

# Solidarity

Issue No. 62 November 2013

\$3/\$5

## CLIMATE CHANGE, REFUGEES:

# LIBERAL

# DENIERS & LIARS





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# SOLIDARITY: WHO ARE WE?

Solidarity is a socialist group with branches across Australia. We are opposed to the madness of capitalism, which is plunging us into global recession and misery at the same time as wrecking the planet's future. We are taking the first steps towards building an organisation that can help lead the fight for an alternative system based on mass democratic planning, in the interests of human need not profit.

As a crucial part of this, we are committed to building social movements and the wider left, through throwing ourselves into struggles for social justice, against racism and to strengthen the confidence of rank and file unionists.

Solidarity is a member of the International Socialist Tendency. Visit our web site at [www.solidarity.net.au/about-us](http://www.solidarity.net.au/about-us) for more information on what we stand for.

## SOLIDARITY MEETINGS AND BRANCHES

### Sydney

7pm Thursday 21 November  
**Climate change, class and capitalism**

Sydney Solidarity meets 7pm every Thursday at Brown St Hall, Brown St, Newtown

For more information contact:  
Jean on 0449 646 593  
[sydney@solidarity.net.au](mailto:sydney@solidarity.net.au)

### Melbourne

6pm Tuesday 19 November  
**The trade union bureaucracy**

6pm Tuesday 26 November  
**Oppression and autonomous organising: The problem with identity politics**

7pm Tuesday 26 November  
**Abbott's climate denial vs Labor's carbon tax: How can we win real solutions to climate change?**

Melbourne Solidarity meets 6pm every Tuesday, Second floor Union House, Melbourne Uni  
For more information contact:  
Chris on 0403 103 183  
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## Things they say

**I wasn't the only party member who couldn't stomach Rudd's complete turnaround on asylum seekers ... [it] struck me as cruel and perverse.**

Former Labor Member for Bennelong  
Maxine McKew assessing Kevin Rudd's deal to send all asylum seekers off-shore.

**Still I backed Rudd for another win.**

Also Maxine McKew ... one out of two isn't bad.

**I view money as a commodity, so I give it away.**

Frank Lowy, Westfield executive chairperson, whose personal wealth in 2012 was estimated to be \$6.7 billion. Yeah, right Frank.

**I'm a great believer in governments doing as little as possible.**

Owner of Harvey Norman Gerry Harvey's advice to the Abbott government

**There you are. Shuffle off this mortal coil. It's nothing you wouldn't do to us ... Obviously this doesn't go anywhere fellas. I just broke the Geneva Convention.**

An audio recording of a British soldier shooting an injured Afghan insurgent at close range, in Helmand Province in 2011

**I am an Australian in a democratic country with freedom of speech who believes that the climate problem is severely overstated**

David Murray, head of Australia's Future Fund and former CEO of the Commonwealth Bank

**I have always been a firm believer in providing the public with choice and access to quality content**

Rupert Murdoch in his speech to the Lowy Institute

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# INSIDE THE \$YSTEM

## Occupy pepper spray cop wins payout

A UNIVERSITY of California police officer who famously and mercilessly pepper-sprayed unarmed students during Occupy protests in November 2011 has been awarded \$38,000 in workers' compensation by the University.

John Pike was filmed calmly and casually walking along a line of seated student demonstrators, spraying them in the face with orange pepper spray. Video of the attack went viral and Pike was condemned around the world for the vicious assault against the protestors. An internal investigation found that Pike acted appropriately, contradicting the later compensation payout won by students after they filed a lawsuit against the university.

In a travesty of justice, the payout to Pike was \$8000 more than the \$30,000 eventually awarded to each of the students. He received the compensation on the basis of the depression and trauma he claimed to suffer in the wake of the incident where he was on the receiving end of public outrage.

## Abbott's mate: Minimum wage too high

THE CHAIRMAN of Abbott's business Advisory Council has declared that, "We cannot hide the fact that Australian wage rates are very high by international standards. Comparing Australian wages to notoriously low US wages, he said, "When we're \$US33,500 and the US itself is only \$15,080 you can see there's an enormous disparity."

## Big pharma withhold Hepatitis C cure

CORPORATE GREED is stifling progress towards an effective oral treatment of Hepatitis C. In its race to secure the hepatitis market US company Gilead Sciences has refused to make their drug sofosbuvir available for collaborative trials with products produced by rival companies. Another US company Bristol-Myers produces a drug daclatasvir which has proven to be incredibly effective when used in combination with sofosbuvir in small trials, showing a 100 per cent success rate.

The cold calculation on the part of Gilead comes down to the fact that if a combination treatment with another new drug was used Gilead would have to split revenues with their rival. Indeed, Gilead's drug is likely to be approved by the US Food and Drug Administration in December and the company is predicting the drug will generate \$1.74 billion in sales in 2014 alone. Upon approval the FDA urged Gilead to make their drug available for collaborative trials. Over 200,000 people in Australia suffer from Hep C and one in four with chronic Hep C will develop cirrhosis, liver failure or cancer. In 2012 Gilead raked in \$2.8 billion in profits.

## Commission of cuts



**Above: Joe Hockey announcing the Commission of Audit with Matthais Cormann**

ABBOTT'S SWEEPING Commission of Audit, announced in October, is a brazen farce designed to pave the way for cuts and privatisations. The five person Commission is stacked with rolled in gold, free market zealots.

It is chaired by Tony Shepherd, head of the Business Council of Australia (BCA), Australia's most powerful pro-business lobby group. The BCA want corporate tax cuts for the rich, to increase the GST and to repeal the Fair Work Act. Shepherd is also chairman of Transfield Services, a construction and services firm that has racked up hundreds of millions of dollars in contracts from the government in recent years, including a \$184.3 million contract to run the maintenance and services for the immigration detention centre on Nauru.

Peter Crone, the BCA's Chief Economist and Director of Policy will head up the Commission's Secretariat. Crone was a senior economic advisor to the Howard government and in his role for the BCA has campaigned for cuts to programs for the sick, disabled and jobless.

Peter Boxall, another appointee, was chief-of-staff to Peter Costello and instrumental in implementing WorkChoices. As head of various public service departments he was earlier responsible for outsourcing IT and selling off government buildings.

Tony Cole is a former Treasury secretary who has described an increase in the GST as "inevitable". His current job is at investment firm and outsourcing specialist Mercer.

Former Howard government minister Amanda Vanstone, who in a rare moment of insight Wayne Swan called, "a political hyena who takes delight in attacking society's most vulnerable", complements the line up.

Research and writing by Adam Adelpour

Send suggestions for Inside The System to [solidarity@solidarity.net.au](mailto:solidarity@solidarity.net.au)

## First they came for the bikies

LAST MONTH Queensland Premier Campbell Newman rammed through a raft of draconian anti-bikie laws that massively increase police powers and trash basic rights.

Under the laws those deemed to be "vicious lawless associates" of prescribed bikie gangs will get slammed with extra punishments if convicted of a crime, in some cases this includes an additional 15-25 years jail.

The definition of an "associate" includes taking part "on any one or more occasions in the affairs of the association in any way". This law is vague enough to allow wide scope for abuse depending on how the courts interpret it. For example someone who simply has a family member in a prescribed gang could fall into this category.

The laws also give police more scope to arbitrarily harass innocent people. Police are now able to stop and search anyone on suspicion of being a member of a prescribed gang.

Absurdly, at a recent protest this lead two police to question a young man wearing a Sons of Anarchy t-shirt. The Sons of Anarchy are a fictional gang from an American television drama.

Newman's government has also been found to have non-existent gangs on its list of banned organizations, such as the Scorpions'.

Even the cops are complaining that Newman's crackdown is over the top. Police union president Ian Lever, in e-mails to Police Commissioner Ian Stuart, reports that officers are unhappy about having to apply for and execute "dodgy" warrants. Lever's main complaint is not that the warrants are unjustified, but that officers are not protected from the "legal ramifications" of executing them.

# EDITORIAL

## Liberals' arrogance and lies already on show

THE LIBERALS' lies and rule for the rich agenda are now on full display.

So soon after election victory most governments are still in their honeymoon period. But Abbott hasn't exactly had a dream start.

The expenses scandal exposed the Coalition as tricky and dishonest, made worse by Abbott's inability to see why people were disgusted by the revelations. Abbott and swathes of his frontbench were caught out making dodgy claims. But they were making no apologies. Abbott even defended the worst abusers like Don Randall, who claimed over \$5000 to fly to Cairns, saying he was on "electorate business"—3500 kilometres from his electorate in Perth!

After initially refusing to clean up the system, six weeks later Abbott announced a set of pathetic changes that do nothing to increase oversight of claims, allowing politicians to continue policing themselves.

It demonstrates what an out-of-touch elite is now sitting in parliament. And they have already begun doing favours for their rich mates.

Treasurer Joe Hockey has handed them back \$3.1 billion through axing taxes. Superannuation savings valued at \$2 million or more will escape a tax hit, preserving a favourite tax avoidance strategy for high income earners. But 3.6 million people earning less than \$37,000 a year will lose a planned tax refund on contributions.

High income earners also gain from continuing Fringe Benefit Tax concessions on cars as part of salary packages. And multinational companies have escaped \$1.5 billion in tax as the Liberals have dropped a crack down on corporate efforts to shift profits offshore.

The deficit for this year is now expected to blow out to \$50 billion, compared to \$30 billion before the election. And Treasurer Joe Hockey says the budget in May will "offer the solutions". He's bound to get plenty of ideas for cuts from the Commission of Audit, stacked with business leaders, which will report at the end of March.

The government has downplayed reports that further privatisation such as Australia Post are on the cards. But Education Minister Chris Pyne has continued to float the idea off selling student HECS debts.

Most damningly, in the public sector, the job cuts have already started. Despite claiming it would find 12,000



job cuts through natural attrition the government has issued a directive to not renew any temporary contracts and to sack all "non-ongoing" workers. At least 600 jobs will go at CSIRO and 220 jobs in Agriculture and Fisheries.

But as parliament resumes, the Coalition wants to focus on their attack on the carbon tax. Labor is now locked into opposing its repeal, with Tony Abbott rejecting their "offer" to help scrap the tax in return for replacing it with an emissions trading scheme.

It has shown again how Labor and The Greens' attempts to present a price on carbon as a solution to climate change have allowed the Coalition to posture as concerned about workers' living standards.

Abbott's plan to spend on average only \$720 million a year on "direct action" to reduce emissions is a joke. The fight for serious government spending—to build the renewable power stations that are needed to slash emissions—will have to come from outside parliament.

### Vulnerable

It is already becoming clear that Abbott's rule is built on a house of cards and is vulnerable to resistance.

Over refugees, the Coalition have hinged their reputation on whether they can "stop the boats"—but the impossibility of this policy already has the government in trouble.

Their arrogance was on show in a standoff with Indonesia on refugee boats, when government efforts to bully Indonesia to take back a boat load of asylum seekers backfired.

**Above: Unions rallied against Campbell Newman's cuts in Queensland, an active response to Abbott is also needed**

Indonesia's co-operation is vital to the Coalition's efforts to "stop the boats", but after Indonesia's rebuff two more arrived.

Morrison's ridiculous efforts to keep the media in the dark about boat arrivals is continuing to make the Coalition look incompetent and deceitful. Journalist Laurie Oakes slammed Morrison's weekly press briefing performances as a show of "arrogance ... little short of breathtaking".

The Coalition's policy has backfired, creating exactly the kind of constant debate around refugee boats and the government's lies they didn't want.

The demonstrations for refugee rights can help intensify the government's difficulties and expose the atrocities in the detention centres.

The Liberals' job cuts too, can be fought with demonstrations and industrial action. They are also beefing up laws against picketing.

Everywhere that action has been called against Liberal cuts, there has been an enthusiastic response.

At state and territory government level, teachers in the NT staged a 24-hour strike in early November to fight staff cuts, following a bus drivers' strike in October and a teachers' strike in WA.

Unions in Queensland have called a "Rally for rights" against the Liberal National Party's attacks on democratic rights as well as on workers' compensation and unions.

Abbott can be stopped—the ball is in the unions' court—a call to action could start the fightback.

**Their arrogance was on show in a standoff with Indonesia on refugee boats**

# Homophobic Abbott exposed by ACT same-sex marriage challenge



**Above: A demonstration for same-sex marriage in Sydney**

By Marijke Hoving

THE ACT has become the first state or territory in Australia to recognise same-sex marriage, in a move that increases the pressure on Tony Abbott and is an important blow against homophobia. Darlene Cox, who is making plans to marry her partner in the ACT, told ABC, “It’s fantastic, it feels great. This is about enhancing my rights.”

The Marriage Equality (Same Sex) Act 2013 allows two adults of the same sex, who cannot marry under the Commonwealth Marriage Act 1961, to enter into a formally recognised marriage. Similar legislation is also being put forward in NSW and Tasmania.

In 2004 the Coalition government’s Marriage Amendment Bill reaffirmed marriage as a “union between a man and woman, to the exclusion of all others ... for life.” This federal ban on same-sex marriage has fostered and legitimised homophobia in Australia. In 2012, laws to legalise same-sex marriage failed to pass in federal parliament, with Labor granting its members a conscience vote and the Coalition voting against.

The ACT legislation, like the bills in NSW and Tasmania, is designed to create a separate category of marriage, so that it does not explicitly conflict with the Federal Marriage Act. It will be up to the High Court to decide whether this is constitutionally valid.

There has been some concern that the ACT law may exclude some transgender and intersex people from getting married, since couples would have to identify as either male or female to apply. Creating two separate types of marriage also means a person’s marriage would no longer be valid if they changed gender. But it is clear that whatever problems it may have the move is a step forward.

The laws, though, are not safe. The Coalition government has instigated a High Court challenge to overturn the legislation with a hearing set for 3 and 4 December. Couples are only able to marry from the 7 December in the ACT.

This is clearly a sign of the government’s homophobia. But publicly Abbott has simply justified the challenge as necessary to ensure ACT law is consistent with federal law, namely the Marriage Act and the Family Law Act.

“It’s not a question of being for or against gay marriage,” Abbott said. “It’s a question of adhering to the Constitution.”

This is a far cry from what Abbott has said in the past and shows the Coalition is on the backfoot. There is wide support in the community for equal marriage, and the Coalition does not have the confidence to be openly homophobic. Protests can put pressure on the High Court and the NSW parliament to support same-sex marriage and further embarrass the Liberals.

# We won! Fightback halts tutorial cuts at ANU

AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL University (ANU) students have set an example in the fight against cuts.

A proposal to cut tutorials in the College of Arts and Social Sciences (CASS) met with zealous resistance. As a result, the university administration were forced to listen to us and have backed down from the tutorial cuts.

In true Orwellian fashion, a review released in September found “no evidence that the College intended to abolish tutorials or compel staff to adopt forum-style teaching”. Back in August they had announced their intention to “move to different delivery models” instead of tutorials.

It was this announcement that prompted a rally in August that ended with a fiery occupation of the Dean’s office. Students poured into her office through the fire escape, chanting, “bullshit, come off it, our education is not for profit.”

Students kept up the pressure with a theatrical “die-in” at the Deputy Vice-Chancellor’s open day address. We showed that we are not afraid to disrupt and embarrass the administration. We showed the power of students when they mobilise to defend their education. The administration is on the backfoot. But while we may have won this battle, there’s still a war going on.

CASS will lose up to \$1 million next year from budget cuts. And the cuts are not isolated to CASS. A preliminary university budget will slash \$686,178 from CAP (College of Asia Pacific) and a staggering \$1 million from the college of Medicine, Biology and the Environment. (This includes the Climate Change Institute and the Fenner School of Environment and Society).

We need to learn from our success fighting for tutorials. To challenge the VC’s slash and burn attitude to our education we need to mobilise. The Education Action Group held a successful speakout in October. When students return to class next year we need to be ready to fight to secure tutorials and defend courses and lecturers from these cuts.

**Geraldine Fela**

# Time to fight for renewables, not carbon tax

By Chris Breen

TONY ABBOTT is taking every opportunity to cast doubt on climate change.

He called attempts to link climate change and the NSW bush fires “complete hogwash” and said that Christiana Figueres, the head of the UN’s climate change negotiations, was “talking through her hat” when she did so.

Rightly, Greens MP Adam Bandt insisted on bringing climate change into the debate.

But his argument to defend the carbon tax will get us nowhere. In an article in *The Guardian*, he even accused Abbott of adopting “a radical anti-market position”.

Similarly, 30 out of 35 “prominent” economists surveyed by Fairfax newspapers, championed keeping carbon pricing because it was the “cheapest” way to cut emissions. But “cheapest” is about putting market needs ahead of the planet.

It means prioritising the small and easy ways to make cuts suitable to business, but delaying the spending necessary for a serious transition to renewable energy.

Whether or not the carbon tax is repealed will make no difference. We need real action.

If current fossil fuel emissions continue, the world is on track for catastrophic warming of over four degrees.

The two biggest sources of emissions in Australia are electricity and other stationary energy (51 per cent) and transport (17 per cent). To achieve mass emissions cuts, we need a rapid transition to large scale solar power stations alongside wind. We also need a massive expansion of public transport. The market can’t deliver this change; we need government spending programs.

## Climate movement

GetUp! and environment groups will host nationwide rallies for climate action on November 17. These rallies are about defending the carbon tax, though it is referred to indirectly, because of the tax’s unpopularity. The demonstrations have no actual demands.

Any attempt to rekindle the climate movement is welcome. But the



A demonstration supporting the carbon tax in 2011

carbon tax has been useless in reducing emissions.

Effectively calling for price rises in an essential service like electricity has been a disastrous strategy for the climate movement, cutting us off from the support to drive the change we need.

The Australia Institute recently found that the cost of electricity increased by 170 per cent from 1995 to 2012, four times more than CPI. This helps explain why the carbon tax is hated.

Higher electricity bills for those on lower incomes can mean going without heating, or choosing between paying rent and bills.

Labor and The Greens should be campaigning against electricity price rises and privatisation and calling for regulation.

But their support for carbon pricing has allowed Abbott to get away with posing as concerned about electricity bills.

Climate activists should argue for more ambitious and popular climate demands instead of defending the carbon tax and market schemes.

## The transition

According to Guy Pearce, in 2010 “replacing the nearly 30GW of existing coal fired electricity in Australia with 115GW of renewables, would cost around \$316 billion”.

In 2011, Beyond Zero Emissions argued that a transition to 100 per cent renewable energy in Australia in a decade would cost around \$37 billion a year.

It sounds like a lot, but when Labor caved in to the mining companies, it forfeited \$60 billion in tax that would have been collected between 2012 and 2020. The government also spends over \$10 billion a year subsidising fossil fuel use that should be ditched to help pay for renewable energy.

The money is there. According to the World Wealth report in 2012 Australia had 207,000 high wealth individuals (each with over one million of spare cash to invest) collectively worth \$625 billion. Their wealth had increased by 15.5 per cent from 2011. This is where the money can come from—taxing the profits of big business and the rich.

The Snowy Hydro scheme is a great example of what could be done. It cost around \$9 billion in today’s dollars and was funded by Commonwealth Government advances. It remains Australia’s most spectacular engineering feat. It also meant jobs. Over 100,000 people worked on the scheme, with a peak of 7300 at any one time. It took 25 years to complete; we need to move faster today, but it can be done.

In Germany, solar panels have produced as much as 23.9 gigawatts of power during the sunniest parts of the day this year, equivalent to around 20 large coal or nuclear power stations. That’s about three quarters of Australia’s total electricity generating capacity, and Australia only uses about half of that capacity in practice.

One hundred per cent renewable energy is technically and financially possible.

We need to move beyond carbon pricing market failure and demand direct government funding of renewable energy instead.

.....  
**Whether or not the tax is repealed will make no difference**

# Burnside's appeals to the powerful won't win refugee rights

By Feiyi Zhang

JULIAN BURNSIDE is a long-term supporter of refugee rights as a lawyer and is a general opponent of the demonisation of refugees. However, his recent proposal for a "Tasmanian solution" is a mistaken attempt to accommodate to government and business views on refugees and appeal to their economic interests.

Burnside proposes making the whole of Tasmania a place of community detention where refugees can be housed, claim Centrelink benefits and work.

He argues that government and business would gain economically from the plan. It would save the federal government \$2.5 billion a year and help stimulate the Tasmanian economy, as refugees would spend their Centrelink payments there.

Burnside makes some interesting points about the cost of offshore processing and the contribution that refugees can make to Australian society. He points out that even if every asylum seeker stayed on full Centrelink benefits, it would only cost about \$500 million a year rather than the \$3 billion for current detention policies.

He argues that alternatively refugees could fill labour shortages in rural areas. Refugees do contribute immensely to Australian society. However, Burnside's plan concedes to the idea that we should only accept refugees if they suit the needs of business or the Australian economy. This threatens to undermine the entire purpose of the refugee program which is not based on what refugees can give destination countries but on the right of people fleeing danger to find safety. It is a specifically humanitarian program designed so that people fleeing persecution, torture and trauma have somewhere to turn.

Burnside's attempt to find a practical solution that the government will agree to leads him to a compromise on mandatory detention. Burnside argues that the Tasmania Solution, "is one way I can think of where you can maintain the fig-leaf of mandatory detention while allowing people to live in the community."

But the refugee rights movement needs to clearly tackle the necessity of mandatory detention as part and parcel of measures to deter and punish refugees. Mandatory detention is cruel and unnecessary. Asylum seekers once



**Above: Many refugees do work hard and contribute to the community, but accepting them as refugees can't be premised on this**

lived in Villawood or Broadmeadows in community hostels rather than the detention centres that exist today.

However it also plays an ideological role in reinforcing that refugees are dangerous, and possibly criminal. Making an argument for community processing is particularly important when the new Liberal Immigration Minister Scott Morrison is revoking bridging visas of refugees with criminal records to inflame community paranoia.

### Political interests

Burnside's plan misses the crux of the refugee issue—it is not economic gain or public opinion that drives government refugee policy but their political interest in using refugees as scapegoats for working class concerns about housing and jobs.

Successive Liberal and Labor governments have used racism against refugees to win votes and conflate the "problem" of refugees with real working class concerns. In the recent federal election Liberal Party election material attacked Labor for spending \$6.6 billion dealing with "illegal boats" and concluded: "That is money which should have gone into improving hospitals, schools and roads".

Working class people face real concerns about the cost of living and the refugee rights movement needs to break governments' attempt to glue together refugees and economic concerns. The majority of society do

not benefit from racism.

Burnside's solution reveals the danger in appealing to those at the top of society who benefit from enforcing racist refugee policies. Trying to find commonalities with a government which continues to stoop to new lows in punishing refugees means compromising on our opposition to refugee policy and makes it harder to win broader support for refugee rights. We need a movement that is clear in its opposition to punishment of refugees and that is prepared to fight the government over it.

The refugee rights movement under Howard demonstrated that it is possible to win over ordinary Australians, who have no interest in upholding the current refugee policy.

The movement drastically changed public opinion and made offshore processing an electoral liability for Howard. Newspoll records show that between 2001 and 2004, the number of people who thought some or all asylum boats should be able to land went from 47 per cent to 61 per cent.

But Burnside's plan orients the movement in the wrong direction by looking to accommodate with the government that enforces the policy. The movement needs to be built from the ground up in local committees, schools, universities and workplaces to force change. We can't win by compromising with current policy, but we can defeat the policies with a mass movement from below.

**Burnside's plan concedes to the idea that we should only accept refugees if they suit the needs of business**



# Punching a hole in Operation Sovereign Borders

By Ian Rintoul

THE GRIN has come off Scott Morrison's face. Journalists openly jeered and Morrison squirmed as his lies about a pregnant Rohingya woman on Nauru were exposed at his 8 November press briefing.

Morrison and the Immigration Department denied she existed, but she had been brought from Nauru to Brisbane on 11 October and gave birth to a baby boy on 6 November.

Morrison knew that the woman had been diagnosed as carrying twins when she was sent from Christmas Island to Nauru in September. (An examination in Brisbane showed she was only carrying one baby.) But when questioned Morrison said the claims "were unsubstantiated" and lectured journalists about relying on information from "advocates".

But it was the Indonesian government's refusal to allow the Ocean Protector to return rescued asylum seekers to Indonesia that has inflicted the biggest damage on Abbott's effort to "stop the boats".

Abbott has invested an enormous amount of political capital on "stopping the boats". Any unravelling of his boats policy will have a disproportionate effect on the Coalition's general political credibility.

Morrison's exaggerated rhetoric and the demonisation of asylum seekers produced a shocking hysterical editorial by *The Australian*. On 11 November it called for the Abbott government not to rescue asylum seeker boats within the Indonesian search and rescue zone; a call essentially to let asylum seekers drown.

But, the editorial demonstrates that Abbott and Morrison are in a precarious situation that provides greater opportunities for the refugee movement.

The Coalition is relying on brinkmanship and a difficult juggling act to keep ahead of the boat arrivals, so they can send enough asylum seekers off-shore to maintain the credibility of Operation Sovereign Borders. Three boats arrived (one into Darwin harbour) in the week after the stand-off with Indonesia that saw the rescued asylum seekers brought to Christmas Island.

So far, there has not been enough room on Manus or Nauru to send all arrivals off-shore. So the numbers indefinitely detained on Christmas Island are slowly, but surely expanding. There



**Above: Asylum seekers caught in the stand off with Indonesia are brought to Christmas Island**

are already indications that there are too many for them all to be kept there.

Meanwhile tensions are growing on Nauru. More information about the appalling conditions there has become public: family groups live in tents, the only running water is at the toilets and showers, which are a long walk from the tents; and showers are limited to five minutes under a trickle of water.

The situation for the over 1000 asylum seekers sent to Manus Island is explosive. Despite claims that PNG will process and resettle asylum seekers, the government has no administrative or legal process to even start assessing refugee claims. There is also active opposition to expanding detention centres on Manus Island.

Although, shamefully, the Labor politicians have yet to publicly declare their intention to support The Greens' disallowance motion, as *Solidarity* goes to press it seems likely that the government's attempt to re-introduce Temporary Protection Visas (TPVs) will be stopped in the Senate. La-

bor will make a final decision at its Parliamentary caucus meeting on 18 November.

The defeat of TPVs would be another blow to Abbott and Morrison.

We can't simply rely on the contradictions of the Liberals' draconian policies to bring them down. But their problems are opportunities for building a grassroots campaign. We will need more petitions, protests and demonstrations.

Both the ACT and West Australian state Labor conferences have recently carried resolutions condemning federal Labor's support for off-shore processing. If TPVs are stopped, the refugee campaign will have to push hard for the government to begin processing the claims of the almost 30,000 asylum seekers living in the community on bridging visas or in community detention.

Every battle won in the refugee campaign can help expose the myths, the scapegoating and the inhumanity, and take us closer to winning the war against Abbott.

## Morrison's illegal decree

IMMIGRATION MINISTER Scott Morrison's media blackout and his orchestrated weekly media briefings are straight out of the Orwellian hand-book of mind control; a desperate government attempt to control information and constrain criticism of the government's anti-refugee policies.

Similarly, the Abbott government's decree that asylum boat arrivals be referred to as "illegals", must be one of the more obvious examples of a government trying to control language to prejudice public opinion.

Although, in fact, it is not illegal to arrive without papers to claim asylum in Australia, some service organisations with government contracts have also issued instructions to use "illegals" and "detainees" as per Morrison's decree.

Not everyone is willing to go along with the government's effort at "thought control". The ABC has explicitly rejected using the term. Now, 138 organisations have sent a joint to Tony Abbott objecting to the decree and the government's attempt to "dehumanise asylum seekers." See statement at <http://bit.ly/1cTR20t>

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**Abbott has invested an enormous amount of political capital on "stopping the boats"**

# Sydney Uni anti-racism debate: We need a united fight

By Adam Adelpour

THE formation of the autonomous Ethno-Cultural and People of Colour Collective (EPOC) at Sydney University has raised an important debate about fighting racism.

EPOC is based on the idea that only those experiencing a particular form of oppression can define and fight against it. EPOC is autonomous, meaning only self-identifying people of colour can join. It is conceived of as a “safe space” for people oppressed by the “dominant white culture” in Australia.

EPOC regards those who are not part of the oppressed group, not only as part of the problem, but also as having a stake in perpetuating oppression. So instead of focusing their anger on racist politicians and policies, some EPOC members have declared that Sydney Uni’s established and open campaign group, the Anti-Racism Collective (ARC), to be “racist” and paternalistic.

They have argued that only their group should be able to elect the Ethnic Affairs officer-bearer rather than students democratically elected to the SRC.

Anti-Racism Collective members have held the Ethnic Affairs position for many years, on the basis of consistent campaigning against racism, for refugee rights and against the NT Intervention on campus.

In a clear win for the ARC’s political arguments and student democracy, ARC member Gabrielle Pei Tia Tia won the vote against EPOC candidates in the contest for the Ethnic Affairs officer position in early November.

## Identity politics

EPOC’s ideas, based on identity politics, are not capable of building the anti-racist fight that’s needed.

Since its election, the Coalition has ramped up racist attacks on refugees and asylum seekers with the reintroduction of Temporary Protection Visas (TPVs) and the expansion of offshore detention on Nauru and Manus Island.

But instead of targeting the policies and structures that perpetuate racism, EPOC has focused on a form of consciousness-raising through reading groups about critical race theory and discussing issues like cultural ap-



**Above: Anti-Racism Collective activists marching on the office of Immigration Minister Scott Morrison in October**

propriation amongst themselves. This attitude is informed by white privilege theory.

Influential (white) US author and privilege theorist Frances Kendall argues that, “any of us that has race privilege is by definition racist”.

Others, such as academic Tim Wise, describe racism as so entrenched in the white working class that they largely reproduce racism as if on “autopilot”.

Since a generalised “white culture” is seen as the source of oppression, there is a very internally-focused attitude and emphasis on the behaviour of individuals.

## Racism from above

Focusing on personal behaviour and creating a false equivalence between all manifestations of racism confuses instances of racist behaviour with the root causes of oppression.

No one is born racist; it’s a socially-conditioned behaviour, enforced by society’s most powerful and influential institutions.

We live in a society characterised by gross and systemic inequality of wealth and power.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics

shows that in 2012-13, 20 per cent of households held 60.8 per cent of the net worth. Racism tries to normalise this inequality by directing anger at the victims of government policies. It is used as a divide and rule tactic.

Racism is not in the interests of white workers and students; they are *worse off* when they accept racist ideas. Individual instances of racism on campus or anywhere else can be challenged and racist ideas can be changed.

The Liberals are already trying to misdirect the anger at government cuts and anxiety over job security onto the wrong target. This was crudely on display when the now Liberal Member for Parramatta, Fiona Scott, openly blamed asylum seekers for traffic jams and public hospital overcrowding in Sydney.

The government’s anti-refugee hysteria fosters a general, anti-migrant sentiment in the community. Reports of racist harassment have increased because of that. Monash University’s Social Cohesion report released in October, records a 59 per cent increase in incidents of racial vilification in 2012-13 compared to the previous year.

Similarly, the Islamophobia of recent decades has been consciously pushed to provide justification for imperialist wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and race-hate attacks on Muslims and Arabs have increased.

What’s needed is a political fight against the structures that generate these racist attitudes.

## Building a movement

Brilliant movements against racism in Australian history have united black, white and Asian workers and students to confront government racism: from the campaign against apartheid in South Africa; to the fight for Aboriginal land rights; to the demonstrations that shut down Pauline Hanson and opposed the Cronulla riots.

If these movements had accepted the logic of identity politics, they wouldn’t have had the force they did. This is why it’s important to challenge the idea promoted by EPOC that white anti-racists are the problem and that we shouldn’t unite and fight together to challenge racism.

EPOC’s anti-racism should be directed against Abbott and everything he represents—not the people who are fighting him.

# Charity man Twiggy not as generous as he makes out

By Mark Gillespie

ANDREW “TWIGGY” Forrest and his wife Nicola were all over the national media in mid-October after donating \$65 million to Western Australian universities, Australia’s single largest philanthropic gift.

“The latest and greatest” lauded one news headline. Tony Abbott told the 350 VIPs gathered at the gala function that “Andrew Forrest is serving our country twice” by “building the mines” but also by investing “in the lives of others”.

But a close look at his philanthropic endeavours shows they are more smoke and mirrors than substance.

While \$65 million sounds like an incredible amount, we shouldn’t forget that 46.5 per cent of it is tax deductible—and paid by the taxpayer. Nor should we forget the billions we lost in tax revenue when Labor backed down from its original mining tax. Forrest, along with fellow billionaire Gina Rinehart, was on the front line opposing this tax, costing us \$26.2 billion over a three year period, according to the Parliamentary Budget Office.

When you compare Forrest’s gift with his total wealth, it’s peanuts. Forrest owns a 30 per cent stake in the world’s fourth biggest iron ore producer and Business Review Weekly ranked him in 2013 as the ninth richest Australian with a personal fortune of \$3.66 billion. In just two days following his “generous gift”, thanks to a spike in share values, his fortune increased by \$440 million.

His other philanthropic efforts are equally hollow. Earlier this year he signed up to Bill and Melinda Gates and Warren Buffett’s Giving Pledge where the world’s billionaires, “commit to giving more than half of their wealth to philanthropy or charitable causes” before they die. It sounds good but the billionaires are allowed to “find their own unique ways to give” and the pledge is just a “moral commitment ... not a legal contract”.

These headline grabbing philanthropic projects are more about pushing an ideological agenda and self aggrandizement than about relieving genuine suffering. Philanthropy is held up as an alternative to genuine rights and reform and we’re all expected to get behind big business, our saviour. The donation to the Western



**Above: Andrew “Twiggy” Forrest donated \$65 million to the University of WA, but that’s hardly much effort when he’s worth \$3.66 billion**

Australian universities will be used to establish the “Forrest Foundation” funding scholarships and a “Forrest Hall” for recipients to live in.

## Paternalism

“Ending indigenous disparity” is one of his great projects, its centrepiece GenerationOne, launched in April 2010. This is effectively a campaigning arm for the Australian Employment Covenant, the government’s indigenous employment program. Fifty thousand jobs were going to be delivered to Aboriginal people in two years through big business’s pledges. But a pledge is not the same as actual jobs and in the three years since only 14,000 jobs have been secured. Thirty per cent did not last six months.

Forrest’s attitude is that unless Aboriginal people recognise his jobs in mining and the corporate world as their saviour, they are good-for-nothing bludgers.

His dispute with the Yindjibarndi Aboriginal Corporation (YAC) over royalties from his Solomon Hub mining project on Aboriginal land showed his paternalistic attitude. This project was set to raise \$200 billion over a 30 year period and YAC demanded similar royalties to what other mining companies were paying. Forrest denounced this as “mining welfare” and denigrated the whole community by saying “little Aboriginal girls” in the local town of Roebourne were offering themselves for “the cost of a cigarette” and “I’m not going to encourage, with our cash,

that kind of behaviour”.

Forrest also funded the documentary *The Songs of the Mission* which offers a “different perspective” on the Stolen Generations and features Aboriginal people who had a “positive” experience in the missions.

While the Australian media treat him like he walks on water he has many dubious connections. Both his in-laws were members of the fascist League of Rights. His sister-in-law married a prominent league member who organised a speaking tour of Holocaust denier David Irving.

His business past too is colourful. The Australian Securities and Investments Commission took legal action against him for misleading the market. He eventually won this case in the High Court but not before three federal court judges had found him guilty of misleading and deceptive practices.

In the 1980s he knocked about with a number of corporate fraudsters that ended up in jail. Forrest has written a commendation for one, Rodney Adler, saying he’s “paid a very high price”. In 2005 he attended a dinner organised by convicted fraudster and business lobbyist Brian Burke, along with Kevin Rudd. “Anyone who deals with Mr Brian Burke” railed former Treasurer Peter Costello is “morally and politically compromised.” To say the least.

Twiggy’s is a self-righteous pro-capitalist view of the world, with an absolute faith in people like himself running the show. There’s no reason to be grateful for the crumbs off his table.

## Teachers in NT vote for more strikes to stop cuts

MORE THAN 1800 school teachers in the NT staged a 24-hour strike on 12 November against job losses and cuts estimated to total \$47 million next year.

Twenty nine schools across the territory were shut, with the rest in caretaker mode. Teacher numbers in secondary schools have been cut, increasing class sizes. Another 71 support staff including ESL specialists and school counselors will also lose their jobs.

The cuts will hit remote schools in Aboriginal communities hard, with new staffing allocations to be determined by school attendance, not enrolment. This means less resources for schools that need the funding most.

Six hundred teachers attended a stop work meeting in Darwin during the strike, voting to continue their action with further four hour regional stoppages across the NT.

## Victorian teachers take action against performance pay

THE VICTORIAN Liberal government is set to roll out a form of performance pay for teachers and schools staff.

But teachers want to fight. In October, the Minister for the Teaching Profession Peter Hall told principals that 20-40 per cent of their staff should not be awarded the annual increment rise on the pay scale toward the full teacher salary.

While the Australian Education Union (AEU) is battling the government in court over a “failure to consult about (these) changes”, a group of 30 rank and file AEU members held a speak out at State Parliament on Thursday 7 November.

Angela Nolan, from St Albans Secondary College Sub Branch told the crowd that she feared performance pay would distort the curriculum, as teachers will be pushed to teach to “measurables” for fear of not getting closer to the full salary.

She said, “the focus for teachers will be taken away from these vital aspects of education—that of being a full human being. Of being empathetic, of having a sense of social justice, of having friendship ... Our children will simply become numbers and data.”

More public action will be necessary, as the Liberals are clearly committed to punishing teachers for their own neglect of public schools. The rank-and-file will have to keep pushing the union officials to mobilise the 50,000 members to win this fight.

Lucy Honan

Right: Teachers in Darwin protest schools cuts during their 24-hour strike



## RMIT digs in for more strike action

UNIVERSITY STAFF continue to pay the price of the cuts to higher education imposed by Labor in April and happily supported by the Liberals. Federal funding to universities will fall by 2 per cent in 2014 and 1.25 in 2015, with a total loss to the sector of \$900 million.

The result has been what the national secretary of the National Tertiary Education Union, Grahame McCulloch, describes as “a chilling effect on negotiations”.

The NTEU has reached agreements in the current national round of enterprise bargaining at just seven universities: Curtin, Central Queensland, Edith Cowan, Deakin, Sydney, James Cook and ANU.

At the first three—reached before Labor’s cuts—the pay deal was 4 per cent a year. The other branches have been forced to settle around 3 per cent, which has become the new going rate for the sector.

The NTEU has also lost a staff ballot at Charles Sturt.

Managements at other universities have taken the opportunity to go on the front foot.

At RMIT, in Melbourne, negotiations have dragged on for 15 months, despite a full-day strike, bans on transmitting exam results and shorter stoppages, including a half-day strike on 11 November.

The industrial action has brought RMIT’s pay offer up to 3 per cent, but management is refusing to meet the union’s key claims around a cap on teaching hours and the creation of fellowships (fixed-term roles) for

casual academics.

It is also refusing to acknowledge access to rostered days off in the agreement, in a move that members interpret as meaning existing RDO arrangements would be eradicated sooner rather than later.

In an attempt to break the deadlock, the RMIT NTEU membership imposed bans on reporting exam results in Singapore, where RMIT has 7000 students. RMIT responded to this globalisation of the struggle by sending the marking of Singapore exams to academics at RMIT Vietnam, where unions are banned.

This undermines the Melbourne-based academics who fly to Singapore to teach and who therefore mark the exams.

Three NTEU members stood their ground heroically and refused to hand over the guides to exam marking that staff in Vietnam would need.

But the university took the union to Fair Work Australia and won a three-month suspension of the bans.

The situation is at stalemate. Management cannot go for a staff ballot as the RMIT has one of the highest union densities in the sector. But the NTEU’s action to date has not shifted things far enough in members’ favour.

Members are drawing the conclusion that strike action will need to be stepped up. As *Solidarity* goes to press, they are gearing up to strike again for 24 hours, with the threat of a further strike on graduation day, 18 December.

By an NTEU member

# Miley Cyrus, sexual exploitation and raunch culture



By Jasmine Ali

THE CONTROVERSY over Miley Cyrus's performance at the MTV Video Music Awards showed all the problems with the ongoing objectification of women. Women are still used and abused in the music and entertainment industry. Far from being men's equals in some liberated post-feminist world, women are still treated as sexual objects. And there is nothing to celebrate about this.

On stage Cyrus proceeded to sing and dance to Robin Thicke's *Blurred Lines*, a song that justifies rape; and spanked and simulated a sexual act on her female backup dancers. One later said she felt used and "inhuman" after the performance.

Of course, some simply blamed Cyrus. Conservatives such as those on America's Morning Joe shamed the 20-year-old for acting lasciviously towards ever-so innocent and unsuspecting 36-year-old co-performer, Robin Thicke, husband and father of two. Never mind that it is Thicke's song that trivialises rape by referring to consent as "blurred" and declaring "I know you want it ... the way you grab me ... I'll give you something big enough to tear your ass in two".

**Above: Miley Cyrus discusses her controversial performance on *Ellen***

Others like Joanna Weiss, columnist for *The Boston Globe*, endorsed Cyrus' performance for subverting Thicke's "Blurred Lines" video saying, "she didn't just prance past him or ... allow herself to be pet. She sang with him, teased him, challenged him, and proved herself the bigger star."

Cyrus herself used this argument on Ellen DeGeneres's talk show to reject criticism her performance went too far.

## Sexism and music

But far from encompassing anything progressive, Cyrus's performance was an essentially commercial venture seeking—as Elton John put it while defending her, to "flatten the competition" in the industry and catapult her upwards in the charts.

The same issues of the sexual objectification of women came to light in 2004 as a result of Janet Jackson and Justin Timberlake's performance at the Superbowl. Timberlake ripped Jackson's clothes in order to expose her right nipple on stage. This had the same intention of self-promotion through using women's bodies, and sadly, generated the same success.

Some female artists did highlight the sexism in the music industry in response to Cyrus's performance.

Sinead O'Connor wrote an open letter to Cyrus that pleaded, "The music business doesn't give a sh— about you, or any of us. They will prostitute you for all you are worth, and cleverly make you think it's what YOU wanted ... and when you end up in rehab as a result of being prostituted, 'they' will be sunning themselves on their yachts in Antigua, which they bought by selling your body and you will find yourself very alone."

British singer Charlotte Church similarly described the pressures placed on women in the industry, saying female artists were often, "coerced into sexually demonstrative behaviour in order to hold on to their careers". She recalled being reminded by executives "just whose money was being spent".

## Raunch culture

But how do we explain what motivated Cyrus, and the decision she has made to objectify herself? She seems to take pride in using denigrating images and stereotypes to boost her career.

It's easy to dismiss Cyrus's actions as personal weakness or immaturity. But they are symptomatic of the "raunch culture" described by Ariel Levy in her 2005 book *Female Chauvinist Pigs*. This is a result of the way the gains of the women's liberation movement of the 1970s have been commodified, repackaged and marketed as a form of empowerment.

Some women now believe they are demonstrating empowerment or being funny or ironic by making sex objects of themselves. Levy writes insightfully that now, "plenty of other women are behind the scenes, not just in the front of the cameras, making decisions, making money and hollering, 'we want boobs'."

No one wants to return to the sexually repressive atmosphere of 1950s where women were expected to be housewives, doting slavishly on their husbands, something Tony Abbott would relish. But there is nothing liberating about embracing sexual objectification and trying to call it "empowerment".

The vast majority of working class women have very little power over their lives and suffer as a result of sexual stereotypes that are impossible to measure up to.

We still need to win genuine liberation, and that means challenging the economic and political system that relies on sexism and racism, not embracing it.

# Millions join national strike across Indonesia

By Vivian Honan

OVER TWO million workers struck across Indonesia in late October and early November. The workers want a 50 per cent wage rise as well as healthcare and an end to contract work and outsourcing.

“Long live the workers” rang out throughout the industrial areas as workers shut down production, blocked toll roads and surrounded government offices. A similar strike last year resulted in massive wage increases. In Jakarta the minimum wage was increased by 44 per cent.

Workers in Indonesia face shockingly low wages and are forced to cope with high inflation of over 8 per cent and major price rises.

According to Dhaffa Syahida Yusuf, who works in construction on the industrial island of Batam, “If we hadn’t held a national strike last year our wages might still have been below Rp 2 million [\$190] a month”.

“Since the experience of the 2012 National Strike we are stronger and more united now.”

The national strike this year was preceded by three days of “warm-up” actions in which around 80,000 workers took to the streets.

On the Tuesday thousands of workers in Jakarta surrounded the office of the Governor of Jakarta, Jokowi. Previously incredibly popular, workers are now furious at Jokowi’s refusal to increase workers’ wages as demanded. Jokowi has announced only a 9 per cent wage rise for workers in Jakarta.

“He says he is pro the people and pro the poor, but he is the one that is making the people poor”, said Alang Fatahillah from the union Progresip.

On Wednesday further mass actions took place. Again workers in Jakarta led the way, managing to interrupt the meeting of the council that decides the new minimum wage for Jakarta. The minimum wage is based on a calculated cost of living (KHL).

“The KHL is far below what is needed for a reasonable life”, stated Yusuf.

“If we want to send our children to school it’s expensive and it means we have to rent a place that is small and dirty. If we want to buy a house, we and our families have to starve. And if we want to eat, well then we have to sacrifice our children’s education.



That’s the life of a worker.”

On top of that, a 44 per cent rise in the cost of fuel this year has really hit the working class.

Yusuf explained that, “the cutting of the fuel subsidy has inflicted a real hardship on poor people. It has caused the prices of basic goods to soar.”

## National strike

On Thursday and Friday industrial areas were paralysed as workers stopped production and spilled out of factories to join the strike.

The majority of the workers are on precarious contracts or are outsourced workers, but this has only encouraged them to take action.

Some of the workers have also been fired in recent years because of their union activity, but still joined the strikes. Forty-five-year old Aisah, who used to work in a factory producing picture frames said, “I joined the strike even though I’ve been sacked. I invited all my friends too because I want a better life.”

Despite the success of the 2012 national strike in increasing wages some union confederations were reluctant to support the strike this year.

“Some of the leaders of the major unions like SPSI didn’t want their members to strike but their members did anyway. Some workers even asked us to do ‘sweeping’ at their workplaces so that they could come

**Above: Workers from Tangerang near Jakarta block a road during the strike**  
Photo: FSPMI

join the strike with us”, said Alang. Sweeping is a tactic where striking workers visit other workplaces and sweep through to bring other workers out on strike.

## Repression

However workers’ demonstrations were met with heavy repression. Thousands of thugs hired by employers and the police and army attacked strikers. Dozens of workers had to be taken to hospital. Some are in a critical condition.

At some factories workers were locked out by employers. Qory Dellasera, from the socialist organisation KPO PRP reported that “There were factories that even locked their employees inside the gates and wouldn’t let them out to join the strike.”

On Friday regional governments began announcing the new wages. A presidential decree and pressure from the capitalists has meant that most have not increased wages by more than 10-30 per cent. This has sparked outrage.

At a meeting of union leaders following the strike it was agreed that the workers would return to the streets in coming days to continue the struggle.

Yusuf concluded, “If the demands aren’t met of course we will strike again. We will continue striking and demonstrating until our demands are met”.

.....  
**Industrial areas were paralysed as workers stopped production and spilled out of factories to join the strike**

## Strike against austerity hits education in Spain

By Caitlin Doyle-Markwick



IN LATE October, tens of thousands of students and education workers across Spain went on strike against the latest round of savage cuts and reforms. The “Green Tide”, a growing movement in defence of public education, filled the streets two days in a row chanting “Down with the reforms!” and “More public, less private!”.

The strikes affected all levels of education, from infant to tertiary. The unions estimate that between 60-70 per cent of students and around 80 per cent of staff took part.

Since 2010 education has lost around \$9 billion in funding as a result of austerity, with plans to cut a further \$5.7 billion before 2015.

Around 20,000 teachers have been sacked, with another 60,000 estimated to go. The cuts will also mean longer hours for teachers and a 20 per cent increase in class sizes.

“University life is increasingly difficult, while the education we receive is getting steadily worse...

And some poorer students will just miss out all together,” said Carla Ayala, a student activist at Carlos III in Madrid.

University fees have risen by up to 50 per cent in some places. Around 3500 students at Madrid’s Complutense University alone will be forced to quit their studies as a result of the fee hike. Half of all under 25s are unemployed.

At campuses across the country students occupied buildings, holding assemblies to plan for future actions.

The recently passed reform “Wert’s Law”, after conservative People’s Party Education Minister Jose Ignacio Wert, will make it much more difficult to qualify for university. At the same time, public funds are being diverted to private and Catholic education, while Spanish language education is being pushed in provinces where other languages are spoken. With the university system becoming increasingly elitist and homogenised, unions have argued that the reforms are a throwback to the pre-1975 Franco era.

The Green Tide movement shows no signs of slowing down, with more strikes planned for the coming month. October’s action coincided with strikes in public transport and cleaning services, also under attack from austerity cuts. Some unions have begun calling for a general strike.

## Pakistan enraged by US drone killings

THE UNITED States has again arrogantly defended drone attacks in Pakistan after killing Pakistani Taliban leader Hakimullah Mehsud and five others in an attack in North Waziristan. The strike enraged the Pakistani government, coming just as peace talks between the Pakistani government and the group were set to start.

Pakistan condemned the attack as a violation of its sovereignty. Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan, the interior minister, said, “This is not just the killing of one person, it’s the death of all peace efforts”.

The attack came just weeks after the release of an Amnesty International report condemning the attacks as a violation of international law, and describing some cases as war crimes. It even added that US officials responsible for the secret CIA campaign should stand trial.

The report highlighted cases of civilian deaths like the grandmother killed while picking vegetables, and 18 labourers slain as they waited to eat dinner. An investigation by Human Rights Watch into drone strikes in Yemen has drawn similar conclusions.

Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif had demanded an end to drone

strikes just over a week before in a meeting with the US President in Washington, and campaigned on the issue before his election earlier this year. Opposition leader Imran Khan has threatened to block trucks carrying supplies to NATO troops in Afghanistan if the attacks don’t stop.

Even Malala Yousafzai, a teenager shot by the Taliban, expressed her opposition to drone attacks while being thanked at the White House last month, “for her inspiring and passionate work on behalf of girls’ education in Pakistan”.

She told the gathering that, “Drone attacks are fuelling terrorism. Innocent victims are killed in these acts, and they lead to resentment among the Pakistani people. If we refocus efforts on education it will make a big impact.”

But the US, determined to maintain its place at the top of the imperialist world order, sees the drones as an indispensable part of its 21<sup>st</sup> century war machine.

In her book in her book *Drone warfare: Killing by remote control*, Medea Benjamin notes that, “In 2000, the Pentagon had fewer than 50 aerial drones; 10 years later, it had nearly 7500.”

**Mark Goudkamp**

**Above: Students take to the streets in Madrid as part of the strike**

# SEXISM AND THE MYTH OF MALE BENEFITS

The resurgence of feminist organising has led to renewed debate about who benefits from sexism, and who has an interest in fighting it, writes **Amy Thomas**

AFTER DECADES of backlash against the gains of the women’s liberation movement of the 1960s and 70s, there has recently been a resurgence of activism across the world to challenge sexism.

This exciting “new feminism” has sparked discussion and debate, particularly over the role of working class men in the fight against sexism.

Historically, international socialists like Solidarity have challenged “patriarchy theory”—the idea that society is fundamentally divided along gender lines and that all men form part of the power structure that keeps women oppressed.

We argue that sexism is rooted in the structures of capitalism. While many men hold sexist ideas, working class men do not in fact benefit from sexism—it is a weapon used by the capitalist class to get free domestic labour and to keep the working class divided and under control.

But in a speech and article, “Marxism, Feminism and Women’s Liberation”, Sharon Smith of the US International Socialist Organisation (ISO) has argued that international socialists need to abandon the argument that men do not benefit from sexism. Smith says that such an argument underplays the seriousness of women’s oppression.

Unfortunately, Smith evades the question of whether men do benefit—a dangerous fudge to make when fundamental arguments are raging about how to struggle for women’s liberation.

More confident to clearly break with the international socialists position is Richard Seymour, who recently split from the Socialist Workers Party in Britain. Seymour has embraced the concept of “male privilege”, which has gained currency recently as a way to argue that all men have a stake in the maintenance of sexism.

The argument that men “benefit” from sexism or possess male privilege has a resonance because it speaks to people’s experience. Many women

**Sexism is reproduced by all the institutions of capitalist society**

have experiences of men being the perpetrators of sexist objectification or abuse. But sexism is much more than this—and it’s obvious that women, too, are also subject to sexist conditioning.

But we must go deeper to grasp the root of women’s oppression. As Karl Marx famously said, “the ruling ideas in society are the ideas of the ruling class.”

Sexism is the institutionalised discrimination against women and is reproduced by all the institutions of capitalist society—parliament, police, the courts, religion, the media.

They create all the sexist poison that permeates every aspect of society from the “it’s a boy” or “it’s a girl” moment. Think of Julia Gillard’s opposition to same-sex marriage, the discrimination against women in the judicial system, or the rampant sexism in the military, police force and sport. Advertisers exploit sex to sell everything; phoney science declares women’s “inferiority” is biologically determined, while women’s magazines photoshop images and suggest worth is based on lack of cellulite and men’s magazines objectify women on the basis of breast size.

This is the transmission belt for the sexism that women experience and that indoctrinates both men and women into sexist ideas.

The white picket fence, and heterosexual nuclear family ideal means childcare and domestic labour is performed at no cost to the bosses or the state.

Sexist ideas can make it more difficult to mobilise men, but male workers do not benefit from women’s oppression. In fact they have an interest in fighting against it. If men are seen by the women’s movement as the enemy, the movement will be less able to confront the system responsible for the violence and misery of sexism.

## Domestic labour

This is not a position shared by many feminist thinkers. Patriarchy theorists

such as Heidi Hartmann have argued that men benefit from women’s oppression because of women’s domestic labour in the home.

Women still do the majority of domestic labour in the home. Research from the Australian Institute of Family Studies earlier this year found women spend almost twice as much time on housework and childcare as men.

The 2006 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) housework survey, which describes housework as “providing goods and services that would otherwise have to be paid for”, estimates that unpaid domestic labour is worth up to half of GDP.

But housework is primarily about raising children—the system’s next generation of workers. Even the care of men that results from women’s domestic labour is about servicing capitalism’s need for healthy workers.

The ABS housework survey also shows that adults, both men and women, spend an average of 50 hours a week, either at work or doing housework. Both men and women are devoting their lives to serving the needs of the system. Former Labor Prime Minister Kevin Rudd called the family “the incubator of social and economic capital.”

Women are pushed into taking primary responsibility for domestic labour by unequal wages, lack of childcare and society’s sexist expectations, not by individual men.

As Lindsey German has argued, “The family under capitalism is dominated by the needs of social production. Its role is straightforward: to maintain the existing generation and, more crucially, to reproduce the next generation of workers. The reproduction of labour power is the central role of the family, and women’s role in society is subordinated to that.”

Of course, socialists argue for men to do their share of domestic labour, but the solution to women’s oppression is not simply a matter of equality of domestic slavery, but how to abol-



ish domestic slavery altogether.

This is why socialists have always argued that to free women from the burden imposed by the family, domestic labour must be socialised, there must be free childcare, public laundries and communal kitchens.

We have to fight for crucial reforms now—like full benefits for single parents, workplace childcare, adequate parental leave, and full abortion rights.

Male workers also have an interest in fighting for these things. Working class women need to fight together with men to abolish the double burden and win equality for all.

### Equal pay

The same goes for fighting for equal pay for women. Because men earn more than women, some draw the conclusion that this must come at women's expense.

Research by the National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling at Canberra University shows that since 1990, the gender wage gap has actually increased over the past decade, from 15.1 per cent in February 2005 to 17.5 currently. They estimate that over a lifetime, this could result in an average earnings deficit of \$1 million to \$1.5 million.

But working class men don't get pay rises because the pay of women workers is held down—in fact the opposite is the case. And couples lose out from the gender pay gap. It diminishes the whole family's overall income and weakens the overall battle for better wages for both men and women. The people laughing all the way to the bank are not male workers, but the CEOs and managers.

In practice, the union struggle for equal pay in Australia has been won by working class women and men fighting together.

As the Russian revolutionary Alexandra Kollontai put it in her classic text, *The Social Basis of the Woman Question*: "The working woman is first and foremost a member of the working class, and the more satisfactory the position and the general welfare of each member of the proletarian family, the greater the benefit in the long run to the whole of the working class ..."

"The woman and her male comrade are enslaved by the same social conditions; the same hated chains of capitalism oppress their will and deprive them of the joys and charms of life. It is true that several specific aspects of the contemporary system



**Above: Support from male workers and trade unionists has strengthened the fight for equal pay for women**

lie with double weight upon women, as it is also true that the conditions of hired labour sometimes turn working women into competitors and rivals to men. But in these unfavourable situations, the working class knows who is guilty."

### Power

Some people argue that men have a stake in women's oppression because it supposedly gives them power over women. They point to the horror of domestic violence, the objectification of women or rape to argue that all men have a power over women that they have an interest in maintaining.

But this is a manifestation of sexism, not its root cause. Only a minority of men inflict violence against women; most men abhor it. Men are also responsible for the majority of violence against other men. Suicide is the leading cause of death for young men in Australia. This is not a description of a ruling group in a position of power and control.

Like women, men are demeaned, dehumanised and insulted at work, and have no say in how the world works.

Men too are constricted by the image of the macho male they're supposed to fit into. It is the powerless-

ness and alienation generated by the system that can lead a minority of men to act out in horrific ways. There is no "benefit" in this tragedy.

### Ideas change

In a world full of sexism, men will adopt sexist ideas and there must be a battle against sexist behaviour and ideas wherever they manifest. Leon Trotsky was right when he said that, "In order to change the conditions of life we must learn to see them through the eyes of women."

Understanding that "men don't benefit" does not diminish the recognition or the seriousness of confronting women's oppression.

In the strongest years of the women's liberation movement in the 1970s, women and men united together in strikes over equal pay; Builders Labourers went on strike for women's studies; male workers walked off for abortion rights. Women and men fought together against the war in Vietnam and for Aboriginal rights.

Understanding that men can be won to the fight for women's liberation is crucial to both fighting for immediate reforms and ultimately to fight, once and for all, to end the system that produces the horrors of sexism.

# THE MARIKANA MASSACRE AND SOUTH AFRICA SINCE APARTHEID

The end of Apartheid has not delivered change for South Africa's black working class, but Marikana showed the new divide in the country, writes **Lucy Honan**

ON THE morning of 27 April 1994, black people in South Africa, oppressed for decades, lined up to vote for the first time. Millions queued across the country, savouring their victory over apartheid and voting for Nelson Mandela's African National Congress (ANC). It pledged to deliver "peace, jobs and freedom" and carried the hopes of millions who had struggled for so long to bring fundamental change to South Africa.

But a year ago, on 16 August 2012, South Africa witnessed the Marikana Massacre, when police opened fire on striking workers at South Africa's Lonmin platinum mine, killing 34 and injuring more than 80. The massacre has exposed the stark realities of South Africa since the end of Apartheid.

The details of the calculated police brutality at Marikana are shockingly reminiscent of Apartheid-era South Africa. Mortuary vans were ordered for the morning of the massacre; police penned peaceful, retreating strikers into their line of fire, and hunted down those who escaped.

Despite police efforts to cover their tracks, there is no hiding the fact that the ANC government, trade union officials and the Lonmin mine owners collaborated in this massacre. The blood on their hands makes it plain that those who were once leaders of the anti-apartheid movement are no longer on the side of freedom and justice for black South Africa. They are now maintaining a system of inequality, poverty and violence barely distinguishable from Apartheid.

The courage and self-activity of the Marikana workers has inspired mineworkers and others across South Africa to take the reins of their own struggle.

## Entrenched inequality

The Marikana strikers' six-week battle for a wage rise starkly revealed how the ANC has spent the 19 years since the end of Apartheid ruling in the interests of capital at the expense of the mainly black working class.

The strikers' demand for a liveable wage highlighted the huge gap be-

## The details of the calculated police brutality at Marikana are shockingly reminiscent of Apartheid-era South Africa

tween the wages of mine workers and their bosses. Platinum mine bosses earn 230 times the average wage of a miner. The top three Lonmin executives together earned as much as that of all of their workers.

Not only have mine owners kept their workers impoverished; the ruling ANC has done nothing to redistribute the wealth of mining companies and the mega-rich. While the total worth of South Africa's mineral reserves is estimated at \$2.5 trillion, the mine workers still live in shanty towns without proper housing, sanitation, clean running water or electricity.

Where once the ANC called for nationalisation of the economy under its 1955 Freedom Charter, now it drives through neo-liberal policies such as privatisation of public services including water, electricity and housing. The results are regular disconnections and evictions as workers cannot afford to pay the escalating prices.

## Class collaboration

Tragically, the ANC's commitment to profiteering companies was structured into the very foundation of the post-Apartheid Government of National Unity. Strikes, mass actions, protests, and soldiers' mutinies convinced the South African ruling class that unless they made substantial concessions to the anti-Apartheid movement there would be a revolution.

But in negotiations for the new constitution in the early 1990s, Nelson Mandela from the ANC and Joe Slovo from the South African Communist Party (SACP) bent over backwards to welcome business to the table. Mandela stressed the need to restore business confidence and attract foreign investment. The very first act of the interim government was to accept an \$850 million loan from the International Monetary Fund, whose secret conditions included lower import tariffs, cuts in state spending and large cuts in public sector wages.

While making the capitalists like Lonmin who profited so much from

the legalised racism of apartheid feel comfortable, the ANC had to reassure the black working class that harmony between the classes that would bring a delayed equality. De-racialising capitalism wouldn't bring prosperity all at once, Mandela said, but it would eventually happen.

Certainly, GDP grew steadily until 2008. Platinum mine owners are still turning enormous profits, white South Africans are as rich as ever, and a black elite has joined the ranks of the rich and powerful. But unemployment rates are now higher than they were in 1994. At an official average of 25 per cent, South Africa's unemployment rate is one of the highest in the world. Fifty per cent of young black workers are unemployed.

Those who controlled the economy under Apartheid had zero interest in empowering and raising the living standards of the black working class—it was madness to hope they would.

## ANC does Lonmin dirty work

So tightly has the ANC tied itself to the interests of big business that when the Lonmin workers showed they were willing to fight, the ANC never hesitated to play the same violent role as the Nationalist Party had under apartheid.

Cyril Ramaphosa, once a leader of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) and a true hero of the struggle against Apartheid, but who now owns of 23 per cent of Lonmin and 100 per cent of McDonald's South Africa, encouraged the ANC government to brutally attack.

The day before the massacre, he wrote to the Minister of Mines, Susan Shabangu, "The state should bring to bear on this crucial sector of the economy using resources at its disposal to resolutely bring the situation under control. The police and the army presence needs to be planned." The minister agreed, and went on to brief President Jacob Zuma.

Lonmin provided the police with a headquarters, and banks of monitors to watch the strikers, as well as medical services and detention facilities on the



**Above: Marikana workers on a march marking one year since the massacre**

day. The ANC government provided 800 police armed with water cannon, grenades, helicopters, armoured cars and the notorious R-5 rifles—a lethal military weapon which fires 600 rounds a minute. Working hand in glove, Lonmin and the ANC government set out to kill the miners who dared to stand up to them.

### Union leaders

But the ANC's betrayal was not the first the Marikana miners suffered. Despicably, the NUM leadership itself did everything it could to crush the strike from the outset.

The NUM was once the powerhouse of the struggle against Apartheid. Twenty-five years ago, the same Cyril Ramaphosa who last August called for the slaughter of the Marikana miners led the NUM in a key strike against the Apartheid regime.

But Cosatu (the main trade union federation) formed part of the "revolutionary alliance" which, alongside the ANC and the SACP, sealed the deal with the white regime.

In return for welcoming big business into post-Apartheid South Africa, Cosatu and its affiliate unions, including the NUM, would have access to protected strikes and centralised bargaining.

The Marikana strike was organised independently of the NUM,

although many of the workers involved, including 11 of the workers killed, were members. Workers were frustrated that the union wouldn't push hard enough for their demands. In fact, the NUM has restrained its membership so tightly that workers have started calling it the National Union of Management.

The Marikana strikers' frustration burst through the NUM's restraint. However, when the wildcat strikers would not return to work, the NUM worked with Lonmin bosses to break the strike. "You provide the transport, we'll provide the workers," wrote a full-time branch secretary to Lonmin Human Resources.

When 3000 miners marched to the NUM offices on 11 August, just days prior to the massacre, 20 or 30 union officials opened fire on them. Two miners were shot in the back and seriously injured as they fled. NUM lawyer Karel Tip was quite happy to tell the inquiry into the massacre: "A confrontation ensued between the marchers and a number of NUM members during which firearms were discharged ... [the] NUM will in due course lead evidence that in the circumstances the use of firearms by NUM members was justified."

The NUM leadership, like the ANC and Lonmin itself, are terrified of the potential power of the black

working class. But their resort to naked violence backfired. The Marikana workers, despite the murder of their comrades, went on to win a 22 per cent pay rise.

There is much more to be won. The Marikana workers have shown the way out of the post-Apartheid muzzle of the ANC. Inspired—and angry—hundreds of thousands of South African workers have been following the example of the Marikana miners, fighting to win the kind of freedom promised by the end of Apartheid.

Gold miners, textile workers, retail workers at petrol stations, technical and construction workers have all staged strikes in recent weeks, organising independently, and in new unions like Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU).

The massacre made it brutally clear that the end of Apartheid has not brought an end to exploitation.

A recent UN report found that 1.4 million children live in homes with no clean drinking water, and 1.7 million live in shacks, with no proper bedding, cooking or washing facilities.

The massive struggle that brought down Apartheid now has to be focussed on the struggle against capitalism itself. As the struggle against the Apartheid showed, the decisive factor is the self-activity of the working class, something which is on the rise.

# WEST PAPUA AUSTRALIAN COMPLICITY AND THE FIGHT FOR FREEDOM

Australian support for repression in West Papua is driven by vested interests, says **Tom Orsag**

The demand for independence in West Papua hit the headlines briefly in October as West Papuan activists briefly occupied the Australian consulate in Bali. Meanwhile the Australian government deported seven West Papuans who arrived here requesting asylum. This followed the arrival of the “Freedom flotilla” in West Papua in September, defying threats from the Indonesian military to complete its 5000 kilometre journey from Australia.

Indonesia seized West Papua by force in the 1960s. Its people’s ongoing struggle for independence deserves our support.

The three West Papuans who occupied had a letter calling on the Australian government to request the release of 55 West Papuan political prisoners from Indonesian jails, including Filep Karma, jailed for 15 years for raising the West Papuan flag in 2004. Indonesia has made the flying of the Morning Star flag of West Papuan independence a criminal offence.

Tony Abbott dismissed the protest at the Australian consulate as “grand standing” and reiterated his support for the “territorial integrity” of Indonesia and its control over West Papua.

Abbott’s complicity over West Papua is a sordid continuation of the long held policy of both Labor and Liberal governments. It is estimated the Indonesian military has killed 500,000 people in West Papua since the 1960s. In one massacre at Biak in 1998, 200 people were first gunned down and then their bodies dumped at sea. As recently as 2011 images of the torture of independence activists appeared in the international media.

Abbott declared that the situation there is getting “better, not worse”. But protests for independence continue to be brutally suppressed by the military, with arrests, beatings and killings commonplace. In May demonstrations making 50 years of Indonesian occupation were attacked

by the authorities, with three people shot dead. Demonstrations in October were again broken up by force.

## Colonial legacy

West Papua’s position inside Indonesia is a product of the European colonial carve up of the area. West Papua comprises the western half of the island of New Guinea, formerly controlled by the Dutch as part of the Netherlands East Indies. But unlike the rest of Indonesia its population is ethnically Melanesian, as is the eastern half of the island, formerly an Australian colony and now independent Papua New Guinea.

Indonesia won its independence in December 1949, following a successful national war of liberation against the Dutch.

The Dutch retained control of West Papua until 1961 when Indonesia, claiming all of the territory of the former Dutch colony, launched an invasion.

UN mediation led to an agreement that Indonesia would carry out a referendum to determine West Papua’s status, eventually held in 1969. This allowed West Papua to be integrated into Indonesia and was cynically referred to as the “Act of Choice”.

The vote is widely regarded as a sham. Just 1025 handpicked supporters of Indonesian rule took part. The vote was by a show of hands in the presence of the Indonesian military.

Indonesia wanted West Papua for a number of reasons: to expand its territory enabling more transmigration from crowded Java; to tighten its grip of sea lanes running through the archipelago and for its natural resources.

Following the take over, the Indonesian government has carried out what has been called a “slow motion genocide”. Papuans made up 96 per cent of the population in 1971. But following the government-sponsored migration of hundreds of thousands

## The Indonesian government has carried out what has been called a “slow motion genocide”

of Indonesians from Java, University of Sydney academic Jim Elsmilie estimates that Papuans make up just 50 per cent of the population today. This will decline further over time if the policy continues.

## Australian complicity

Until 1962, the Australian government’s favoured West Papua remaining under Dutch control, consistent with its own colonial control of Papua New Guinea. After pressure from the US and UK governments, however, Australia shifted, remaining firmly against independence but now supporting West Papua’s incorporation into Indonesia. External Affairs Minister Garfield Barwick wrote that an independent West Papua would be a “standing provocation” to Indonesia, and a strong relationship with Indonesia was more important than allowing it self-determination.

On the eve of the farcical “Act of Free Choice” two West Papuan activists crossed in then Australian-controlled Papua New Guinea, carrying testimony from West Papuan leaders calling for independence. Australian authorities prevented them from travelling to the UN, detaining them on Manus Island, the site of the present refugee detention centre.

Australian government policy has been driven by a determination to place economic and strategic interests above all else. This has meant an unbending disinterest in the human rights and lives of West Papuans.

Two-way trade between Australia and Indonesia grew from \$8.5 billion 2005 to \$14.6 billion in 2012.

Direct Australian investment there totalled \$5.4 billion in 2011. This includes Rio Tinto’s 15 per cent stake in Freeport’s Grasberg mine in West Papua.

Indonesia’s geo-political and strategic importance to the Australian ruling class is even greater.

Indonesia straddles the sea routes

between the Indian and Pacific Oceans. World shipping, both trade and naval, passes through the Malacca and Sunda Straits.

In the late 1990s, Peter Hartcher wrote in the *Financial Review* that, “Forty per cent of all world shipping passes through the archipelago [of Indonesia] ... A sixth of all Australian trade passes through those Indonesian straits.”

Both the United States, as the world’s sole military superpower, and Australia, as the regional military power, perceive an interest in keeping the islands of the Indonesian archipelago under the tight control of the political and military establishment in Jakarta. This ensures maximum “stability” for both economic and geopolitical interests in the region.

Any threats to the unity of the Indonesian state—such as the secessionist movements in West Papua or Aceh—are perceived as threats to this “stability”. They worry an independent West Papua would be a micro-nation open to “outside influence” from other world powers. This is something that Australia’s rulers are determined to avoid so close to home.

Therefore they have done everything they can to support Indonesia’s control over its archipelago, and oppose independence movements.

This complicity has extended to direct military support for the repression carried out by the Indonesian military.

There have been reports in the last year that Detachment 88, an Indonesian army unit that has received extensive training from the Australian Federal Police, is involved in torture and extra-judicial killings in West Papua.

Australian supplied military helicopters were used in the 1970s to carry out indiscriminate shootings and napalm bombing, according to a report released last month by the Asian Human Rights Commission.

In November 2006, the Howard Government signed a new security treaty with Jakarta. As the *Melbourne Age* reported at the time, “At the core of the treaty is a commitment from Australia never again to intervene in Indonesia’s internal affairs or undermine its territorial integrity.” This includes any support for moves towards West Papuan independence.

The treaty also made it harder for West Papuans seeking political asylum to settle in Australia.

The grant of asylum to 43 West Papuans who arrived in Australia in



**Above: Protests for West Papuan independence are regularly broken up by police**

February 2006 angered the Indonesian government. By including references to asylum seekers in the new treaty, the Howard government hoped to make the case of the 43 the last of its kind.

The 2006 treaty formalised renewed links between the Australian SAS and Indonesia’s Special Forces—Kopassus. The SAS had

previously helped train Kopassus, only to see them used to terrorise the East Timorese in the lead-up to their independence in 1999.

Tony Abbott says he will “do everything that we possibly can to discourage and prevent” West Papuans assisting the independence movement from inside Australia. We have to make sure he fails.

## Deadly spear of ‘development’: Freeport’s Grasberg mine

TWO YEARS before the formal decision on West Papua’s future, Indonesian dictator General Suharto signed a contract with US mining company Freeport to establish a mine at Ertsberg, on the largest above ground copper deposit ever discovered. Later Freeport set up another mine at Grasberg, today the world’s largest gold mine and the third-largest copper mine, with reserves worth an estimated \$50 billion. The mine remains the largest single taxpayer to the Indonesian government.

Like all copper mines it produces huge amounts of waste. This has simply been dumped, severely impacting nearby rainforest. Local rivers are now unsuitable for aquatic life.

In 2006, Freeport chairman James Moffatt’s pay package was worth \$US47 million and CEO Richard Adkerson made \$US36.1 million.

Moffatt believes the company is bringing civilisation to the people of West Papua. In 1995, he told *The Nation* magazine, “We are thrusting a spear of economic development into the heartland of Irian Jaya ... This not a job for us, it’s a religion.”

The mine is situated at the top of a 4700 metre high mountain range, which the company has hewn down by 1200 metres. As a result landslides are common.

In 2003, Freeport was forced to admit that it paid the Indonesian military to harass local Papuan landowners.

*The New York Times* reported that company records showed the total amount paid between 1998 and 2004 was nearly \$US20 million. During the three month strike from September 2011, Indonesian police admitted they were paid “pocket money” by Freeport. They had shot and killed five miners.

One “noteworthy” Freeport board member was Henry Kissinger, former US Secretary of State and war criminal. As President Nixon’s national security adviser, in July 1969, he wrote, “You should tell [Suharto] that we understand the problems they face in West Irian.”

As Secretary of State he agreed to Indonesia’s invasion of East Timor in December 1975. He was the company’s main lobbyist for dealings with Indonesia until 1995.

# THE 1913 DUBLIN LOCKOUT A MODEL OF FIGHTING UNIONISM

One hundred years on **Phil Chilton** argues that the Dublin lockout was a model of effective, militant unionism—but it also showed the problem of the union bureaucracy

IN AUGUST 1913 Dublin tram drivers abandoned their trams in the street after their employer, William Martin Murphy, sacked union members and declared war on the Irish Transport and General Workers Union. The Dublin Lockout, as the dispute that developed became known, eventually involved 25,000 workers.

It was the most important industrial struggle in Irish history and a high point of the militant syndicalist unionism of the early years of the twentieth century. One hundred years later it still provides important lessons for those who continue to fight what Irish socialist James Connolly called the “fierce beast of capital”.

The Irish Transport and General Workers Union (ITGWU) was led by Jim Larkin. Larkin was a union leader who had learnt the value of organisation and solidarity among workers through bitter experience. In 1905 he had been swept up in the Liverpool docks strike. That strike was defeated when scab workers were brought in and saw Larkin sacked as a ringleader.

He was taken on by the National Union of Dock Labourers (NUDL) as an organiser for the ports of Scotland and Ireland. In 1907 he brought Belfast dockers out on strike, and stymied the employers’ hopes of using scab labour to break the strike by persuading carters not to cross the picket lines. Employers might be able to use scabs to unload the ships but without the carters they could not get the cargo off the docks.

The 1907 dispute saw unprecedented working class unity on the streets of Belfast—a city known for its sectarian division between Catholic and Protestant. When attempts were made to shift cargo hundreds of Protestant shipyard workers reinforced the mainly Catholic picket lines. Eventually even the police mutinied and refused to continue to escort scab cart

drivers. Troops were sent into Belfast and in fierce clashes two men were shot dead.

The strike was finally broken not by the employers or the army but by the intervention of the NUDL’s general secretary, James Sexton. Sexton convinced carters into returning to work with a pay rise. The dockers were isolated and doomed to defeat.

Larkin’s militant tactics had won the support of rank-and-file workers, but alarmed the conservative trade union leaders. Larkin was removed as organiser for the NUDL but he had already acted to form a new fighting union—the Irish Transport and General Workers Union.

## Syndicalism

The ITGWU was informed by syndicalism, a form of revolutionary unionism that swept France, Spain, the US and Australia in the early years of the twentieth century. Its great strength was its commitment to militant unionism, through bold tactics and a willingness to take strike action.

Larkin saw the ITGWU as an effort to build “one big union” that would organise Irish workers across industry lines in a challenge to capitalism as whole.

His aim was to organise the entire Irish working class, in order to declare a general strike that would seize control of the workplaces from the employers and bring the working class to power.

James Connolly, the renowned Irish socialist and the ITGWU organiser in Belfast, shared Larkin’s syndicalist politics. During time spent in the US Connolly had become involved with the syndicalist Industrial Workers of the World.

Connolly recognised in the idea of industrial unionism the power, “to transform the dry detail work of trade union organisation into the

.....  
**Militant tactics—solidarity strikes and the “blacking” of goods tainted by scab labour—earned significant improvements**

constructive work of revolutionary Socialism”. For Connolly every fresh shop or factory organised under the banner of industrial unionism was, “a fort wrenched from the control of the capitalist class and manned with the soldiers of the revolution to be held by them for the workers.”

The ITGWU aimed to organise Ireland’s large unskilled workforce and it grew quickly from 4000 members in 1910 to 22,000 by 1912. Larkin’s militant tactics—solidarity strikes and the “blacking” of goods tainted by scab labour—earned significant improvements for Ireland’s most exploited workers. In so doing, however, the ITGWU raised the hackles of some of Ireland’s most powerful capitalists. William Martin Murphy, newspaper baron and Dublin United Tramways Company (DUTC) owner, one of Ireland’s richest men, was prominent among them.

## The Lockout

In August 1913 Murphy demanded that workers in the dispatch office of his Irish Independent newspaper drop their ITGWU membership. Forty workers were immediately sacked for refusing to do so. Two days later he sacked 200 tram workers for the same reason.

By September the Employers Federation had joined Murphy in his battle against the ITGWU. Employers across Dublin initiated a general lockout of 25,000 workers to try and smash the union.

The Lockout of 1913 was bitterly fought. Trams that tried to operate during the lockout were attacked with stones by striking workers. In one such incident a scab tram driver drew a revolver to force his tram through against an angry crowd: William Martin Murphy had ensured that “loyal” employees had been issued with licenses for firearms.

Violence between workers and the

police was rife. Larkin announced he would address an open air meeting in O'Connell St (Dublin's main thoroughfare) on Sunday 31 August. The meeting was banned, but in defiance James Connolly, Larkin's chief lieutenant during the dispute, suggested to a mass meeting that on the day people might choose to take a stroll down O'Connell Street to see if a meeting was being held there or not. For his suggestion Connolly was arrested for incitement.

On the day of the banned meeting Larkin appeared on the balcony of the Imperial Hotel on O'Connell Street—an establishment owned by William Martin Murphy. As bystanders and sympathisers began to cheer the police attacked. A witness described them as, “the most brutal constabulary ever let loose on a peaceful assembly ... kicking the victims when prostrate was a settled part of the police programme”.

This became known as “Bloody Sunday” (one of four in Irish history). Over that weekend police beat three working class men to death: John Byrne, James Nolan and James Carey. Police broke into people's homes, ransacking them and assaulting residents. John McDonagh, who was paralysed and confined to his bed, was beaten so badly that he died later in hospital.

The Lockout was a life and death class struggle and there was no doubt as to which side the police were on.

### Solidarity action

Larkin and Connolly understood that without solidarity action from unions in Britain to ban Irish goods the strike would be lost.

Many workers in Britain quite rightly recognised the attack on Irish workers as an attack on their own rights. Thousands of British railway workers stopped work in solidarity. Food ships sponsored by the British Trade Union Congress (TUC) steamed into Dublin port to feed the strikers and their families.

The militancy of the ITGWU was politically awkward for the British trade union leadership. They hoped to broker a negotiated settlement to the dispute, even if that meant capitulating to the Dublin employers. The employers, however, refused to compromise, demanding the complete destruction of the ITGWU.

In November Larkin travelled to Britain to build support for the strike, in what became known as the “Fiery Cross Crusade”. Larkin spoke to thousands of workers; at a meeting of 4000 people in Manchester's Free Trade Hall (with some 20,000 more



**Above: Jim Larkin addresses the crowd on O'Connell street in Dublin**

outside), Larkin declared that he was “out for revolution or nothing”.

British workers, he said, had “sent money and moral assistance” but now they had to help “get the scabs out of Dublin”. British workers were roused but their trade union leaders were alarmed.

The Trade Union Congress (TUC) called a special conference to discuss the Dublin dispute. It was stacked with conservative full-time union officials. Even worse, some union delegates known to be sympathetic to Larkin were denied accreditation.

The conference proceeded to censure Larkin for his attacks on the trade union leadership. The proposal for solidarity action through banning goods on rail and sea from Dublin was overwhelmingly defeated.

The conservatism of the full-time union officials, a product of their distinct position as mediators between capital and labour, saw defeat snatched from the jaws of victory.

In the aftermath Connolly commented acerbically: “the Dublin fight was sacrificed in the interests of sectional officialism ... Irish workers must go down into Hell, bow our backs to the lash of the slave driver ... and ... eat the dust of defeat and betrayal. Dublin is isolated.”

By January Dublin workers were forced by deprivation to return to

work. Connolly described the Lockout as “a drawn battle” but the ITGWU had been badly mauled during the dispute and it would take some years to rebuild the union's capacity for industrial action.

The Dublin Lockout's centenary is celebrated this year by the likes of the Irish nationalist party Sinn Féin. The Lockout was not, however, a nationalist struggle; it was a class struggle of Irish and British workers pitted against employers. William Martin Murphy himself identified as a nationalist and championed it in his newspaper.

This is part of the lesson of the Dublin Lockout. When populist millionaire politicians like Clive Palmer claim to be “uniting the nation” we should recall the nationalism of William Martin Murphy as he tried to starve Irish workers into submission.

The Dublin Lockout was defeated not because of the ITGWU's militancy but because its actions were not supported by the more conciliatory trade union leaders of the British TUC. British and Irish workers were willing to fight, their leaders were not.

This problem is all too familiar in the union movement today. In 2013, with an Abbott government poised to launch its own attack on the living conditions of working people, we can learn from the courage and militancy shown by Irish workers.

# One of 20th century's greatest crimes: Inside Indonesia's anti-Communist purge

**The Act of Killing**  
Directed by Joshua Oppenheimer  
Coming soon to DVD

TODAY RIGHT-WING vigilantes in Indonesia can still openly boast about murdering “Communists”.

Last month the *Jakarta Post* reported an attack in Yogyakarta by the Indonesian Anti-Communist Front (FAKI) against relatives of victims of the 1965 anti-Communist purges.

The founder of the Yogyakarta FAKI branch declared, “[The families of the victims] are also Communists. It is legal for us to kill them, just like when we killed members of the PKI in the past.”

This is a sign of the impunity enjoyed by the killers, and of the continuing status of the anti-Communist purges even after almost 50 years.

While Joshua Oppenheimer's documentary, *The Act of Killing*, has not been publicly shown in Indonesian cinemas, it has reopened debate in Indonesia about the history of the Indonesian left and the tragic fate of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI).

In 1965 the PKI was widely believed to be on the threshold of power. At the time of its destruction the PKI boasted a membership of three million, the largest Communist party outside Russia and China. Membership of affiliated organisations numbered up to 20 million and the PKI's trade union federation, SOBSI, was Indonesia's largest.

But at the height of its strength the military, and allied civilian militias given carte-blanc for murder, slaughtered up to

two million PKI members, ethnic Chinese and alleged sympathisers.

The pretext for the killings was the assassination on the night of 30 September 1965 of six army generals by the Thirtieth of September Movement, a group of disaffected junior army officers with links to the PKI. The movement's troops took over parts of Jakarta, including national radio and announced that they intended to protect President Sukarno from a coup plot by right-wing army generals.

However they were swiftly crushed by a campaign headed by a surviving army commander, Major General Suharto. He blamed the PKI for the murders of the generals and proceeded to launch one of the bloodiest crackdowns of the 20th century.

This slaughter was the baptism of the Suharto regime (1966-98). Its chief claim to legitimacy was that it had “saved” the country from “Communist treachery” and it continued to warn of the “latent danger of the PKI” right up to its overthrow in 1998.

In the decades following the killings, anyone who criticised the Suharto dictatorship (also known as the New Order), organised in unions or advocated for social justice lived in fear of being labelled a “Communist.”

New Order propaganda lionised the army and other perpetrators as heroes and peddled myths about the bloodlust of Communists and the supposedly barbaric murder and mutilation of the generals.

*The Act of Killing*

**The military, and allied civilian militias given carte-blanc for murder, slaughtered up to two million PKI members**

returns the focus to the callousness of the Communists' persecutors.

**The murderers speak**  
One of the murderers is the protagonist in the documentary, Anwar Congo, a gangster and member of Pancasila Youth, one of the army-sponsored paramilitary organisations that carried out the killings.

The film is remarkable for its intimate examination of the perpetrators, and their candidness in explaining their part in the bloodshed. Anwar retraces his steps in 1965 and gloats about his role as executioner, complete with graphic demonstrations of his preferred killing methods.

The film reveals important links between the killers of the Communists and Indonesia's current ruling elite.

It shows Anwar and other killers hobnobbing with the Governor of North Sumatra, who praises them for their role in exterminating Communism. Later they are treated like celebrities on a TV talk show.

Astonishing footage shows former Vice President Jusuf Kalla groveling to a Pancasila Youth audience, telling them, “We need gangsters to get things done.”

As the documentary descends into a surreal cinematic re-enactment of the massacres—with the killers directing—the film over-indulges the killers as they face their inner demons, with Anwar showing repentance but still insisting what he did was necessary.

But it shows little of the political context of high tensions that characterised the period under

President Sukarno. Worse, this omission can portray the killings as just spontaneous slaughter, reinforcing the orientalist view of Indonesian barbarism.

Indeed, at the time many commentators downplayed the central role of the military in fomenting the violence, resorting to racist stereotypes about Indonesians, “emotionally and psychologically ready to run amok.”

But to understand the brutality of the crackdown we need to look at its roots in the tensions and dashed hopes that emerged in post-colonial Indonesia.

**Independent Indonesia**  
Indonesian nationalist leader and first president Sukarno declared independence from the Dutch on 17 August 1945.

After four years of war, the Dutch finally recognised Indonesia's independence in 1949. The early 1950s were a time of radical hope as the Indonesian masses emerged from fighting the Dutch, mobilised and radicalised.

As Benedict Anderson wrote, it was, “a kind of permanent round-the-clock politics in which mass organisations competed with each other at every conceivable kind of level without there being any real resolution.”

But, formal independence wasn't all the Indonesian masses had fought and died for: Impoverished by colonialism, they expected independence should bring tangible changes to their daily lives. But by 1953, 70 per cent of estates in Java and Sumatra had returned to foreign control and unemployment remained high.

The PKI were well



placed to capitalise on this resentment at the fruits of independence. In the 1955 general elections the PKI polled fourth with 16.4 per cent of the vote, and in local elections two years later in Central Java they were the most popular party.

At the same time however, the army, was also consolidating as a locus of national power for Indonesia's emerging ruling class.

The army had always felt it deserved a political role in the affairs of the nation due to its part in the war of independence. The military's role in Indonesian national life was strengthened with the declaration of martial law from 1957 to 1963, as regional rebellions—backed by the US—broke out in several locations across the archipelago.

Sukarno's radical rhetoric against Dutch and US imperialism emboldened workers into occupying their foreign-owned workplaces in 1957-58, resulting in their nationalisation.

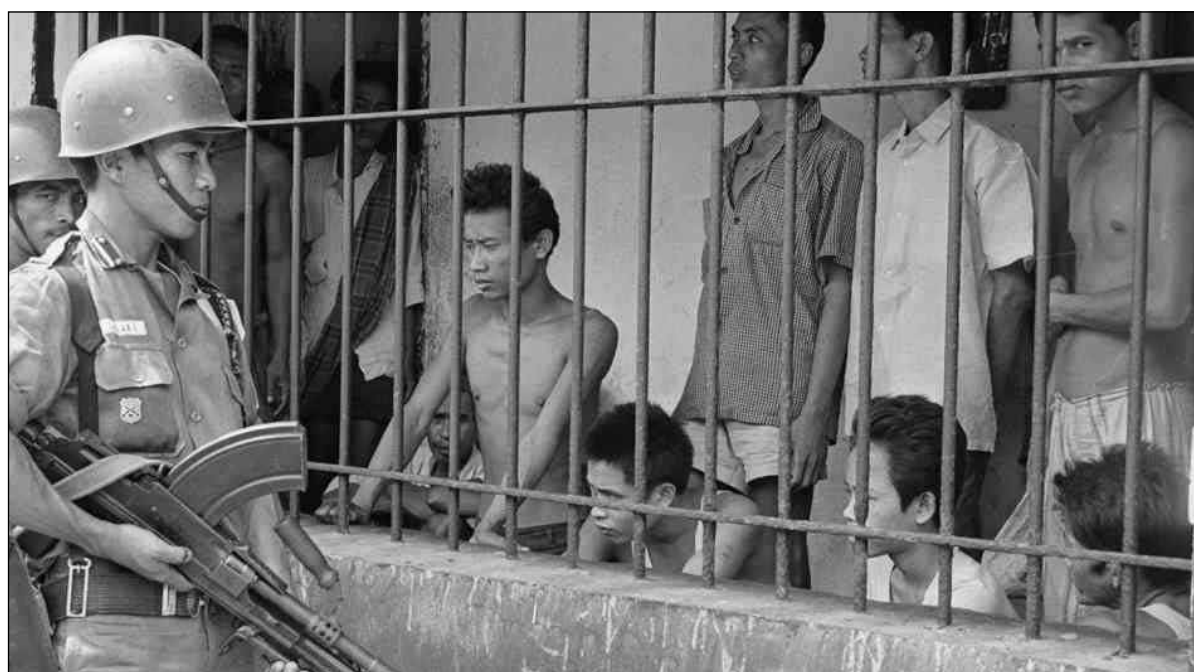
The unintended consequence was that the foreign managers were replaced by Indonesian military managers.

The army's political role was now supplemented by a strengthened economic position. The failure of Indonesian workers to maintain control over their workplaces once they had occupied them would tragically come back to haunt them.

### “Guided Democracy”, misguided strategy

Independent Indonesia was a nation in turmoil. Due to the weakness and fragmentation of the Indonesian bourgeoisie after centuries of colonialism, no coherent national agenda could be formulated.

In less than seven years six different cabinets passed through govern-



**Above: Communist Party members being held in jail in Tangerang near Jakarta in 1965**

ment, while secessionist movements under the influence of different sections of the elite threatened disintegration of the new nation. Sukarno became the glue that kept the state together.

Partly in response to this dysfunction, and in part due to his growing delusions of grandeur, in 1959 Sukarno introduced what he called “Guided Democracy”, dissolved parliament, suspended elections and appointed a hand picked “consultative congress.” The PKI didn't raise any objection to this.

Sukarno, while generally supportive of the PKI, tended to position himself above partisan disputes. He mediated between the military on one side, and the Communists on the other. Meanwhile the PKI lined up uncritically behind Sukarno. For Sukarno, without any power base of his own, the PKI were an important counterweight to the army.

From 1960 the PKI increasingly placed their emphasis on Sukarno's notion of NASAKOM (acronym of Nationalism, Religion and Communism), which would entail greater inclusion of the PKI in government.

The PKI grew rapidly over the Guided Democracy period. Its campaigns against rampant corruption, for distribution of land to the peasants, for worker involvement in the management of state enterprises, and for wage increases and price controls in a period of hyperinflation struck a chord with the Indonesian poor.

A land reform law had been introduced in 1960, but little had changed in practice. Then from 1963-1964 drought and a rat plague depleted the rice harvest, resulting in mass starvation across Java, Bali and South Sumatra. Peasants deserted their empty rice paddies and seized land elsewhere.

In rural areas from 1963 the PKI advocated “unilateral actions” against large plantations and farms to enforce the land reform law—often against Muslim landlords. (Later in 1965 the landlords would exact bloody revenge for the peasants' audacity. Indeed conservative Muslim militias were key perpetrators of the massacres.)

From 1963-65 PKI workers seized British, American and other Western enterprises and

plantations in response to the British role in the establishment of Malaysia and American meddling in Vietnam—again with the army stepping in to manage them!

In early 1965, Sukarno and the PKI began advocating the formation of a Fifth Armed Force—arming workers and peasants—to rival the military's monopoly on arms. Rumours about a shipment of arms from China circulated.

Then in August 1965 Sukarno's health took a turn for the worse, triggering speculation on who would succeed him. In the months leading up to September 30 the masses mobilised in increasing numbers for price controls and land distribution. Events were swiftly heading towards a showdown with the army and landlord class.

### Bloodbath

In these volatile conditions it only took a spark to set off a raging inferno. The botched coup provided it. Few bloodbaths in history can rival that which befell the Indonesian Communist Party from 1965-66.

*Time* magazine witnessed this horrific scene

in late 1966:

“The murder campaign became so brazen in parts of rural East Java that Moslem [sic] bands placed the heads of victims on poles and paraded them through villages. The killings have been on such a scale that the disposal of the corpses has created a serious sanitation problem in East Java and Northern Sumatra where the humid air bears the reek of decaying flesh. Travellers from those areas tell of small rivers and streams that have been literally clogged with bodies.”

The bulk of Indonesia’s most militant unionists and activists were murdered, along with virtually the entire leadership of the PKI.

PKI leaders offered no guidance to their millions of members on how to resist the slaughter. They had so utterly subordinated themselves to Sukarno that when the army removed him, the PKI was defenceless.

## Dictatorship

Suharto seized complete control and by March 1966 had consolidated his dictatorial power.

The ruling classes of the West delighted in this extermination of the Communist threat. Australian Prime Minister Harold Holt remarked casually at the time that, “With 500,000 to 1 million Communist sympathisers knocked off, I think it is safe to assume a reorientation has taken place.”

The US actively encouraged complete annihilation of the PKI in order to ensure that “reorientation” was absolute.

They weren’t disappointed. The killings aimed to break completely the organisation and morale of the masses. Under the “New Order” that followed the masses were denied any political participation, as any degree of

politicisation of the people was deemed dangerous.

## Lessons

How did it go so terribly wrong? Crucially, the PKI’s aim wasn’t the masses taking power by their own efforts and with their own institutions of grassroots democracy, but rather taking a greater share of power within the Indonesian capitalist state.

According to PKI Chairman Aidit, the state was of a dual nature, with a “pro-people” aspect and an “anti-people” aspect. The PKI followed Sukarno in calling for a “retooling” of the state apparatus to tilt the balance in favour of the “pro-people” elements. In effect, this resulted in the complete subordination of class struggle to maintaining an alliance with Sukarno.

Only after the catastrophe of 1965 did the remnants of the PKI see the error of this “two aspect theory” of the state. In 1966 they wrote: “According to this ‘two-aspect theory’ a miracle could happen in Indonesia. Namely the state could cease to be an instrument of the ruling oppressor classes to subjugate other classes, but could be made the instrument shared by both the oppressor classes and the oppressed classes. And the fundamental change in state power ... could be peacefully accomplished by developing the ‘pro-people’ aspect and gradually liquidating the ‘anti-people’ aspect.”

Alas, this correction of their “top-down” approach came too late.

This muddled analysis stemmed from the PKI’s embrace of the Stalinist two-stage theory of revolution which dictated that the coming revolution could not go beyond the bourgeois-democratic stage, and that a socialist revolution was not possible in the immediate future.



This meant that the PKI viewed the aim of the revolution as bringing the national bourgeoisie to power.

Aidit spelled this out: “The revolutionary forces in Indonesia are composed of all classes and groups suffering from imperialist and feudal oppression. They are the proletariat (the working class), the peasants, the petty bourgeoisie, the national bourgeoisie and other democrats. They must be united in an anti-imperialist and anti-feudal national united front based on the worker-peasant alliance and led by the working class.”

Despite lip service to working class leadership, holding together a coalition with the “national bourgeoisie” came at the expense of worker and peasant demands like workers’ control of the factories and land reform which would harm its better off “allies.” This meant holding back the only force that could build socialism: the working class leading the peasant masses.

Academic Rex Mortimer described a PKI report to a party congress where, “The entire emphasis ... was on the self-abnegating role of the

**Above: The ongoing glorification of the killers by the establishment is shown by Anwar’s appearance on a TV chat show**

workers and their political responsibilities toward other classes and the nation as a whole”.

They identified Sukarno as the embodiment of this “national bourgeoisie”. So when the counter-revolution swung into full force, and Sukarno was unable to stem the slaughter, their mass membership was disarmed. The PKI made no attempt to organise strikes or demonstrations to resist the crackdown.

*The Act of Killing* reveals the challenges that the current generation of Indonesian activists face in overcoming the defeat of 1965. Pancasila Youth, the militia Anwar was a member of during the killings, still harasses Indonesian workers’

demonstrations today, with the backing of employers and the authorities. In fact, scores of striking workers were severely injured in clashes with Pancasila Youth during the Indonesian national strike this month.

Adi, another of the perpetrators in the film, responded to inquiries about the morality of his acts with these words: “War crimes are defined by the winners. I’m a winner. So I can make my own definitions.”

This film creates space to reveal the bloody history of Indonesia’s ruling class and the way anti-Communism has been used to sustain their rule. It can also give a boost to current activists’ understanding of the PKI’s failed strategy of capturing state power.

With the Indonesia workers’ movement again on the rise, the struggle for a genuine socialism-from-below is back on the agenda.

**Lachlan Marshall**

Further reading: John Roosa, *Pretext for Mass Murder* Rex Mortimer, *Indonesian Communism under Sukarno*

## Legally Brown—not much to laugh at

**Legally Brown**  
SBS One  
ABC 2, Wednesdays  
at 9.30pm

NAZEEM HUSSAIN made his mark as part of the *Fear of a Brown Planet* duo with Aamer Rahman, exposing the absurdity of John Howard and Liberals' "war on terror" after 9/11 and the racism that went hand in glove with it. After enjoying success with the show, Hussain's new project *Legally Brown* on SBS will have viewers expecting the same cutting political messages as his previous comic venture. But the show is disappointing.

On debut, Hussein issues a warning to those "expecting funny accents, jokes about the weird foods we eat and stories about my wacky ethnic parents" and assures us this will be avoided in *Legally Brown*. Hussain is acutely aware of the way that ethnic minorities are constantly made the butt of jokes in mainstream comedy and television shows. Yet almost immediately after this statement of purpose, Hussain proceeds to imitate his mother's ethnic voice, and her advice for him to take her goat curry. This is unsurprisingly met with uproarious laughter.

After three episodes of the show, Muslims and migrants have woefully been the punch line of most jokes. Of particular note are Hussein's caricatures of ethnic people as explosive, unhinged, difficult personalities, who create social disharmony wherever they go. Whether it's in the workplace, where a man with "Indian Tourette's" breaks out into uncontrollable Bollywood-styled dancing (which is just offensive) or the "Prince of Mumbai" who tries speed dating and flips out, to name just two. These are general themes



with Hussein's ethnic characters, who far from challenging stereotypes, reinforce them.

This is not to say all the skits in the show have these problematic themes. There are some small exceptions. For example, Hussain's sketch where he dresses up as non-white celebrities including Sachin Tendulkar or will.i.am to sign autographs is an unmasking of stereotypes. It makes fun of the absurdity of the dominant views in our society that assume migrant and ethnic people are homogenous, rather than distinct individuals.

This skit also shows that racist ideas are not held simply held by "white people", and that members of other ethnic groupings are also vulnerable to making the same assumptions. Still, they leave the question of who is responsible up in the air. Is it the "bogan" backward ideas of working class people in the suburbs or a reflection of deeper systemic racism

in our society that benefits those at the top?

Hussein's confusion on this question means that the most controversial issues, like the question of people smuggling, is left in dangerous, ambiguous territory. The skit opens with a survey stating that a majority of Australians are opposed to people smugglers and believe they are evil people. The skit portrays a people smuggler who visits different storage companies attempting to unload a cargo of refugees from his truck. Yet at the end of the skit we are left wondering what the point is and waiting for any attempt to demystify an argument that has been the lynchpin of anti-refugee racism.

### Isn't it ironic?

Waleed Aly, a columnist in *The Age*, has celebrated *Legally Brown* as an achievement, saying that it's "not all one-way traffic" and Hussein's character Uncle Sam, is dynamic (like the show), because

"Everyone's a target". For Aly, Uncle Sam not only exposes ignorant views about Islam, but is "putting the radical, conspiratorial Muslims ... back in the box". Uncle Sam developed as a response to the racist anti-Muslim campaign to stop the Islamic school being built in Sydney's Camden in 2008 and exposed the ideas of racist bigots and government fear-mongering equating all Muslims as terrorists.

But surely it's obvious that racism is not directed at "everyone"? More importantly, the radical Islamism that Aly wants to put in a box is a response, albeit a flawed response, to fighting racism, whereas anti-Muslim racism is about maintaining Western and US interventions and occupations in the Middle East. Treating them as equivalents is a grave mistake.

Aly aside, the limitations of Hussain's subversion are painfully displayed when Uncle

Sam discusses the issue of same-sex marriage. In this skit the only thing that's exposed is Uncle Sam's own ignorance about same-sex marriage and transgender issues, rather than the government's own bigotry and unwillingness to pass same-sex marriage. As a consequence what is reinforced are stereotypes about Islam and Muslims being reactionary on issues of gender and sexuality, the kind of ideas that have been the backbone of the virulent anti-Muslim ideology.

So if you're going to watch *Legally Brown* set your sights low. It lacks either sharp political wit or clarity and, too often, wanders into the reinforcing racial stereotypes rather than challenging them.

It's a comic recipe that will guarantee cheap laughs, but is inadequately short of offering relief or humour from racism in Australia today.

**Jasmine Ali**

# LIBERALS SLASH WHILE AUSTRALIA BURNS



By James Supple

THE BUSHFIRE season began shockingly early this year. This is exactly what climate scientists are telling us to expect as the climate warms.

And now in another devastating climate tragedy, 10,000 people have been killed by Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines.

Yet Abbott and the Liberals tried to shut down discussion about climate change and weather, declaring attempts to link the NSW fires and climate change, “politicising human tragedy”. Yet Abbott was quite happy to make mileage himself, gratuitously courting media attention for his volunteer firefighting.

The link between climate change and bushfires is undeniable. The world is already warming: the Bureau of Meteorology says the year to the end of October was the hottest on record. Professor Will Steffen, one of Australia’s leading climate scientists explained that, “the likelihood of extreme fire weather has gone up over the last three decades or so. The bushfire season has also lengthened at both ends.”

## Cutbacks

Governments should be boosting spending to deal with this reality.

Yet as the fires destroyed over 200 homes in the Blue Mountains, the NSW government was cutting firefighters’ jobs and resources by imposing cuts on the Rural Fire Service (RFS).

In January RFS Association President Brian McKinlay slammed the budget cuts, declaring that, “Governments cut emergency services at their peril”. The NSW Auditor-General revealed that the RFS budget was cut from \$307 million to \$287 million in 2011-12.

McKinlay has explained that, “What it means is infrastructure items such as tankers and capital equipment and control centre [construction] hasn’t proceeded as in previous years.”

There are more cuts to come. Both the Rural Fire Service and Fire and Rescue in metropolitan areas face cuts to jobs and wages. The bulk of the RFS are already volunteer firefighters who take time off work to face fire emergencies. This means many are retirees, with a third of Queensland’s volunteers aged over 55. Cutting the few full-time staff will leave it even less equipped to fight fires.

The RFS has been told to reduce its wages bill by \$12 million over the next four years—at a likely cost of 120 jobs.

As Fire Brigade Employees Union NSW Secretary Jim Casey told *Solidarity*, “The cuts escalate over a four year period. They will end up being an 8 per cent reduction in the wages budget.”

“At current levels of cuts management are meeting targets by temporary closure of fire stations when they are short staffed. At some point in 2015/2016 it will mean permanent job losses.

“The problem is not so much

this fire season, but the next and ones after that. Once jobs go and stations close their doors permanently these resources won’t be available. Less fire engines available means delayed response. This means we get to working jobs later than we otherwise would expect to, which makes the fireground exponentially more dangerous for both us and the community.”

## Abbott’s fire sale

But the state government is not the only one pinching pennies. Abbott’s federal government tightened the rules for disaster recovery payments to people affected by the fires, denying people cut off from their homes or without power and water for extended periods any payment.

There was further embarrassment for the government when it was revealed that the army had started the fire near Lithgow, the largest fire among dozens in the state that week, which destroyed at least seven homes and burnt for more than a week.

The army confirmed that a training exercise involving the detonation of explosives had started the blaze.

It has emerged that the military are serial offenders. The same week a live-fire exercise in Queensland sparked a grass fire on the Sunshine coast. On the Saturday before smoke bombs and simulated explosives started a fire at an army training base near Port Augusta in South Australia, burning for three square kilometers.

On climate change, as on properly funding the bushfire response, our governments’ heads are in the sand.

Both the Rural Fire Service and Fire and Rescue in metropolitan areas face cuts to jobs and wages

**Solidarity**