Zionists have huge difficulty when it comes to winning the argument. And therefore they have to impose restrictions on free expression and solidarity with Palestine from the top down through institutions of state, the administrations of our universities and so on.

For five years we have seen a massive offensive against Jeremy Corbyn and the Labor Left over false charges of antisemitism.

The Corbyn leadership team never confronted the attacks politically, to insist that the conflation of anti-Zionism or criticism of the state of Israel with antisemitism was a false conflation.

We’ve seen concession after concession unfortunately, and the Labour party adopted the IHRA definition itself in 2018.

The key battleground has become the university campuses. In Britain the demand from government that the IHRA definition be adopted was not popular amongst university administrations.

A very important focus for the [Palestinian] movement is defending free expression against attempts by the state [to use the IHRA definition to] limit the freedom of protest and expression. This kind of approach has a wider appeal.

To win the widest base of support, opposing the IHRA definition should not be made conditional on whether you are anti-Zionist or support a particular view on Israel and Palestine.

It simply has to insist that it is not antisemitic to advance an anti-Zionist position or support BDS.

To give an example, the administration at University College London adopted the IHRA definition without consultation. There was a long campaign to fight this.

The academic board then met to discuss it and the vote was overwhelming against the adoption of the IHRA, because the argument was conducted this way.

That vote [did not come from] academics who are anti-Zionists. UCL is overwhelmingly a medical institution. Everywhere this strategy has been adopted we’ve won.

I think the Zionists, nonetheless, will press the attacks [against free expression over Israel] as far as they can. You’ve seen in Britain the sacking of an academic at Bristol University, Professor David Miller, recently, [for making criticisms of Israel.]

By building a broad opposition to the IHRA, and [defending] free expression and free speech, we can engage with a wider audience than might otherwise be the case, and then argue about the issues around Palestinian freedom, Israel and Zionism. We need to raise Palestine solidarity everywhere that we can reach.
IT IS common sense for most people who want to change the world to try to elect people to parliament who have our interests at heart.

Huge numbers of young people in the US have been inspired by the rise of Democratic Socialists like Alexandria Ocasio Cortez (AOC) and Rashida Tlaib and their talk of radical change. Many here put their hopes in The Greens winning more influence in parliament.

Behind this is the idea of using the existing state to change society.

Vladimir I. Lenin’s book State and Revolution was written over a century ago, during the Russian revolution of 1917. But it remains relevant in explaining the nature of the capitalist state and why it cannot be wielded in the interests of workers and the oppressed.

Lenin argued that the state is not a neutral body but is fundamentally an organ which maintains the capitalist system. To truly transform society the state needs to be smashed and replaced with a radically different form of democracy—workers’ power.

The state under capitalism

The starting point for Lenin is that the state is a product of the class antagonisms inherent to capitalist society. The state emerged historically as the product of the class struggle between the exploiter and the exploited.

The state grew out of the necessity for the dominant class to use force to maintain their control. The state is to “reestablish what Marx really taught on the subject of the state”.

Lenin wrote State and Revolution to “reestablish what Marx really taught on the subject of the state”. His main target was Karl Kautsky, the key theorist of the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the Second International, which grouped together socialist parties.

Reforming the state?

Many parties and organisations have long argued that because we have won universal suffrage and parliamentary democracy, socialists can win a majority in parliament and use that control to tame and reform the state and subordinate capitalist rule to promote working class interests.

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across Europe.

Kautsky claimed to be a Marxist but, Lenin wrote, had forgotten a fundamental principle of Marxism: that the emancipation of the working class could not happen “without the destruction of the apparatus of state power which was created by the ruling class”.

Kautsky’s desire to use parliament and the state as a tool for change led the SPD to identify with the state and with the interests of the German ruling class. This resulted in the SPD supporting Germany against its rivals in the First World War.

Similarly, today left-wing Democrats like AOC who were elected for championing policies of taxing the rich and opposition to America’s imperialist ventures around the world, have caved into supporting the Israeli imperialist ventures around the world, for championing policies of taxing the rich and opposition to America’s.

In the 100 years since Lenin wrote State and Revolution we have repeatedly seen the vindication of his argument that change cannot come through parliament.

When the Labor prime minister Chifley tried to nationalise the banks in 1947, the High Court and British Privy Council ruled the move “unconstitutional” even though it had been supported by both houses of parliament.

In Greece in 2015, the Syriza government which had been elected on a promise to reverse austerity was blackmailed and threatened with bankruptcy by the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

If the obstructions from unelected state bureaucrats and financial institutions fail, the state will turn to more violent means—the police and the military.

In Chile in 1973, a socialist, Salvador Allende, was elected president and tried to begin the implementation of sweeping reforms. In response he was overthrown in a military coup and tens of thousands of ordinary people who supported him were murdered.

The revolution still unfolding in Sudan has also demonstrated the need to completely smash and dismantle the existing state institutions to bring change. After a popular uprising overthrow the old dictator in 2019, the military which sat behind him made concessions to allow civilian rule, with the promise to hold elections. But as the recent military coup shows, the old state remains determined not to lose control. Violence is the ruling class’s last line of defence against the threat of serious change.

**Workers’ state**

But what, if anything, replaces the old state? In 1917 in Russia the question of state power was a live issue as workers were on the verge of taking power into their own hands.

Lenin drew on the experience of the mass of workers in Paris in 1871 to answer these questions.

The Paris Commune—the first workers’ state in history—was a completely new type of government based on “municipal councillors, chosen by universal suffrage in the various wards of Paris” recallable at any time and paid an average worker’s wage.

Lenin, quoting Marx, points out it was “a working, not a parliamentary, body, executive and legislative at the same time”. In other words, those elected, unlike politicians today, had to carry out the decisions made in practice.

Crucially, the first decree of the new state was the “suppression of the standing army, and its replacement by the armed people …”

Instead of a specialised, separate body run by a small group of unelected people, there was simply the armed people with recallable representatives elected from the mass of workers.

Lenin concludes: “The Commune, therefore, appears to have replaced the smashed state machine ‘only’ by fuller democracy … democracy, introduced as fully and consistently as is at all conceivable, is transformed from bourgeois into proletarian democracy; from the state (= a special force for the suppression of a particular class) into something which is no longer the state proper.”

The soviets, the Russian word for workers’ councils, had already been established in Russia after millions of workers toppled the Tsarist regime in February.

These councils were made up of delegates elected from workplaces. The soviets were a means of coordinating the revolutionary struggle, but Lenin also saw them as the embryo of the workers’ state.

The soviets were more democratic than any parliament, made up of delegates who were immediately recallable by their electors.

Their power was based on democratic control of the economy through workers’ power in the factories.

Lenin and the Bolshevik Party argued for the soviets to overthrow the existing state and take power.

In October 1917 the soviets established a workers’ state. The working class drove the police off the streets, the military disintegrated as soldiers mutinied, workers paralysed entire industries and ultimately wrested control of the economy from the bosses.

Lenin’s arguments in State and Revolution are still relevant to how we organise today.

It is in our workplaces and communities, not parliament, that the power lies to win real change and it is here where we will build the power to smash the existing state and establish a completely new society.

**Above: Police attack a picket line during a strike at Sydney University**
COVID OUTBREAK SCANDAL CALLS GROW TO FREE ALL THE REFUGEES

By Ian Rintoul

AT THE height of the COVID-19 outbreak among refugees in the Park Hotel prison in Melbourne, 22 of the 46 refugees were infected, an infection rate rivalled only by the worst of the outbreaks in aged care homes.

The government has never revealed how many Serco and Border Force officers at the hotel were also infected, although it must have been an officer who brought the infection into the facility.

Mohammad Sohrabi, an Iranian refugee hospitalised with severe COVID, has been returned to the Park.

The COVID scandal at the Park has brought renewed calls for the Medevac refugees to be freed from detention. There were protests outside the Park, called by the Refugee Action Collective and backed by the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation.

In just two days, more than 11,500 people signed a petition calling on the government not to send Mohammad back to the Park. A snap vigil was called at St Vincent’s hospital as soon as Mohammad was told he was being discharged but wasn’t enough to prevent Serco and police moving him back.

The outrage at the government’s negligence did win some changes inside the facility. Since the Park became a prison last December there had only ever been one nurse working, from 8am-4pm, Monday to Friday. In the early days of the outbreak, the same nurse was “caring for” both positive and negative refugees, an astonishing breach of basic COVID care protocols.

But as pressure mounted, a second nurse was employed working 8am-4pm; then more were rostered to work on weekends and around the clock. But the windows, sealed shut by Border Force in December 2020 to prevent refugees communicating with protesters outside, still didn’t open.

Eleven days after the outbreak, with COVID-positive and negative residents still housed on separate levels of the same facility, the government finally issued an air-filter for each room.

The calculated indifference to refugee lives in the Park (and MITA) can only be understood as an extension of the deliberate cruelty of offshore detention that has kept refugees in detention, on and offshore, for over eight years. It is a glimpse of the brutality that has been systematically inflicted on asylum-seekers sent offshore.

Scott Morrison is determined to maintain that brutality as the central feature of Operation Sovereign Borders, to deter and deny protection to asylum-seekers arriving by boat.

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