

# Solidarity

Issue No. 63 January 2013

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**HOLDEN,  
MEDICARE,  
BOAT TURN BACKS**

**ABBOTT DECLARES WAR  
ON REFUGEES AND THE POOR**



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## EMAIL

[solidarity@solidarity.net.au](mailto:solidarity@solidarity.net.au)

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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.

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**Historical materialism: Marx's theory of history**

7pm Thursday 30 January  
**Corporatising black Australia: Abbott's agenda and the unfinished business of the NT Intervention**

with Paddy Gibson, Associate Producer, *Utopia*  
Ray Jackson, Indigenous Social Justice Association

7pm Thursday 6 February  
**Sectarianism and imperialism in the Middle East today**

7pm Thursday 13 February  
**Film screening: *Utopia* extras**

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 11 February  
**Corporatising black Australia: the NT Intervention and Abbott's unfinished business**

Paddy Gibson, Associate Producer, *Utopia*  
Celeste Liddle, Indigenous Organiser, NTEU

Melbourne Solidarity meets 6pm every Tuesday, Second floor Union House, Melbourne Uni

For more information contact:  
Chris on 0403 103 183  
[melbourne@solidarity.net.au](mailto:melbourne@solidarity.net.au)

### Perth

For more information contact:  
Phil on 0423 696 312

### Brisbane

For more information contact:  
Mark on 07 3123 8585 or  
[brisbane@solidarity.net.au](mailto:brisbane@solidarity.net.au)

### Canberra

For more information contact:  
Geraldine on 0458 039 596

### Magazine office

Phone 02 9211 2600

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# Same-sex marriage anger turning on Abbott



By Amy Thomas

TONY ABBOTT and the Coalition should have been celebrating a victory when the High Court overturned the Australian Capital Territory's same-sex marriage legislation in December 2013.

Liberal Attorney-General George Brandis had launched the challenge to the laws. But their attempt to stick with a minority position against same-sex marriage is not doing the Coalition any favours.

If anything, the High Court ruling has only added to the pressure building on the government to pass federal

same-sex marriage legislation and support a conscience vote. Though the High Court struck down the ACT laws, claiming the ACT did not have the power to legislate over marriage, they confirmed that the federal government certainly does have the power to extend marriage to same-sex couples—meaning the focus of anger is now back on Abbott and the Coalition.

The government's defence of their court challenge relied on a weak justification about conflicting state and federal laws, rather than what they knew would be an unpopular conservative crusade to defend "traditional marriage". This now makes them even

**Above: Supporters of marriage equality take their message to Abbott at his Manly electorate office**

more vulnerable to the argument that the federal law should be changed.

The pressure is building from all directions. In a symbolic defeat for the government, the five-day gap between the ACT laws passing and the High Court decision gave a window for over two dozen same-sex marriages. Images of exactly what Abbott didn't want—same-sex couples celebrating their relationships—were broadcast all over the country.

Compounding Abbott's problems is the possibility of another attempt at same-sex marriage legislation in Western Australia, designed not to conflict with federal laws.

On top of that are the emerging divisions in the Coalition. The WA Liberals are supporting a conscience vote in their state. Arch conservatives in the Liberals like Senator Cory Bernardi, who rails against same-sex marriage (again) in his new book, *The Conservative Revolution*, are only confirming how far the Coalition's fringe bigotry is from majority public opinion.

Abbott is openly opposed by Coalition members, including Malcolm Turnbull, and the candidate for the Griffith by-election, Dr Bill Glasson.

A December 2013 Galaxy poll show 64 per cent support same-sex marriage and 75 per cent believe the reform is inevitable. A majority of Christians, 53 per cent, support it. Remarkably, 76 per cent of Coalition voters support a conscience vote—in direct conflict with Abbott's view.

After former leaders of Labor Rudd and Gillard both opposed same-sex marriage and a conscience vote in power, allowing for the defeat of same-sex marriage, a majority of Labor, including leader Bill Shorten, now support it. (Shamefully, however, the votes of Labor MPs, including Left MP Luke Foley, tipped the balance against NSW same-sex marriage legislation in November 2013).

Abbott has so far stuck with opposing same-sex marriage and binding Coalition MPs to vote against it. There are two main reasons: the importance of conservative ideas about heterosexual marriage and family responsibility; and his desire to curry favour with conservative organisations like the Australian Christian Lobby.

But Abbott and the Coalition have long lost the argument and now cannot bury the issue. They may have won the ACT battle, but the campaign for marriage equality could ensure they lose the war.

## Things they say

**Ariel Sharon embodied fearless leadership through trying times and spent his life serving Israel and its people. In his final years as Prime Minister, Sharon made great strides in the Israel-Palestine peace process**  
Federal Deputy Opposition Leader Tanya Plibersek, eulogises a war criminal

**I'm sure in years to come people will look back on history and say, yep, remember global warming ... we're still going.**

Ian MacDonald, a Liberal National Party Senator in Queensland, isn't worried

**Governments' job is to make it easier for good businesses to do**

**their best ... Everything we have done over the past three months has been to make it easier.**

Tony Abbott to the Business Council's 30th anniversary dinner

**Why have a Human Rights Commission at all? It's just another \$30 million haven for leftists, no matter who's the boss.**

Miranda Devine is opposed to Tim Wilson's appointment, too

**"Like I told the guys, 'You are leaving here today but there's plenty more to do around the world.'"**

Major General Craig Orme, on the day that Australian troops withdrew from Oruzgan, Afghanistan

# EDITORIAL

## Outrage and anger shows Abbott can be fought

INCREDIBLY, JUST months after he came to power, both Newspoll and Nielsen polls revealed in December that Abbott has slumped to a position where he would now lose an election. The government has over-reached on a whole number of issues.

Its performance in the polls is the worst for any government so soon after an election in 40 years, according to pollster John Stirton.

There is already a widespread disgust and hatred for Abbott that can be mobilised into fighting his agenda. Over 140,000 people signed a petition within days to protest the refusal of a partner visa for gay Pakistani man Ali Choudry in January.

Education Minister Chris Pyne was forced into an embarrassing backdown after he announced plans to scrap the schools funding formula the Coalition had pledged to keep at the election.

The government's public attacks on Holden in the days before it announced its closure showed their contempt for the jobs of Holden workers. But sadly the widespread sympathy that could have supported a fight for jobs was squandered by the union leaders (see p10).

Abbott has effectively declared war on asylum seeker boats, with reports of the navy firing shots and towing boats back to Indonesia. This is a high stakes policy which risks the loss of lives and shows the government's desperate fear that it might not be able to "stop the boats" as it has promised.

### Preparing for cuts

It is clear the Liberals are trying to prepare the ground for cuts. So far Abbott has been cautious, ruling out ideas such as privatising Australia Post and HECS debts when they surfaced. But when the idea for a \$6 fee for Medicare bulk-billed visits to the GP was raised, the government refused to rule it out.

This episode has the fingerprints of the Liberal Party all over it. The idea came from former Liberal Party adviser Terry Barnes, in a submission to the government's Commission of Audit. While the government has not yet said it will implement the fee, Health Minister Peter Dutton responded by saying that Medicare spending was "unsustainable" and there was a need to cut costs.

Abbott is trying to engineer a barrage of propaganda in the media about supposed government over-spending.



Treasurer Joe Hockey has said he wants to start "a national conversation about how we can live within our means" and declared that "the government is spending too much money".

He used his mid-year economic statement in December to talk up the size of the deficit. While the deficit has grown from \$30 to \$47 billion since the election, \$10.3 billion of this is because of the Liberals' own decisions. And at the same time as Hockey talks up the need to cut spending, the Treasury Department wants more spending on economic stimulus to avoid a recession.

So in all likelihood, Hockey's cuts will be about shifting money around to advance the Liberals' ideological agendas—like user pays and privatisation along with spending on infrastructure on big business' wish list.

The Medicare fee is a prime example. It would hit the poorest in society the hardest, and further undermine the principle of a free, universal health system. The Liberals have long hated the public health system, pushing people into private health insurance by introducing the private health rebate under John Howard, and insisting that user-pays is the only way to expand the health system.

But Abbott and the Liberals know they have no mandate for cuts from the election. They even agreed to match Labor's NDIS spending and its new schools funding formula for the first four years. So they are worried about

**Above: The plan for a new Medicare co-payment fee must be fought to send a message to Abbott that he will not easily get away with new cuts**

how much they can get away with.

Large protests to demand they rule out the Medicare fee plan will force the government to rethink their attacks. In Sydney 400 turned out to a save Medicare rally with just days notice on 4 January.

We need to use the period in the lead up the budget in May, when their final plans will be revealed, to build up activist networks capable of fighting whatever cuts the Liberals come up with. Mobilising union members will be particularly important—the unions put hundreds of thousands on the streets to oppose WorkChoices under Howard. But getting this response required a fight inside the union movement. Much of the union leadership had to be pushed into calling demonstrations.

The rallies that have already been called to defend Medicare around the country are a good start. They can be used to both defend the public health system and to combat the Liberals' ideological offensive about the need for cuts.

If they are large they will build momentum and pressure for a broader union response.

With their attacks on refugees central to the Liberals' agenda, we also need to keep opposition to their fortress Australia policies prominent. As they face more and more problems both turning around boats and in the detention centres, a campaign capable of seizing on the opportunities to turn public opinion around will be key.

**There is already a widespread disgust and hatred for Abbott that can be mobilised into fighting his agenda**

# Abbott has the unions in his sights



By Mark Gillespie

TONY ABBOTT deliberately portrayed himself as an industrial relations moderate before the election. But he is no moderate. His aim was to undercut any fear campaign from Labor and the unions of a pending industrial relations nightmare with a return of the Liberals' Workchoices legislation.

While so far Abbott hasn't been confident to bring back Workchoices, at every chance he's trying to undermine workplace rights and the union organisation that defends those rights.

On the second day of the new parliament he passed laws re-establishing the Howard-era anti-union Australian Building and Construction Commission (ABCC), an inspectorate with special powers designed to go after militant construction unions.

Under the ABCC, construction workers were treated like suspects under anti-terror laws, denied the right to silence and forced to front secret interrogation sessions. They had no right to chose their own lawyer or to reveal to anyone afterwards what they were questioned about. If they refused to cooperate, they faced a six month jail sentence.

The ABCC's aim was to make the unions ineffective by imposing massive fines and damages. The interrogations were used to get evidence of so called "illegal" strike activity.

Abbott has not only restored the ABCC but extended its powers:

- The building industry is now more broadly defined to include off site prefabrication, offshore oil and gas platforms, and transport of materials to building sites, making the Transport Workers Union and the Maritime Union of Australia potential targets.
- The definition of picket lines has been extended with the onus of proof now falling on unionists to prove they weren't acting as the ABCC allege.
- Employers access to the courts to stop industrial action has been sped up, fines have been increased, compensation claims for damages will be uncapped and unions will also be hit with more court costs.

While Labor and the Greens will block the bill in the Senate until July, Abbott is looking for different ways to go after the construction unions in the meantime. One is beefing up the Fair Work Building Industry Inspectorate (FWBII), Labor's replacement for the ABCC.

He has already appointed Nigel Hadgkiss, the former head of the ABCC, as FWBII head. Hadgkiss is an ex-cop connected to the far right HR Nicholls society. For over two years he pursued ordinary rank and file unionist, Ark Tribe, threatening him with jail for non-cooperation.

Employers complained that the FWBII was a "toothless tiger". But it maintained the power to interrogate construction workers with the threat of jail and its former head, Leigh

**Above: Unions take to the streets against the ABCC under Labor**

Johns, bragged to employers that the Inspectorate was "investigating more unlawful industrial action and coercion matters than in the past".

## Anti-union commission

This is not the only front Abbott is attacking on. During the election he promised an judicial inquiry into the AWU and its slush fund. This has been dramatically widened into a Royal Commission targeting the whole union movement and it is expected the commissioner will be given wide powers to interrogate union officials and no doubt some Labor MPs.

It is clearly a union bashing exercise that will be used to justify further attacks. Abbott has done this before. In 2001 while Workplace Relations Minister he established the Cole Royal Commission into alleged criminal activity in the building industry. Over \$60 million was spent yet no evidence of organised crime was found. Yet 87 per cent of the Commission's recommendations were directed against union activity and included the establishment of the ABCC.

There is no doubt that unions have to defend themselves: the question is how?

Traditionally they've had a two pronged approach. On the job they've continued to organise by finding creative ways to duck and weave around the full thrust of the law, while at the legislative level they campaigned for the re-election of a Labor government and relied on them to make more favorable laws.

This approach has failed. The unions' 2007 "Your rights at work" campaign succeeded in sweeping Labor to power, but Labor squandered that support by continuing to serve the big end of town. Workchoices faced only mild changes while the ABCC lived on in all but name.

Unions continued to pay millions in fines for unlawful industrial activity under Labor. This is set to get worse.

Last time around, the construction unions campaigned to support unionists Noel Washington and Ark Tribe, who both faced prosecution for refusing to co-operate with the ABCC. On both occasions, the Commission dropped the cases. The ACTU too has now pledged to support any worker prosecuted for non-compliance.

A campaign of mass defiance against the ABCC, including industrial action whenever it steps on site or tries to interrogate a unionist, is the way to make the body inoperable—not putting our hopes into re-electing Labor.

# Blacktown shows how to beat the Liberals



By Matthew Meagher

A CAMPAIGN by unionists and the Blacktown community has scored a victory. Plans to sell off Blacktown City Council's 24 child care centres were derailed, following protests by parents and child care workers, when three Liberal Councillors crossed the floor to support a motion to continue providing the services late last year.

Up to 200 unionists and members of the Blacktown community attended a town hall meeting hosted by the United Services Union on December 2 to protest further cutbacks and closures to services by Blacktown City Council.

Council sittings in the week following the December protest meeting slashed the number of houses the Council had proposed to acquire for development from 488 to 27.

But members of the community remain concerned. The Liberal Mayor, Len Robinson, has commissioned a report into the "viability" of council-run child care centres and the closure of centres could be revisited as early as February. In addition the Mayor has closed Mt Druitt Swimming Pool, axed a pensioner rebate on council rates and plans to "rezone" private homes for future parkland, while selling existing parks to developers.

Residents' anger is palpable. One woman in the meeting demanded to know, "Blacktown Council is the richest in NSW and the fifth richest in Australia, it is sitting on a \$137 mil-

lion surplus, so what's your excuse?"

The Mayor had received a petition with 2200 Blacktown residents' signatures urging him to attend the December 2 meeting to hear their concerns. He refused. Only one Liberal councillor turned up.

The meeting heard from United Services Union (USU) officials, Labor councillors, Unions NSW Secretary Mark Lennon, NSW Opposition Leader and Member for Blacktown John Robertson, representatives from various community groups and Liberal councillor Walter Smith.

Unionists and community members spoke passionately of the high regard they have for the council-run child care alongside a deep distrust of plans for privatisation. Raffaele Catanzariti, a USU delegate, told the crowd that, "when you privatise social services everybody knows the quality deteriorates ... Our children shouldn't be seen as a commodity".

One woman described how important childcare was to her ability to work, and worried that a privatised service would reduce services for infants and children with disabilities, and mean shorter hours. "The child care workers are wonderful, they raised my children with me," she explained.

The sudden closure of Mount Druitt Swimming Pool has been met with disbelief and outrage. The pool provided one of the only ways for people to escape the heat in summer and hosted all the local school swimming carnivals. A former pool worker

Above: Blacktown residents at a Town Hall meeting

passionately described the importance of the free learn-to-swim classes the pool provided.

In 2012 the Liberals won control of the council for the first time since 1989, in what is a traditional Labor heartland. Labor councillors spoke of the Liberals' "radical agenda for privatisation" and repeated, to hearty applause, that it would take "people power" to stop them.

Labor Councillors have since won a motion in Council that could help save the pool. The motion called on the Council "to stop the rezoning process, keep the land for recreation and engage the University of Western Sydney to develop plans and options to make Mount Druitt swimming pool viable and able to be re-opened for the 2014/2015 summer".

Blacktown is showing how to fight the Liberals' cuts and privatisation agenda—and the kind of action needed to stop Tony Abbott.

## The Liberals lie: we can afford Medicare

THE LIBERALS claim that healthcare costs are rising so fast that they will be "unsustainable" without cutbacks. But this is only because they want to reduce taxes on corporations and the rich. Australia's tax take compared to our economy's wealth is low by international standards—25.6 per cent compared to the average of 33.8 per cent in 2010 among the OECD rich club of nations.

The Liberals' solution to funding healthcare is to force people to pay more through private providers. This ends up costing more overall and only serves to boost the profits of private health companies. The private health insurance rebate currently costs \$5.5 billion a year. The Grattan Institute recently calculated that scrapping it and redirecting the money into the public health system would actually be \$3 billion cheaper. And it would mean everyone could access healthcare, not just those who can afford it.

The \$6 co-payment fee for GP visits is designed to entrench the principle that growth in healthcare costs should be met through a user-pays system. Once set in place this fee will only grow over time. A co-payment fee will hurt those who need free healthcare the most—the poor, the elderly and the chronically ill. Already 8 per cent of people say they have avoided or delayed a visit to the GP because of cost—since there are usually extra costs involved for prescriptions or further tests.

The plan may even end up costing the health system more overall, as Con Costa from the Doctors Reform Society explains, "People would stop seeing their GP, ending up sicker and going to hospital—which costs thousands of dollars a day versus the current \$36 to see a GP bulk-billed."

The Liberals have long opposed a universal, free healthcare system. Malcolm Fraser abolished the first version of Medicare introduced by Gough Whitlam. John Howard tried to undermine bulk-billing and forced more people to take up private health insurance.

### Outpouring of protest after visa denied to gay Pakistani man Ali Choudry

A PETITION campaign to support the visa application of Ali Choudry generated huge support in a matter of hours in January.

Ali is an openly gay Pakistani man who applied for a partner visa, recognising his long-term relationship with his partner, Matthew Hynd. The application was rejected and as a result Ali's ability to stay in Australia was in doubt.

Over 140,000 people signed the online petition. The response shows the support that exists for LGBT rights and the rights of refugees and immigrants, and has exposed the racism and homophobia of the Immigration Department.

Gaining a partner visa is notoriously difficult for same-sex and heterosexual couples alike, due to the bureaucratic tyrannies and racist attitudes faced in order to prove their claims to the Immigration Department.

For LGBT asylum seekers the situation is even worse. Research by Senthoran Raj into the asylum claim decision-making process for gay asylum seekers has shown assessors often make decisions based on stereotypes about gay identity and culture, such as music taste or involvement in the gay community, and the degree to which someone has been open about their sexuality where they came from—even if it was illegal.

In 2011, a lesbian asylum seeker from Uganda had her claim rejected because Immigration officials decided she "had merely adopted the persona of a homosexual" for a protection visa.

Notoriously, the PNG solution means that LGBT asylum seekers can be sent to a country where homosexuality is illegal and can attract a 14-year jail sentence.

A December 2013 report by Amnesty International revealed Immigration officials told asylum seekers on Manus Island that they will be reported to police if they engage in "homosexual relations" while in detention. Mandatory reporting is not a requirement under PNG's laws.

**Amy Thomas**

### Christmas Island protests rock Morrison



THE PROTEST that has erupted inside the Christmas Island detention centres is the largest to confront the government since the protest and fire that destroyed the Nauru detention camp on 19 July 2013.

At least ten people have stitched their lips together and hundreds are on hunger strike in both the single men's and family compounds, Aqua and Lilac, with 350 of them saying they will hunger strike for a week. Up to ten people have been hospitalised after attempting suicide or self-harming with glass and razor blades.

Christmas Island is a shockingly overcrowded warehouse for around 2200 asylum seekers, all of whom have arrived since 19 July 2013—the start of PNG deal introduced by the Rudd Labor government. Tony Abbott says they will all be sent to Nauru or Manus Island to be processed, and none resettled in Australia. Since the start of the most recent protest around 40 single men have been transferred to Manus Island.

The conditions on the island are bad—inadequate medical services, too few toilets. In November, The Guardian revealed that 15 doctors wrote a damning report about Christmas Island to their employer and detention provider, IHMS. Among other things the doctors say: asylum seekers queue for up to three hours for medication (and some queue four times a day); antenatal care is unsafe, and inadequate; basic medical stocks are low; drugs requested by doctors are not provided; and long delays in

transferring patients to the mainland are leading to life-threatening risks. But it is the lack of information and the uncertainty of future processing and resettlement that is driving the protests. Some people have already been in detention seven months, and the government says that processing will only start when they are sent off-shore.

A letter written by protesting asylum seekers in Lilac compound asked Immigration Minister Morrison, "We have already been told that all of us will be sent to Nauru, but let us know how long this will take? What will eventually happen for us?"

The UNHCR's most recent official report from late November said that conditions on Manus Island were appalling and that the detention centre violates the UN's prohibition on torture! PNG and Nauru say they will start processing in February—but with no more than three people at any one time on Manus Island to do any processing, it will be many, many months before people are processed.

Morrison has had to admit that neither PNG nor Nauru have anything in place to accommodate or resettle anyone found to be a refugee. Indeed it is essentially impossible for refugees to become citizens in PNG while Nauru has said refugees cannot become citizens and will not be resettled.

The Christmas Island protests are just the tip of the iceberg of the crisis and contradictions that riddle Abbott's detention regime.

**Ian Rintoul**



# Turn back Abbott—not the boats

By Ian Rintoul

IN ITS desperation to “stop the boats” the Abbott government has secretly resorted to intercepting and towing boats back to Indonesian waters. After Indonesia denied entry to two Australian navy ships carrying asylum seekers in November last year, it seems that there have been at least five asylum boats turned back by the Australian navy since Abbott was elected.

Incredibly at least two of them have been well into Australian waters. One of them may well have made landfall at Bathurst Island, north of Darwin.

Abbott has now admitted that on several occasions, the Australian navy has violated Indonesian territorial waters in its efforts to push boats back to Indonesia. Despite Indonesia’s stated opposition to the tow-back policy, made clear in November, the Abbott government secretly turned back three more boats before the territorial incursions by the navy became public in January.

Indonesia now plans to place its own navy frigate in the vicinity of Australia’s tow back operations.

But far more significant than violating Indonesia’s territorial sovereignty, the Abbott government is violating the human rights of asylum seekers on a grand scale.

The navy is subjecting asylum seekers to the kind of force and military threats that made them asylum seekers in the first place—now the guns are being carried by the Australian navy rather than the Taliban or Sri Lankan military.

Scott Morrison has denied allegations that live rounds have been fired on asylum boats to get them to stop, but it is probably true. In 2001, under the Howard government’s similar policy of “deter and deny”, the navy did fire on defenceless asylum boats.

Tony Abbott tried to excuse the military action by equating turning back asylum boats with being at war. But targeting civilians or holding them hostage in a war situation is considered a war crime. Abbott is certainly guilty of crimes against refugees.

The UN has condemned the turn-back policy as contravening the Refugee Convention. Other experts think that forcibly intercepting boats



**Above: Abbott’s tow-back policy is gambling with asylum seekers’ lives**

and forcing asylum seekers back to Indonesia is at least people trafficking and would fit the definition of piracy.

## Labor’s silence

Shamefully, all Opposition Leader Bill Shorten is only willing to criticise is Abbott’s media blackout and his damaging Australia’s relationship with Indonesia, saying nothing about the brutality of the tow-backs or demanding he allow the boats to land.

Indeed Labor continues to take the credit for offshore processing saying that the PNG deal was all Labor’s doing.

Tragically, that’s true. And Shorten goes in using the same language as Abbott, like saying “There is nothing more serious than dealing with the evil trade of people smuggling.” Really?!

Labor is completely blind-sided by its own anti-refugee policy. Abbott’s popularity has fallen but Labor will struggle to take advantage until it ditches its Abbott look-alike policy and starts to stand up for refugees.

Fairfax has reported that 42 people were intercepted near Christmas Island on 23 December. Four days later, the navy took fuel containers from their boat and left them off southern Java. But the fuel ran out before they could make it to land. They were forced to swim for about an hour to get to shore.

A woman and her baby were

helped by an Indonesian in a small boat.

In 2001, also under Howard’s “deter and deny” policies that Abbott wants to copy, three asylum seekers drowned trying to get to land from an asylum boat that had been towed back and beached off Rote Island.

Abbott is playing a dangerous game—asylum seekers have been captured and mistreated by the navy, boats have foundered and asylum seekers have jumped into the sea. It is only luck that, so far, an asylum seeker hasn’t drowned as a consequence of Abbott’s boat turn-arounds.

Abbott is desperate to get more serious runs on the board to fulfill his election boast to “stop the boats”. The stand-off with Indonesia may put a temporary halt to his effort to tow asylum boats, but Abbott is reckless enough to try again—perhaps by trying to use careful manoeuvres to avoid violating Indonesian waters and then pushing asylum seekers into the life boats he bought in Singapore.

But his turn-back-the-boats policy shows every sign of being another example of the government going too far and alienating even greater sections of public opinion. The Refugee Action Coalition in Sydney has called a protest at Abbott’s electoral office, meeting at Manly Park, 12pm Saturday 22 February

.....  
**It is only luck that, so far, an asylum seeker hasn’t drowned as a consequence of Abbott’s boat turn-arounds**

# Nationalise Holden: fight for every job

By Jean Parker

AFTER 64 years manufacturing in Australia, and taking billions in government subsidies, General Motors Holden has announced its Australian factories will close in 2017. At least 3000 workers face the sack and up to 45,000 jobs in the auto component industry are at risk.

Shamefully, no one—not the Labor opposition, not The Greens and not the car union leaders in the Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union (AMWU)—is proposing a fight for the Holden workers' jobs.

But there could be a fight for jobs: if the union leaders gave a lead, a campaign of industrial action could cut off Holden's profits and exports, and appeal for broader support. Workplace occupations could prevent Holden removing any valuable stock and equipment.

If Holden will not keep the plants running, the company could be nationalised.

## Make GM pay

The media has blamed Holden workers and the unions for pricing themselves out of a job. But General Motors' Australian factories are, in fact, the most productive in the world. Workers have made concession after concession—only for the GM bosses to pocket the money and then cut jobs anyway. The current enterprise agreement, signed in April 2013, locks in a wage freeze, while forcing every worker to work 16 minutes longer each shift for free.

In 2008, at the height of the economic crisis, Holden workers agreed to work half-shifts and take a huge pay cut to keep operations going.

Tony Abbott is offering only \$100 million to South Australia and Victoria to retrain sacked Holden workers. It's a joke.

When Mitsubishi closed in 2008 only a third of its workers ever found full-time work again. Holden workers will be thrown on the scrap heap without a fight to keep the jobs.

In 2012, GM made a global profit of \$7.6 billion. They can afford to keep the factories open.

Right wing commentators say that the lesson of Holden's closure is that Toyota workers must sacrifice wages to keep Toyota manufacturing



Above: Holden workers have been left in the lurch

in Australia.

So far, the unions have resisted Toyota's demands. But the risk is the officials will give in the same way they gave in at Holden. As the Financial Review revealed, "Many of the things Toyota wants—the shorter Christmas lockdown, fewer sickies, lower rates for new temps and freedom to use them—were agreed to by [the AMWU at] Holden."

## Nationalise Holden

Over the last 12 years Holden's profits averaged \$50 million per year. Australian taxpayers gave the company on average \$153 million per year.

This means all the investments in plant and equipment has been bought by taxpayers. Successive governments have handed the car industry \$30 billion since 1997—almost \$2 billion a year of public money.

Australian workers have already paid for Holden's Australian factories; they belong to the workers. If Holden won't guarantee the jobs, we must fight to nationalise Holden—for a take over of its factories under workers' control.

But the official political response has been split between two poles—the free marketeers who argue that noth-

ing can be done, and the protectionists who argue that the government should have acted to keep Holden here by offering further subsidies.

Abbott's free market "do nothing" strategy shows his contempt for workers' jobs. The Coalition government itself is sacking up to 14,500 public servants.

The protectionist argument of the Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union (AMWU) and the Labor Party claims to be about saving jobs. Their approach means subordinating wages, conditions and the right to a job to Holden ability to make profits.

Rather than organise the fight that's needed, AMWU officials have even painted Holden as the good guys, arguing that Holden's bosses have been fighting to keep operations in Australia.

Cosying up to the bosses and handing them subsidies hasn't worked. In March 2012 the Gillard Labor government gave Holden another \$215 million, claiming this would keep the company in Australia "for at least the next 10 years". Within 13 months Holden had announced another 680 job cuts.

It will take an industrial fight against both Holden and Abbott to save the jobs.

## Alternate plans?

The day before Holden announced its closure, Holden boss Mike Devereaux told the Productivity Commission that to have to have a future in Australia, Holden needed a "Public Private Partnership" with government.

South Australian Labor Premier, Jay Weatherill, has proposed turning Holden's Adelaide plant into a government armaments factory as part of the \$10 billion "Land 400" project.

Another proposal is to make the Holden factory part of the Port Adelaide defence shipbuilding Techport facility. In other words the Labor government can envisage the government taking over the plant (no doubt compensating Holden) if it is to be part of increasing Australia's military capability.

Rather than turning potentially useful manufacturing capacity over to the military, the nationalisation of Holden could see it converted—to building large-public transport vehicles, wind turbines and the green technology that we need to tackle climate change.

All the investments in plants and equipment has been paid by taxpayers

# Retreat from Afghanistan shows disaster of occupation

By Chris Breen

IN DECEMBER Australia's last combat troops in Afghanistan left after 12 years. According to Tony Abbott the withdrawal was, "Not with victory, not with defeat, but with, we hope, an Afghanistan that is better for our presence here", in an effective admission that the West has lost the war.

Far from making things "better" Western occupation has been a disaster for Afghanistan.

The fake commitments to democracy, to Afghan women, or building Afghan schools are now long forgotten. President Hamid Karzai's re-election in 2009 relied on massive corruption and vote-rigging. For the last two years the country has been ranked as the most corrupt in the world.

The US has brought back into power the same ruthless warlords who destroyed the country in the 1990s. Several of them, like Mohammed Fahim and Ismail Khan, are ministers in the Afghan government.

At the end of this year the last US and British combat troops will quit the country too. They have failed to defeat the Taliban, which now controls large areas of the country. In a humiliating climb-down, the US has agreed to talks with the Taliban—the enemy the warmongers said they went in to defeat.

The return of the Taliban is all the more remarkable given there was little popular support for them in 2001. It took almost three years after the invasion for significant military resistance to the Western occupation to develop.

It came after continual US airstrikes that saw thousands of civilians bombed and wedding parties, funerals and whole families killed. Even the US-installed President Karzai has demanded an end to these attacks. Overall at least 15,000 Afghan civilians have died in the war.

The war also saw over 2000 US troops killed and 20,000 wounded. More than 20,000 Australians fought in Afghanistan, with 260 wounded and 40 killed. The Australian government has put close to \$8 billion into the conflict to date.

Shamefully the commitment to the US alliance that dragged Australia to war was bipartisan to the end. Labor leader Bill Shorten stood shoulder to shoulder with Tony Abbott telling



**Above: An Australian soldier on patrol in Afghanistan**

troops before withdrawal, "You make us proud to be Australian".

Afghanistan has been Australia's longest war, and has become one of its least popular. Two thirds of Australians initially supported the invasion in the aftermath of 9/11, but by mid-2013 69 per cent wanted troops out. A recent CNN poll in the US found that a staggering 82 per cent of Americans also oppose the war.

The US has spent \$100 billion to "rebuild" Afghanistan, but there is little to show for this money.

Australia's efforts have been no better. According to Kabul-based journalist Jeremy Kelly, the Australian Defence Force claimed "a rise in the number of schools from 34 in 2006 to 205" in 2012. But in Chora "only one of the 32 schools supposedly open actually has students attending".

At a Senate hearing last year Defence admitted that they had no information on 31 out of 48 projects, on which they had spent \$34 million.

## War aims

The real motives for the war were boosting US power in control of Central Asia and restoring its imperial pride. The 9/11 attacks had made the US look weak, and required a demonstration of US military might to the world.

Invading Afghanistan was also the

cover for establishing a string of US bases in the former Soviet republics to its north. The US also wanted to run an oil pipeline through Afghanistan from the Caspian Sea, without having to go through Russia or Iran.

Some on the left have been wary of the Afghan resistance because it is led by the right-wing and Islamic Taliban. But their support is due to the fact they are the only people inside Afghanistan that have consistently opposed Western occupation. Secular forces and parts of the left disturbingly sided with the occupation, from former Afghan communists to Western NGOs and feminists.

The West will undoubtedly blame any violence that occurs after they pull out on Afghans themselves. But we should never forget who is really to blame. The West has left Afghanistan in a mess at the mercy of squabbling warlords, and produced a revival of the Taliban.

Some Western troops will remain as trainers and advisers to the Afghan army, including at least 10,000 US troops and between 300-400 Australians. The US and Australia will continue to fund the Afghan Army as they try to salvage what they can for Western imperial influence.

Afghanistan after the occupation faces a difficult future. But it is only the end of Western control that promises it any hope.

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**The real motives for the war were boosting US power in control of Central Asia and restoring its imperial pride**

# Ukraine: Pro-EU protests no answer to corruption and crisis

By Adam Adelpour

AN ECONOMY in crisis and a corrupt government: Ukrainians have plenty to protest about. But the protests that grabbed international headlines in December against President Viktor Yanukovich are happening on the terms of a nasty section of the ruling class. They offer little prospect of improving the situation for ordinary Ukrainians.

In December, hundreds of thousands of people took part in massive and often militant protests in Independence Square in the capital, Kiev. Thousands camped out continuously. Tens of thousands continued to mobilise throughout January.

The initial spark was the Yanukovich government's announcement that they were backing away from a pact with EU leaders in late November 2013. This would have opened up trade with Ukraine and increased political and strategic ties.

On the afternoon of the announcement thousands took to the streets, demanding that the agreement be signed. In response Yanukovich sent in 1000 police with clubs and tear gas to smash the protests, but this backfired badly. Hundreds of thousands joined the protests in response to the brutality and were soon fighting police, invading government buildings and calling for the resignation of Yanukovich.

## People power?

The brutality of the government's crackdown, and the fact of the government's notorious corruption, means it has been easy to present these protests as straightforward expressions of "people power".

But at this stage the anger, much of it entirely legitimate, is being channeled into a self-interested battle between rival ruling class factions. Behind the fight also lies the imperialist rivalry between Russia and the West.

The ruling class squabble between Yanukovich and the opposition is best understood in light of what happened after the fall of the USSR. In the former Soviet countries, massively corrupt privatisations saw a few individuals grab vast state assets. Between 1991 and 1999 Ukrainian GDP contracted by 60 per cent and ordinary people suffered as 50 oligarchs came to account for 85 per cent of the



**Above: Protesters fly the flag of Yulia Tymoshenko, an imprisoned right-wing oligarch**

Ukraine's GDP.

There are two main competing factions inside the corrupt elite. Those around Yanukovich and his Party of Regions tend to be heads of heavy industry, mainly from the Russian speaking east of the country. Their industries depend on Russian gas and protectionist trade barriers that could be undermined by the EU agreement.

On the side of the opposition at the head of the protest movement tend to be those oligarchs who seek to benefit from access to EU markets, mainly from the Ukrainian speaking west of the country. The Association Agreement would eliminate trade barriers which would mean around an extra \$5 billion for Ukrainian companies that currently export to the EU.

A look at the opposition shows they are really just another bunch of corrupt oligarchs. Their leading figure is the currently imprisoned Yulia Tymoshenko, who leads the centre-right Fatherland Party. She made her fortune in the energy sector as part of the plundering that happened after the collapse of the USSR.

The Ukrainian Democratic Alliance for Reform is another centre-right opposition party, founded by a major property developer. The third force in the opposition is the repulsive far-right Svoboda; it publicly supports homophobic violence and is openly anti-Semitic.

## Imperialist rivalry

The West and Russia each back op-

posing factions. Since the fall of the USSR Russia has fought to maintain political, economic and military interests in former Soviet countries, while the US particularly has sought to peel off countries from Russia's sphere of influence.

The US state department channeled US \$65 million to the pro-Western candidate in the lead up to the 2004 Ukrainian presidential elections. In exchange the US can shore up its own interests. Among other things it hopes to weaken Russia's monopoly on European gas and help pull Ukraine into NATO. Republican Senator John McCain spoke at one of the big rallies in Kiev saying, "The destiny you seek lies in Europe ... America is with you, I am with you."

Russia's aim is to do likewise by backing Yanukovich, for example by locking down gas pipelines that run from Russia through the Ukraine to Europe and stopping NATO encroachment.

Tellingly, immediately after Yanukovich rejected the EU deal Russia gave the Ukraine a \$15 billion bailout and cut gas prices by over 25 per cent.

Cheering for either section of the ruling class will not improve the situation for ordinary Ukrainians. Neither the West or Russia, the opposition or Yanukovich, can offer relief from economic crisis or provide genuine democracy.

The prominence of the far right in the movement shows the dangers of the current political situation.

# Australia's Timor oil grab exposed in spy scandal



By Vivian Honan

FOLLOWING ABBOTT'S arrogance over the Indonesian spying scandal, there have been fresh revelations of a disgraceful Australian government spying operation in East Timor. This is part of Australia's grab for access to the impoverished nation's oil and gas.

The fiasco has exposed Australia's ruthless pursuit of its imperialist interests in the region, and its willingness to bully poor neighbouring nations for resources and economic control.

East Timor's government has taken Australia to the International Court of Justice to dispute the current Timor Sea Treaty, officially known as Certain Maritime Arrangements in the Timor Sea (CMATS). The treaty, signed in 2006, stipulates that East Timor and Australia will "equitably share" the proceeds of the gas and oil located in the Greater Sunrise fields. However there is nothing equitable about it. East Timor only receives 50 per cent of the revenue when the fields are part of the Timor Sea, situated 150 kilometres off East Timor's coast. They are 450 kilometres north-west of Darwin. Australian oil and gas company Woodside has the rights to their development.

East Timor is challenging the treaty after evidence came to light that Australia bugged East Timor cabinet offices during negotiations in 2004.

In response, the government has tried to intimidate witnesses and prevent them testifying. A former Australia Secret Intelligence Service (ASIS) officer was prepared to testify

**Above: East Timorese people protest the oil grab outside the Australian Embassy**

that the bugging occurred. Under instructions from Liberal Attorney-General, George Brandis, ASIO raided the man's house and seized his passport to prevent him from travelling out of Australia to testify in early December 2013.

ASIO also raided and seized important documents from the office of Australian lawyer Bernard Collaery, who is representing East Timor.

## Australia—neighbour from hell

The Australian government has continually put cold calculations of economic and strategic interests above all else in its dealings with East Timor. Australia supported Indonesian control of East Timor and has long pressed to gain control over its resources.

In 1974, suggesting that Indonesia negotiate with Australia over the Timor Gap, Australian ambassador to Indonesia Richard Woolcott sent a cable stating, "I know I am recommending a pragmatic rather than a principled stand but that is what the national interest and foreign policy is all about."

Then Labor Prime Minister Gough Whitlam supported Indonesian dictator Suharto's invasion of East Timor in 1975. He justified it saying, "An independent East Timor would be an unviable state and a potential threat to the area." Tens of thousands of East Timorese people were killed.

Despite mounting domestic and international pressure, in 1982 Fraser bullied other South Pacific leaders to vote with Indonesia in the UN against moves towards East Timor's indepen-

dence.

In 1989, Labor Prime Minister Bob Hawke managed to secure Australian control of the oil and gas resources through a deal with the Indonesian government called the Timor Gap Treaty. Close to 80 per cent of Greater Sunrise's resources were given to Australia.

Following a long struggle and the fall of Indonesia's dictator Suharto, East Timor finally gained independence in 2002. This left the previous Gap Treaty invalid. The Liberal government of John Howard was forced to negotiate with the new independent state over the resources.

The negotiations amounted to little more than bullying. Then East Timorese foreign minister José Ramos-Horta stated that Australia's proposals "amounted to an unacceptable blackmail."

Facing pressure from Australia and in need of revenue, the East Timorese government signed the current treaty in 2006.

## Exposing Australia

Allegations that the Australian government spied on East Timor during these negotiations were first raised a year ago. East Timor's Prime Minister Xanana Gusmao wrote to then Prime Minister Julia Gillard requesting they reopen negotiations over the treaty, but received no reply.

Since then the Australian government has been internationally embarrassed over reports that Australia spied on Indonesian officials. This scandal has given greater coverage to East Timor's allegations.

It has also come out that Australian spies gained entry into East Timor as aid workers, raising questions over AusAid's role in the region.

Protests have been held in the East Timorese capital Dili outside the Australian embassy. A fitting image of a kangaroo carrying buckets of oil dripping with blood was painted on the military compound.

The long history of imperialist dominance and exploitation of East Timor has made it into one of the poorest countries in the world. According to the United Nations, 40 per cent of the population are malnourished and 37.5 per cent live on less than \$1.40 per day.

The spying scandal is a chance to expose Australia's horrendous role—and demand justice for the East Timorese.

## Russia's homophobia in Olympic spotlight

By Clare Fester

THE UPCOMING Sochi Olympic Games have shone an international spotlight on Russia's treatment of dissent.

President Vladimir Putin initially proposed a ban on protests at Sochi. After pressure it was lifted, and a town 18 kilometres away from Sochi declared a "protest zone" for approved actions. Imprisoned members of the band Pussy Riot, and the Greenpeace "Arctic 30", were given amnesty and freed from prison in January.

Some activists, politicians and celebrities, like Stephen Fry and Lady Gaga, have called to boycott Sochi over Russia's new anti-gay laws. But opportunism and hypocrisy has driven Western leaders to jump on the bandwagon.

### Anti-LGBT laws

Last year the Russian parliament unanimously passed laws that ban people from distributing "propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations" to children, with heavy fines attached. The laws are broad and apply to any individual or organisation that publicly acknowledges the existence of homosexuality—in the classroom, on the street or on the Internet.

One provision extends to foreigners travelling in Russia suspected of being "pro-gay". They face arrest, 14 days of detention and deportation. In July four Dutch filmmakers working in Murmansk were detained under the law for "promoting homosexuality to children".

Gay parents from other countries will be prohibited from adopting Russian children.

Singles and unmarried couples who live in a countries with marriage equality will also be barred from adopting.

In September Russian politicians discussed a bill to remove children from gay parents, but it was withdrawn until after the Olympics.

The laws have led to a spike in homophobic attacks. City council members in Saint Petersburg declared it acceptable to physically assault people at gay pride marches. A politician in eastern Russia proposed using Cossacks and paratroopers to publicly whip LGBT people.

Neo-Nazi and vigilante groups are using social media to lure young LGBT people and then film them-



Above: Russian naval officers attack a gay rights protester

selves abusing, humiliating and even torturing them. There are some reports of murders. One study found that 15 per cent of LGBT Russians experienced physical assaults in a 10 month period.

### Western hypocrisy

Opportunistically, French and German Presidents Francois Holland and Joachim Gauck are refusing to go to Sochi. Obama will not be attending and is sending two gay former athletes in a US delegation to the games.

Obama has given late rhetorical support to same-sex marriage, but it is still illegal in 37 states. In 29 states it is legal for bosses to sack people on the basis of their known or suspected sexual orientation.

Although the Cold War has ended Western countries still compete with Russia for influence. The boycott is an opportunity for Western rulers to strengthen their own imperialism while appearing progressive on LGBT rights.

The Russian LGBT Network has issued a statement against the boycott. Leading campaigner in the organisation, Anastasia Smirnova, says it would be more powerful to take a stand during the Olympics than boycott them.

We can show solidarity by offering support to the resistance in Russia, not to our own leaders.

## Cambodian strikers shot down by military

ON CHRISTMAS eve, as Australian retailers like K-Mart and Big-W tried to maximise holiday sales profits, the Cambodian workers who make their clothes and footwear (as well as for Adidas, Levi Strauss, H&M, the Gap and Puma) were walking out on strike.

Between Christmas and the New Year the strike spread until it ground the garments sector to a halt. Workers demanded an increase in the minimum wage from \$80 to \$160 a month. When the government offered just \$95, the strike erupted. Then they sent in the army and thugs.

On 2 January the Cambodian military and riot police shot dead four striking workers. Soldiers and riot people were then sent into factories across the country. The repression forced a halt to the strike, but the struggle is far from over. Already there have been more strikes and sit-ins.

The garments sector has grown massively in the last decade and now represents 80 per cent of Cambodia's export industry and the backbone of its economy. There are 800 factories employing 600,000 workers on below subsistence wages. In the first 11 months of last year the industry made \$5 billion, up 22 per cent on the previous year. These profits are generated by women, 90 per cent of the workforce, earning \$5 for a 10-12 hour workday. Labour rights groups say that a living wage would be \$283 a month. Instead workers work excessive overtime, live in overcrowded and unventilated dorms, and suffer malnutrition that leads to large-scale fainting in the factories.

The growth of textile production in Cambodia is the latest in a long pattern of garment producing capitalists seeking countries with the cheapest labour. But in each country workers' resistance has eventually developed. After only 34 strikes in Cambodia in 2011, there were 131 in 2013 before the December strike.

The fear created by the killings cannot last. While Cambodia's labour laws state that workers cannot be paid for strike days, the government advised textile companies to offer half-pay for the strike in December and January. When some factory managers refused, around 12,000 workers in Kandal and Phnom Penh struck and occupied their factories. It is only a matter of time before the struggle to increase the minimum wage breaks out again.

Jean Parker

# Aboriginal soldiers: rewarded with racism and discrimination

By Tom Orsag

THE ANZAC legend will be pushed ad nauseam this year and the next in the 100th anniversary of WWI and Gallipoli. In early January, Sydney's *Daily Telegraph* campaigned against British commemorations of WWI which "downplay" Australia's role fighting for the British Empire.

It even devoted an editorial to Britain's "snub" of the way "Australians and New Zealanders fought for British freedom and liberty."

But the supposed freedom and liberty fought for in both world wars was never extended to Aboriginal soldiers who sacrificed for Australia's rulers.

Aboriginal people were barred from enlisting in WWI, with all men who were not "substantially of European origin or descent" excluded.

But some Aboriginal people did sneak through, either because they were deemed "white enough" or because of the desperation to recruit flesh for the slaughter.

There was a "relaxation" of the regulations in May 1917 as the army struggled to reach recruitment targets, allowing the enlistment of Aboriginal men with one European parent.

At least 400 Aboriginal are known to have enlisted. The real figure is likely higher as race was often not recorded. Three Aboriginal soldiers received awards for bravery—Corporal Albert Knight, William Rawlings and Harry Thorpe. Only Knight made it home. Military historian John Moremon estimates a third of the Aboriginal soldiers sent to the battlefields of WWI were killed.

It is estimated 3000 Aboriginal soldiers joined the armed forces in WWII. Special indigenous regiments were raised in places like the Torres Strait—but unlike soldiers in the regular army, they received only about half the pay.

## Racism on return

When Aboriginal soldiers returned from both wars, they continued to face racism and discrimination. They were denied citizenship and were not even counted as human in the census until 1971. Aboriginal people faced demeaning controls on their behaviour under the Protection Acts, with their wages and movement controlled by Protection Boards.

Even after WWII they had a limited right to vote. In NSW, Victoria and SA Aboriginal people could vote in



**Above: Reg Saunders managed to enlist in the army early in WWII despite a later ruling banning Aboriginal people from serving**

State elections only. But in Queensland, WA and NT this was not allowed. Aboriginal soldiers were refused service in pubs due to segregation.

Many soldiers were granted farmland under soldiers' settlement schemes after both world wars. But all but a tiny handful of Aboriginal soldiers were denied land. In NSW, only one Aboriginal veteran was successful in gaining a settlement lot after WWI.

To add to the indignity, Aboriginal people were often moved off reserve land where they lived to free up land for the returning soldiers. Following WWII Aboriginal reserve lands including those at Lake Condah and Corranderk were parcelled up and handed to returned white soldiers.

Nineteen Aboriginal people from Lake Condah, in two generations, had served. They included Herbert Staley Lovett, a veteran of both wars. His request for some of the land at Lake Condah after WWII was refused and most of the families there were uprooted and arbitrarily transported to Lake Tyers in Gippsland, 600 kilometres to the east.

Even Reg Saunders, the first Aboriginal soldier to rise from private to be a commissioned officer, was denied land in the Western Districts of Victoria by the Soldier Settlement Scheme after WWII.

The racist treatment of Aboriginal soldiers after WWI led to debate amongst Aboriginal activists about whether they should volunteer to serve again in WWII.

The Aborigines Progressive Association led by Bill Ferguson, Pearl Gibbs, and Jack Patten, convened the first national conference of Aboriginal people and dedicated a Day of Mourning for Invasion Day 1938, calling for full Aboriginal citizenship. William Cooper from the Aboriginal Advancement League in Victoria was also involved.

Jack Patten enlisted in the military when WWII started, hoping that if Aboriginal people fought for the nation it would help them win citizenship. But Cooper argued against Aboriginal people serving until they were given full citizenship rights. Bill Ferguson demanded the release of Aboriginal servicemen from the Army in 1944 when the Federal Arbitration Court denied Aboriginal pastoral and agricultural workers award wages.

In 1919, the Queensland Chief Protector of Aborigines had fixed a minimum wage for Aboriginal pastoral workers at about two-thirds of Queensland's pastoral award.

Today there is an effort to incorporate Aboriginal soldiers into Anzac day marches and commemorations. But there is still no recognition for the Aboriginal people who fought the first war in this country—the frontier battles against the British colonisers and settlers who stole their land. Australia's rulers still refuse to admit that their invasion of this continent had nothing to do with democracy or freedom—but was based on theft and slaughter for profits.

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**Aboriginal people faced demeaning controls on their behaviour under the Protection Acts, with their wages and movement controlled**

# UTOPIA: THE INTERVENTION EXPOSED

John Pilger's new film exposes the worsening conditions for Aboriginal people as a product of the return to assimilationist policies, writes **Lucy Honan**

IF YOU want to know what the Intervention has done to resuscitate assimilation politics and take the struggle for Aboriginal rights back decades, watch John Pilger's *Utopia*. Against all the platitudes (amplified for Invasion Day) that pretend the horrors are in the past, and that "the first Australians" are a benign thread in a harmonious Australian national story, Pilger insists on the truth. Six years of Intervention politics are the sharp edge of disastrous poverty, criminalised Aboriginality and reignited Stolen Generations policies. This documentary is a storm of justifiable rage and an irrefutable argument for a fight back.

## Assimilation politics resuscitated

"Those that have been assimilated into earning a good living, earning wages, accepted into civilised society... can handle society, I'd leave them well alone. The others—I would dope the water up so that they were sterile and would breed themselves out in the future, and that would solve the problem."

Lang Hancock (Gina Rinehart's father) offered this disgusting prescription for Aboriginal people in 1984. It opens the documentary because Hancock's sick dream is playing out in 2013. Instead of sterilisation, successive governments have been starving out those Aboriginal communities that will not submit to the market economy.

Through the NT Intervention, Liberal and Labor governments axed thousands of community development jobs, cut off the meagre housing and services for the majority of remote communities in the NT, and introduced welfare quarantining, putting half their payments for "prescribed" Aboriginal people on a "BasicsCard". Then the Labor government extended the measures to communities across Australia.

Pilger pulls no punches in showing the ongoing devastation in the NT: 30 plus people crammed into each asbestos filled house, third world diseases

and mortality rates, dilapidated health clinics with blocked toilets, no public transportation, no access to decent nutrition, no running water. The situation is far bleaker than Pilger's 1985 documentary *A Secret Country*, where communities were poor, but winning some control over land, radio stations, school curriculum and local councils. But even as they were won, all of those meagre victories for Aboriginal control were starved of funding and support and finally snuffed with the Intervention—bilingual education programs were banned, land compulsorily acquired, local social programs junked.

In one scene, Salil Shetty, General Secretary of Amnesty International, mentally calculates how easy it would be for a country as rich as Australia to just fund public services and put an end to the disgraceful poverty—in the midst of such wealth he cannot fathom the cause of the neglect. The deliberate nature of the neglect is illustrated where an Aboriginal man living in a shack with no kitchen or running water looks across at the 17 air conditioning units cooling a white bureaucrat's house next door. The inequality is palpable.

Pilger puts the question to Warren Snowden, Indigenous health minister and MP for the most disadvantaged Aboriginal communities in Australia for nearly three decades: "Why haven't you fixed it?" Snowden squirms in his own repulsive incompetence, which is delicious to watch, but it's Rosalie Kunoth Monks from Utopia who gets to the heart of it: "they are starving us out".

The federal government declared Aboriginal communities like Utopia unviable and cut them off from social spending, not because they are actually unaffordable—the territory is awash with cash for white bureaucrats and elaborate programs of social control—but because they had to be made to fit an Australian society where neo-liberalism reigns. It is now a six

**The federal government declared Aboriginal communities like Utopia unviable and cut them off from social spending**

year long project to enforce values of individualism, mainstream economic participation and asset accumulation. As Abbott put it menacingly, "there is no place outside the mainstream" for Aboriginal people.

Abbott turned the pitch of the neo-liberal assimilation agenda up a notch further when he appointed a team of corporate bigwigs including Gail Kelly from Westpac and David Peever from Rio Tinto to advise on "economic Aboriginal reform" in November. His spokesperson echoed Hancock's maxim that Aborigines need to submit to the labour market and corporate Australia's rule: "we must ensure that children go to school, adults go to work and that the ordinary law of the land operates in Aboriginal communities." Or else.

## Criminalised

But the new assimilators are so patently not succeeding at their own mission.

Cutting Aboriginal programs like the Community Development Employment Program (CDEP) was supposed to force people into "real" jobs, wherever they existed. But Indigenous unemployment went from 15.6 per cent to 17.1 per cent between 2006 and 2011. Axing bilingual programs and cutting welfare payments for truancy was supposed to set a high standard of education. But Aboriginal children's school attendance is plummeting across the country and markedly in the NT. It's an admission of failure that Indigenous Affairs minister Nigel Scullion is sending an "army of truancy officers" into remote communities to try to persuade children back to school, while the Country Liberal NT government continues its cuts to remote schools.

Cutting Aboriginal services, Aboriginal jobs, and Aboriginal curriculum and piling on the punishments has not driven people into jobs that don't exist. But it has driven people further into the margins of society, and into prisons.



Pilger reminds us that jailing Aboriginal people and killing them in prison is an Australian tradition—from the prison and execution site at Rottnest island WA, to the jails and police cells that kill young Aboriginal people like Eddie Murray in NSW, to Mr Ward’s cooking to death in the back of a police van in 2008, to the police who killed Kwementyaye Briscoe in 2012.

But with the Intervention and its extension across Australia, never have Aboriginal incarceration rates been higher. With it came 18 new police stations in the NT, star chamber powers for police and outrageously discriminatory penalties for carrying alcohol and porn in prescribed communities. No pedophile rings were caught, but many more people are locked up for traffic offences—largely due to poverty induced dependence on unregistered cars and unlicensed drivers. The former Minister for Corrective Services Margaret Quirk tells Pilger WA has begun “racking and stacking” prisoners to accommodate their numbers—piling them on top of each other in overcrowded cells. Now the WA government is building new prisons just for Aboriginal people.

Pilger uses footage of a police officer spray-and-wiping Briscoe’s blood off the floor after slamming him to the ground, knocking him unconscious, and dumping him face down to suffocate to death. She complains to a fellow officer that theirs is “not a glamorous job”. Her mundane murder is the threat lurking behind the Intervention, the brutal end point of Abbott’s “no room outside the mainstream” agenda.

### Stealing children

The resurrection of mass child removals is the loudest siren in Utopia, warning us how far back into the dark ages of failed assimilation politics Australia has plunged. The numbers of Aboriginal children being removed are higher than they were at any point last century. In the NT the removal rates are double what they were before the Intervention, and across the country removal is overwhelmingly for “neglect”, a by-product of poverty and extreme disadvantage.

Pilger interviews Olga Havnen, who was Coordinator General for Remote Services in the NT until her scathing report earned her the sack. Where in one year the NT government spent only \$500,000 to support impoverished families, they spent \$80 million on surveillance of families and



**Above: John Pilger explores the shocking housing conditions for Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory, like this tin shack**

child removal. This spells the beginning of a new Stolen Generation.

There is a painful interview with Kevin Rudd, who is smarmy and defends his apology to the first Stolen Generation as not just “gesture politics”. But it’s clear, particularly in light of the new child removals how the apology served as a false bookend, pretending to close off an era of hostility while actually opening the frontiers to launch new attacks.

The apology and the Intervention politics are building up a mythology that the “Aboriginal Problem” is an historical one, and that there is no need for a struggle for a separate Aboriginal self-determination, that there is no conflict between Aboriginality and Australian nationalism.

Pilger’s Australia Day vox pops reveal the level of delusion. When Australian flag laden revellers are asked if they can understand why some Aboriginal people might be uncomfortable or angry with the celebrations, the responders are bemused, “Really? Why’s that?”, and “but we all think of them too now”, “but now it’s everyone’s place, we’re all Australians now”.

Throughout the documentary you get the sense Pilger just wants to shake “White Australia” out of its torpor. How can we not see how deeply Australian racism runs? How can we not see through the feckless politicians and their empty apologies, promises and lies?

### Resistance

The documentary shows the depth of

rage in Aboriginal communities, and the consistency with which Aboriginal people throw up resistance against each injustice. From the Gurindji who fought for land rights and sparked the shift toward self-determination in the 60s, to the Murrays who fought black deaths in custody for decades, to the people of Ampilatwatja who walked off in protest against the Intervention, to the women of Lightning Ridge who fought for their children back.

But Pilger’s solution at the end of the film is for a treaty between “White Australia” and “The First Australians”, rings hollow. The idea is not explored in any depth in the film, just dropped in at the end, seemingly as a silver bullet to cure all the horrors that have been shown. The usefulness or otherwise of reviving calls for a treaty is an important discussion to have amongst supporters for Aboriginal rights. As Pilger himself acknowledges, Indigenous people in places such as Canada and the US may have treaties, but still suffer grinding oppression.

What is urgently needed is to rebuild the kind of social movement for Aboriginal rights of the 1960s and 70s that won the beginnings of self-determination and land rights as an alternative to the assimilation agenda. As the Intervention politics lurches on we can be sure that alongside the horrors there will be resistance. This can be the basis for building mass campaigns that could reverse the suffering displayed vividly in the film - stop the intervention, and fight for resources that might allow real community control.

# SOUTH AFRICA AFTER MANDELA: THE UNFINISHED STRUGGLE

Nelson Mandela's South Africa did not live up to the hopes of freedom and equality that drove the struggle against apartheid, argues **James Supple**

NELSON MANDELA'S death in December was a time to remember the powerful struggle that brought down the racist apartheid regime in South Africa. Yet amidst the celebrations of Mandela's life, it was largely ignored that the South Africa he left behind has failed to live up to hopes of an end to poverty and oppression for the black majority.

Mandela led the African National Congress (ANC) to power in 1994, becoming the country's first black president. His party has governed the country ever since. Now, however, the ANC faces a growing crisis, with massive disappointment and anger amongst its supporters about the lack of change.

This was powerfully demonstrated at Mandela's memorial in Johannesburg when current ANC leader and South African President Jacob Zuma was booed by the crowd of tens and thousands.

Zuma wrested the ANC leadership from Mandela's successor Thabo Mbeki in 2007 with the backing of trade unions and the left of the ANC. He presented himself as a break with the pro-business approach of Mbeki, famously singing anti-apartheid song Umshini Wami (Bring Me My Machine Gun) to associate himself with the hopes of the anti-apartheid struggle. But his policies in power have been little different.

The ANC has enjoyed the backing of the trade unions through the peak union body COSATU since the anti-apartheid struggle. But at the end of last year the country's largest union, the National Union of Metalworkers (NUMSA), decided to end its support and financial backing for the ANC. Justifying their stance, they said in a statement, "Swelling the ranks has merely resulted in delivering more working class victims, like lambs to the slaughter by the ANC's bourgeois

leadership." The union's conference, attended by 1200 delegates representing 338,000 members, also issued a call to set up a new workers' party.

There is also pressure on the ANC's left, from a new party called the Economic Freedom Fighters, set up by the former ANC youth wing leader Julius Malema, who was expelled from the party. He has called for nationalisation of the mines and redistributing white-owned farmland to blacks without compensation.

## Unequal

The reasons for discontent with the ANC are obvious. Unemployment has almost doubled since the ANC came to power to a shocking 25 per cent, or 35 per cent if those who have given up looking for work are included.

Inequality has also increased, with the country now rated as the most unequal in the world. From 1993 to 2008 the income share of the top 10 per cent grew from 54 to 58 per cent, while the bottom 50 per cent dropped from 8.3 to 7.8 per cent of income.

The number of blacks in poverty sits at 42 per cent, while for whites it is just 1 per cent. On average whites still earn six times more than blacks, according to the 2012 census. And almost 18 per cent of the population is infected with HIV—6.1 million people.

One of the starkest problems is housing. Although the ANC claims that 3.3 million low cost houses have been built since 1994, this has failed to keep pace with population growth. There are still 2.1 million people waiting for housing. Shanty towns continue to mushroom on the fringes of the major cities, housing an estimated 25 per cent of the population in the largest cities.

Access to services like piped water and electricity has increased as a result of government spending.

## Shanty towns house an estimated 25 per cent of the population in the largest cities

But charges have risen as a result of privatisation and outsourcing, meaning increasing disconnections. In Durban water prices doubled between 1998 and 2004, leading to a sharp decline in water use by the poor. Local communities have resisted by illegally reconnecting power and water services.

## Compromise

This abject failure to improve the lives of the vast majority of the black population is a direct result of the ANC's decision to accept a negotiated transition from Apartheid with the old white ruling class. Rather than challenge capitalism, the ANC agreed to run it.

Instead of a redistribution of the country's wealth, the transition, "allowed whites to keep the best land, the mines, manufacturing plants and financial institutions, and to export vast quantities of capital", as South African academic Patrick Bond put it.

The ANC abandoned its former commitment that "the people shall share in the country's wealth" spelt out in its 1955 Freedom Charter. This promised "nationalisation of the mineral wealth beneath the soil, the banks and monopoly industry". Upon taking power the ANC instead insisted that there could only be "redistribution through growth". This was a classic neo-liberal strategy that assumed if the government promoted economic growth and higher profits for big business, the benefits would trickle down to the majority.

Mandela and the alliance of the ANC, COSATU and South African Communist Party (SACP) agreed to keep the workers' movement under control and hose down expectations of change.

Mandela declared early on that, "We must rid ourselves of the culture of entitlement which leads to the expectation that the government must promptly deliver whatever it is that we

demand.”

In an effort to reassure investors, Mandela even retained the old white ruling party’s Finance Minister in his first government. It adopted a new economic strategy, GEAR, based on government spending cuts and attracting foreign investment through business tax cuts and privatisation.

The new government forced through a series of cuts to corporate tax, from 48 per cent in 1994 to 30 per cent by 1999.

### Two stages

The ANC was always a middle class, nationalist organisation whose aim was “the development of a prosperous, non-European bourgeois class”, as Mandela put it. It was opposed to a socialist transformation to put working class people in power, instead aiming to establish black-run capitalism in South Africa.

Yet the movement against apartheid, and the black workers’ movement in particular, had the potential to mount a challenge to capitalism itself and to seize control of the wealth from the hands of the white minority. The end of the 1970s saw new independent black unions emerge and win legal recognition. By the 1980s workers were organising co-ordinated general strikes, increasing in number from four in 1984 to 22 in 1985 and 26 in 1986. The largest ever strike by four million workers shut down the country in August 1992.

The Apartheid economy had become increasingly reliant on the labour of black workers to function.

But the ANC, the South African Communist Party (SACP) and COSA-TU held back working class struggles in favour of negotiations with the regime for democratic reforms. The ANC, in order for the negotiations to succeed, had to show to international investors and the whites who held the levers of economic power in South Africa that they could restore capitalist stability through bringing the strike movement to an end.

In his autobiography Mandela admits that in 1992, after attending a mass demonstration of 200,000 people held in response to the murder of 46 ANC activists in Boipatong, he drew the conclusion that “it was time to cool things down” after seeing banners declaring “Mandela give us guns” and “Victory through battle not talk”.

A year later when SACP leader Chris Hanu was assassinated in 1993, Mandela called for calm, saying “we



**Above: Workers in the National Union of Metalworkers, who have broken with the African National Congress**

must not permit ourselves to be provoked” and attempting to slow down the mobilisation and protests.

The issue for Mandela, however, was not really violence, but the threat of a genuine, socialist revolution in South Africa.

This strategy of negotiations was justified by adherence to a two-stage theory of revolution. According to the SACP, South Africa’s white minority Apartheid regime was a “colonialism of a special type”. They argued that a “national democratic revolution” and a long period of economic growth would be necessary before there was any prospect of a socialist revolution.

This idea was a product of the SACP’s Stalinist politics, and the rejection of the experience of the Russian Revolution, which had shown the possibility of workers taking power in an underdeveloped country.

The Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky had spelled out how workers could pursue a strategy of permanent revolution, moving straight from dictatorship to workers’ power without any extended intermediate stage.

There were some within the workers’ movement who did reject the national democratic alliance, rightly arguing that it meant subordinating workers’ interests. This “workerist” current argued that workers’ struggle for higher wages and conditions should remain primary. But they failed to put forward an alternative political strategy for the struggle against the Apartheid regime, such as advocating workers’ control.

### Beneficiaries

In the end, the main beneficiaries of the end of apartheid has been a small

new black elite. Many of them have come from the ranks of the ANC leadership, now able to benefit from the spoils of office.

A stark example is Cyril Ramaphosa, current Deputy President of the ANC and a former mine union leader, who presided over Mandela’s memorial. He has become a multi-millionaire worth \$675 million, and owner of the South African McDonalds franchise, on top of his interests in the Lonmin mining company that runs the Marikana mine.

President Zuma has recently been caught out in a corruption scandal of his own, with \$22 million of public money spent on renovations to his private home, including a new swimming pool and private amphitheatre.

But the working class in South Africa is once again beginning to move.

Strikes and protests have been growing since 2012, symbolised by the Marikana mine workers strike.

At Marikana, the ANC may have directly collaborated with union officials, employers and police in an operation to break the strike by shooting 34 workers dead.

But Marikana has encouraged a succession of wildcat strikes, taken without legal protection and often without consulting union officials. Since 2006, unrest and demonstrations in black townships has been on the rise, as mostly unemployed workers demand adequate sanitation, electricity and water.

This renewed strike and protest movement could be the seeds of a different future for black South Africans—one where the wealth is not controlled by a tiny elite, white or black, but by the working class.

# ABBOTT'S AGENDA MEANS ABORIGINAL ASSIMILATION

By Paddy Gibson

NOT CONTENT with the devastation of six years of the NT intervention, Tony Abbott went to the election insisting he would be the "Prime Minister for Aboriginal Affairs". He has wasted no time in launching a new wave of attacks on Aboriginal communities.

Just before the election, the Liberals revealed plans to cut \$42 million from Aboriginal Legal Services (ALSs). Following outrage and threats of protest, this was scaled back to a \$13 million cut. But NATSILS, the peak body representing ALSs, has been completely defunded. NATSILS chairperson Shane Duffy said the cuts will "further entrench Aboriginal people as second class citizens in their own country".

Similar cuts under Howard saw steep increases in Aboriginal imprisonment. The number of Aboriginal prisoners has increased four times since the 1991 Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. Their incarceration rate is amongst the highest in the world.

ALS lawyers already deal with up to 50 clients per day, making effective representation impossible. And the focus on cutting "policy positions" means the cuts will cripple advocacy around issues such as deaths in custody or community development and diversionary programs as alternatives to prison.

The \$3.4 million cut to Indigenous Family Violence Legal Services (IFVLS) is particularly shocking, given horrific levels of violence and despair in Aboriginal communities. Queensland's IFVLS told a recent inquiry the majority of their work involves advocating for women who have had their children removed by Child Protection authorities. More children are currently being removed from Aboriginal families than at any time in Australian history. Already many parents go unrepresented in these cases and this will now worsen.

Cuts that haven't been reported at all in the media include Aboriginal Early Childhood Support and Learning, set to lose all their funding after two decades co-ordinating and advocating for Aboriginal preschools. Similarly, organisations who had



Above: Tony Abbott with Warren Mundine, chair of his hand picked Indigenous Advisory Council

received grants under Labor from the Aboriginal Benefits Account (ABA), revenue from mining on Aboriginal land in the NT, have been told all grants are suspended pending review, crippling vital community projects.

## Corporate Agenda

The Liberals have also cut \$15 million from the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples, an Aboriginal representative body created under Labor. Congress was set up as a toothless "advisor" to government and has struggled to gain roots in communities, with less than 900 people voting in their last election.

However, in its place, Abbott has hand picked representatives for his "National Indigenous Advisory Council", chaired by Warren Mundine. Disgracefully, Mundine has already accepted the "need" for cuts to Aboriginal services, including Legal Aid.

The Council includes the Westpac CEO and the Managing Director of Rio Tinto. It is part of the broader Liberal push to promote big corporations and the free market as the route out of poverty. While Abbott blames Aboriginal people themselves for the third world living conditions and high levels of unemployment, he is pushing for them to sell their land and assimilate into the "mainstream economy".

Abbott wants to undermine collective ownership of Aboriginal

land across the country. In his free-market fantasy this will lead to private companies driving economic development in communities and flourishing "private home ownership" to cure chronic overcrowding. In the NT, the attack comes in the form of 99-year, whole of township leases. Regulations introduced in December will allow NT Land Councils to be by-passed on decision making over leasing lands.

In Queensland, collective Aboriginal title could be replaced by individual title, something Errol Neal, the Mayor of Yarrabah, has warned could lead to the community being "swallowed up by developers".

Mining magnate Andrew Forrest has been chosen to chair Abbott's review of Indigenous employment, threatening even more punitive measures to force Aboriginal people off their lands into work or training for corporate Australia. This is despite the complete failure of his Aboriginal Employment Covenant. Despite promising 50,000 jobs for Indigenous people and taking millions in government funding, it secured only 14,000 jobs over the last five years—30 per cent lasting less than six months.

The idea of corporate Australia as the saviour for Aboriginal people is a joke. Abbott's corporate agenda is meant to finish off what the Intervention started—to dispossess and complete the assimilation of Aboriginal Australia.

There is a broad push to promote big corporations and the free market as the route out of poverty

**Solidarity**