

# Solidarity

Issue No. 87 / February 2016

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Let them stay

DOCTORS,  
TEACHERS  
NURSES SHOW

THE POWER  
TO BREAK THE  
DETENTION REGIME

MALCOLM TURNBULL  
#LetThemStay

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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

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## Things they say

**The politics of doing that would be incredibly hard. You don't get a politics prize for working that out**  
Scott Morrison on why the government ditched the plan to increase the GST

**There are broader questions to be asked about the efficacy of capitalism**  
Goldman Sachs bank analysts trying to explain the high profit margins but lack of investment in the world economy

**The uneasy equilibrium of recent years—between repeated disappointment in global growth and substantial monetary policy stimulus - is at risk.**  
Wilhelm Buitere, chief economist Citibank, shares his gloomy outlook on the world capitalism.

**I will give you the job, but as you are not an Aussie, I will be paying you a lesser amount**  
Jeff Herscu, Health Express owner, to a 27-year-old Nepalese student, on why she would only get \$12 an hour

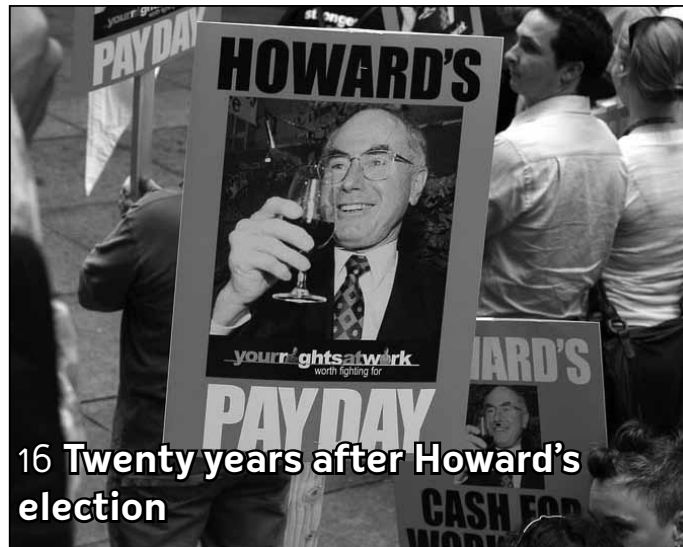
**Gina is a tall poppy that deserves to be tall.**  
Julian Malnic, chair of the Sydney Mining Club at a Sydney “gala evening” last December at which billionaire Gina Rinehart was declared “Miner of the Decade”

**Continuous conflict. There is no going back to normal.**  
David Kilcullen, former Australian Army officer and now counter-terrorism consultant, on the Middle East.

**An understanding of just how concentrated, brutal and aggressive a handful of businesses operate [in Australia], and the real corporate power where it actually rests in this country**  
Labor Senator Sam Dastyari on what he has learnt in Canberra

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# INSIDE THE \$YSTEM

## Immigration bosses hire 'life coach'

THE DEPARTMENT of Immigration and Border Protection has hired "life coach" and motivational speaker Andrew Hughes to inspire its senior staff. He will receive \$15,000 of taxpayers' money to speak at a "leadership conference", to enable department big wigs to benefit from Hughes' expertise in "human potential and transformational leadership".

In his 22 page online book Hughes says: "I'm excited to share with you what has worked for me and so many of my clients who are living authentic, fulfilling lives—working in their passion, evolving into their true potential, finding peace, love and also making thousands of dollars by being themselves".

Hughes says his spiritual journey began with backpacking, a pilgrimage to India and regular meditation. This helped him discover what he calls his "Seven steps to freedom". Hughes says these steps help clients—in this case the high level heads responsible for running Australia's notorious refugee prison camps—"eliminate the hidden subconscious fears" that may be preventing them from "being great".

## Australia more corrupt says international body

TRANSPARENCY INTERNATIONAL'S Corruption Perception Index has seen Australia's score fall six spots from 85 in 2012 down to 79. The Index gives 168 countries a score between 0 (perceived to be highly corrupt) to 100 (perceived to be very clean).

In the last few years corruption scandals have rocked major companies like BHP Billiton, AWB and Leighton Holdings, as well as the Reserve Bank.

According to incoming Transparency International Chairman Anthony Whealy the fall was, "the result of inaction from successive governments who have failed to address weaknesses in Australia's laws and legal processes".

"The delay in responding to these issues has now made reform critical and a commitment to ramp up efforts to tackle foreign bribery, which has particularly impacted perceptions of Australia, is now urgent".

## Keating tells Libs to cut ten times harder



FORMER LABOR PM Paul Keating has called on the Liberals to push through massive spending cuts instead of pursuing tax reform. Keating boasted of his own time as Federal Treasurer, saying that in today's terms he made \$90 billion worth of cuts between 1985 and 1990. These are ten times greater than the cuts being proposed by Scott Morrison.

Despite being underwhelmed by the scale of the Liberal attacks on health care and other vital services, Keating was glad that Morrison was at least talking about cuts as a necessary response to falling revenue. "All these things are pushing down on commonwealth revenue and, when it has been so affected, the penny ought to drop that we ought to be cutting spending," he said.

The truth is Keating's cuts hit public services and those least able to afford it while the rich got richer. He privatised, slashed welfare and shifted the cost of university education off bosses and onto students via HECS, all while cutting corporate tax.

## NT Intervention brings Close the Gap failure

THE LATEST annual Close the Gap report, delivered by Turnbull in February, showed continued failure to meet targets on indigenous disadvantage. In the NT—the site of the much celebrated Intervention since 2007—things are even worse.

A new report by the Castan Centre for Human Rights at Monash Uni gives the Intervention four out of ten for its general human rights performance. It also failed against seven other human rights measures, including the right to self-determination.

The report also gives a fail mark to every close the Gap Measure bar education, pointing out the, "increasing and inordinate amount of Indigenous Australians being incarcerated". As the author of the report says, "The Intervention was meant to improve the lives of Indigenous people in the Northern Territory, but at this rate the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people may never close in many areas". According to ABS data incarceration rates are up 41 per cent since the start of the Intervention while there has been a 500 per cent increase in reports of self-harm or suicide by Indigenous children.

Research and writing by Adam Adelpour

Send suggestions for INSIDE THE SYSTEM to [solidarity@solidarity.net.au](mailto:solidarity@solidarity.net.au)

## Another charge against a CFMEU official collapses

ANOTHER FLIMSY charge against a CFMEU union official has collapsed.

Despite Dyson Heydon's Trade Union Royal Commission claiming to lay bare the CFMEU's "corruption" and "thuggery", charges against Andrew Sutherland have been dropped by the Commonwealth Department of Public Prosecutions.

The charges were in relation to an industrial incident three years ago that had already been dealt with by the Fair Work Building Industry Inspectorate. No new evidence was presented by the Trade Union Royal Commission cops who laid the charges.

National Construction Secretary Dave Noonan drew comparisons with the charges levelled at ACT CFMEU official Johnny Lomax:

"In both cases, it was obvious from the outset that there were very spurious grounds for the charges laid and little chance of success."

The charges against Lomax were eventually dropped as well. Noonan said, "These actions seem to be designed to create a storm of negative publicity for the union without amounting to anything."

"It should be a concern to the community that the Turnbull Government is directing the police to pursue matters which are nothing but attacks on workers and unions."

## 73 per cent say ban Trump from Australia

A *LATELINE* poll of nearly 10,000 people has found 73 per cent support banning Donald Trump from entering Australia.

The ultra-racist Republican Presidential candidate has called for a "total and complete shutdown" on all Muslims entering the United States.

# EDITORIAL

## ‘Let them stay’ defiance can stop Nauru removals

THE WAVE of action demanding the government let the 267 asylum seekers from Nauru and Manus Island stay has put Turnbull on the back foot. We need to keep him there. The growing concern about the 267 has run straight into the government’s determination to send them back to the appalling conditions on Nauru and Manus Island.

The wave of action to let them stay is still continuing, with a vigil and daily protests outside the Lady Cilento hospital in Brisbane and group photos at workplaces across the country.

Opinion polling by Essential Media has shown public opinion on whether babies should be sent back to Nauru and Manus is 40 per cent for keeping them in Australia and 39 per cent for sending them back. But over 20 per cent are undecided.

Now is the time to push even harder. A win against Turnbull over refugees would strike a blow against the years of official racism and xenophobia. It would be a blow against Turnbull—full stop.

By sinking deeper roots, an even stronger movement can emerge to end offshore processing and the government’s shameful mandatory detention and deterrence policies.

For years the refugee movement has persisted against successive governments—with meetings, factsheets, rallies, demonstrations at detention centres. That campaign laid the basis for the upsurge of support to “Let Them Stay” we are seeing at the moment.

The inspiring support from unions and workplaces—a full page ACTU ad; national and state secretaries pledging support for baby Asha—has been the result of painstaking efforts to connect the issue of refugees and racism to issues workers face more directly.

Even the stand by the Labor premiers against Turnbull can’t be understood except for the efforts of the refugee movement to make refugees an issue inside the Labor Party.

The support for refugees is clearly deepening across society, and opinion is shifting in the movement’s favour. But there is still a long way to go.

The 20 March Palm Sunday rallies will be the next major mobilisation for the refugee rights movement. Everyone can do something to build the rallies—in your local area, university campus, workplace or union. A strong showing will help turn the “let them stay” actions into a larger ongoing refugee rights movement.



**Above: The stand by doctors at the Lady Cilento hospital in Brisbane in refusing to discharge baby Asha show workers’ power to stop removals offshore**

Every workplace that has held a “let them stay” photo action should send a contingent to the rally. Large contingents of workers who have direct dealings with the refugee detention system, like doctors, nurses and teachers, as well as from the wider union movement, can give more workers confidence to directly get in the way of plans to send refugees back to Manus Island and Nauru.

This would deal a blow to the government’s efforts to scapegoat

refugees and divert attention from the real threat: their cuts and efforts to rule for the rich. And it would weaken a powerful ideological weapon that the Liberals have used again and again to divide us against each other.

To do this most effectively, we need more socialists. The refugee movement is an example of where more socialists has meant a stronger movement. Solidarity has been at the centre of the fight for refugee rights. Now is the time to join us.

## Keep Turnbull’s hands off Medicare

MALCOLM TURNBULL is not as secure as he looks. His decision to junk plans to increase the GST is clearly driven by fears of an electoral backlash. The threat of the GST saw the opinion polls plunge four points to give the Coalition a lead of 52-48 two party-preferred.

But the government is still committed to helping the big end of town. Treasurer Scott Morrison says it is still aiming to get spending down, meaning cuts to services.

The government has already announced that the final two years of Gonski schools spending will be cut which amounts to \$30 billion in lost funding over a decade.

Unemployment has just risen to 6 per cent. Now, climate change programs at the CSIRO are being gutted, with 100 jobs cut from the Oceans and Atmosphere department. These are among 350 job cuts in total, as a result of budget funding cuts still rolling through.

Cuts to Medicare pathology services are still on the table. And plans to privatise the Medicare claims system could cost thousands more public service jobs.

Privatisation results in worse quality services, threatening patients’ refunds for medical bills and discouraging access to healthcare.

But even as Turnbull cuts services he is still determined to hand money to the rich through tax cuts. And he wants to cut corporate tax for his business friends. Morrison says his tax cuts will be “growth friendly...earner friendly...profit friendly”. But in 2013-14, more than 600 of 1539 of Australia’s largest corporate entities, did not pay any tax at all.

Turnbull and Morrison want to impose austerity measures just like Abbott and Hockey. Between now and the May budget in May, we need more rallies and union action to tell Turnbull—hands off Medicare; make the rich pay.

.....  
**The support for refugees is clearly deepening across society, and opinion is shifting in the movement’s favour**

# Lady Cilento Hospital workers show the way to win

By Amy Thomas

“IF YOU move on baby Asha, you move on 15,000 Maritime Union members.” That’s what Bob Carnegie, Queensland State Secretary of the MUA, told a wildly enthusiastic crowd outside Lady Cilento Hospital on Monday 15 February.

A few days before, when news leaked that Lady Cilento Hospital staff had refused to discharge baby Asha to possible deportation to Nauru, refugee activists quickly organised a solidarity vigil and picket. It has been going strong since then, with unions now organising a roster of supporters.

Coming amidst the anger over the 267 facing deportation to Nauru, Asha’s plight has been a lightning rod for the growing refugee movement. The stand by doctors and nurses has vividly demonstrated the meaning of one of the movement’s slogans, “get in the way to #letthemstay”.

At the same rally that Carnegie pledged the Maritime workers’ support, over ten other unions did the same, including the CFMEU (Construction and General), Queensland Nurses, NTEU, CPSU, Together, United Voice, AMWU, ASU, IEU, and ETU.

“We’re all here tonight to say we back them 100 per cent,” said Ged Kearney, Secretary of ACTU. She called for an end to “all offshore immigration facilities” and for equal access to healthcare, education and employment for refugees.

A representative from the Queensland Teachers’ Union told the rally, “We have students in community detention and detention and we want to see them released to reach their full potential.”

If unions refuse to co-operate with any deportations, it will create a serious obstacle for the government. And any stance against the removals would get wide community support.

Baby Asha’s cause has brought together a beautiful cross-section of the community.

The Rohingya community set up a kitchen to feed the crowds. Other supporters have simply showed up with cakes and snacks. Several Catholic schools joined a school students’ afternoon. Faith leaders held a candle-light vigil and lead prayers; children’s entertainers were enlisted to do a sing-a-long at a Mums and bubs event.

Queensland’s Health Minister Cameron Dick has been pressured to



**Above: A solidarity banner for Asha, with as many signatures squeezed on as possible** Photo: David Haines

support the cause, saying “I strongly support doctors in our hospitals to make the right clinical decisions.”

This is one of the most promising and inspiring developments in the movement to free the refugees we’ve seen in a long time. Keeping up the momentum, and deepening the support, is essential.

The government has flagged mov-

ing Asha and her parents to community detention. But that would leave them more vulnerable to the Immigration Department and being moved to Nauru.

There is only one place that Asha, her family and all of the 267 can get the safety and protection they need—and that is to be free in the Australian community. One child—one person—in detention, is one too many.

## Teacher solidarity with refugees spreads through schools

TEACHERS, EDUCATORS, aides, translators and administrative staff in over 70 schools across Australia have come together to say refugees should be studying in our schools and educational institutions instead of languishing in offshore camps.

After the High Court threw out the challenge to detention on Nauru, Teachers for Refugees initiated the “Teachers say #LetThemStay” action. Group photos and “selfies” of teachers holding signs demanding that Malcolm Turnbull “let them stay” and “close the camps” were taken and uploaded to social media. Now the movement has also spread to universities and other workplaces.

“I am so proud to work at a school with so many wonderful people who are not afraid to speak up about the atrocious and illegal treatment of people seeking refuge in our country,” said Nicky Jackson, teacher at Beverly Hills Intensive English Centre.

But teachers are acting because the government is making schools a battleground. In November last year teachers from Yeronga State High School took strike action to demand justice for Year 12 student Mojgan Shamsalipoor. Just a few months

away from finishing her HSC, Mojgan was forcibly moved from Brisbane to Darwin detention centre.

In December Teachers for Refugees organised 26 schools to take photos demanding “education not detention” on Human Rights Day.

Manus Island asylum seekers responded to the hundreds of photos posted by Teachers for Refugees saying, “There are many teachers among us and we need you to tell the truth for us, about the Manus Island hell, to the Australian government and to all the people, that we should be free.”

In my school teachers have become politicised around the growing wave of support for refugees. The “Let Them Stay” campaign at Beverly Hills Intensive English Centre has seen more teachers actively organising and promoting the action, more teachers that were convinced to take part and more teachers sick of the billions of dollars going towards imprisoning vulnerable people instead of our schools.

While last time our slogan was “welcome refugees”, this time we demanded that we “close the camps”.

**Matt Meagher**  
Follow: [facebook.com/t4refugees](https://facebook.com/t4refugees)

.....  
**The stand by workers has demonstrated the meaning of the slogan ‘get in the way to #letthemstay’**

# Fight to let them all stay—fight to close the camps

By Ian Rintoul

THE HIGH Court decision that offshore processing is lawful has triggered a massive wave of defiance and protest, from the churches to the Labor Party.

Tens of thousands have demonstrated, signed petitions, and called MPs to demand that the 267 asylum seekers brought from Nauru and Manus Island are allowed to stay in Australia. Churches and the Victorian Trades Hall have committed themselves to defying the law and offering sanctuary; *The Age* has editorialised against offshore processing.

Now, the stand of staff at the Lady Cilento Hospital in Brisbane not to discharge baby Asha to be sent to Nauru has galvanised support for the “Let Them Stay” campaign.

The support for the hospital has been fantastic (see p6). With a 24-hour vigil and daily rallies, opinion polls are shifting toward asylum seekers. Hundreds of workplaces have hit social media to show union and workers’ support.

If we can harness the growing opposition, we can win the demand to keep the 267 asylum seekers in Australia and go on to build the movement against offshore processing and mandatory detention.

The letter from Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews to Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull calling for the 267 to be allowed to stay was a political turning point. The Australian Education Union quickly backed Andrews’ call.

Andrews’ offer turned up the heat on Turnbull. But it has also turned up the heat on federal Labor. Four Labor state and territory leaders have called on Turnbull to let the 267 stay.

So far, Bill Shorten has fallen in behind Turnbull’s position; restating federal Labor’s support for offshore processing and that any returns should be considered on a case-by-case basis. A serious stand by federal Labor would politically transform the situation.

The union support for baby Asha, and the “Let Them Stay” campaign needs to be stepped up.

The state premiers need to go further and declare they will block any removal.

By increasing the union and community campaign, we can make it politically impossible for Turnbull to



**Above: Thousands have rallied across the country to “Let them stay” including in Sydney** Photo: Vladuin Vega

remove any of the 267.

## Build the movement

Socialists have long argued that a mass campaign of meetings, rallies and grassroots organising can raise awareness, shift public opinion and mobilise the force of organised workers to change government policy.

The current upsurge in support for refugees is a vindication of this strategy.

Socialists have also argued not to compromise our demands. We need to build on the “Let Them Stay” campaign and demand that Nauru and Manus be closed. The campaign needs to go from “Kids Out” to, “ALL Out!”

It is now very obvious that the arguments made by Robert Manne and others, that the movement should go quiet, accept that Abbott had stopped the boats and accept the bi-partisan support for offshore processing, are wrong.

From the beginning of the campaign, socialists argued for a focus on the union movement and mobilising organised workers in support of refugees—to build support among the most powerful group in society and to break the Labor leaders’ bipartisan support for turnbacks and offshore processing.

It was the mass movement under Howard last time that shifted public opinion, and pushed Labor to promise permanent protection and to close Nauru and Manus when it came to power in 2007.

The Coalition’s racism and fear-mongering is aimed at the working class. We can organise most effectively against the Coalition and pressure the Labor Party leaders by building inside the unions.

Last year there were demonstrations against the Border Force Act and at hospitals with “Detention Harms Children” banners. The number of teachers and schools involved in the “Let Them Stay” campaign has dramatically increased since last year (see p6).

The ACTU published a full page “Let Them Stay” ad. State and national union secretaries have been at the Lady Cilento rallies. We need more resolutions from the unions and workplaces to draw wider layers into the rebellion against Turnbull.

So far, the government has not dared to remove anyone. But Turnbull still insists that the asylum seekers will be returned. Everyone needs to be ready to mobilise at the detention centres and the airports, if that is needed.

The government attempts to make a false link between refugees and terrorism and uses refugees as scapegoats for the government’s failure to provide jobs, or fund housing and health care.

Yet Turnbull pays Transfield/Broadspectrum over \$1 billion a year to run the offshore detention centres and lets big business get away with avoiding tax.

We need to fight to end the government’s cruel detention regime and fight to end their system of crisis and war that constantly creates refugees.

.....  
**We can organise most effectively against the Coalition and pressure the Labor Party leaders by building inside the unions**

# Public servants set to strike again

FEDERAL PUBLIC sector workers are again ramping up their campaign to win better enterprise agreements.

In February the largest agency, DHS (including Centrelink, Medicare and child support workers), rejected a government-approved offer a second time, with an overwhelming 79.5 per cent voting “no”.

Many other agencies within the 152,000-strong Australian Public Service (APS) have also rejected sub-standard offers put to the vote by management. Government policy has imposed a cap on pay rises averaging 2 per cent a year combined with an effort to strip working conditions.

It is now 20 months since bargaining began, and more than two years since our last pay rise.

To call this unfair is an understatement. With Tony Abbott as Prime Minister and Eric Abetz as Employment Minister, the maximum pay rise was set at 1.5 per cent per year. They demanded the majority of conditions enshrined in the agreement, and protected by industrial law, be removed and placed in unprotected departmental policy—calling this a trade off for the pay increase.

After workers began industrial action they agreed to allow superannuation entitlements to remain.

The new team of Malcolm Turnbull and Michaelia Cash has increased the pay cap to 2 per cent and relaxed the attack on conditions slightly. Even so, the option even of forgoing a pay rise in return for maintaining conditions remains off limits.

Michaelia Cash has shown complete lack of respect for staff, claiming that public servants who wouldn't accept these offers weren't living in the “real world”. Her own Department of Employment responded by twice rejecting draft agreements.

In over 100 agencies, there have been nearly 50 ballots, more than half returning “no” votes. Those who vote “yes” are generally smaller agencies.

## A war on the public service

Under Abbott 17,000 jobs were destroyed, increasing workloads for those who remain. This is not just a war on the workforce, but on all Australians who depend on public services.

Our services have widespread support in the community, as illustrated by the huge mobilisations to defend Medicare against Abbott's GP co-payment. Decent working conditions for the people who provide these services are vital to maintaining them.

Financial Review journalist Laura



**Above: One of the CPSU's first rallies of the campaign, back at the end of 2014 in Canberra**

Tingle's recent Quarterly Essay *Political Amnesia: How we forgot how to govern* was another reminder of how cuts have undermined the public service under successive governments.

This is part of the neo-liberal agenda, putting the interests of business and narrow economic concerns above everything else. The budget update in December included further budget cuts in Arts, health and the Attorney General's Department.

The government's attack on public servants is part of attacking all workers. A recent report by right-wing think tank the Institute of Public Affairs argued, “wage increases in the public sector may place undue pressure on the private sector to match”.

## Industrial action

We are now at a stalemate, with four agencies voting “no” twice. Some agencies have accepted poor outcomes, including Veteran's Affairs and Health after second ballots. If bargaining drags on, the government will wear more agencies down.

The union campaign must match the determination of this vicious anti-worker government. The Australian Public Service Commission, which oversees the APS, is now headed by John Lloyd, former head of the ABCC, Howard's construction industry police.

The union was hoping that successful “no” votes and low level bans and strikes would shift the government. There has been some movement, but nowhere near enough. And getting rid of the Coalition at the

election is now far less certain.

Stronger industrial action is required to prevent the severe undermining of conditions that the Coalition has planned.

The size of the “no” votes indicates the widespread support for the union's campaign, among members and non-members of the union.

The largest departments remain the most hostile. Three: Tax, DHS and Immigration and Border Protection (DIBP) together comprise about 40 per cent of the APS. In Tax 85 per cent voted “No”, in DIBP 91 per cent.

In the aftermath of their second ballot rejecting management's offer, further strikes are planned in DHS. And there is continuing action by individual agencies, particularly the DIBP.

But we need public sector-wide action with the strongest departments striking together. There have been two days of strike action uniting a number of agencies. But we need to step the industrial action up further. In September the union leadership failed even to organise meetings during the well-supported half-day strike.

The largest department, DHS, has more than 50 per cent membership. In tax and DIBP, which have voted “no” by large margins, even a determined minority taking action would be effective. Other agencies would join such action.

This is the kind of action that can defend public services and working conditions built up through many decades.

**By CPSU Delegates, Melbourne**

.....  
**Under Abbott 17,000 jobs were destroyed, increasing workloads for those who remain**



# Turnbull stalls on equal marriage to please homophobic MPs

By James Supple

PART OF the deal Malcolm Turnbull struck to take Tony Abbott's job was promising to stick with his plan for a plebiscite on same-sex marriage after the next election. Six months on, the government is yet to discuss a formal proposal for how to run the popular ballot or how to change the law. Attorney-General George Brandis says the details will emerge "in the coming months".

As it stands, parliament would still have to pass legislation after a plebiscite to actually make equal marriage law. Turnbull has said that, should the plebiscite succeed, he would expect his MPs to wave the change through parliament.

But Coalition MPs Eric Abetz, Cory Bernardi and Bridget McKenzie declared in February that they could still vote against equal marriage even if the public voted in its support—demonstrating what a farce the process is.

The plan for a popular vote serves the same purpose for Turnbull as it did for Abbott—delaying the issue as long as possible. Turnbull's prime concern now is not introducing equal marriage but finding a way to keep the homophobes in the Coalition contented. Doing otherwise risks his position as leader.

If he had any principles, Turnbull would simply bring on a parliamentary vote. In late January Rodney Croome of Australian Marriage Equality told the media, "We're confident the numbers are there for marriage equality to pass both houses of federal Parliament right now if a free vote is granted to Coalition members."

It's already clear from opinion polls that an overwhelmingly majority of the population support marriage equality, as many as 68 per cent, according to a Fairfax poll last year. Turnbull's Facebook declaration of his love for wife Lucy on Valentine's Day was met with a torrent of comments pointing out he's denying others the same rights.

A plebiscite is nothing more than an expensive operation in stalling. There is simply no need for it.

However some supporters of equal marriage have argued against a plebiscite on the grounds that it would unleash a torrent of homophobia. Rodney Croome warned the process would be "divisive".

There would surely be offensive campaigns against equal marriage. But the opponents of equal marriage,



**Above: Rallying for marriage equality**

including a series of reactionary MPs who are constantly given a platform in the media, have been broadcasting homophobic nonsense for years in an effort to prevent equal marriage.

Any plebiscite would demonstrate

again the overwhelming support for marriage rights. Ireland's referendum for equal marriage won an inspiring victory and built support for equality in a country with a history of conservative attitudes to sexuality.

## Death in custody at police hands in NSW

THE FAMILY of Aboriginal man David Dungay Hill, who died in custody in NSW's Long Bay jail on 29 December, are demanding answers over the role of corrective services officers in his death.

The \$50 million Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody in 1991 called for urgent action to stop the mass incarceration of Aboriginal people and made a series of recommendations to stop such deaths, which were mostly ignored. Since then Aboriginal prison numbers have increased more than four times and deaths in custody remain a regular occurrence.

The ABC reported that he had been "restrained by a number of guards around the time of his death". He died in the prison's medical complex. Corrective Services NSW later released a statement saying police were not treating his death as suspicious—but it is still under investigation by the Corrective Services Investigation Unit.

Family lawyer George Newhouse believes that David did not die of natural causes. He told the Macleay Argus, "David died at the hands of Corrective Services officers and their contractors. Serious questions must

be asked of the NSW Department of Corrective Services about their treatment of David on that day".

A statement from the family was delivered to February's rally for TJ Hickey in Redfern: "Our son, brother and warrior David Dungay Jnr was taken from us through a death in custody. David only had two weeks to go until his release after a lengthy time in jail. He was only 26 years old."

"We cannot understand why this has happened to our son and brother and demand answers. The [Corrective Services Assistant] Commissioner made a very premature statement saying David's death was not suspicious, which just makes us so angry considering he doesn't even know what happened.

"We have requested a meeting with the Commissioner with no result. All we want to know is what happened to David and why.

"We are going to fight to the end until all are held responsible for the death of our son and brother David Dungay. But we are going to fight for all the other mothers, fathers, brothers and sisters who have lost a loved one in prison and try...to make sure this never happens to any of our people again."

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**Turnbull's prime concern now is finding a way to keep the homophobes in the Coalition contented**

By Dylan Griffiths  
Sydney Uni SRC Education Officer

## Sydney Uni's sweeping restructure: cutback and fightback ahead

ON THE last day of work for 2015, the University of Sydney's Chancellor, Belinda Hutchinson, announced a drastic restructure of the University. The decisions were made in a secret Senate meeting days earlier. They include amalgamating ten faculties and six schools into six faculties and three schools and cutting down 122 degrees to 20 degrees.

While they're at it, they're removing five alumni and two staff-elected from the University Senate.

Education and Social Work and Sydney College of the Arts students are extremely displeased about the plan to merge them both with the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences.

EdSoc, the Education and Social Work Student Society, created a survey with the option to show support or opposition to the merger. After it was shared just once through Facebook last year, 250 students registered opposition. Not a single student registered support.

One student wrote, "This would be a travesty for all faculties involved and would severely damage not only the quality of teaching but the student experience." Another, "I'm very worried this merger is more about cutting costs then increasing the quality of social work education."

The Faculty of Agriculture and Environment and the Faculty of Veterinary Science are set to move under Science, and share the new school of Life Sciences and the Environment with Biology.

Many details are still yet to be finalised, but the Chancellor's email confirmed the intention to merge Medicine, Pharmacy, Nursing and Dentistry in a new Medical Science faculty. Already, the University's website has been updated to fit the restructure. You can now find Veterinary Science through the Science faculty website. The University doesn't want new students to get a taste of the old structure.

As well as EdSoc's organising, the College of the Arts students called an open meeting for students to voice their concerns. Both groups have thrown their support behind a campus rally against the restructure for 16 March.

### Management myths

Management claims students will be better off under the changes. But with less teaching and general staff, this is



**Above: Sydney Uni has a long history of student and staff protest to defend jobs and stop cuts to courses**

about placing profit before students and cutting back staff. Administration is already being centralised in preparation. One academic working in the faculty of Education and Social Work describes their faculty's administration staff as being the holders of "institutional memory" who are essential for specialised support.

Generalising curriculum will no doubt lead to academic staff losing their jobs, too. Management explicitly aims stop "overlap" and "duplication". But they are out of touch with the curriculum. One Biology lecturer pointed out that "Botany taught by Biology is completely different to botany taught from an agricultural perspective", but they are set to be amalgamated.

The Sydney College of the Arts faces the shutdown of their whole campus at Callan Park, and a transfer to the main campus without essential studio and gallery space. The move also puts subject areas that require specialised studios and expensive materials, like Glass Blowing and Ceramics, under threat.

Management claims SCA and other faculties are financially unsustainable. But the University has significant savings and makes the choice to deprioritise learning quality. Last year the University spent millions on a new Business School.

The restructure is a product of the shift towards a user-pays, market-driven education system which has

seen adapt into corporate, money-making machines. Universities, in an intense competition over students, look to channel prestige, believing wooing to investors and keeping a well-maintained Jacaranda provide the edge they need to enrol a high number of students. Then they abandon these students in oversized classes with fewer staff.

### We can fight and win

At Sydney University students have fought against faculty amalgamations and staff cuts in the past, and won. The successful campaign to stop the merger between the Political Economy Department and the Department of Politics and International Relations in 2011 demonstrates that grassroots student organising is key. In that campaign, a major student meeting followed by rallies and motions in lecture theatres brought management to heel.

Management refuses to hold real consultations, so we need to make democratic spaces for students to voice their opposition. Faculty meetings can bring together students and build for rallies and direct action in large numbers.

Disrupting business-as-usual can capture attention and embarrass the university. Hitting the campus in the early weeks of semester is key. All students can get involved, organise a contingent from their class to the 16 March rally, and talk to classmates and teachers.

**Education and Social Work and Sydney College of the Arts students are extremely displeased about the plan to merge**

# CAN SOCIALISM END OPPRESSION?

**Clare Fester** restarts our series on common questions about socialism

WE LIVE in a profoundly unequal world. While in Australia women have equal pay by law, they still earn, on average, 17.9 per cent less than men. Equal marriage may seem inevitable, yet 61 per cent of LGBT people experience verbal homophobic harassment and 18 per cent experience physical abuse in their lifetime. In Australia, Indigenous children are 24 times more likely to be incarcerated than non-Indigenous children.

There is a common and false caricature that says socialists can deal with economic problems like wages or capitalist crisis, but they can't explain or fight oppression like sexism, racism or homophobia. Far from it—socialists have always been involved in struggles against oppression.

Firstly, socialists are for the self-emancipation of the working class. To overthrow capitalism the working class needs to be united. The working class is Muslim, LGBT, Aboriginal and female. So we need to take on every division and prejudice that diminishes our ability to fight together.

Writing in 1902, Russian revolutionary Vladimir Lenin argued that the role of a revolutionary socialist is to be: "the tribune of the people, who is able to react to every manifestation of tyranny and oppression, no matter where it appears, no matter what stratum or class of the people it affects."

What Lenin is saying here is that socialists must take oppression seriously and lead struggles to fight it—and that it's only the working class that can end the system that produces oppression.

## Capitalist oppression and division

Oppression is not natural. To paraphrase Marx, the ruling ideas in society are the ideas of the ruling class. Oppression is structured into class society and it serves the interests of the ruling class. The police, the media, the education system, religion, and so on, all maintain systematic discrimination and the ideology that supports it.

Sexism, for example, is rooted in the nuclear family. Working class women provide free childcare and free domestic labour in the home to produce the next generation of work-

**Above: Inessa Armand, a Russian revolutionary socialist who fought for women's liberation**



ers for the ruling class. British PM David Cameron recently called the family "the greatest welfare system of them all."

Sexism also divides the working class. Workers' accepting stereotypical ideas about women makes it easier for the ruling class to exploit both women and men.

Racism, too, divides workers and justifies inequality. The ruling class peddles racist myths about Indigenous people, Muslims and refugees. For people suffering cuts to social services and growing unemployment, racism is a way that government and bosses can deflect the blame. Instead of fighting for more services and jobs for everyone, some workers can mistakenly accept racist ideas that encourage them to see other workers as the enemy.

## Class and struggle

Yet while capitalism divides us, it also brings us together. Today it is common, especially in universities, to hear that class is one of a series of intersecting oppressions, along with gender, race, sexuality and many others.

However, class oppression is not the same as other oppressions. As Marx writes in the Communist Manifesto, capitalism creates its own gravediggers. The working class produces all the wealth in society. We run the call centres and the transport systems, the schools and the factories. The capitalist system itself gives the working class a potential source of power.

Capitalism also brings together workers of all genders, sexualities and races, meaning that workers' collective action creates a drive toward unity and to challenging oppressive ideas. The 1968 Ford Dagenham strike, the subject of the film *Made in*

Dagenham, shows how women workers taking collective action forced their husbands to see them as class allies and equals, and helped break down sexist ideas. The strike was the beginning of the Women's Liberation movement in the UK.

Oppressed groups are also divided by class. For example, Julia Gillard experienced a torrent of sexist abuse as Prime Minister. But, as a ruling class figure, she was quite willing to cut the payments of thousands of single mothers. And mining mogul Gina Rinehart isn't interested in equal pay for women—her wealth depends on exploiting women and men.

## Revolution and socialism

To uproot the oppression so deeply embedded in capitalism requires a total revolutionary transformation of society. This means the majority of ordinary people taking power into their own hands, and the active involvement of the mass of oppressed people in decisions that affect their lives. Workers' control over production, rather than bosses' control, means decisions can be made about how the whole of our society works.

The experience of unity and empowerment through struggle shifts people's conceptions of what is possible and realistic, and this is magnified 1000-fold in a revolutionary situation. It is truly "a festival of the oppressed".

In Russia, nearly 100 years ago, the revolution established socialised childcare, kitchens and laundries, giving women full freedom to participate in running society. A whole ministry dedicated to women's education toured the country. They even recognised same-sex marriage—something Australia has yet to do. National and religious minorities were granted self-determination.

What would workers' power be capable of today? This, and more. A revolutionary movement would grant freedom of sexual and gender expression, and of religion. It would revolutionise our education system. It would disband the police force that harasses and murders Aboriginal people, it would end wars and refugee detention.

It would build a society in which every individual could flourish and meet their full potential. We have nothing to lose but our chains.

**We need to take on every division and prejudice that diminishes our ability to fight together**

# Flint: How austerity poisoned a US city

By Jimmy Yan

THE US city of Flint is in the midst of a man-made public health emergency. For almost two years, the predominantly low-income residents of the city of 100,000 people have been exposed to extreme levels of lead contamination in the city's water supply.

This was the outcome of extreme austerity measures that saw the city's elected officials replaced with unaccountable administrators.

An outbreak of legionnaires' disease linked to water contamination has killed ten people. Widespread reports of illness, including incidences of rash, hair loss and burns, have been met with indifference from Republican Governor Rick Snyder.

Levels of lead found in the Flint's water have exceeded the federal limit by ten-fold. The World Health Organization states that, "the neurological and behavioural effects of lead are believed to be irreversible."

Every child in the city faces a future of learning impairment, behavioural problems and permanent brain damage as a result of drinking poisoned water. As filmmaker Michael Moore, a Flint local, notes, "all the children have been exposed, as have all the adults, including me".

## The making of a crisis

Up until April 2014, Flint's water was supplied by Lake Huron in Detroit, a stable water source forming part of the second largest fresh water lake in the US.

Darnell Earney, an unelected administrator tasked with the implementation of austerity measures, shifted the local water supply to the highly polluted Flint River. Its water was so corrosive that lead from aging infrastructure leached into the water supply.

The decision was driven by a projected cost saving of \$19 million over eight years in the construction of a cheaper pipeline.

The ensuing public health crisis has been at the centre of a cover-up lasting almost a year. In October 2014, General Motors (GM) complained of rusting components in its local car plant resulting from corrosive water.

Officials spent \$440,000 to allow GM to reconnect to the original Detroit water supply. But they continued to maintain that the water was safe for human consumption. Even the work-



**Above: Members of the National Guard have now arrived in Flint to help distribute water**

ers at the GM plant continued to drink polluted water from water fountains and ice machines there.

As late as July 2015, a Michigan Department of Environmental Quality spokesperson claimed, "anyone who is concerned about lead in the drinking water in Flint can relax".

The declaration of a federal State of Emergency in January this year was an overdue recognition of an unfolding crisis caused by the logic of neo-liberal austerity.

The Flint water crisis is the direct outcome of a wider offensive against public services driven by Republican Governor Rick Snyder in Michigan. Snyder is a former venture capitalist who passed anti-union laws and gave corporations a tax break at the expense of ordinary people.

Elsewhere in the state of Michigan, in the bankrupt city of Detroit, 27,000 low-income households unable to pay rising water bills were targeted for mass water shut-offs last year.

In 2011, Flint was placed under "Emergency Management", with unelected officials appointed to draft policy and re-negotiate public contracts in order to cut public spending.

The city's low-income residents have been forced to pay some of the highest water rates in Michigan for contaminated water, alongside the cost of bottled water.

Michael Steinberg of the American Civil Liberties Union observes that, "Flint is Exhibit A for what hap-

pens when a state suspends democracy and installs unaccountable bean counters to run a city."

## Flint Lives Matter

In a majority African-American city in which over 40 per cent of residents live below the poverty line, the Flint water crisis has deepened a decades-long social catastrophe of de-industrialisation.

The same Republican politicians who supported the introduction of "Emergency Management" in Flint and Detroit opposed the introduction of equivalent measures in white-majority areas of Michigan.

A statement by the Black Lives Matter movement argues that African-American "residents living with autoimmune disorders like lupus and HIV are at especially high risk".

Months of public protest by residents have since forced the return of the city's water supply to Lake Huron. But the damage to pipes by corrosion has already been done and water remains undrinkable.

It will cost an estimated \$1.5 billion in public investment for a wholesale replacement of water infrastructure. This requires a challenge to the austerity agenda of Snyder.

The Flint Water Crisis has exposed the consequences of running vital public services as a business. Once the site of the 1934 Sit-Down Strikes in the city's car factories, the struggle to put people before profits in Flint is literally a fight for survival.

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**The decision was driven by a projected cost saving of \$19 million**

# US primaries shake the candidates of the corporations

By James Supple

AS THE US presidential race gets underway, both major parties are being shaken by a revolt against the preferred candidates of the party establishment and the corporate elite.

Bernie Sanders was the real winner of the first two Democratic primaries. Six months ago he was written off as an outsider. But he won comfortably in New Hampshire with 60 per cent, after finishing neck-and-neck with Hillary Clinton in Iowa.

Sanders calls for a “political revolution” to sweep away the control of politics by corporate interests. In his victory speech in New Hampshire he declared, “we can no longer continue to have a campaign finance system in which Wall Street and the billionaire class are able to buy elections.”

The 74-year-old Senator for Vermont describes himself as a socialist and champions policies like free university tuition, government-funded healthcare and a \$15 an hour minimum wage.

He has slammed establishment favourite Hillary Clinton as funded by Wall Street and big business. Her \$675,000 in speaking fees from Goldman Sachs in 2013 has become symbolic.

Sanders has galvanised support from young voters in particular, winning 83 per cent of those aged 18-29 in New Hampshire, and 84 per cent in Iowa. This includes young women, despite Hillary’s attempt to spruik her feminist credentials. Over 80 per cent of women under 30 backed him in both primaries.

But it remains unlikely that he will win the Democratic nomination. The US Presidential election itself is not until November. Caucuses among Democratic and Republican supporters in each state to vote on their candidates continue until June, with a major test “Super Tuesday” on 1 March, where 15 states will vote at the same time.

Around 15 per cent of the vote in the Democratic Party is held by “super delegates”, party officeholders and dignitaries who are heavily favouring Hillary. In New Hampshire, despite Sanders’ overwhelming win in the popular vote, Hillary Clinton came away with an equal number of delegates, taking six super-delegates to Sanders’ zero.

He also re-iterated after New



**Above: Bernie Sanders is galvanising support through campaigning against the priorities of corporate America**

Hampshire his willingness to channel his support towards Hillary should she win the nomination, saying, “I also hope that we all remember, and this is a message not just to our opponents, but to those who support me as well, that we will need to come together in a few months and unite this party and this nation because the right-wing Republicans we oppose must not be allowed to gain the presidency.”

This means falling in behind one of the candidates of corporate America.

But Bernie Sanders’ support is an indication of the distrust of the US political system, and the desire for change.

He reflects the impact of movements like Occupy, and its focus on the wealth of the 1 per cent, and Black Lives Matter. Workers’ wages in the US took a beating after the economic crisis hit in 2009, while the 1 per cent increased their wealth further.

Sanders is one of a series of new left-wing figures and parties who are riding this wave of discontent, from British Labor leader Jeremy Corbyn to anti-austerity party Podemos in Spain.

## Republican crazies

This rage at the establishment is being reflected in the Republican race too, but in the success of even more reactionary and racist candidates than usual. The Tea Party movement, encouraged by Republican elders as a way of attacking Barack Obama, presented itself as a protest against the Washington elite.

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**Sanders has slammed establishment favourite Hillary Clinton as funded by Wall Street and big business**

The radicalised Republican base is now turning against mainstream candidates like Jeb Bush. So the two leaders in the Republican race are now the racist big-talking billionaire Donald Trump and evangelical Ted Cruz.

Trump scored a commanding 20-point victory over other candidates in New Hampshire, with 35 per cent of the vote. He was narrowly beaten by Cruz in Iowa.

Trump’s brand of right-wing populism appeals to those who have lost out from a sinking economy with his promise to “Make American great again”. His vile racist scapegoating puts the blame for this squarely on Muslims and immigrants, with a promise to ban Muslim immigration and build a 3000-kilometre wall between the US and Mexico.

This is only a more extreme version of the racism already in the mainstream. Last year 31 Governors released statements refusing Syrian refugees entry to their states after the terrorist attacks in Paris.

Cruz is a Tea party favourite who made his name as the architect of the “government shutdown” in 2013 by refusing to pass government funding bills through the House of Representatives. He is even more loathed by the Republican establishment than Trump.

More reliable servants of Wall Street and the top end of town like Jeb Bush or Marco Rubio for the Republicans and Hillary Clinton for the Democrats may still end up coming out on top. But the disenchantment with the US political system is clear.

# WHAT WOULD SOCIALISM BE LIKE?

**Erima Dall** explains what we mean by socialism, and how a world run on the basis of human and environmental need, not competition and profit, would work

WHEN ASKED for an alternative social system in a BBC interview, comedian Russell Brand answered:

“Well, I’ve not invented it yet... But here’s the thing you shouldn’t do. Shouldn’t destroy the planet, shouldn’t create massive economic disparity, shouldn’t ignore the needs of the people... What are you saying, there’s no alternative? There’s no alternative? Just this system?”

Brand’s interview went viral. He didn’t have a blueprint for change, but he said what a lot of people are thinking.

We live in capitalist world of growing inequality, war and looming climate catastrophe. In Australia, the income share of the top 1 per cent has doubled in the last few decades. Globally, just 62 people own as much wealth as the world’s poorest 3.6 billion people.

The world’s major military powers have created devastating conflicts in the Middle East, yet want to turn away the millions of refugees this has created.

All this is feeding the popularity of new radical challenges to mainstream politics, such as Bernie Sanders in the US and Jeremy Corbyn in Britain. Their rise to prominence has put the idea of socialism back on the agenda, as both call themselves socialists. Their talk of affordable education, higher taxes on the rich, action on climate change, and anti-racism have excited millions of people.

## Alternative

But what exactly *is* socialism, and what would it be like?

Real socialism would be nothing like the old dictatorships in Russia or Eastern Europe. It would be based on a profound extension of democracy.

Firstly, it would require putting all the wealth in society, from control of the factories, the mines and the massive multinational companies under democratic control.

This means taking them out of the hands of the billionaires like Gina

## Under socialism workplaces will be the new centres of democratic governance

Rinehart, Rupert Murdoch and James Packer. These major capitalists are not elected, but their decisions shape the world—they create and destroy jobs and transform landscapes with high-rises, pollution and open-pit mines.

This version of socialism is quite different from the socialism of Sanders or Corbyn.

When you dig beneath the surface, what they really argue for is a more humane version of capitalism, and a compromise with the wealthy and the powers that be.

They have radical policy proposals. But unless we get rid of capitalism altogether, such reforms can always be reversed. After all, we *used* to have free education and a much higher corporate tax rate.

Vested interests will raise hell to stop us making change in the first place, using every tool at their disposal including the mainstream media, the police, the army and their control of major businesses to cripple the economy.

## Power

Against this power, we have to use the power of the organised working class. Workers are the people who keep society ticking over—nurses, cleaners, teachers, bus drivers, construction workers, scientists, journalists, manufacturers, cooks.

Through going on strike and halting production, they have the ability to bring capitalism to its knees.

Any major strike movement poses the question of who controls production and therefore who runs society—the workers or the old management and shareholders.

This holds the potential for a socialist revolution where workers take power.

Control of the workplace would be the source of workers’ power. Each workplace would hold mass meeting to decide how the workplace would be run, and even decide *what* to produce.

There are historical examples of

this.

Key has been the emergence of workers’ soviets (soviet means council). They first appeared in St Petersburg, Russia during the 1905 revolution. Soviets re-emerged in the 1917 revolution and became the basis of government.

Workers’ councils also sprang up in the German revolution of 1918-19, and Budapest in 1956. Local workplace committees were formed in Italy 1919-20, the *cordones* of Chile 1972, and the *shoras* in Iran 1979.

These councils emerged to co-ordinated the workers’ movement across workplaces.

Under socialism workplaces will be the new centres of democratic governance. Today work is about the least democratic place there is, where we are ordered to do this or that, under the threat of the sack.

But this is because the boss has control. Yet even under capitalism we have to co-operate at work to get things done. At work an entire group of people operate as a team, according to a division of labour, like a slick machine. Sometimes we don’t even notice it.

A hospital, for example, relies on cleaners, cooks and administrators as much as doctors and nurses. Right now we are only cogs in the machine; under socialism we will be in the drivers’ seat.

Workers have the most intimate knowledge of what works and what doesn’t. Bosses like to set KPIs and enforce procedures that make no sense.

But when the internet is broken, you want an IT technician, not the CEO of Google, on the phone. When the power is out, you want electricians on the job, not AGL shareholders.

There would be mass participation in decision making based on directly elected workplace delegates. Delegates from workplaces would come together in local, national and international meetings to make decisions such as what our cities will



look like, and what our school curriculums will teach.

### Objections

There are many common objections to this. For example, some argue that human nature means greed, corruption and self-interest will always dominate. But humans also have a tendency towards co-operation and compassion. How else do you explain volunteer firefighters, charity, or the martyrs of the Egyptian revolution who fought for democracy, to name but a few examples.

That isn't to say people are angels, far from it. But people's ideas and behaviours are shaped by their conditions of existence.

Capitalism encourages a lot of awful behaviour. The greediest bank managers and mining magnates get enormous bonuses. Imagine if they were social outcasts. The worst violence is that of the ruling classes—drone strikes, bombs on Syria, detention camps. Is it really surprising we also find violence on our streets, in our pubs and homes?

Alienation and poverty perpetuate crime. And the police force make it all far worse—in the US cops killed 1140 people in 2015. This is how “justice” works under capitalism.

### What we could do

Capitalism wastes colossal resources on war, advertising, bank bonuses, duplication, and cheap design (inbuilt obsolescence).

There is more than enough wealth

**Above: Movements like Occupy, which pointed out that 99 per cent of us were being left behind, express the desire for an alternative society**

to provide everyone with running water, food, housing, public transport and renewable energy. Yet under capitalism there are 795 million people who do not get enough food for their basic needs—about one in nine people on the planet.

Socialism would allow us to put the basic needs of people and the environment first, rather than profits.

Instead of nations competing and warring for oil and geo-political control, we could share techniques and technology between richer and poorer countries and quickly solve climate change, for starters.

In a more rational society, we could all work less, and save time not having to compete for jobs. Instead we could enjoy and educate ourselves, playing music, learning languages and html code, travelling, or learning first aid.

Far from socialism crushing individuality and replacing it with sterile uniformity, it would allow individual expression and innovation to flourish.

Socialism would radically transform gender and sexual relationships.

People could live and form relations as they chose, whether that be in same-sex or straight couples, or radically different arrangements. The establishment of collective childcare and communal dining rooms and laundries is needed to abolish the gendered division of work, including child-rearing.

It will take intense struggles to break down sexist ideas – but it can be done when masses of women and

men participate together in strikes and revolutionary uprisings.

### Russia

The Russian Revolution of 1917 saw the most complete workers' democracy, with all power in the hands of the workers' councils. A socialist government took power in a major country for the first time.

The revolutionary government withdrew from the First World War, redistributed land, liberated oppressed nationalities, granted divorce, decriminalised homosexuality and abortion, gave women the vote, and set up a department to teach women literacy and numeracy.

Workers themselves established factory committees, turfed out managers, and took over the books. Factories set up libraries and crèches on grounds – some even added sportsgrounds and ice-skating rinks! Public lectures took place, open to all. And everywhere, people learned to read.

American communist John Reed, witness to the revolution, wrote:

“The thirst for education, so long thwarted, burst with the Revolution into a frenzy of expression. ... Russia absorbed reading matter like hot sand drinks water, insatiable. And it was not fables, falsified history, diluted religion, and the cheap fiction that corrupts—but social and economic theories, philosophy, the works of Tolstoy, Gogol, and Gorky”.

### Limits

Tragically, over the next decade, the revolution degenerated into a bureaucratic dictatorship.

Socialism in Russia could not survive without spilling over the borders. But the revolution in neighbouring Germany was crushed.

The key leaders of the revolution including Lenin and Trotsky had long argued that the revolution needed to spread to neighbouring countries. Isolated, it was strangled through invasion, civil war and famine as the rich and powerful across Europe united to try to crush it. On the ashes of the workers' democracy Stalin established a brutal regime.

Capitalism is global—and so must be its downfall. The growth of new movements around the world is demanding an alternative—from the ongoing strikes against austerity in Greece, the solidarity with refugees in Europe and in Australia, and the Black Lives Matter movement against police shootings in the US.

The potential exists to begin building a movement for another world.

# 20 YEARS SINCE HIS ELECTION JOHN HOWARD: CLASS WARRIOR FOR THE RICH

The Howard government had a ruthless class agenda, writes **David Glanz**, but it was Labor's timid opposition that kept it in power

HISTORY RECORDS that John Howard's Liberals won government 20 years ago, on 2 March, 1996.

According to the media, the result was a rejection by large chunks of the working class—the so-called “Howard's battlers”—of political correctness.

Hurt by the recession of the early 1990s, more and more workers were “aspirational” and had turned their backs on old Labor values.

The political reality, however, is that the election was not won by Howard but lost by Labor, with workers punishing the ALP for 13 years of neo-liberal attacks.

Some 55 per cent of those voting Liberal in 1996 did so because they disliked the other parties—just 39 per cent backed the Coalition because they liked them.

As Queensland Labor premier Wayne Goss put it in the run-up to the election, voters were “sitting on their verandas with baseball bats” for their chance to punish Paul Keating's government.

Under Bob Hawke and then Keating, Labor had privatised the Commonwealth Bank and Qantas, ended free tertiary education, taken Australia into the first Gulf War and given voters, in Keating's words, “the recession we had to have”.

Keating had survived the 1993 election only because Liberal leader John Hewson had campaigned for a 15 per cent GST, the end of bulk billing, severe restrictions on access to the dole and \$10 billion in cuts.

On election day 1996, the Liberal and National coalition won 94 seats to Labor's 49. Three ministers lost their seats.

Goss could not be accused of being out of touch—as the results rolled in, the ALP retained just two seats in Queensland.

The common perception was

that Howard had won by avoiding Hewson's mistakes—making himself a small target, promising “unity” and good government and undertaking to maintain Medicare and environmental policies.

But Howard had his own neo-liberal agenda. In a speech on February 18, he pledged to bring in individual workplace agreements, to oppose compulsory union membership and to attack what he called “rigidities”—what workers would call hard-won conditions.

He was already committed to privatising Telstra, but threw in a capital gains tax cut for small business for good measure.

Significantly, the Liberal campaign was fought under the slogan “For all of us”—a dog whistle to those concerned about the impact of the High Court decision in 1992 to recognise Aboriginal native title (the Mabo case).

Howard was also talking in code to those who had welcomed his call in 1988 to reduce Asian migration and to end multiculturalism.

On election night, Howard claimed a clear mandate and he moved quickly to enforce it, passing the Workplace Relations Act within months.

Provisions included individual contracts, reduced access to workplaces for union organisers, the ability for employers to seek injunctions against industrial action, enterprise level bargaining and all-staff ballots.

But the most important initiative within the WRA was the concept of protected industrial action.

Previously, unions could, in theory, be sued for damages arising from industrial action—but in practice, workers were free to take action how and when they wanted without them or their officials being sued.

The Liberals offered the trade

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**On election night, Howard claimed a clear mandate and moved quickly, passing the Workplace Relations Act within months**

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union bureaucracy a carrot and a stick. So long as workers had voted in a ballot, unions could take protected industrial action within a defined period of bargaining.

But the new law allowed employers to go directly to a judge for damages if action happened without a ballot or outside the protected period.

The penalties written into the WRA threatened the assets of the unions much more than those of individual union members. This was because the Liberals' main aim was to intimidate union leaders into inactivity.

Howard did not get it all his own way. The number of working days “lost” in 1998 was still 524,900—a significant figure compared to the 80,900 days of action in the year to September 2015.

But in general, Howard and his Workplace Relations Minister, Peter Reith, were successful in intimidating most union officials into limiting or preventing industrial action that could see them lose their offices, cars or branch bank accounts.

The election night talk of “unity” was quickly forgotten.

Instead, as Reith put it: “Never forget the history of politics. And never forget which side we're on. We're on the side of making profits. We're on the side of people owning private capital.”

Howard's other major initiative in 1996 was a major round of cutbacks. He declared that Labor had left a \$7.6 billion budget “black hole” and responded by breaking what he called “non-core promises”.

Public service and university jobs were slashed, the Commonwealth Employment Service was privatised, students' HECS was increased, and cuts were made to all departments except defence.

The Liberals' first two budgets



reduced spending by \$8 billion.

### Racist scapegoating

Broken promises, cutbacks, attacks on workers, even a run of ministerial resignations—Howard needed a strategy to deflect people’s angry response. He turned to his favoured weapon ... racism.

Racist scapegoating under Howard took a variety of forms. His first act was to cut migration—particularly family reunion, which was seen as a bid to limit the arrival of relatives of the Chinese marooned in Australia by the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre.

Then came the attack on the so-called “Aboriginal industry”, falsely claiming that the national Aboriginal organisation was corrupt.

Most damagingly, he refused to condemn the newly elected Pauline Hanson, whose maiden speech to parliament in September 1996 unleashed a tidal wave of racism and led to the establishment of the One Nation Party.

At every step of the way, Howard made sure that the “debate” continued. He encouraged the racists with nod-and-a-wink comments about “free speech”.

At the same time he attacked what he called the “black armband” view of history, meaning any attempt to recognise the attempted genocide of Aboriginal people. He refused to issue a government apology for two centuries of institutionalised racism.

Howard was re-elected in 1998 but the Coalition vote dropped 8 per cent and Labor even won a majority of the two-party preferred vote. The looming introduction of the GST, the impact of budget cutbacks and the bitter Maritime dispute (to be discussed below) had taken their toll.

Howard moved to buttress his position by attacking asylum-seekers. A mere 8000 arrived by boat between 1999 and mid-2001, but it was enough to allow the Liberals to posture as the defenders of the nation’s borders.

In August 2001, the government instructed a Norwegian freighter, the Tampa, not to bring asylum-seekers rescued in international waters into Australian waters. When it did, Howard ordered the ship to be boarded by Australian special forces.

Almost immediately, the government introduced border protection legislation and launched the “Pacific Solution”, sending asylum-seekers to Nauru.

In the midst of this fear campaign, the 9/11 attacks presented Howard



**Above: Unionists rally against Howard during the Your Rights at Work campaign**

with the perfect opportunity to pose as the champion of national security. On October 5, he called an election.

Just two days later, the government falsely claimed that a group of asylum-seekers intercepted by an Australian warship had thrown their children overboard.

In this fevered atmosphere, Howard made the defining statement of the election: “We will decide who comes to this country and the circumstances in which they come ...”

From having faced defeat according to opinion polls in early 2001, Howard won the November election with one of the biggest swings towards a sitting Australian government.

Buoyed by this, Howard took Australia into two wars, first in Afghanistan and then, in 2003, in Iraq, revelling in his role as cheerleader for the two main warmongers, US President George W Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair.

### Failure of opposition

As already noted, Labor won the popular vote in 1998. But it was to be another nine years before it could repeat that feat. In between, it made Howard’s life much easier by ceding key political ground.

Labor leader Kim Beazley soft-

pedalled on Howard and Hanson’s racism. When the NSW Labor secretary called Howard a racist, Beazley responded: “He can use his own words. I don’t go down the road of characterising John Howard like that.”

The ALP’s assessment of its 1996 defeat noted “a deep uneasiness about some aspects of multiculturalism”. Its response was to go quiet.

On the industrial front, Labor opposed aspects of the WRA but pledged to leave the core of the legislation intact.

Labor defeated the first attempt at border protection legislation in 2001 in the Senate. Howard labelled Beazley as having “no ticker” and Labor’s resistance promptly collapsed. They passed amended legislation and supported the invasion of Afghanistan.

If it had been left to Labor, the Liberals would have had it easy. But from the earliest days of the Howard government, resistance from below began to grow.

The first line of resistance was to Hanson’s One Nation. Thousands marched, picketed and handed out how-to-vote cards.

The turning point was the attempt by the Patrick Corporation stevedoring company to break the Maritime Union of Australia.

The Howard government stood firmly behind Patrick. When former soldiers were recruited as scabs in late 1997 in an aborted plan to send them to Dubai to train as waterfront workers, the government expedited passports.

Patrick locked out its workforce at Webb dock in Melbourne at midnight on 28-29 January and, on 7 April, in response to rolling MUA national action, locked out its national workforce before sacking them.

It was a carefully choreographed operation, openly backed by the Liberals and the National Farmers Federation.

It was revealed that Patrick was hiring its workers through shell companies that had no assets. On April 8, Reith helpfully introduced legislation to pay wharfies their redundancy.

Workers responded quickly and strongly in response to this conspiracy. There were regular mass pickets, first at Webb dock and then at all Patrick operations, particularly in Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane and Fremantle.

Most picket lines were banned by court injunctions, but the numbers there continued to grow, state Labor MPs and ACTU secretary Bill Kelty among them.

## FEATURES

By mid-April, the dispute was on a knife-edge.

The MUA and ACTU were conducting a legal campaign (while offering up cuts to wharfies' conditions). Fear of the WRA and being sued for damages meant the MUA would not shut the waterfront by pulling out its members at P&O, the other major stevedoring company.

On the other hand, unionists and community activists were blockading all Patrick operations. Well-organised workplaces began to send delegations. There was a real sense that a general strike was possible if the call came from the top of the movement.

On the night of 17-18 April, the police made it clear they intended to break the picket at East Swanson dock in Melbourne—the biggest Patrick operation in the country. The Liberal Police Minister threatened a blood-bath.

Three thousand MUA supporters held the gate all night, packed like a cork in a bottle between the gate and cyclone fencing on either side of the road. At dawn the police advanced, then hesitated in the face of mass defiance.

The stand-off ended when Victorian Trades Hall Council pulled construction workers arriving on a nearby project off the job and marched them down to the dock.

The police were trapped and surrendered to Trades Hall secretary Leigh Hubbard. They marched away, removing their caps to show they were no longer on active duty.

It was a famous victory for the union movement and led, in practice, to a legal win a fortnight later in the High Court.

The dispute ended in an unnecessary economic defeat—concessions by MUA members at Patrick that were a result of the officials' unwillingness to confront the WRA head-on.

But in the view of most non-wharfies, the outcome was a resounding political victory. As the chant went, the MUA was indeed here to stay. Howard would not try another frontal assault on a union.

A year later, the mood of growing defiance could be seen in spontaneous working day rallies in support of East Timor.

And the following year, 2000, saw another significant highpoint when 10,000 people from around the country surrounded Crown Casino in Melbourne for three days from September 11 (or S11) to blockade a meeting of the World Economic Forum.



Howard had to scuttle in by boat. On the second day, Trades Hall led a march of thousands of Melbourne workers to the blockade in solidarity.

The refugee solidarity movement was growing throughout this time, culminating at Easter 2002 in 1000 people gathering outside Woomera detention centre in outback South Australia.

Encouraged by this support, detainees tore down the fences and dozens escaped into the desert. Woomera was shut the next year. The 2007 Kevin Rudd government was to meet most demands raised by the movement.

In 2003, perhaps a million Australians marched in the world's biggest protest yet—against the invasion of Iraq.

It was a mobilisation made necessary by the lies of our rulers, not least Howard, and made possible by the preceding five years of struggles.

Howard squeaked back into office in 2004, helped by a rising economy and a bomb blast in Jakarta during the election campaign, which re-emphasised the topic of national security.

For the first time, Howard also gained a majority in the Senate. He saw this as an opportunity to complete unfinished anti-union business (he had been forced to abandon a toughening up of the WRA in 1999). The result was the WorkChoices legislation.

Howard's arrogance was to bring him undone. The Liberals had been careful in drafting the WRA in 1996 to hobble the union bureaucracy and the militants around them. Workers who had little experience of industrial action were not deeply impacted.

**Above: Howard lied over Iraq, children overboard and his promise to leave workers better off**

WorkChoices, on the other hand, put a weapon to the head of every worker. It removed unfair dismissal rights from those in workplaces under 100 and removed the "no disadvantage" test on AWAs. This meant workers could be pushed on to inferior individual contracts with no way to resist.

The ACTU organised a huge "your rights at work" campaign, focused on getting Labor elected. But others wanted to go further and there were mass political strikes and protests. In Melbourne, 150,000 strikers marched.

The campaign finally broke the Howard government's back. The Liberals were thrown out of office on 24 November 2007.

Howard became only the second Australian Prime Minister to lose his seat.

### Rotten legacy

Howard was a class struggle conservative in the spirit of Britain's Margaret Thatcher. He hoped to pull Australian society firmly to the right.

Did he succeed? In some respects, yes. He reinforced the neo-liberal agenda launched by Hawke and Keating. Today, the logic of the market still totally dominates official politics. The Fair Work Act has inherited the core of the WRA.

He also reinforced Australia's role as deputy sheriff of US imperialism, laying the basis for today's Islamophobia. Australian troops are still in Afghanistan and Iraq today.

He created a mass demonisation of asylum seekers and injected racism deep into Australian society. And he pioneered the racist Northern Territory intervention, aimed at breaking up Aboriginal communities and resistance.

In all of this he was aided, during his time in office and after, by Labor either endorsing Howard's positions or offering a pale alternative.

But in other regards, Howard failed and he did so because of sustained mobilisations from below.

The union movement has been weakened, but is still the largest organised movement in the country. The refugee movement is once again on the rise.

The mainstreaming of environmental common sense, the upswell of support for same-sex marriage, and the opinion polls that show many voters to the left of Labor on questions of social and economic equality—all these are signs of the Howard agenda's shallow roots.

# THE ORIGINAL EGALITARIAN SOCIETIES WHAT HUMAN HISTORY TELLS US ABOUT HUMAN NATURE

For the bulk of our existence, humans have lived in egalitarian societies, argues **Caitlin Doyle-Markwick**, showing that a society based on competition and greed is not inevitable

ONE OF the most common objections to socialism is the idea that humans are inherently selfish.

It is often assumed that greed and individualism are a biological fact, inherent in so-called “human nature”. The competition and violence in modern societies are assumed to be simply natural.

It follows then that a truly egalitarian society is idealistic and impossible.

This applies to the inequalities between men and women too. Some people, including many feminists, claim that the oppression of women has been common to all human societies, suggesting that men are naturally domineering or aggressive. The upshot of this argument is that it is not possible to create a society in which women and men are truly equal, unless men were to be constrained in some way.

However, exploitation, inequality and the subordination of women to men in the nuclear family do not arise from an inherent and immutable “human nature”. They are products of history.

In fact, for the majority of human history since our emergence as a species 200,000 years ago, people did actually live in egalitarian societies, where sharing and co-operation were the norm.

Hierarchy, inequality and oppression were virtually unheard of. This changed only within the last 10,000 years.

These were hunter-gatherer, or “foraging” societies, in which both women and men contributed to the economic and political activity of the group. Marx and Engels described this as “primitive communism” or “original communism”, and saw it as proof of the possibility of a different way of



**Above: Foraging societies that continue to exist in difficult conditions in Africa today point to the possibility of egalitarian societies**

running society.

These societies call into question the common sense idea that all human societies are naturally driven by selfishness and greed.

The strict equality of societies in Australia and the Americas prior to colonisation has been an important source of inspiration and pride for Indigenous peoples fighting back against the brutalities of the new system.

Fred Maynard, an Aboriginal waterside worker and founder of the Australian Aborigines Progressive Association in the 1920s wrote, in a letter to NSW Labor Premier Jack Lang demanding self determination:

“The members of [the AAPA] have also noted the strenuous efforts of the Trade Union leaders to attain the conditions which existed in our country at the time of invasion by Europeans—the men only worked when necessary, we called no man ‘Master’ and we had no king.”

The film *Two Laws* shows interviews in Borroloola in the NT during the early 1980s, where local women fighting for land rights argued, “today we’ve got a whitefella boss, but Aboriginal people didn’t have a boss, there were leaders for the ceremony and the land, but no boss over other people. Men never bossed over women”.

This egalitarianism is also evidenced by detailed written descriptions from early contact with Aboriginal people in the Americas and in Australia before the full impact of European colonisation.

### **Egalitarian societies**

From their first arrival in “the New World”, the Americas, European colonists took records of their interactions with the local populations.

Some of the most detailed come from Christian missionaries who attempted to live and work with indigenous people.

A French Jesuit missionary, called Le Jeune, kept meticulous written records from his time spent amongst the Montagnais-Naskapi people in what is now Canada in the year 1633-34.

At the time Le Jeune was writing, indigenous societies were still virtually unchanged by interaction with settlers from Europe.

The Montagnais were a hunter-gatherer society that lived by hunting for small and large game, and in summer gathered nuts, berries and roots.

Le Jeune reported that customs amongst the group called for generosity, co-operation and patience. He commented that “good humour, lack of jealousy and willingness to help” characterised daily life. People who didn’t contribute their share weren’t respected and it was an insult to call people stingy.

The Montagnais had no permanent leaders or “chiefs”. Those who were chosen to speak as intermediaries between Native American groups or with the French upon their arrival, were chosen because of their rhetorical ability, but held no formal power within the group. This applied to many other nomadic groups in North America.

Leadership fell at different times to different people because of their superior knowledge on a given topic or practice. Important matters were resolved through considered discussion.

Both men and women took part in these decisions. Le Jeune saw women as holding “great power” and having “the choice of plans, of undertakings, of journeys, of winterings”.

The Jesuits, however, worked very hard to introduce the concepts of hierarchy and male supremacy into Native American societies, with the aim of entrenching the idea that private property should be passed down from father to son, requiring a man to control the sexual activities of

his wife.

Le Jeune records a Montagnais man’s bafflement at these suggestions:

I told him it was not honourable for a woman to love anyone else except her husband, and that this evil being among them, he himself was not sure that his son... was his son. [The Montagnais man] replied ‘Thou hast no sense. You French people love only your own children; but we all love all the children of our tribe.’”

But co-operation didn’t arise by accident. It was a matter of necessity. The stress on generosity follows from the way hunter-gatherers were intensely dependent on one another.

### **Women’s role**

In societies like these there was a sexual division of labour, usually arising from the need for women to bear children and breastfeed, and therefore not being able to join the hunt for risk of danger and jeopardising carrying on the clan.

But this did not mean that women’s labour was less valued. Indeed in most societies gathering, rather than hunting, made up for much more than half of the group’s food intake. By virtue of their essential economic contribution, women were respected and well regarded.

And these divisions were usually not strictly enforced. Care of children also fell to men. Women sometimes joined the hunt, men sometimes gathered.

Spouses in almost any of these societies could also separate without suddenly jeopardising their own livelihood or that of their children.

In Australian Aboriginal societies too, women exercised a degree of autonomy and sexual freedom that their “civilised” sisters could only dream of at the time. They usually chose their own partners. Until they were married, and in many cases even after, women and men often had casual sexual relationships.

Women also had much more control over their own reproduction. In some places abortions were performed if a pregnancy was unwanted, and women tended to space out pregnancies by a few years.

This is true of many hunter-gatherer societies, where women used abortion, abstinence and even infanticide to decide how and when they would have children.

Social behaviour and customs

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### **By virtue of their essential economic contribution, women were respected and well regarded**

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in hunter-gatherer societies also developed to maintain the stress on co-operation and reciprocity.

Amongst the traditional !Kung people of the Kalahari desert in Africa, who maintain a difficult existence even today, behavioural customs are used to maintain equality and keep egos in check, first by cutting down to size the arrogant and boastful, and second by helping those down on their luck to get back in the game.

Men are encouraged to hunt well, but the correct demeanour for the successful hunter is modesty. One of the !Kung explained to anthropologist Richard Lee in the 1960s:

Say a man has been hunting. He must not come home and announce like a braggart. “I have killed a big one in the bush!” He must first sit down in silence until I or someone else comes up to his fire and asks, “What did you do today?” He replies quietly, “Ah, I’m no good at hunting. I saw nothing at all... maybe just a tiny one”. Then I smile, because I know he has killed something big.

Whatever their skills !Kung leaders have no formal authority. They can only persuade, but never enforce their will on others.

Subsistence societies rely on intimate knowledge of the natural environment. Though they were vulnerable to the extremes of that environment, on a day-to-day basis they were not materially poor.

Many hunter-gatherer people worked no more than three to four hours a day to acquire enough from their surroundings to sustain them. This meant they had time for a rich spiritual, religious and cultural life in what some anthropologists have called the “original affluent societies”.

### **The development of class and women’s oppression**

However, after agriculture fully developed for the first time around 10,000 years ago, class divisions developed in some societies.

With the advent of class came the development of a centralised state authority, as well as economic inequality, systematic warfare and the oppression of women.

First, however, society needed to produce enough surplus food to support a group of individuals not directly producing what they ate. Agricultural production allowed settled societies to produce far more than hunter-

gatherers.

As agriculture developed, women were increasingly excluded from food production.

As agricultural labour became more complex, involving heavy ploughing and the herding of cattle, it became impossible for child-rearing to take place alongside it.

Instead women took on work in the family home, bringing up children and cooking. Agricultural societies had higher birth rates so women were pregnant more often. Male children, the farmers of the future, became more important.

Long-distance trade became controlled by men, as women remained in the home.

A similar process took place with warfare, as the strict domain of men. The rise of agriculture meant that enough food was produced that it could be stored, and therefore stolen. For the first time systematic warfare began to make sense.

The emergence of a ruling class dominated by men also contributed to the oppression of women. Now it became essential to ensure their property was inherited by their male children and women too became the “property” of their husbands.

Once enough surplus was produced it became necessary for a group of people to be freed from direct labour to look after the stores of food, make sure they weren’t consumed immediately and to co-ordinate large-scale production. But often they found that increasing production to put enough away for lean years, or stopping the immediate consumption of food in good years, required them to bully the rest of the population into line.

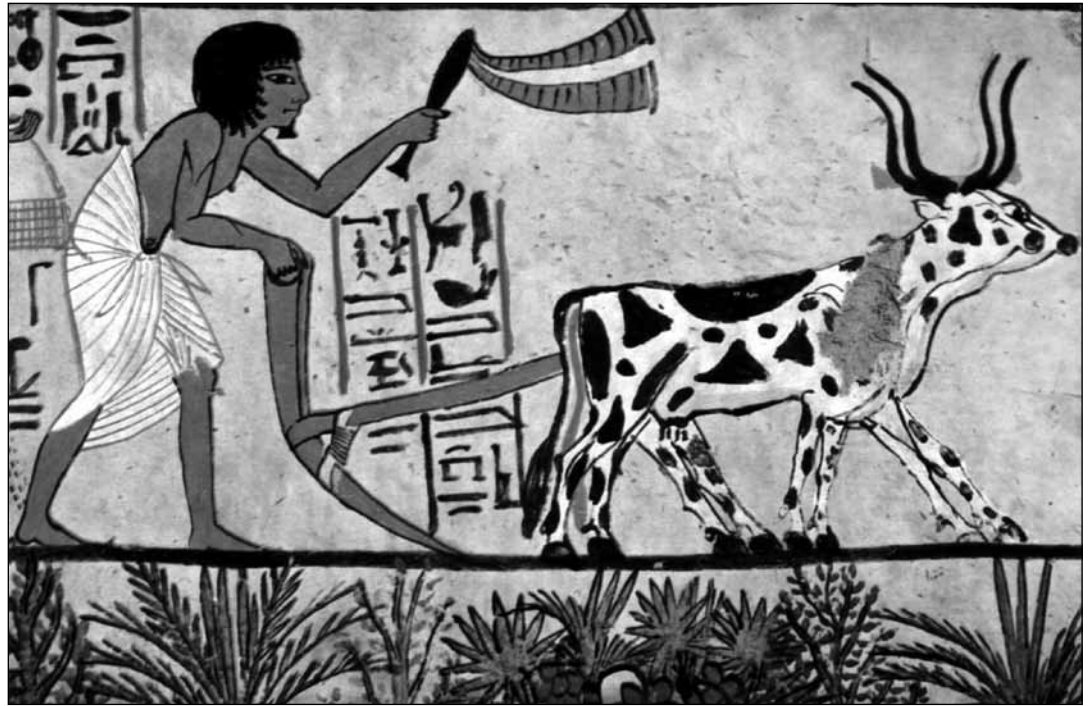
Over time such “leaders” turned into “rulers”. They went from acting in the interests of the whole society, to acting with a view to their own personal interests.

They began to use their control of the surplus for their own advancement, even at the expense of society as a whole.

The logic of class societies remains essentially the same, through slavery and feudalism, through to capitalism.

Throughout history the ruling class has justified their control in many and varied ways. Religion was one of the earliest justifications, with many of the first rulers setting themselves up as priests.

Capitalism is no exception. The ruling class works hard to justify its



**Above: The development of agriculture in Mesopotamia and Egypt led to the development of class divisions**

existence and rule by telling us that the private ownership of the vast bulk of world’s wealth by the (less than) 1 per cent is necessary because collective, democratic ownership and control is simply impossible.

Those who wish to preserve the status quo constantly tell us that society cannot fundamentally change because we are constrained by our very human nature.

Meanwhile those same people are materially rewarded on a daily basis for the utmost greed and violence. CEOs and other bosses are richly rewarded for exploiting other humans, deploying weaponry that can kill entire villages, destroying the planet’s resources and finding complex new financial tools to swindle people.

Those who controlled the banks and financial institutions that were partly responsible for the Global Financial Crisis were, rather than being punished, in many cases rewarded with enormous bonuses and salary increases.

Meanwhile these same people cut wages, cut jobs and insist that less money be spent on essential public services. The bulk of us are made to compete for jobs, housing, places at university, space on the train and hospital beds.

This kind of competition, which is forced upon us by the system in which we live, often causes people to behave in selfish or anti-social ways just to get

by or get marginally “ahead”.

Even so, there are acts of kindness, solidarity and collective action on a daily basis, whether it be volunteers feeding the homeless, people rallying for women’s rights, for their loved ones to be able to marry their partners, or against war, or going on strike to make our collective lives better.

Humans have enormous potential to be caring, generous and compassionate.

An understanding of the fact that inequality, oppression and violence developed historically shows us that these features do not spring from an unchanging “human nature”, but from specific material circumstances. The egalitarian societies that existed for over 100,000 years across the world demonstrate this perfectly.

We now have the technology and productive capabilities for everyone to live in comfort. What is holding us back is the undemocratic, unaccountable and self-interested power of the capitalist class who continue to divide and rule.

With a radical transformation of society, the economic and political system could again be socialised, and along with them the unequal burden borne by women.

This could allow for co-operation, creativity, collectivism and real democracy to become the basic principles of society once again.

# Inside the banking scam that produced a global crash

**The Big Short**  
 Directed by Adam McKay  
 In cinemas now

*THE BIG Short* blows the whistle on the catastrophe and madness of a system run by bankers and profiteers. It leads you through the glassy corridors of Wall Street in the months leading to the Global Financial Crisis and shows how the drive for profits had infected everything: CEOs, ratings agencies and the government.

Most of us are familiar with the austerity politics that hit the working class around the world after the 2007 crash—the waves of ravaging unemployment and welfare cuts that keep coming at us. This film fills in some blanks about whom and what we have been paying for.

The (mostly true) story follows four oddball fund managers who cotton on to just how dodgy the mortgage investment boom was.

Ryan Gosling's character, Jared Venet, neatly demonstrates the impending disaster with a Jenga tower, each block representing a bundle of debts that agencies had outrageously over-rated. We later find out Standard & Poor's and other agencies were issuing high ratings based on fees rather than actual quality. So with a slight increase in mortgage defaults, the tower—the US housing market—crashes.

In another explainer, a chef chops up three-day-old fish, representing rancid investments, and throws them into a fish stew, representing Collateralized Debt Obligations or CDOs, which agencies issue AAA ratings to! Why was no one trying to prevent this impending disaster? "The banks are too



busy getting paid obscene fees to sell these bonds", explains Venet.

Before committing to "shorting" (betting against) the housing market, Mark Baum's investor team takes a field trip to reality. They discover the creeping malaise of unemployment, debt, defaults and impending homelessness in a mortgage belt area.

But no one can acknowledge reality—when the crash begins it's "just a gully", repeats everyone along the profit chain, from chirpy real estate agents through to mortgage brokers, sleazy bankers and CEOs.

### Bailing them out

The four characters who bet against this grand fraud (and the audience) get momentary satisfaction in seeing the lies come crashing down when the bubble finally bursts. But the satisfaction gives way to a deeper horror, as we remember who ended up footing the bill for the bankers' lunacy.

Australian taxpayers coughed up \$120 billion dollars to underwrite the banks during the crisis—

but it's schools, hospitals and single parents that get the blame for deficits.

The US government committed \$16.8 trillion to paying out banks and companies. The Greek people have suffered devastating austerity to pay for €230 billion worth of "loans" to avoid a government default on its debts, 90 per cent of which actually went straight through Greece into European banks.

Brad Pitt's character,

Ben Rickett, spells out the ramifications of a crash: "If we're right, people lose homes. People lose jobs. People lose retirement savings, people lose pensions. You know what I hate about f\*cking banking? It reduces people to numbers—every 1 per cent unemployment goes up, 40,000 people die, did you know that?"

"They knew taxpayers would bail them out", sighs Mark Baum as he watches the fallout. And the dawning realisation that it was the political system that protected and bailed out these profit-seeking bankers makes *The Big Short* stronger than other accounts, which have often limited their critique to the shocking immorality of the financial sector.

*Big Short* doesn't explain the crisis of profitability that gave rise to the bubble, and its roots in the operations of capitalism itself. And a Bernie Sanders-style prescription of prosecuting the culprits and breaking up the big banks is offered as the justice that should have prevailed—not so

much an overhaul of our social order.

None of the mass rebellions against the system that were prompted by the crisis, including Occupy, the Arab Spring and the ongoing upheaval in Greece are given any attention. Pointing to them might have alleviated the gloomy self-loathing that afflicts the protagonists at the end, as they realise they have done nothing to actually challenge the system.

But this film should fuel the confidence of those of us who are fighting the madness and irrationality of capitalism.

In a closing scene, two young investors walk through the empty Lehman Brothers trading room, looking at the chambers of wealth and power they had been excluded from for years. Like discovering the fraud behind the Wizard of Oz in the Emerald city, they realise that there are no "grown ups" running the system. It's an emboldening message—unless we want to see the corruption and crisis continue we are going to have to take control.

Lucy Honan

**The political system protected and bailed out these profit-seeking bankers**

## There's no Cowspiracy—fossil fuels are the main climate threat

**Cowspiracy**  
Directed by Kip Andersen and Keegan Kuhn  
Showing on Netflix

AL GORE has gone vegan and actor Leonardo Di Caprio has thrown his name behind a new film, *Cowspiracy*, which suggests that all we have to do to stop climate change is stop eating meat.

Is that really all there is to it?

*Cowspiracy* starts reasonably enough. Narrator and co-producer Kip Andersen expresses his frustration that lifestyle changes such as riding his bike and taking shorter showers are not leading to emissions cuts. But the film goes rapidly downhill. Rather than challenge the failed politics of individual lifestyle change it doubles down on the strategy, claiming that the real problem is that we are still eating hamburgers.

But individual lifestyle choice is a dead end that is incapable of delivering significant emissions cuts. It blames ordinary people rather than challenging the power and profits of the fossil fuel industries. It avoids the need to build a movement to force politicians to act.

*Cowspiracy* paints animal agriculture as the number one climate villain by cherry picking wrong or misleading “facts” and “experts”. The film only pays lip service to the idea that fossil fuels are a problem, and completely ignores profit as a driver of environmental destruction.

One of the film's main claims is that, “Animal agriculture is responsible for 18 per cent of all Greenhouse gas emissions, more than the combined exhaust from all transportation”, or as it puts it elsewhere,



“livestock and their by-products actually account for...51 per cent of annual worldwide greenhouse gas emissions”. These claims both come from the widely criticised 2006 UN Food and Agriculture Organisation report *Livestock's Long Shadow*. It has been debunked by Simon Fairlie in his book *Meat: A Benign Extravagance*. He puts the figure at closer to 10 per cent. More recent data from the authoritative Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Fifth Report in 2014 comes to a similar figure of under 10 per cent. (It lists agriculture as producing 24 per cent of global emissions, of which methane produced by livestock accounts for 39 per cent).

Nor is it true that agriculture emissions are growing faster than those from other sources. The IPCC says, “emission from fossil fuels contributed 78 per cent to the total greenhouse gas emission increase between 1970 and 2010. Since 2000 emissions have been growing in all sectors except in agriculture”.

The film shifts away from climate concerns as it

**Above: Emissions from livestock amount to perhaps 10 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions**

progresses, moving to animal rights and veganism. It makes the old vegetarian argument that eating meat leads to human starvation, claiming, “82 per cent of starving children live in countries where food is fed to animals, and the animals are eaten by Western countries”.

But the fundamental reason people starve is competition for profit. The world produces more than enough food to feed everyone. The reason people starve is that they can't afford to buy it. Huge amounts of food go to waste when they cannot be sold at high enough prices. Governments in rich countries also pay

farmers not to grow food to keep prices high.

### Mobilising for change

All the way along *Cowspiracy* alleges a conspiracy to let cows off the hook. It hints darkly at the power of the meat industry to silence environmental organisations. It asks questions about meat industry funding of environmental organisations without making any specific allegations which could be proved or refuted. It makes ponderous use of the fact that Greenpeace will not grant Kip Andersen an interview.

But all the conspiracy ultimately amounts to is the suggestion that big environmental organisations need donations from people who eat meat. Even this is undermined by the fact that Greenpeace actually does encourage people to eat “less or no meat or fish”.

There are problems of conservatism in big environmental organisations. But these having nothing to do with meat. Naomi Klein's film and book *This Changes Everything. Capitalism vs The Climate* exposes the cosy up to corporations by big

environmental groups and advocates grassroots movement building in response.

But *Cowspiracy* is ultimately demobilising—calling for a focus simply on individual lifestyle change. Kip Andersen, a self-described “serial entrepreneur” who makes a living from “a number of business that I run” makes this explicit in an interview with realnews.com stating, “The solution is really simple...it doesn't even take necessarily widespread transformation with the legal system and our politics. It's basically just switching our diet.”

Tackling climate change requires a focus first and foremost on transitioning away from the use of fossil fuels like coal, gas and oil. This will mean a series challenge to the profits of major corporations.

But emissions from animal agriculture do need to be addressed. Climate research group Beyond Zero Emissions' Land Use Report does recommend reducing herd numbers, and therefore eating less meat.

But it also suggests changes to production methods like rotational grazing (rather than burning used pastures), feed changes, selective breeding, conversion of methane to bio-energy at piggeries and practices which increase soil carbon. Such changes would need “very significant investments” and require political change.

Not only does this film have no solutions to the climate crisis, it points in entirely the wrong direction: blaming ordinary people, ignoring fossil fuels, and letting corporations, politicians, and capitalism off the hook.

**Chris Breen**

# NO CUTS, NO PRIVATISATION STOP TURNBULL'S WAR ON MEDICARE

By Amy Thomas

NOT CONTENT with cuts to pathology and diagnostic bulk-billing, the Turnbull government has resuscitated Tony Abbott's plan to privatise Medicare payment systems. But these twin attacks on Medicare could prove to be Turnbull's major mistake. The government is in for a fight, with the first "These Cuts are Killing Us" rallies, widely backed by the union movement, hitting the streets on 20 February.

Reports confirm that the \$50 billion privatisation is very likely to be a part of the May budget, with private accounting multinationals like KPMG already writing up the "business case" for privatisation, and the Department of Health preparing for a trial.

Turnbull and Health Minister Sussan Ley are using Turnbull's cringe-worthy spin about the "digital revolution" to declare they are bringing Medicare payments "into the 21st century". But their plan is to pay a private provider to upgrade the payment systems for Medicare, the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme and aged care.

As CPSU National Secretary Nadine Flood explains, "This privatisation could threaten thousands of jobs, particularly in regional Australia." Personal health information would be at the mercy of private companies.

Australia Post has expressed interest in taking over the system, which could be part of preparing the ground for its own privatisation. Major companies like eftpos, the big banks and even the infamous detention centre contractor Serco are also reported to be circling.

The privatisation will not save money; it will simply mean taxpayer money going to private profits. A similar process has been a catastrophe for NSW TAFE, with costs blowing out to \$500 million dollars for an IT upgrade led by private company Accenture. It has been such a disaster that many students cannot even enrol in courses.

There is no reason why an upgrade to the payment systems should be done by a private company. It could easily and much more effectively be done in-house.



**Above: Turnbull has made a mistake messing with Medicare after the backlash against Abbott's co-payment**

Across the country, unions are gearing up to make the attacks on Medicare an election issue. Polling organised by unions shows nearly 70 per cent of people in marginal seats are opposed to the pathology cuts. These cuts will see patients paying upfront for widely-used services; in some cases, the out-of-pocket costs will be enormous.

Already, the two major private pathology providers are trialling co-payments for pathology and diagnostic services, though the cuts don't go to the Senate until July.

"We are hearing every day from members of the community just how angry they are at any attempt by government to take us down the US-

style path of health care," said Ged Kearney, ACTU President, launching a union campaign to Save Medicare. An ACTU meme about the cuts was shared two million times on Facebook.

But we'll need more than social media and doorknocking in marginal seats. The 20 February rallies will be a great opening shot for a sustained campaign, with hundreds of organised workers joining in. We can follow up by building local committees, workplace meetings, and organising for major mobilisations around the budget itself.

The movement against the GP co-payment was part of what made Tony Abbott toxic. It's time to subject Turnbull to the same treatment.

## The cost of the cuts to pathology

DIABETES PROFESSIONALS are aghast at the pathology cuts, fearing they will mean their patients skipping vital tests and ending up in hospital. Tests to manage Type 2 Diabetes will cost a minimum of \$16.80 + \$9.70 four times a year, not including extra charges by pathology providers on top of the rebate.

During pregnancy, innumerable tests can be required by GPs, depending on the mother's history and the risk of complications. Each individual test might not seem so ex-

pensive (for example, quantitation of bile acids in the blood in pregnancy, \$19.65) but this would really start to add up over multiple tests.

Some tests will be extremely expensive. An electron microscopic examination of biopsy material will be at least \$184.35.

Genetic testing, which is increasingly used to assess things like cancer risk, can be several hundred dollars. For example, chromosome testing has a fee of \$394.

**Peter Jones**