

BOSSSES' PROFITS DRIVE UP COST OF LIVING

IT'S TIME TO STRIKE BACK



LABOR

Jobs summit farce
aims to please bosses

CLIMATE

Offsets show
43 per cent target farce

MILITARISM

US helps fuel
Taiwan crisis

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

National

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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Solidarity No. 162

August-September 2022
ISSN 1835-6834
Responsibility for election comment is taken by James Supple, 410 Elizabeth St, Surry Hills NSW 2010.
Printed by El Faro, Newtown NSW.

SUBSCRIBE TO SOLIDARITY MAGAZINE

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

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

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

Things they say

People who will be feeling the cost of living, we have to just manage that. Commonwealth Bank CEO Matt Comyn opposing higher wages to deal with the cost of living

I'm not going to use Angus Taylor's words.

But Treasurer Jim Chalmers agrees with him in rejecting union ideas for the Jobs Summit

Forget the AUKUS promise of nuclear submarines to be delivered in the later 2030s. By then the Chinese Communist Party will be a relic of history or dictating to the Indo-Pacific.

Peter Jennings, former executive director of the government-funded Australia Strategic Policy Institute, predicts war with China by the mid 2020s

I have been called a hawk, a xenophobe, a 'national security cowboy', a shill for the military industrial complex and worse.

Also Peter Jennings—no surprises there

This [the Voice] isn't a body that is above the parliament; it's not even at the side of the Parliament

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese explaining where the Voice will actually sit

You have called me Mr Speaker on at least a dozen occasions. My title is deputy speaker. I don't need a Mr, a Mrs, a Madam, it's just deputy speaker.

The Liberals' Angus Taylor apparently can't process the fact that Federal parliament's Deputy Speaker Sharon Claydon is a woman

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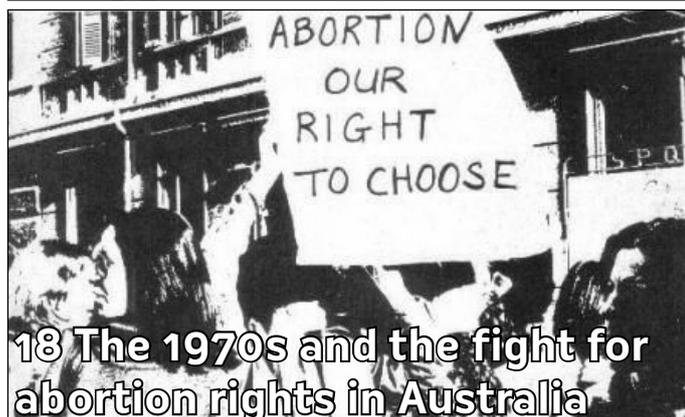
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Gas company's mixed messages on climate action

A GAS company with designs on the Beetaloo basin has called on the Australian government to water down its climate targets, while simultaneously labelling itself part of the answer to the climate crisis.

Tamboran Resources, which was handed \$7.5 million in government money to assist its gas operations in the Beetaloo, called on the government to drop any reference to the aim of keeping warming to 1.5 degrees, the safe limit nominated in the Paris climate agreement. This is now too hard to achieve, it argued, saying talk of a goal of "well below 2C above pre-industrial levels" was better.

At the same time it says opening more fossil fuel projects is actually the best thing for the climate, claiming with a straight face that, "Unlocking the Beetaloo Sub-basin gas resource is the single, largest emissions reduction project currently available in Australia".

The comments were contained in the company's submission on the Labor government's legislation on its 43 per cent reduction target.

NSW Indigenous deaths in custody surge

THE NUMBER Of Indigenous deaths in custody or during a police operation in NSW last year was double the previous record.

Last year there were 16 deaths. The highest number previously was eight in 1997. The Aboriginal Legal Service's Nadine Miles described the figure as "unthinkable and shameful". "No one should die alone, in pain and fear, forcibly separated from their loved ones," she said.

The NSW government has refused to act on recommendations from a parliamentary inquiry last year to stop police investigating police over deaths in custody, or to increase efforts to keep Indigenous people out of jail through alternatives to prison.

Indigenous people make up 27.8 per cent of the total adult prison population in NSW, with an imprisonment rate nearly ten times that of the rest of the population.

Obscene wealth exposed by official tax data



SIXTY AUSTRALIANS earning over a million dollars last year didn't pay a single cent in tax, information from the Australian Tax Office has revealed.

In total the 60 millionaires claimed \$165.3 million in tax deductions to avoid handing their money over. That included \$224,876 on average for the 28 of them who claimed for the cost of managing their tax affairs.

The country's top ten best paid postcodes saw their average incomes pass \$170,000. The highest among them were residents of Perth's exclusive Cottesloe and Peppermint Grove, whose 5200 residents drew an average income of \$325,343 or almost \$1.7 billion across the two suburbs.

Following them were residents of Sydney's harbourside Darling Point, Edgecliff and Point Piper, with an average income of just over \$200,000. Melbourne's wealthiest postcode was Toorak and Hawksburn with an average income of \$185,000.

Those in the top tax bracket on more than \$180,000 made up just 3.6 per cent of all taxpayers. The median taxable income was just \$48,381.

It also revealed the gender pay gap, with women 49 per cent of all income earners but just 34 per cent of those on between \$90,000 and \$180,000 and just 27 per cent of the top tax bracket.

The data also showed that 86,000 people nationwide owned four or more houses.

Facebook helps anti-abortion case

A 17-YEAR-OLD woman and her mother have been charged over a medication abortion in Nebraska, after Facebook handed over private messages between the pair.

Celeste Burgess and her mother bought a kit of mifepristone and misoprostol, designed for use in medical abortions up to nine weeks of pregnancy. Burgess was 28 week pregnant, beyond the ban on abortion after 20 weeks in force in Nebraska.

After taking the medication, she miscarried. Burgess has been charged with three offences including concealing the death of a person, while her mother has been charged with five, including performing an abortion beyond 20 weeks.

The state of Nebraska issued a search warrant to Facebook's parent company demanding all Burgess' private data.

Extreme sexism exposed at NSW parliament

THERE HAVE been more revelations about extreme sexism and abuse in parliament, this time in NSW. A report into workplace culture at the NSW parliament reported five people who said they had experienced rape or attempted rape in the building or at an after-work function.

The report depicts the parliament as rife with toxic and alcohol-fuelled behaviour, sexism, bullying and homophobia. One in five MPs said they had heard about or witnessed sexual assaults.

The review spoke to political staff, cleaners, security and catering staff inside parliament house.

"The amount of MPs that I saw trying to make sexual advances on young men and women at party social events was pretty much constant", one person told the reviewers. Another said, "It's a completely predatory environment. People use their position to influence and manipulate young adults to get what they want."

Several MP's offices were also alleged to have carried out extreme bullying and harassment against staff, with one staff member saying, "There is a real drive among some MPs to humiliate staff in front of others". The authors spoke to 109 people in confidential interviews and collected survey responses from 447 people who work in the parliament.

Millions for them, wage cuts for us

COMMONWEALTH BANK CEO Matt Comyn has seen his pay surge 35 per cent to an outrageous \$6.97 million, at the same time as warning against wage rises for workers to match inflation. Wage rises for ordinary workers were a "risk" that could lead to a "wage-price spiral", he claimed.

But it is profiteering that's driving inflation, not wages. The Commonwealth Bank boosted its profits to \$9.6 billion in the last year. Analysis of national accounts data has shown that "it is rising profits, not rising costs, that are driving Australia's inflation," the Australia Institute's Dr Richard Denniss says.

EDITORIAL

Labor offers symbolism not real change— strike back for action on wages and the climate

ANTHONY ALBANESE is trying to present the appearance of change, announcing steps towards a referendum on an Indigenous voice to parliament, and celebrating the support for Labor's climate bill in parliament.

But beyond the symbolism, Labor is refusing to budge from the conservative, small target policies it took to the election or offer anything substantial.

Workers are facing a major hit to living standards as the cost of living soars. Treasurer Jim Chalmers has admitted inflation is likely to rise further to hit 7.75 per cent by the end of this year, and still be around 6 per cent in a year's time. This has already produced a 3 per cent drop in real wages this year, with worse to come.

Wages will continue to drop in real terms for another year and a half, according to the Reserve Bank, back to the levels of 2010.

Yet despite its attack on the way "everything is going up except your wages" during the election, Labor is now refusing to do anything about it. Chalmers has simply washed his hands, saying "every household has to make tough decisions".

The new government is trying to blame the legacy of the Coalition for its own inaction.

As the ACTU points out, the wages share of the economy is at its lowest level since records began in the 1960s. But instead of a focus on wages or delivering workers a bigger share amid surging business profits, the new government's Jobs Summit in September is focused on boosting productivity and delivering even more for the bosses.

The money to fix childcare, hospitals and ease the squeeze on living standards is there.

The government has come under growing pressure to scrap the appalling "stage three" tax cuts for the rich it backed in opposition. The \$17.7 billion in the first year alone in 2023-24 goes overwhelmingly to the rich, with almost 80 per cent of benefits for the top 20 per cent of income earners. Chalmers has dismissed the idea of scrapping them, reaffirming that Labor wants, "to leave them in place."

Labor is also committed to ramping up military spending including \$270 billion on weapons over the next decade, announcing a new Defence Strategic Review to decide on the purchases. The nuclear submarines will



Above: NSW nurses are set to strike again on 1 September

cost another \$170 billion on top. Labor is backing the same aggressive military build up against China as the Coalition.

Climate deal

The Greens' decision to back Labor's climate targets shows that negotiations in parliament will do little to force more serious change. Despite The Greens' efforts to improve the bill, Labor refused to accept any serious changes. The target of 43 per cent reduction is nowhere near what's needed. Labor refuses to put a stop to further coal and gas projects, threatening to cancel out much of its emissions cuts.

And instead of taking action to bring the power industry back under public control, it wants to allow the private sector to build and own all the new renewable power generation. Energy Minister Chris Bowen even declared that Labor's policies mean "Australia is open for business".

But insisting that climate action can only happen if it's profitable won't deliver the urgent action needed. Nor will it deliver the well-paid jobs needed to look after workers moving out of the fossil fuel industry.

It is going to take action on the streets and in the workplaces to win the change that's needed. We need more strikes to boost wages and deal with the cost of living crisis.

NSW nurses are showing the way, voting to keep fighting for a 7 per cent pay rise even against the efforts of their

union leaders. A further strike is being planned for 1 September, but rank and file nurses need to build pressure within the union to step up the fight.

Public sector unions in WA are also fighting their state Labor government for at least a 5 per cent pay rise, after an offer of 3 per cent plus a one-off \$2500 bonus.

The NTEU at Sydney Uni has taken another 24 hour strike, its fourth day of strike action since May, demanding an above inflation pay rise and a reduction in casualisation. Rail workers in NSW are also staging more industrial action for a legal guarantee of safety on new intercity trains and pay.

We also need a much stronger climate movement. While hundreds have joined initial climate protests since the election, 40 per cent of the population think Labor's target is not enough, according to Essential poll. That is more than three times the number who voted for The Greens. Many more people can be won to joining the protests needed to avoid climate catastrophe.

The Greens should be throwing themselves into building protests and campaigning, instead of simply focusing on discussions in parliament.

Actions in November around the COP27 climate summit, which Albanese is likely to attend, will be an important focus.

It is struggle outside parliament that's needed to force Labor to deliver change over workers' rights, the cost of living and climate action.

.....
Negotiations in parliament will do little to force more serious change

Indigenous Voice a hollow advisory body, Labor confirms

By Paddy Gibson

ON 30 July, at the Garma festival, Anthony Albanese outlined the details of Labor’s proposed constitutional reform to enshrine an Indigenous “Voice to Parliament”.

These details confirm that the planned referendum will offer no constitutional rights to Indigenous people and ensure the Voice has no enshrined powers.

As with Labor’s recent climate change legislation, the Voice referendum is concerned with symbolism and an appearance of progress, while the destructive impact of racism and punitive policy continues to grind on across Aboriginal communities.

Labor has no serious plans to address the crises of mass incarceration and deaths in custody, removal of children in unprecedented numbers, mass unemployment and poverty, or the continuing attacks on Aboriginal lands by resources companies.

Albanese’s proposed changes to the constitution simply state that there will be a body called an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice and that it may make “representations” to parliament and the executive government.

The government will be under no legal obligation to even consider this advice, let alone to ensure Aboriginal people exercise any real control over policies that affect them.

When last in office, Labor legislated to continue John Howard’s racist NT Intervention, systematically defying the demands of all peak Aboriginal organisations in the NT and comprehensive consultations with the communities themselves.

It’s clear who would win out if Voice policy proposals conflicted with powerful interests—if it called for veto rights for Aboriginal people over developments on their lands, for example, or for police to be disarmed in Aboriginal communities.

As Albanese reiterated to ABC radio after his speech: “This isn’t a body that is on top of the parliament, it’s not even at the side of the parliament”.

Criticisms of the tokenistic nature of Voice proposal have been made by many Aboriginal activists since a group of delegates walked out of the major conference in 2017 that launched the Uluru Statement from the Heart.

In response to Albanese speech, a statement from the Tasmanian Aboriginal Land Council read:



Above: Labor Prime Minister Anthony Albanese at the Garma Festival

“To limit Aboriginal empowerment within Australian democracy to advice only is belittling, patronising and a racist double standard.”

Controlled by parliament

Albanese’s proposed clause stipulates that parliament will “have power to make laws with respect to the composition, functions, powers and procedures of the Voice”.

Critics from both the left and the right have called for more details on how the Voice would function. But under this proposal, a hostile government could dissolve any Voice that became too outspoken, regardless of its structure, and replace it with something more compliant.

This is exactly what happened to other advisory bodies when Bob Hawke abolished the National Aboriginal Conference in 1985 and John Howard abolished ATSIC in 2004.

The government could even hand pick members of the Voice, as the constitution will make no reference to elections or any participation by communities themselves in choosing their own representatives.

Subordination to Parliament has been a key feature of the Voice proposal since it was conceived by Noel Pearson and his supporters in 2014, seeking to win over the political right and Corporate Australia. As Pearson told ABC following Albanese’s speech:

“This isn’t a proposition that has its origins in a leftist proposal... we need constitutional conservatives and conservatives and Liberals generally”.

Early advocates of the Voice included the Business Council of Australia, and mining companies such as BHP have long subsidised Uluru

statement campaign activities. These companies are happy to support the Voice precisely because they know it poses no threat to their power.

There have always been strong Voice supporters in the Liberal Party, such as current shadow Minister Julian Leeser. Since 2017, however, the leadership of the Coalition has preferred to posture against a referendum, using racist rhetoric that rejects any idea Aboriginal people are oppressed or deserve rights as First Peoples.

While Dutton has not committed either way on the referendum, racist campaigning against the Voice has been enthusiastically taken up by Pauline Hanson and by hard-right members of his own party such as CLP Senator and Warlpiri woman Jacinta Price.

In the context of many years of Liberal opposition, Indigenous advocates for the Voice campaigned to keep the Voice on the agenda and win support from across civil society. Polls consistently show clear majority support for the Voice in the electorate, a clear rejection of Hanson-style racism.

In whatever form a future government allows a Voice to exist, however, it won’t be an advisory body that defends and extends Indigenous rights. It will be mobilising widespread sentiment against racism into a struggle from below, like the strikes that won equal wages and land rights for the Gurindji and grass-roots campaigns like the one that stopped the Muckaty nuclear waste dump and the Jabiluka uranium mine.

This is where the real power lies to challenge dispossession and oppression and fight to end the systemic racism deeply embedded in Australian capitalism.

.....
Under this proposal, a hostile government could dissolve any Voice that became too outspoken

We pay, they profit: Labor's Jobs Summit farce

By Mark Gillespie

THE ALBANESE government is inviting unions, employers and community groups to Canberra for a Jobs and Skills Summit in early September to discuss “our shared economic challenges”. The summit is modelled on the Hawke Labor government’s 1983 National Economic Summit and Albanese wants to “rediscover the spirit of consensus that Bob Hawke used”.

But Hawke-style consensus politics is a trap the unions need to avoid. In the 1980 and 1990s it devastated them. While profits soared to record levels, workers’ share of national wealth dropped as did union membership and the unions’ fighting capacity.

Stagnant wages will be a big issue at the 2022 summit. Currently wages growth has stalled at 2.6 per cent a year, but inflation is expected to reach 7.75 per cent by year’s end, which will mean a sharp wage cut.

These low wage outcomes are in spite of the July unemployment rate being 3.4 per cent, the lowest in 48 years. When unemployment is low, traditionally unions have been able to push wages up, but two factors are working together against this.

One is the enormous legal restrictions on unions such as bans on industry-wide pattern agreements, multi-employer agreements, solidarity strikes and content in agreements, such as limits on the use of labour-hire.

Severe restrictions are also placed on strikes. Unions can only strike during bargaining periods and only after undergoing a long, complex process. Even once approved, employers can (and successfully do) apply to get strikes suspended on the grounds of their potential impact, destroying their entire purpose.

The other is the decline in union membership and the unwillingness of many unions to seriously fight the employers or organise strike action—if necessary in defiance of the law.

Productivity

Albanese made stagnant wages an election issue but, outside a few minor concessions, he is not about to lift the restrictions on unions. His solution is to link wage increases to productivity increases. Before the election he told the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI) that Labor “will reinvigorate Australia’s enterprise



Above: Public sector workers in NSW demand pay rises not more sacrifices

bargaining system to promote productivity”.

Wage rises based on productivity are meant to keep inflation in check, as businesses can absorb them without hitting profits or raising prices. Labor wants to “lift wages, lift profits, without putting pressure on inflation”, said Albanese.

This is something the employers can live with and, like the government, they are eager to “restore the Hawke-Keating enterprise bargaining system to lift productivity and let Australians earn more.”

Linking wages to productivity, however, is a con. In reality it means continually trading away workers’ conditions in exchange for wage rises just to maintain your current spending power.

Enterprise bargaining was introduced by the Keating Labor government in the early 1990s. But in recent years it has stalled.

Between 2013 and 2021, the total number of enterprise agreements fell from 23,500 to 10,000. Essentially workers have run out of things to trade off and the unions are so overwhelmed by legal restrictions that attempts at enterprise bargaining often go nowhere.

The employers’ solution to “restore” enterprise bargaining is to remove the Better Off Overall Test (BOOT), a safeguard mechanism that ensures workers don’t go below basic award conditions during pay negotiations. Reforming the BOOT “has to be part of addressing the decline in enterprise bargaining” argues Andrew

McKellar from the ACCI. They will be going to the summit hoping Labor can influence the unions to make concessions.

The union agenda

The ACTU has produced a paper for the summit that argues productivity is “no magic bullet”. Their alternative is a bold plan of macroeconomic reforms to fight inflation and rising inequality.

The plan includes the regulation of energy prices; investment in social housing and child care; rent controls; a tax on excess profits and policies that prioritise “full and secure employment”. They also want to overhaul the industrial relations system to allow workers “to bargain for their fair share of the national wealth”.

This plan is positive but how will it be achieved? The ACTU is “participating earnestly” in the summit and wants to convince the government and some employers of the merits of their proposals. But Labor Treasurer Jim Chalmers has already thrown cold water on the proposals saying they “are not government policies”.

The danger is that in the “spirit of consensus”, unions will be sucked into making more concessions. In the 1980s and 1990s they agreed to restrain wages to reform the economy in return for a “social wage” that, outside of Medicare, proved to be illusory.

Instead we need a real fight for both better wages and serious political change from Labor—through a union campaign of strikes and industrial action that hits the bosses where it hurts.

Linking wages to productivity means trading away workers’ conditions

Offsets scam means Labor’s climate target even worse than it looks

By James Supple

LABOR’S 43 per cent climate target looks set to pass the Senate in September. The Greens have now agreed to support it despite saying it is based on “weak targets”, with Greens leader Adam Bandt declaring that “the fight to stop Labor’s new coal and gas mines continues”.

Labor’s target is nowhere near enough to avoid climate catastrophe, weaker than even the Business Council’s proposed goal and far below the 75 per cent by 2030 that is consistent with holding warming to 1.5 degrees.

Labor’s legislation is mostly symbolic, simply establishing the target, requiring reports to parliament on progress, and instructing government bodies like Export Finance Australia, the Northern Australia Infrastructure Fund and Infrastructure Australia to take it into account in their decisions.

Albanese is only promising an additional 13 per cent emissions reductions by 2030, with a 20 per cent reduction on the global benchmark 2005 level already accomplished, and a further 10 per cent anticipated from existing measures.

And it gets worse. The target relies on massive use of dodgy offsets, where companies can simply buy their way out of making cuts to emissions.

Independent Senator David Pocock has raised questions about this. The government also needs his vote or that of Jacqui Lambie to get the bill through the Senate.

Labor’s policies to deliver the emissions reductions are still to be finalised. It is relying on private companies to drive the shift to renewable energy, proposing government investment only on new transmission wires to connect power projects to the grid.

A revamped “safeguards mechanism” is also being finalised to drive cuts to emissions in industry, including in manufacturing and mining.

This is a cap and trade or emissions trading system, which requires large industrial polluters to reduce their emissions to meet a set target. However, companies do not actually have to cut emissions—they can also buy offsets or credits from other companies.

The mechanism was set up under the Coalition but despite one in five companies failing to meet their reduction targets, none of them have faced penalties. As a result, emissions have increased in the sector by 7 per cent



Above: The climate movement needs to get back on the streets to force Labor to deliver any serious action

since the system was introduced. Labor claims it will act to give it “teeth”.

But it still plans to allow use of offsets to deliver 19 per cent of the reductions, according to the Reputex modelling that Labor has released.

It could end up being far more. New fossil fuel projects such as the Scarborough gas hub would drastically increase Australia’s direct emissions, due to gases released during mining. These would also need to be offset.

Offsets a scam

The idea behind offsetting is that companies pay for projects that reduce emissions and store carbon, including tree planting, preventing deforestation, or the capture of greenhouse gases like methane from landfill.

Pocock has raised issues with two specific types of offsets—tree planting to replace timber plantations after logging and the capture of gases from landfill. Both were allowed into Australia’s carbon credit scheme just months before the election.

But the whole offsets scheme has been “largely a sham”, Professor Andrew Macintosh, the former head of the government Emissions Reduction Assurance Committee set up to monitor it, says.

His colleagues investigated 119 tree regeneration projects and found that despite being awarded 17.5 million credits under the scheme, total forest area had hardly increased.

Macintosh and fellow academics Megan Evans and Don Butler wrote that, “Credits have been issued for

emissions reductions that were not real or additional, such as protecting forests that were never going to be cleared, growing trees that were already there, growing forests in places that will never sustain them permanently.”

Labor has announced a review. But the problem is not just with the Coalition’s scheme. The whole idea of offsets is bankrupt. Projects that would have happened anyway are too easy to pass off as new offsets. And “offsets” based on storing carbon in vegetation, which can quickly burn or decompose, simply cannot compensate for burning fossilised carbon, formed underground over millions of years.

When there are big profits to be made, companies have an interest in cutting corners and cooking the books.

There is an important role for some activities that currently generate climate credits, like reforestation or Indigenous fire management, which can help rehabilitate ecosystems and mitigate the impact of climate change. But this should be happening in addition to making real reductions in emissions, not as an excuse for more fossil fuels.

Offset schemes should be banned to force companies to actually reduce emissions.

As long as Labor’s target relies on the use of offsets, it will not even deliver a 43 per cent emissions reduction. The future of the planet is more important than corporate profits—it’s time to get serious about tackling the climate emergency.

.....
Offset schemes should be banned to force companies to actually reduce emissions

Deals in parliament won't deliver the climate action we need

By Ruby Wawn

THE GREENS hailed the 2022 federal election as a “greenslide”, winning four seats in the lower house and 12 senators. It was the party’s best ever election result but it fell short of delivering them the balance of power they had hoped for.

With The Greens winning 12 per cent of the national vote and seven teal independents elected, the result demonstrated support for action on climate change beyond what Labor was offering.

Labor’s pathetic climate target of 43 per cent reduction in emissions by 2030 is set to pass federal parliament with The Greens’ support.

Greens Leader Adam Bandt claims the party “improved” the bill through ensuring the 43 per cent target was a floor not a ceiling. But The Greens conceded on their key demands of a 75 per cent reduction target and a moratorium on new coal and gas projects.

So little did The Greens secure that Deputy Prime Minister Richard Marles argued they got “nothing” in the negotiations. Labor didn’t need to entertain The Greens’ demands, as Energy Minister Chris Bowen made it clear their climate policies could be implemented without legislation.

The Greens have the numbers in the Senate to block legislation but this does not give them the power to force Labor to deliver serious action.

Bandt says the agreement on the climate bill was only “round one” and that “the fight to stop Labor’s new coal and gas mines continues”.

But instead of building a climate movement on the streets that can win climate demands, The Greens’ focus is entirely on parliamentary negotiations with Labor to extract whatever small concessions they can.

Adam Bandt used a speech to the National Press Club to lay out his next steps. But all his plans are focused on parliamentary negotiations.

Bandt has threatened to use the Senate to disallow Labor’s climate Safeguards Mechanism for industry. But this would require Liberal support. He has pledged to “comb the entire budget for any public money ... going to fossil fuel corporations”.

But unless The Greens are willing to block the budget, something they refused to do even with Tony Abbott’s 2014 horror budget, they have little



Above: Greens leader Adam Bandt during the election campaign

power over this.

The Greens also want a climate trigger included in the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act.

The government already assesses and approves new projects based on “matters of national environmental significance” including threatened species, international recognised wetlands and world heritage sites, but climate change impact is not one of the matters currently considered.

The trigger would not prevent new fossil fuel projects from being approved. The Minister would need only to “consider” the climate impacts when giving projects approval.

And the current regulation system under the EPBC Act is already failing to prevent environmental damage. A 2020 independent review of the legislation found it was “outdated and not fit for the purpose of environmental protection”.

Blocking

The Greens are anxious to avoid being presented as blocking action after a media onslaught when the party blocked Labor’s Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme (CPRS) in 2009. But they were right to do so—the scheme was worse than nothing.

The CPRS would have resulted in no real cuts to emissions for 25 years, simply passing the cost of action onto ordinary people.

It promised over \$20 billion in compensation to fossil fuel companies, food processing businesses and power generators that would have

inflated their profits while energy prices soared.

It would have locked in a pathetic 5 per cent emissions reduction target until 2020. According to modelling from the Treasury, not a single coal power plant would have closed until 2033. All the actual emissions cuts relied on dodgy offset schemes.

The CPRS was designed to seem like something was happening about climate change, while ensuring that fossil fuel industry profits continued.

But blocking bad legislation alone is not the answer to solving climate change. We need a climate movement that can pull people onto the streets and out of their workplaces to stop new fossil fuel projects and demand a just transition to 100 per cent renewable energy.

The School Strike for Climate protests in 2019 did far more to make climate change an issue and generate pressure for action than anything that has happened in parliament. People power movements have also stopped individual polluting projects, like the Bentley blockade against coal seam gas mining in 2014.

Instead of seeing politics as being all about parliamentary horse-trading, The Greens could use their parliamentary platform and resources to mobilise their members, climate activists and unions to join struggles on the streets to pressure Labor and force real action on climate change.

We need to focus on building power outside parliament through mass movements, not on manoeuvres inside parliament.

The Greens’ focus is entirely on parliamentary negotiations with Labor to extract whatever concessions they can

ABCC defunded, but unions still need the right to strike

One surprise since Labor's election win in May has been its immediate move to almost totally defund the anti-union Australian Building and Construction Commission (ABCC).

The ABCC's 2022 budget of \$35 million is being cut by \$28 million, with virtually all its budget cut by 2025-26.

In addition, Industrial Relations Minister Tony Burke announced the stripping of almost all of the ABCC's powers via regulation, and the winding back of the Federal Building Code of Practice.

The Code banned terms from workplace agreements such as paying labour hire workers the same as full-time employees doing the same work, allowing union flags to be flown on government-tendered construction sites, or union stickers the size of a matchbox on hardhats.

The ABCC was established to police industrial laws in the Fair Work Act as well as special laws for the construction industry designed to make effective union organising and strike action illegal, through the use of special powers to uncover even the most trivial breach of the laws. The aim was to weaken construction industry unions like the CFMEU.

It relentlessly pursued not just the unions themselves but individual union members and officials over the use of industrial action. The ABCC has hit individual workers with more than 250 personal fines worth over \$530,000 since it was reinstated in 2016.

Its systematic anti-union bias has been slapped down by the courts on a number of occasions. Former NRL player and CFMEU ACT official John Lomax won a court payout after the ABCC dragged him through the courts on false charges of blackmail. In another example it prosecuted a union delegate on the Melbourne Metro Tunnel Project after he told workers in 2019 to stop work over safety concerns about first aid facilities on site. The judge slammed the ABCC's actions in bringing the case as "verging on improper".

The industrial laws allow building unions to be prosecuted for any "coercive behaviour" towards building companies outside the very limited "bargaining period" when a workplace agreement expires every three or four years.

Every strike or union campaign



Above: CFMEU stopwork rally against the ABCC under the last Labor government

is a form of coercion, an attempt to apply pressure on builders to force agreement on some issue.

In one recent case in the Federal Court, the ABCC prosecuted the CFMEU for "coercion" for demanding a building company supply female toilets on a building site.

The ABCC was first put in place by the Liberals in October 2002 on the flimsiest of pretexts, before a rotten Royal Commission set up to justify it even gave its final report to Parliament in February 2003.

Not one union official was ever charged as a result of the Royal Commission. The whole exercise was nothing but an anti-union exercise to benefit the Liberals' building company mates.

Finish it off

In order to abolish the ABCC in full, Labor will have to pass legislation through Parliament later this year.

While officially the CFMEU has welcomed the decision to defund it, there is plenty of scepticism within the union that Labor will finally end the ABCC.

Labor had the chance to do so after the election of Kevin Rudd in 2007 and refused.

Back then, Labor only got rid of the worst aspects of the ABCC, rolling its powers into the Fair Work Building Industry Inspectorate. That body still prosecuted the CFMEU for routine union organising and industrial action,

much of which is still illegal under the Fair Work Act Labor introduced.

Today Tony Burke today hints at something similar, saying, "A lot of what it's [the ABCC] been doing can appropriately be done by another regulator." The Fair Work Ombudsman will take over all the ABCC's current 39 cases against the unions.

At least when Rudd rolled the ABCC into Fair Work his government directed that all the ABCC's cases be settled without going to court.

The CFMEU has put its faith in the election of a Labor government as the way to abolish the ABCC, only mobilising union members for occasional set piece strikes against it.

The union has never been willing to seriously target building companies that call in the ABCC during industrial disputes.

The union has paid over \$14.7 million in court fines, even raising members' union dues to do so, seeing them as "the cost of doing business" for the union.

Now the ABCC may go, but Labor looks set to replace it with another similar body with weaker powers. Most of the laws against strike action, union right of entry and "coercion" will remain.

Building unions need to prepare for a serious fight to win the right to strike, and to get rid of all the restrictive laws and inspectorate bodies set up to police the unions—and to fight Labor.

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The ABCC may go, but Labor looks set replace it with another similar body with weaker powers

Sydney Uni shut down again for fourth strike day

By Luke Ottavi

STAFF AT the University of Sydney have taken their fourth day of strike action since May this year against an aggressive and hostile university management.

The strike on 17 August was “enormously successful”, NTEU branch president Nick Riemer told supporters at a rally on the day. At least eight entrances to the main university campus were picketed, with the university again deserted with cars and pedestrians turned away.

“We have had more union colleagues out on the pickets than we have had on previous days and our branch, the Sydney Uni branch of the NTEU, is now bigger than at any time in the last decade”, Riemer said.

The strikes have begun forcing concessions from management.

“Since our last strike, we’ve got workload control mechanisms for professional staff for the first time.

“Management has softened their attack on the teaching-research nexus and on academic workload committees.” They have offered to limit changes to the 40/40/20 teaching-research workload formula for academics to 10 per cent.

“They’re telling us that they’re going to offer a serious decasualisation deal. We have told them in no uncertain terms that if they really want to remove the scourge of exploitative casualisation, they are going to have to create 880 ongoing teaching and research jobs.”

Staff are also continuing to fight for an above inflation pay rise, an enforceable First Nations employment target of 3 per cent, and four weeks annual gender affirmation leave.

Students also supported the strike action and joined picket lines. A “roaming picket”—where students went into strike-breaking classrooms to argue with staff and students to support the strike—resulted in one teacher cancelling his class, joining the pickets, and signing up to the union on the spot.

Students also joined classes still running on Zoom to talk to staff and students about why the class shouldn’t go ahead—resulting in one lecturer apologising to their students in an email for being “hacked” and stating that no student’s attendance would be penalised due to the class shutting down.

Students also prevented a soccer



Above: Strikers are Sydney Uni on Wednesday 17 August

match between on-campus colleges from taking place during the strike by occupying the soccer field.

Staff are planning to stage further action during the university Open Day on Saturday 27 August.

They want university management

to drop their attack on the 40/40/20 workload nexus completely and offer a serious reduction in casualisation.

As Riemer argued, “we have a lot of work left to do and this campaign has a long way still to run. I think we’re going to need more industrial action.”

Community protests keep Redfern NCIE open

A WEEK of protests has won a reprieve for Redfern’s National Centre for Indigenous Excellence (NCIE), after plans to shut the centre were announced suddenly.

The centre hosts numerous youth programs and sports groups and is one of the few remaining areas in Redfern still accessible to the local Aboriginal community.

The Indigenous Land and Sea Corporation has agreed to continue funding NCIE and paying staff until long term arrangements for its future are in place.

There was a huge outpouring of community outrage at the decision to close NCIE. Up to 500 people gathered there after around 50 staff were abruptly sacked. The local community also began a sit-in to keep NCIE open.

“These doors were meant to close at 12pm,” Margaret Haumono, co-founder of Redfern Youth Connect, which operates out of NCIE, told the crowd. “If we’ve got anything to do with it, they’re not closing. I had an elder say to me ‘if these doors close, they’ll never open again’.”

“There’s so many people who are impacted by this, all the children, the elders, the people who work here, the families in and around the community who have seen the benefits of the NCIE,” Shane Phillips, Redfern

community leader and CEO of Tribal Warrior, said.

NCIE has operated at a loss of around \$2 million a year. It has been owned and funded through the Indigenous Land and Sea Corporation, a federal statutory body established with government money that is now self-funding through the operation of several business ventures.

Discussions between the Land and Sea Corporation and the NSW Aboriginal Land Council were supposed to work out an arrangement to transfer ownership and maintain funding, so that NCIE could work towards being self-sustaining. Despite the short-term reprieve, those discussions are still ongoing.

At daily meetings to update supporters and rally support, many community spokespeople argued that such an important centre should not be forced to rely on a profit making model. The \$2 million annual shortfall is nothing compared to the many millions spent over-policing the community and locking both children and adults up in prison.

Federal Labor Indigenous Minister Linda Burney and local MP Tanya Plibersek visited the centre last week. But so far there has been no commitment of federal government funding either.

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“We’re going to need more industrial action” —NTEU branch president Nick Riemer

Ecuador rises up against austerity amid cost of living crisis

By Joshua Look

INDIGENOUS PROTESTS in Ecuador have won major concessions after a general strike that brought the capital Quito and the port city of Guayaquil to a standstill for 18 days in June. Protesters blockaded roads, occupied key government buildings and used targeted sabotage to disrupt fossil fuel infrastructure.

The effects of COVID hit Ecuador particularly hard—a disastrous government response saw over 35,700 deaths, whilst economic mismanagement has seen suffocating inflation and household income drop by an average of 40 per cent at the height of the COVID crisis. Over 60 per cent are jobs outside agriculture are in the informal sector, including street vendors and taxi drivers.

Since taking office, Ecuador's right-wing President Guillermo Lasso, a former banker and businessman, has furthered the economy's decades-long embrace of neoliberalism.

This has only exacerbated the extreme inequality within the country. With markets now slowly crumbling, Lasso has created an impossible situation for many Ecuadorians, but none more so than the primarily agricultural, already impoverished Indigenous population.

Sonia Guamangate, an Indigenous woman who joined the protests by travelling from Samanga in the Coto-paxi region, explained how economic pressure has driven her community to breaking point:

"The prices have risen in the city, but what we get paid for our agricultural products remains the same. Sometimes they are paying as little as \$5 or \$6 for 100 kilograms of potatoes. That's a year's work for some of us. They call us ignorant Indians. We are not ignorant. We supply the food for the city."

Primarily led by the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE) and joined by a multitude of unions and student groups, the movement was quickly and brutally targeted by government forces, who labelled the protest as an attempted coup, declared a state of emergency, sought to arrest CONAIE leaders, and authorised police to use deadly force to disperse protesters.

However after the actions of the protesters caused significant food shortages in Quito and Guayaquil,



Above: Strikers in the streets of Ecuador's capital Quito in June

Lasso narrowly avoided both a motion of no confidence and impeachment and the government finally broke on June 30, agreeing to most of CONAIE's demands, including:

- The suspension of the state of emergency;
- The reduction in the price of a gallon of gasoline and diesel by 15 cents;
- The prohibition of mining in protected areas and ancestral territories, as well as in archaeological and water protection zones;
- Support for immediate delivery of medicines and supplies to hospitals and health centres;
- Raising the human development bonus from \$50 to \$55;
- A fertiliser subsidy.

This signifies a major victory for CONAIE and its allies, staring down a defiant neoliberal government with little interest in providing any form of relief to its citizens in the midst of a severe cost of living crisis.

Cycle of revolt

In recent years mass protests have shaken a series of Latin American countries, including Chile, Haiti and Puerto Rico. New left-wing leaders have also been elected in Chile, Colombia and Peru, in a region ravaged by US imperialism and neoliberal austerity.

This is not the first time that CONAIE and its allies have forced major change to Ecuador's political landscape through mass protest.

Formed in the mid-1980s, CONAIE has engaged in a series of

mass uprisings alongside labour and urban neighbourhood allies.

However it has continually put its trust in electing left-wing governments that have betrayed it. A major uprising in 2000 toppled a President who had sought a deal with the IMF.

After the following election CONAIE led another uprising against the new President, after backing him at the election. The left-wing governments of Raffael Correa and his successor Lenin Moreno also proved a disappointment.

In 2019 CONAIE staged another mass national strike against the supposedly left-wing leader Moreno. This won a victory forcing the abandonment of a major austerity package including attempts to cut fuel subsidies.

But it then called off the protests, out of concern a more right-wing leader might be the result. This meant that instead of pushing for the working class and poor to take power themselves, the existing parliamentary system remained intact and the government survived.

After the protests were called off, the right won the subsequent elections.

The movement has now entered a 90-day negotiation period with President Lasso in exchange for halting the current protests.

The example set in Ecuador shows how mass protests and strikes can win real, tangible victories over the cost of living and inequality. But real fundamental change cannot come through working to elect different leaders within the existing state—the movement from below has to take power for itself.

The example set in Ecuador shows how mass protests and strikes can win real victories

Taiwan visit goads China in US imperialist power play

By Adam Adelpour

NANCY PELOSI'S provocative visit to Taiwan in August has signalled a dangerous new phase in the rivalry between the US and China.

Pelosi—the Speaker of the US House of Representatives—is the most prominent US official to visit Taiwan in 25 years.

China vehemently objected to the visit. The official US policy on Taiwan has been dubbed “strategic ambiguity”. The US formally recognises the “One China” principle which states that Taiwan is part of China.

However, the US Department of State says that, “Though the United States does not have diplomatic relations with Taiwan, we have a robust unofficial relationship.” This “unofficial relationship” involves implicit political support, military aid and a constant US military presence around Taiwan.

The mainstream media simply blamed China for heightening tensions. But Pelosi's visit is just the latest US escalation over Taiwan.

In May Joe Biden was asked whether the US was, “willing to get involved militarily to defend Taiwan if it comes to that?” His blunt reply was “Yes”. This pointed departure from official US policy was designed to send a message to China—the US is willing to go to war over Taiwan.

The Pelosi visit took things a big and dangerous step further. Knowing the visit would provoke a hostile response from China, the US moved an aircraft carrier into position near Taiwan, as well as mobilising two warships and a number of F-35 fighter jets.

Pelosi said during her visit that, “our delegation... came to Taiwan to make unequivocally clear we will not abandon our commitment to Taiwan.” The mobilisation of US military might accompanying it made it abundantly clear what this meant—that the US was willing to use force to maintain its dominance in the region.

The danger involved in such an escalation is immense. War between the two nuclear powers would be an unthinkable catastrophe.

Ahead of the visit China's Foreign Affairs spokesperson Zhao Lijian said, “The People's Liberation Army will never sit by idly.” Over 20 Chinese fighter jets entered Taiwan's air defence identification zone in the lead up



Above: US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi arrives in Taiwan

to Pelosi's arrival. This was followed by live fire military drills, including missile strikes in waters off Taiwan.

US policy

Taiwan's contested status is a legacy of past imperialist interventions. Western-backed Nationalists retreated to Taiwan following their defeat by Mao's Communist Party in the Chinese civil war in 1949.

The current US policy of “strategic ambiguity” emerged in 1972 in the Nixon era. President Richard Nixon sought to normalise relations with China to draw them out of the orbit of the USSR during the Cold War.

Taiwan occupies a strategic location. China is highly dependent on sea lanes for trade and imports of strategic commodities like oil. In the event of war the US would try to use control along the “first island chain” off China's coast, including Taiwan, Japan, the Philippines and the island of Borneo to impose a naval blockade.

Pelosi's stunt in Taiwan shows that US imperialism has been emboldened by its proxy war in Ukraine. Following its humiliating defeat in Afghanistan, the US is pouring tens of billions of dollars of weapons into Ukraine to weaken Russia and prove its ability as an imperialist bully to use force to get its way.

Anthony Albanese remained relatively tight lipped about Pelosi's provocation, saying it is “a matter for them”. But his actions spoke louder

than his words. As Pelosi addressed the press in Taiwan, Albanese and Defence Minister Richard Marles announced a comprehensive re-assessment of Australia's Defence Force.

The message was clear—that Australia is preparing for war. Albanese is committed to Scott Morrison's policy of \$270 billion defence spending in the next decade as well as to the AUKUS Alliance and the acquisition of nuclear-powered subs at a cost of \$170 billion. The review will likely entrench the shift towards acquiring weapons directed at China, such as missile systems.

Taiwan will continue to be a flashpoint in a region that is increasingly a tinderbox of imperialist tensions.

Another delegation of US politicians arrived in Taiwan 12 days after Pelosi's visit, led by Democratic Senator Ed Markey, chair of the Senate Foreign Relations East Asia, Pacific, and International Cybersecurity subcommittee. Chinese aircraft have continued to cross the midpoint of the Taiwan Strait regularly, despite the official end of military exercises.

As inflation skyrockets globally the obscenity of this imperialist jockeying is laid bare.

Governments are spending billions on war and risking nuclear conflict while ordinary people struggle for the most basic necessities. It is more important than ever that we fight their system and build movement in Australia against the military alliance with the US, Labor's militarism and the drive to war on China.

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Pelosi's visit is just the latest US escalation over Taiwan

CAPITALISM AND THE CLIMATE CRISIS WHY IT'S SOCIALISM OR EXTINCTION

A new book explains why it will take a revolution to force the action needed to halt the climate crisis—and how we can win one, explains **Rory Larkins**

THE LAST few years have seen a growing climate movement worldwide in the face of world leaders' refusal to take the action needed to avert catastrophe.

From the school student Climate Strikes to Extinction Rebellion and Blockade Australia as well as the demonstrations around last year's COP26 summit, new groups have sprung up to demand climate action.

Many have raised the slogan "system change, not climate change". This acknowledges how massive fossil fuel corporations have forced governments to protect their interests. But what kind of system change do we need, and how do we get it?

Some, including prominent writers like Naomi Klein, see the problem as neoliberal policies which rely on the free market to fix the problem, rather than capitalism itself.

Their solution is often to support left-wing leaders like Bernie Sanders in the US to implement some sort of Green New Deal.

But efforts in parliament always end in disappointment.

The Greens here claimed their ability to block legislation in parliament would force Labor to the left. But The Greens were unable to push Labor to make any significant improvements to their pitiful 43 per cent emissions reduction target. The focus on parliament also carries the danger of demobilising the climate movement to focus on elections, instead of looking to movements from below to deliver change.

Martin Empson's new book *Socialism or Extinction: Revolution in a Time of Ecological Crisis* is an accessible explanation of why only a socialist revolution—where workers seize control of their workplaces and run the economy democratically—can stop capitalism from destroying the world in its endless drive for profits.

It guides readers through many of the common debates in the climate movement.

Empson takes care to build his argument from the ground up. For this reason, it is a worthwhile read for anyone involved in climate activism.

He argues that disastrous climate change is an inevitable product of the inner working of capitalism as an economic system. He writes, "All capitalist production requires the use of natural resources through the exploitation of human labour. Because competitive accumulation is central to capitalist production, there is no limit on the system's degradation of nature."

Fossil fuels are central to capitalism, he argues, with fossil fuel corporations including energy companies and car manufacturers making up the bulk of the world's largest companies.

Their total wealth, he writes, "is staggering" so that "BP, for instance, had a net income in 2021 of \$8.5 billion and total assets of over \$287 billion."

The book also traces why fossil fuels became so embedded in the system, looking at the way the steam engine powered by coal helped drive forward the industrial revolution, and how the use of coal and oil by European colonial powers allowed them to control the world through steamships and later more advanced battleships and aircraft.

He dismisses any hopes of a green capitalism, looking at how market-based solutions such as carbon credits or offset schemes, which have made no dent in reducing emissions, can potentially encourage more fossil fuel investments.

These scams have been at the heart of all the carbon markets and emissions trading schemes that were

He argues that climate change is a product of the workings of capitalism

supposedly designed to reduce emissions.

As Empson writes, "These schemes are attractive to the capitalists because they appear to offer a way of dealing with climate change while allowing capitalist production to continue as normal."

What kind of movement?

In the face of the lack of real action, a number of more radical groups in the climate movement have concluded that conventional campaign tactics have failed.

Roger Hallam, one of the founders of Extinction Rebellion, argues that non-violent direct action is the only way to win change, while author Andreas Malm advocates violent tactics such as blowing up oil pipelines.

Empson contrasts these approaches with the success of mass mobilisations which combine large-scale street marches with disruptive mass direct action.

For instance, the Standing Rock campaign which stopped the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline was, "led by Indigenous people and supported by environmental activists, workers and even military veteran groups." There were 15,000 people involved in the protest camp at its height.

But to win permanent change, we will need mass movements on an even larger scale.

Empson discusses the various proposals for a Green New Deal and massive state intervention to build a sustainable society.

If all the world's resources were put to use to immediately transition to renewable energy, we could cut pollution extremely quickly. We could ensure sustainable practices in all of our industries, we could make energy free and available to everyone. We

could set to work on repairing the damage already done, and ensure no one is left behind.

But the challenge of such proposals to reform capitalism “is getting them implemented”, he writes.

Activists who advocate getting more progressive politicians into power or change within the existing system under-estimate the forces we are up against.

As Empson explains, the power of the state alongside the interests of the rich means that, even when left-wing parties get a foothold in parliament, they are unable to implement the wide-reaching reforms that tackling climate change requires.

Capitalists, unable to escape the system’s logic of competition and profits, will not allow this to occur due to its threat to the profits of the massive fossil fuel companies.

The ultra-rich own the bulk of the mainstream media and use this to promote their agenda. But they also have enormous power thanks to their control over the major corporations and society’s basic economic decisions.

In the past they have used this to force elected governments to do their bidding through threatening to sack thousands of workers and crash whole national economies.

In a worst-case scenario, the ruling class can use the state not just to use violence against protests and social movements but to resort to the military to overthrow governments and parliamentary democracy itself.

Revolution

Empson therefore argues that in order to stop climate change, it is not enough to get progressive politicians into power but that the capitalist system as a whole has to be overthrown.

Empson draws on the history of past revolutions, such as the Paris Commune of 1871, the Russian Revolution of 1917 and more recent events like the Egyptian revolution in 2011 and the revolution in Sudan still ongoing from 2019 to explain how this has occurred.

He explains why the working class is central to any hope of revolutionary social change.

Capitalism is a system which protects the property rights of the bosses. The vast majority of people, who own nothing, must work for these bosses in order to live.

This unequal situation means that bosses can exploit workers by



only paying them a fraction of what they earn for the bosses through their work.

While this means that the world is run in the interests of a tiny minority of ultra-rich bosses at the expense of the vast majority, it also reveals capitalism’s Achilles’ heel.

Through taking strike action and collectively refusing to work, workers have the power to bring capitalism grinding to halt. Strike action on a large enough scale shows ordinary working class people their own capacity to control society and run it for themselves.

Workers’ control of individual workplaces would be the basis for democratic control over the whole economy. This means that instead of a capitalist economy characterised by competition, exploitation, and the endless accumulation of profits, workers could run the economy along socialist lines.

There would be mass democratic control of every aspect of society to ensure that everyone’s basic needs are met, and production run on the basis of planning, active participation, and debate.

This sort of socialist economy would be run by the vast majority in their own interests, and allow decisions about social and economic priorities to take full account of environmental sustainability.

It would allow a rapid and planned phase out of fossil fuels in favour of renewable energy and a zero carbon

Above: Bushfires have swept through Europe this month including at the Le Capannine beach in Catania, Sicily

economy. Only then will climate change be addressed adequately and efficiently.

What we need is a socialist revolution. The question becomes: how do we get it?

Empson writes, “A protest movement can become a mass uprising, an uprising can develop into a revolutionary situation and a revolutionary situation can evolve into a workers’ power.

“But none of these steps are inevitable... Whether they do or not depends on the specific situation and the conscious intervention of women and men arguing for the movements to take those steps.”

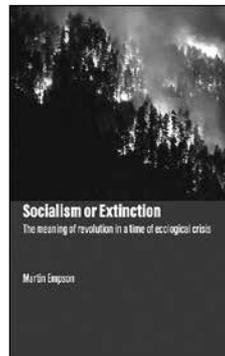
This shows the need for a revolutionary socialist organisation which is capable of leading the movement to victory.

As he writes, “Revolutionaries cannot conjure revolution from thin air, but they can act to develop the combativity and organization of workers.”

In the here and now, socialists must aim to broaden the climate movement, to develop the struggle, and to provide concrete answers to the challenges of the day. Martin Empson’s book is a thorough guide to equipping ourselves with these answers.

Socialism or Extinction: Revolution in a Time of Ecological Crisis

By Martin Empson, Bookmarks \$25



LIFTING THE LID ON WAGE THEFT AND EXPLOITATION

Ben Schneiders is a Walkley award winning investigative journalist at The Age. His reporting has exposed more than two dozen companies for wage under-payment including some of the biggest names in corporate Australia.

His new book *Hard Labour: wage theft in the age of inequality* is out in October. He spoke to *Solidarity's* David Glanz.

You start the book by talking about inequality, writing that the top 1 per cent in Australia control more wealth than the bottom 60 per cent of households combined. Why is this happening?

Over the longer term we've seen a dramatic change in the level of both income and wealth inequality in Australia.

We can see that more acutely in some other countries—such as the US where inequality is at levels last seen in the late 19th and early 20th century, the so-called Gilded Age of robber-baron.

The rich industrialised countries saw a dramatic shift in economic policy in the late 1970s and 1980s onwards, what's commonly called neoliberalism, with a focus on free markets, deregulation, privatisation and similar policies.

I rely heavily on Thomas Piketty and his book *Capital in the twenty-first century*. It gives very detailed analysis using economic statistics of how the post-war period saw a great levelling and reduction in wealth and income inequality.

The wages share of income was at record highs in the late 1970s, there was a lot of industrial disputation and a problem, the way that business and government saw it, of unions being too powerful.

There was a seismic change from

the 1980s onwards. In the US and the UK Thatcher and Reagan demolished the unions and aggressively cut corporate tax.

Australia is now in the top third of countries for income inequality in the OECD.

Here we had the Accord where unions agreed to real wage cuts and a reduction in industrial disputation in exchange for what was called the social wage, things like Medicare and increased welfare payments.

The floating of the dollar, and opening up of what was an economy with high tariffs and industry protection, all came from that period onwards.

How did you as a journalist first become aware of wage theft? And did you have any inkling about how many horror stories you were going to find?

Union officials and workplace lawyers who started their careers in the 1990s describe a very different kind of world where they just wasn't this level of wage underpayment.

It's clearly very different now 20 or 30 years later. I'd been the industrial relations reporter for *The Age* in the late 2000s, just after WorkChoices. Wage theft wasn't something that people were talking about. Five later by 2015 that had really started to change.

I was looking at the treatment of temporary migrant workers, and got a tip-off from someone of Taiwanese background. I started looking at foreign language websites and jobs were being advertised regularly to people on temporary visas at half the legal rate.

And it was across all parts of the service or low-wage economy—nail salons, food courts, parts of construction.

Around the same time we saw



Ben Schneiders, investigative journalist at *The Age*

the 7-Eleven expose by my colleague Adele Ferguson.

Since then you've seen wage theft exposed of hundreds of millions of dollars a year.

A big feature of hospitality is the systemic use of unpaid overtime, workers in restaurants doing 20 to 30 hours a week unpaid overtime. The scale of the underpayment there could easily be \$600 or \$800 a week if you were working a 60 or 70 hour week, which is common.

A second area was the wage deals between big businesses and the SDA. A researcher from the NTEU, Josh Cullinan, started looking at these deals and showed that there was significant wage underpayment.

The agreements were trading off workers' penalty rates, overtime, casual rates for really small amounts of compensation. The net impact of that was wage theft of tens of millions of dollars every year at places like Coles, Woolworths, McDonald's, the top three private sector employers in the country.

The SDA in cahoots with the employers was doing deals that left half the workforce every time, part-time workers and casuals, underpaid.

There's a test in the Fair Work Act called the Better Off Overall Test, which is meant to ensure that you're paid more than the minimum rates of the award.

Cullinan and a young trolley operator Duncan Hart challenged the Coles agreement in the Fair Work Commission and won.

All the agreements in the sector had to be renegotiated to comply with the award. At least a quarter of a million people were underpaid.

At Domino's pizza Deutsche bank showed that the underpayment was \$30 or \$40 million a year.

The conditions on farms have been the worst in terms of bad labour conditions and underpayment anywhere in

the country.

A lot of the workers are migrant workers. There are probably 100,000 people in Australia that are undocumented workers with no rights that are working on farms.

They are coerced into paying exorbitant fees for transport and accommodation, crammed many people to a room in the regional back blocks.

There's still a lot of wage theft in the sector but the campaign from the mid-2010s by the United Workers Union (UWU), in an area that was regarded as next to impossible to organise, has had a lot of success. There's now much more compliance with minimum wage laws and even attempts to bargain for agreements.

That helps challenge the common idea that migrant workers are somehow more submissive, more willing to take poor conditions or poor wages.

A lot of the people I got to know were migrant workers on temporary visas effectively organising themselves.

The UWU tapped into some incredible networks of people from Pacific Islands who worked together to ensure they were paid correctly.

There are as many as 21 universities currently under investigation for wage theft. What's going on in this sector?

When you look at the university sector and compare it to other fields the levels of insecure work are just extraordinary. At every major Victorian university bar one, more than half the staff are on casual or fixed term contracts.

Funding to universities is part of the equation. But the NTEU make the reasonable point that all businesses have uncertain funding from year to year. University managements has responded to this by using much higher levels of temporary or insecure work than elsewhere.

You note in the book that unions today are not just smaller than in the 1970s, but that, "they're exhausted after decades of decline and attacks. There is little optimism or energy among them." What do you think needs to happen to rebuild numbers, density and fighting spirit?

As a whole I think the movement has been exhausted, there's been decades of restrictions on organising and anti-union laws. Unions that were histori-



Above: Union organising against wage theft in the hospitality industry

cally very important are a shadow of their former selves. Manufacturing has diminished as a part of the Australian economy and the AMWU now only has tens of thousands of members nationally.

I think the union movement has had too much of a focus on party politics and parliamentary outcomes. Resources need be pushed into some of the hard to organise industries. The farm workers campaign would have cost the UWU a lot of money. But the reason for unions' existence is to organise exploited workers, and improve their lives.

Changes to workplace law and attacks on organised labour under the Howard government such as the waterfront dispute in 1998 that reduced the influence of the MUA, and later attacks on the CFMEU, have also weakened unions.

Barely 10 per cent of the workforce in the private sector are now in a union, back in the 1980s it was more like half the workforce.

There's no question that there's been a decline but it's also clear that people join unions when they think they are going to fight and there's a chance of winning. Unions always report big increases in membership when they actually take part in struggle and at the core of that is the willingness to take on the law and take back the right to strike.

You were part of a similar show of defiance at *The Age*, where union members went on strike in defiance of the law without actually receiving any fines.

In the media industry from 2008 there were really significant job losses at what was Fairfax media where I worked, now owned by Channel Nine. We had several strikes during that period and all of them were unlawful. We would just walk off the job almost in protest at what we saw as the gutting of our newsrooms and what was being done to our colleagues.

The most significant of those strikes was in 2017 when we walked off for a week.

By the letter of the law, we could have been individually prosecuted and the MEAA could have been prosecuted as well.

Over the last decade, there's been very few nationally important strikes.

But it does feel like there's a shift in mood and we're seeing more industrial action.

In unionised sectors we're starting to see more and larger wage claims due to high inflation where people are pushing back against reductions in living standards. You've seen some significant rebellions in the US, including at Amazon in New York, and big public sector strikes here as well.

Whether that manifests itself into something bigger and broader is the question.

THE 1970s AND THE FIGHT FOR ABORTION RIGHTS IN AUSTRALIA

Abortion became a political battleground in the 1970s, as social attitudes, court decisions and the Women’s Liberation Movement forced dramatic changes writes **Judy McVey**

UNTIL 1969 abortion in Australia was illegal, with a maximum sentence of life imprisonment. After that court decisions and law reform began to change this. The radical struggles of the period, including the emergence of the Women’s Liberation Movement, were also vital in securing access in the decade that followed. Abortion shifted from a taboo subject to become a major political issue.

Abortion has always been common. But before 1969, “Women who had means could attend a skilled abortionist; otherwise they went to someone less skilled or tried to abort themselves”, according to pro-choice doctor Stefania Siedlecky. Corrupt police ran a protection system for underground abortion racketeers.

The legalisation of abortion saved lives, “abortion still remained the highest single cause of maternal death in Australia until the 1970s”, Siedlecky noted. “Annual deaths from abortion declined from 125 in 1941 to 14 in 1970, but in the triennium 1973-75 there were only 2 abortion deaths”.

Indigenous women faced different issues including forced sterilisation, and state-enforced removal of children, which still occurs today. People with disability continue to suffer non-consensual sterilisation too.

From liberal to radical reform

The changing role of women in the workforce and the availability of the pill from 1961, which gave women greater control over the decision about having children, helped shift attitudes to abortion.

Humanist Societies and civil libertarians took the first steps for legal reform, opposing state interference in what they declared were “private” individual decisions including homosexuality and abortion.

They set up Abortion Law Reform Associations during the late 1960s,

inspired by the 1967 Abortion Act in Britain which legalised abortion in the first 28 weeks of pregnancy, subject to agreement by two doctors that the woman’s physical or mental health would be endangered by continuation of the pregnancy, or a serious risk of foetal abnormality. In 1969, the state government of South Australia introduced reform along similar lines.

But Liberal Party governments in the largest states, Victoria and NSW, were unwilling to follow suit, despite growing evidence of police corruption and women dying at the hands of back street operators. Under the spotlight, police responded more vigorously against abortion doctors, with unintended consequences.

When two doctors were arrested in Victoria, Judge Menhennitt acquitted them and ruled that the particular abortion was necessary to preserve the woman from serious danger to her life or to her physical or mental health. The Menhennitt ruling acknowledged that some abortions were lawful, setting an important precedent. Doctor Bertram Wainer then set out to test the issue, daring the police to arrest him for performing abortions and threatening to expose corrupt police profiting from illegal abortions. His stand established that abortions could be performed legally.

In Sydney the smell of scandal compelled the government to send the infamous “Abortion Squad” to raid the Heatherbrae Clinic in May 1970, arresting five staff under the anti-abortion law.

Over the next year the Women’s Liberation Group in Sydney held six major demonstrations protesting about the arrests. They submitted a petition with 9000 signatures to the NSW parliament on 20 April 1971. With only 15 Labor MPs voting in support, feminists concluded the prospect for abortion law repeal was “very

The growth of a militant new left would help push the abortion struggle forwards

slim”. But in October 1971 Judge Levine acquitted all Heatherbrae staff and handed down a ruling similar to Menhennitt’s.

The growth of a militant new left would help push the abortion struggle forwards.

The first women’s liberation groups formed in early 1970. They grew out of a period where protest against the Vietnam War became a catalyst for deepening youth rebellion, encouraging other radical movements including Indigenous demands for land rights and a growing strike wave.

The Women’s Liberation Movement (WLM) would use militant protest tactics to break through cultural and political obstacles. Challenging the idea of sexuality and abortion as private matters, they insisted the personal was political.

Inspired by Vietnam and other national liberation struggles, the WLM demanded “self-determination” for women, control over their bodies, equal pay and abortion on demand. Socialist unionist Zelda D’Aprano, a leading equal pay campaigner, joined the abortion campaigns, saying that despite “all the scandal and exposure of the abortion [graft and corruption] trials, women were silent”. The first WLM demonstration in Melbourne, “Contraceptives, not Chrysanthemums!” demanded free contraception and abortion on request.

In November 1971 street marches were held in Melbourne and Sydney for a woman’s right to choose. The following year Women’s Abortion Action Coalitions were formed demanding “free abortion on demand”, and thousands joined marches for abortion rights. These efforts helped establish widespread support.

As early as the 1970 Gallup Poll, 57 per cent agreed that abortion should be legal “in all circumstances” or “in cases of exceptional hardship,

either physical, mental or social”, a shift of 9 per cent since 1968. Only 11 per cent opposed legalising abortion.

The radical mood in society led to the election of Prime Minister Gough Whitlam in December 1972. Whitlam publicly supported abortion and sought to push the issue. However, the Labor party also allowed a “conscience vote” where MPs could vote according to their “own conscience”, and against party policy.

In 1973 when federal parliament debated abortion law reform for the ACT, right-wing Catholic ALP MPs used the “conscience vote” to defeat it.

Abortion law liberalisation had only succeeded in three of the six states—SA, Victoria and NSW. Thousands of women would travel to Melbourne and Sydney to access safer abortions.

But the legal changes made medical practitioners the gatekeepers instead of women themselves—no abortion would be lawful simply based on a woman’s choice to have one.

Whitlam also funded women’s centres and refuges, as well as Medibank, the forerunner of Medicare. When it was introduced in July 1975, all women who received “lawful” abortions could access a rebate (subsidy) covering most of the cost of the procedure, Australia-wide.

Because of these initiatives people began to understand abortion as “normalised”, affordable and safe.

Yet the Right never gave up. MP Kevin Harrold raised anti-abortion amendments twice, unsuccessfully, in NSW parliament. Clinics were banned in the ACT in 1978, and subject to ongoing police harassment in NSW.

The core political issue at stake over abortion is women’s right to control their own bodies and sexuality; in order to play a full part in social life.

Anti-abortion groups and the religious right defend what they see as women’s “traditional” role in the family bringing up children. This clashed with women’s demands for equality and the right to work outside the home as well as make their own decisions about abortion, marriage and children.

In the boom period after the Second World War, more and more women began entering the workforce. The workforce participation rate of married women rose from 8.6 per cent in 1947 to 18.7 per cent in 1961, and 32.7 per cent by 1971.

But women faced a contradiction: capitalism increasingly wanted them as part of the paid labour force; yet the system continued to rely on women in the home to care for and bring up



Above: Rallying in defence of abortion rights in Sydney in 1979

children as part of the nuclear family. Without this unpaid labour in the home, capitalism would have to meet far more of the cost of bringing up the next generation of workers.

These developments created the circumstances for abortion law reform, but change was not automatic.

Beating back the backlash

The Whitlam government was undemocratically sacked in November 1975. The new Malcolm Fraser Liberal government immediately began to undermine funding for women’s services and attacked Medibank, sparking a national general strike of two million unionists in 1976.

In 1979 conservative MP Stephen Lusher moved a motion to stop Medibank funding abortion services. WLM and pro-choice supporters initiated broad-based rallies around the country and the Lusher Motion failed 62 votes to 52. Many MPs, concerned about their own support, recognised this as a class issue—that without subsidies working class women would not be able to afford the procedures, but wealthier women could still access them.

After the opening of Queensland’s first abortion clinic in 1979, the conservative Bjelke-Petersen government responded with a new bill banning abortion unless a woman’s life was immediately threatened, and even banned women travelling interstate for the purpose of abortion. The right mobilised with a “Celebrate Life” march and played the “heartbeat of a foetus” over commercial radio. Pro-choice groups including Chil-

dren by Choice, Labor Women and Women’s Campaign for Abortion, with the support of the Trades and Labour Council (TLC), held rallies and illegal marches. The government retreated.

With this victory it was clear that bans on abortion were unlikely to succeed anywhere in Australia.

The social power of the union movement was a major factor. The Queensland TLC, along with ten major unions, helped build the pro-choice movement in 1979-80, arguing that, “The question of pregnancy termination should be the decision of the woman and her doctor”.

Today most states have laws allowing abortion at the request of the woman until between 16 and 24 weeks of pregnancy. However, availability and access are still a problem. Decriminalisation has been an important step forward but we still need to fight for free access to abortion accessible in public hospitals, and the full right to choose an abortion at any stage in the pregnancy.

Women are now a permanent part of the workforce and over half of union members, with great potential social power. While there is no prospect of the frontal attack on abortion rights here as in the US with the overturning of *Roe v Wade*, the right has used equal marriage, the Religious Discrimination Bill and opposition to transgender rights to try to maintain the status quo and enforce traditional gender roles.

The fight to ensure abortion remains affordable and accessible continues. The working class movement remains key to defending and extending women’s rights.

BILOELA FAMILY GETS VISAS BUT LABOR LEAVES THOUSANDS IN LIMBO



Above: Around 1000 refugees in limbo and refugee supporters rallied in Sydney in July

By Ian Rintoul

THE QUIET visit by Home Affairs officers to the Nadesalingam family home in Biloelela in August was very different from the last time Border Force officers came to their home in 2018.

In 2018, Border Force officers were carrying handcuffs; this time Home Affairs officers were carrying permanent visas.

Twice, the Coalition government had attempted to deport the family and twice it was stopped by protests and legal action. Rallies in Biloelela and across the country pushed the family into the political mainstream.

So much so, that getting the family back to Biloelela was one of only two promises that Labor made over refugees before the election. Labor was quick to make good on that promise—and was also keen to get as much publicity as it could. Anthony Albanese posed for media photos with bunches of flowers and the two Tamil children, Kopika and Tharnicaa.

After years of the Coalition, and the punitive use of ministerial discretion, Labor's positive use of such powers was widely welcomed. The celebrations went far beyond Biloelela and raised hopes that this was Labor's first step to right the wrongs of the past nine years.

Within days, lawyers had publicly appealed to the Immigration Minister, Andrew Giles, to similarly intervene in the case of the Scottish family

threatened with deportation after Mr Green, an electrician, lost his job, and therefore his right to stay on his skilled migrant worker visa.

After the South Australian government backed the request, Giles has given the Greens a month's extension for their appeal to be considered.

Of course, the Green family should be allowed to stay. Giles hasn't said that yet, but his speedy response to the Greens' appeal, however, is in stark contrast to the fact that 19,500 refugees on temporary visas are still waiting for the government to fulfil its election promise to grant them permanent visas.

Left behind

Labor will pay dearly if the visas for the Biloelela family is a one-off attempt to grab some positive media and earn some brownie points from the refugee movement.

Patience is wearing thin. Afghans held rallies around Australia to mark the one-year anniversary of the fall of Kabul. All the rallies raised demands for permanent visas that allow family reunion.

Thousands of refugees and asylum-seekers on bridging visas are also anxious for Labor to at least remove the requirement for the visas to be renewed every six months. But Labor's concern to keep the architecture of offshore detention in place has seen them do nothing.

The six-month visas create problems trying to get a job or somewhere to rent. Medicare cards also expire

along with the visas and the bureaucratic delays obtaining a new card can be devastating when families need medical care.

But there was little sympathy from Labor for refugees from Nauru and PNG on bridging visas who raised the issue during recent delegations to parliament.

Similarly, the calls to evacuate the remaining 200-odd refugees from Nauru and PNG fell on deaf ears, although Labor knows that between 500-600 refugees will have no secure resettlement even if all the places in US, Canada and New Zealand are taken up.

Now, very quietly, Labor has dumped the private Liberal Party-donating company, Construct, that has made hundreds of millions of dollars from running Nauru for the Australian government.

But it is being replaced by MTC Australia, a subsidiary of a private company that runs prisons and detention centres in the United States.

In January, the Coalition gave Construct \$220 million for "garrison services" on Nauru for just six months, around \$1 million for every refugee and asylum seeker on Nauru. Instead of scrapping offshore detention, Labor is maintaining the horror.

On Tuesday 6 September at 11am, refugees and supporters will converge on Parliament House in Canberra to demand the Labor government makes good on its promise to grant permanent visas for all those on temporary visas, known as TPVs and SHEVs.

The 19,500 refugees on temporary visas are still waiting for the government to fulfil its election promise of permanent visas