

Solidarity

Issue No. 88 / March 2016

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TELL TURNBULL

LET THEM STAY

CLOSE THE CAMPS

BRING THEM HERE

US ELECTION

Can Sanders' socialism win the White House?

REFUGEES

Europe closes the borders

IRELAND

100 years since the Easter Rising



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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 for more information on what we stand for.

SOLIDARITY MEETINGS AND BRANCHES

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Things they say

I think that is a pretty good outcome
Peter Dutton on the \$55 million plan to dump refugees in Cambodia, where there are now just two of the original five refugees left

I judge everything I do by the way you operated.

PM Malcolm Turnbull to former Liberal PM John Howard, who introduced the GST, went to war in Iraq, introduced Workchoices, the Pacific Solution—enough said!

We are serious about innovating...

We want to try new things, new ideas, and we will be looking at investing in technology

ACTU Secretary Dave Oliver jumps on the innovation bandwagon looking for ideas to stop union membership losses

The idea that you should just vote how you feel, I think it kind of misses the point.

Tanya Plibersek bemoaning the fact that some people want to vote for politicians with principles

It is going to take a much more severe downturn before politicians will actually see the need for dramatic structural reform and cuts in spending.

Shirley In't Veld, recently appointed to the board of NBN and a director of Asciano, CSIRO, Duet and Perth Airport, puts the big business view, as unemployment rises and investment slumps in WA

Yes he deserved it. The next time we see him, we might have to kill him. We don't know who he is. He might be a terrorist.

Donald Trump supporter John McGraw, who punched a black protestor at a Trump rally.

I'd like to punch him in the face, I'll tell ya

Donald Trump urging on the crowd over a protestor at a Trump rally a month earlier.

But if we came to the Right without the leftist human rights lawyer, the conversation could be quite different.

Funny that—Noel Pearson explaining his strategy of sucking up to the Right as the way to get Constitutional recognition.

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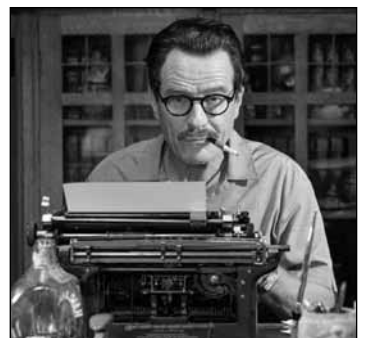


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INSIDE THE \$Y\$TEM

Mushroom farm migrant workers underpaid \$92,000

FIFTY-TWO MIGRANT workers at a Hunter Valley mushroom farm in NSW were underpaid a total of over \$90,000 over an 11 month period between 2013 and 2014. The mostly Taiwanese and Chinese workers couldn't speak much English. The outrageous rip off was uncovered by a Fair Work investigation into the horticultural industry.

This latest scandal comes after companies including 7-11, Domino's Pizza and other agricultural suppliers to Coles and Woolworths such as Zerella in South Australia have been exposed for underpaying workers.

Farm operator Gromor Enterprises outsourced its workforce through labour provider TDS International Investment Group. This left workers on a flat hourly rate of only \$16.37. For staff picking, weighing and packing the fungi this should have been increased to \$20.14 and then \$21.08. Including public holiday rates pay should have been as high as \$37.95 under the horticulture award, more than double what the workers received. One worker took a \$6938 hit.

Poker champ advises stockmarket traders

FOR TRADERS, the stockmarket operates like a gigantic casino, where there are big risks and big money to be made.

According to the *Financial Review*, US trading firms are now routinely encouraging traders to try their hand at poker, valuing the skills in "numeracy, risk assessment and composure under extreme competitive pressure".

Now Australian poker champion Joe Hachem has offered his advice saying, "A winning poker player is a conservative person who only sticks his neck out when he thinks he has the edge...If I let my emotions overtake my numbers...I can blow my whole bankroll."

In the wake of scandals about drug taking, late night parties and expletive-ridden emails among stock traders at ANZ, he must think they could use the tips.

Qantas to make \$1 billion after axing 5000 jobs



QANTAS IS on track for a \$1 billion profit this year after it cried poor two years ago and demanded 5000 job cuts. The 234 per cent profit increase took airline's half-year profit to \$688 million. The mega-profits were driven by a drop in oil prices which saved the company \$488 million in costs.

Shareholders will reap major rewards. The company is buying back \$500 million worth of its shares which will crank up the value of the remaining shares on the market.

When the job cuts were announced in 2014 Transport Workers Union Secretary Tony Sheldon refused to put up a serious fight. He said the union would "discuss cost-saving measures to mitigate job losses".

Now it seems there is no shortage of profits, running costs are dramatically down and shareholders are raking it in; but the jobs are gone anyway. To add insult to injury, Qantas is attempting to impose a pay freeze in upcoming Enterprise Agreements. Linda White, the assistant national secretary for the Australian Services Union, said the company's huge profits were "going to make it a bit hard" to ask her members to accept a wage freeze. Qantas CEO Alan Joyce is on \$12 million a year. The ASU took aim at his hypocrisy on Facebook, saying, "Qantas announce record breaking profits as Alan Joyce, the \$12 million man, tells workers to take a wage freeze. That's cold."

Education Department corruption exposed in Victoria

THE VICTORIAN Education Department spent \$1.4 million on over the top entertainment and gimmicks to promote their \$180 million dollar "Ultranet IT" project. The project was supposed to establish an online platform that connected teachers, parents and students. But it collapsed due to technical problems on the day it was launched.

The revelations came during an ongoing inquiry into the 2010 project by Victoria's Independent Broad-based Anti-Corruption Commission (IBAC). The lunatic promotional spending included a specially designed Ultranet bus and a professional Ultranet themed song and dance routine performed in front of department staff, principals and corporate partners, to the tune of the Madonna song, Material Girl.

Meanwhile, the cost of the project blew out from \$60 million to a possible \$240 million. The inquiry heard that senior executives within the education department bought shares in the company that received the government tender for the failed project, CSG Limited. They declared no conflict of interest.

Research and writing by Adam Adelpour

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

Wages growth hits 18 year low

WAGES GROWTH has hit an 18 year low thanks to company cost-cutting, low inflation and longer hours at work.

In the period from October to December wages rose only 2.2 per cent, the lowest since the index was established in 1998 and practically level with core inflation of 2.1 per cent. In the private sector wage growth was even lower, at just 2 per cent.

Employment actually rose in the last three months of 2015. But analysis by Macquarie Wealth found that an increase in the number of hours people are working meant, "average earnings per employee in the economy actually declined." Workers are doing more hours but taking home less pay as the mining boom tails off. Bosses want workers pay for the economic slowdown.

School says gay author visit 'not appropriate'

WILL KOSTAKIS, an award winning author of young adult books, has had a speaking visit to a Catholic school cancelled, days after he came out as gay on his blog. This decision was spurred by an ex-boyfriend being diagnosed with cancer.

Less than a week later he received a cancellation email from De La Salle College in Revesby Heights in Sydney, a school he had visited previously. The letter stated, "We were reading over your blog and I think it might not be appropriate, and parents might not be happy." The letter also expressed concern about Kostakis' new book, which has a gay character, saying, "We have a concern about promoting your new book at our school as it is a Catholic school".

Kostakis told Fairfax that the right-wing attacks on the Safe Schools Program had encouraged homophobia. He said he spoke out on his blog because "I want to add my voice, however quiet it is, at the end of a week when every idiot in parliament is making links between Safe Schools and sex shops".

EDITORIAL

Senate recriminations get in the way of fighting Turnbull

MALCOLM TURNBULL is floundering. His lead in the polls has disappeared as he hesitates about tax changes, the budget, and when best to call the election.

The Liberals can be beaten. Their “rule for the rich” agenda is deeply unpopular, as we saw in the response to Abbott’s horror 2014 budget and Turnbull’s cuts to Medicare pathology payments in December.

The scale of the protests to let the 267 asylum seekers from Nauru and Manus Island stay in Australia has seen the government retreat on sending them back to offshore detention.

But instead of building the kind of united left fightback that could put Turnbull on the ropes, The Greens, Labor and the ACTU have collapsed into mutual recriminations over Senate voting reforms and the consequences for the Australian Building and Construction Commission (ABCC) legislation.

Turnbull is telling the cross-bench Senators to support the reintroduction of the ABCC or face a double dissolution election—where most of them would lose their seats.

The ACTU should be leading a fight against the ABCC—*The Australian* is bragging about the trumped-up charges against 100 CFMEU officials and delegates, including Victorian CFMEU officials, John Setka and Sean Reardon.

There should be strikes and rallies and the rebuilding of a “Your Rights At Work” campaign to kill off Turnbull’s attempt to resurrect the ABCC. Instead the ACTU has initiated robo-calls to campaign against The Greens and the Senate voting reforms; calls which don’t even mention the ABCC. The claim that The Greens have done a deal over Senate voting reforms that will hand control of the Senate to the Liberals is not true.

The ACTU’s focus on a Senate lobbying strategy, rather than struggle, has reduced them to being propagandists for the Labor Party. As a result awareness and activism around the ABCC is low, when it should be front and centre.

For their part, The Greens are at a critical juncture and have done themselves no favours.

Greens leader Richard Di Natale is pioneering a path towards electoral respectability and pragmatism. The Greens’ agreement with Turnbull over Senate voting reforms embodies this approach. In order to get reforms that increase the chance of The Greens



Above: Construction unions rally against the ABCC in 2008

holding the balance of power in the Senate, they have given Turnbull a gun to hold against the heads of the current cross-benchers.

The Greens’ deal with Turnbull over Senate reform comes on top of Di Natale’s much-quoted “never say never” comment about forming government with the Liberals, his refusal to advocate preferencing Labor over the Liberals, and media speculation about the Liberals preferencing The Greens in Victoria. The combination is bleeding the support The Greens have won among union members and working class people.

While The Greens may be formally right to support the voting reforms, the reforms are insignificant compared to the risk of the reintroduction of the ABCC.

Priorities

The Greens should have been prepared to sacrifice Senate reform in this term to make it clear that stopping the ABCC was their first priority. The ABCC is literally a life and death issue for construction workers and The Greens needed to show that class interests come before their self-interest to hold the balance of power in the Senate.

The Greens are the most consistent opponents of the Liberals’ agenda in parliament, but this isn’t enough. They need to make it beyond doubt that a Greens vote is anti-Liberal. That also means adopting a national policy of swapping preferences with Labor in every seat.

The Greens manoeuvring over the

Senate reforms has seriously damaged their relations with the unions. Now the Senate voting reforms have been carried, the focus will shift to a possible double dissolution election and the fight against the ABCC.

Whether or not there is a double dissolution, we already know what Turnbull stands for. Parliament will sit again for the May budget. Turnbull might try to push the ABCC legislation through then.

Instead of playing parliamentary games, the ACTU should be calling the demonstrations we need. The Greens should be willing to throw their weight in with the unions to lead the rallies to pressure the cross-benchers to hold the line and oppose the ABCC. They should be pledging their support for industrial action that has the real power to stop anti-union laws.

The struggle that can beat Turnbull is not in parliament. Instead of infighting we need to unite to shift politics back to the left. The mobilisation at the Lady Cilento hospital to defend baby Asha saw hundreds of people stand vigil at the hospital, backed by the Queensland unions to oppose the return of the refugee family to Nauru. United protests to defend Medicare in February took the fight to Turnbull.

Federal public sector workers need all our support as they continue their campaign of strike action against Turnbull’s cuts to jobs, pay and conditions. This is the kind of action that can defend our rights and give us the best chance of knocking the Liberals out at the election.

.....
The Senate reforms are insignificant compared to the risk of the reintroduction of the ABCC

Refugee politics at work—how did teachers say ‘Let them Stay?’

By Lucy Honan

WHEN HUNDREDS of photos of “Teachers say Let them Stay” actions at schools poured through social media in February, everyone fighting for justice for refugees stood taller and felt bolder.

Teachers have a stake in closing the camps. Many of us have students or colleagues who are suffering directly from the policies, or from the racism that underpins them. When we watch videos of the kids on Nauru it’s obvious to us they need a place in our schools, and their parents deserve safety and support. We teach critical thinking and respect, but all our students are growing up in a political environment drenched with anti-refugee lies and demonisation. And the cost of running the offshore prisons could pay for half of the \$4.5 billion the Turnbull government won’t spend on the last two years of Gonski.

Despite decades of teacher bashing from politicians and the media, polling shows the community has enormous respect for teachers. When we speak, people listen. So we have a responsibility to speak up.

How did it happen?

Disgust about government refugee policy has percolated in school staff-rooms for years. We have found small ways to show refugees solidarity, from passing around teaching resources that humanise asylum seekers, to tracking down study options for students on temporary visas.

But codes of conduct have made it challenging for teachers to take open, political positions. Politicians use schools and teachers to further their political positions all the time, like attacking Safe Schools or the Islamophobic anti-radicalisation kits. But we are not supposed to speak up about anything in our capacity as teachers, even though we see the impact of these policies up close.

When doctors and hospital workers refused to release children back into detention, and Brisbane teachers struck over the detention of a year 12 student, we found the courage to follow their example.

The actions required someone at every school to take a lead. Some teachers put the call out for action via the union email list. Others used word of mouth, or put a note in staff pigeon holes. Others put up sign on sheets, or



Above: One of the teachers “Let them stay” action held at schools

were able to make announcements at staff meetings. Sharing articles about the abuse in schools on Nauru, the UN allegations of torture, and the principal from Glenroy Secondary speaking out against having his students sent back to Nauru helped make the case for action. At some schools, a few individuals or small groups took “selfies” with signs to start the ball rolling, and then others felt more confident to get involved.

Once a few schools had taken action, it became easier—we were part of something really broad. “I felt so relieved and proud to see a huge group of my colleagues waiting for me to take the photo. It opened up conversations and there was a sense of unity”, one teacher reported.

Trouble from principals

A few principals supported the action by participating themselves, or covering the event in the school newsletter. Others gave tacit support by stepping out of the way.

But some, scared that “their” school would face a backlash from the community or media, reprimanded staff for using the school’s name, department email, or department paper. They waved the code of conduct at teachers to try to intimidate us from taking a stand.

The actions happened anyway, despite the intimidation. We now know that hundreds of other teachers, and our unions, as well as health, community and social workers support us.

Even State Premiers are falling in step with the pro-refugee momentum.

Where next?

Following the photo actions, Teachers for Refugees have held meetings in Sydney and Melbourne to debrief and hear first-hand from people who taught refugee children on Nauru. We have organised Teachers for Refugees contingents for the Palm Sunday rallies, and for refugees to speak at union and staff meetings.

But the government is still intent on sending the 267 refugees back to Nauru and Manus, and both major parties remain committed to offshore detention. Public opinion has shifted, but it needs to shift further to create decisive pressure on the politicians.

Replicating the teacher selfie actions amongst other groups of workers is one way to deepen support for the campaign. Union bans on work involved in detaining and deporting refugees would make offshore detention practically and politically impossible. This underlines the importance of organising at work.

The action by doctors and nurses at Lady Cilento hospital in Brisbane drew massive public support. All workers refusing to co-operate with refugee detention need to feel confident that they too would have support if they implemented bans.

The more workers take up the fight for refugees, the greater chance we have of dismantling the detention regimes for good.

.....
Some principals, scared that ‘their’ school would face a backlash, reprimanded staff

Let Them Stay, Bring Them Here: people power vs the government

By Ian Rintoul

ALMOST TWO months ago, the High Court ruled that offshore detention on Nauru and Manus Island was lawful. The 267 people who had been brought to the mainland, and who had been part of that case, were liable to be sent back.

Baby Asha, with her parents, arrived in Brisbane for treatment for burns suffered on Nauru just before the High Court decision. They were liable for return after the burns were treated at Lady Cilento hospital. In the week before she was released, Serco did make one attempt to remove Asha and her mother from the hospital for return to Nauru.

But after a week long stand-off at the hospital in Brisbane, they were released into community detention.

None—not one—of the 267, nor baby Asha and her parents, have actually been moved offshore.

Every day that passes makes it more likely that the 267 will stay; and every day they are kept in Australia is a win for the “Let Them Stay” campaign.

The stand by the doctors and staff at the Lady Cilento, backed up by the hundreds of supporters who maintained the week-long vigil, has shifted the campaign against the government.

Every selfie action and resolution gives confidence to the staff of the next hospital to take the same stand when the time comes. Although the government still warns the asylum seekers that they will be sent back, slowly, but surely, more of the 267 are being released into community detention.

This means the government has declared residences outside a detention centre to be “places of detention”, and stipulated conditions that apply to living there. People in community detention are not allowed to work. Although they are usually relatively free to come and go, sometimes there are curfews and even guards in place.

On 13 March, hundreds more people took part in non-violent direct action training at churches across Australia, in preparation to physically defend asylum seekers seeking sanctuary from deportation.

There are growing numbers—a majority now—supporting the Let



Above: The No Pride in Detention float at Mardi Gras—with banner highlighting the case of Nima and Ashkan on Nauru

Them Stay campaign. Increasingly the discussion is about how can we make it impossible for the 267, or anyone else, to be sent to Nauru or Manus Island. Deepening the movement, building local and workplace-based groups, can qualitatively transform the campaign.

Wider layers are being actively drawn into the campaign—a Let Them Stay selfie initiative by one union delegate at City of Sydney Council spread across different departments. The “No Pride in Detention” float supporting gay refugees Nima and Ashkan on Nauru reached many thousands more, and will be the basis of a contingent at the Palm Sunday rally.

The news that another two refugees transferred from Nauru to Cambodia had gone back to Iran exposed that the government has no resettlement arrangement from Nauru.

The bashings and the rapes starkly reveal that Nauru is not safe.

The Iranian Foreign Minister has once more said that Iran will not accept asylum seekers being forcibly returned. Now the 490 Iranians in closed and community detention must be released.

The resonance of the call to Let Them Stay is more and more a call to, “Close the camps,” and “Free the refugees.”

No pride in detention: gays face prison and danger on Nauru

MORE THAN 100 people marched with the “No Pride in Detention” float at the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras.

The float highlighted the plight of Nima and Ashkan (not their real names), two gay Iranian refugees on Nauru. Astonishingly, Mardi Gras organisers threatened to remove the contingent from the parade after ALP leader Bill Shorten was heckled over his support of offshore processing.

In 2013, the then Labor government knew that homosexuality was illegal in Papua New Guinea and Nauru, yet gay asylum seekers, like Nima and Ashkan, were sent there anyway.

Nima and Ashkan were found to be refugees and have been living in the community on Nauru. But gay sex is illegal there, punishable by up to 14 years jail, with hard labour.

“People from Immigration and Connect Settlement Services all tell us that we mustn’t hold hands or be affectionate in public,” Nima said from Nauru.

“Whilst we were still going outside, we got beaten up and were attacked. Spat at, verbally abused, had stones thrown at us and hit with sticks. It’s been a horrible experience,” said Nima.

In July 2015, both of them were severely beaten. Since then, afraid of going out, they have been virtual prisoners in their accommodation and are escorted once a week to do their shopping.

The international LGBTI rights group All Out has begun a petition calling on Malcolm Turnbull to bring Nima and Ashkan to safety in Australia (go.allout.org/en/au/australia-asylum/).

The Immigration Department refused their request to be transferred to Australia. A Border Force officer replied, “While I note that you have recently experienced some unpleasant (sic) behaviour...you have been accepted as a resident on Nauru and are subject to the local laws of Nauru.” It went on, absurdly, “I encourage you to actively engage with Nauruan community members for the duration of your time in Nauru.” How do you engage with official homophobia? You don’t. It has to be fought.

Turnbull spends billions on war despite budget austerity

By Amy Thomas

MASSIVE INVESTMENT in new weaponry aimed at containing China, a commitment to more war, and more intervention in the South Pacific—that’s the Turnbull government’s vision for a “capable, agile and potent” defence force in the 2016 Defence White Paper.

The figures are astonishing. The government will hand an extra \$29.9 billion to defence between now and 2025-2026. That will make the defence budget \$42.4 billion a year in 2021-21—or 2 per cent of GDP.

Turnbull’s priorities are clear. It’s as much money as we need to completely transition Australia to renewable energy, going by the estimates of Beyond Zero Emissions.

The new spending comes as the Coalition’s \$57 billion in funding cuts to health (over eight years) are starting to bite. Already, 70 per cent of patients in Emergency departments are waiting more than eight hours to get medical attention.

But it’s Defence, apparently, that’s had “significant under investment”. So where are the billions going?

“Capital expenditure” will double over ten years. There’ll be 1100 new personnel carriers—light enough for airlift to the battlefield but also equipped with grenade launchers.

For just \$17 billion, we’ll get 72 of the F-35 joint strike fighters. They’re the world’s most expensive item of military equipment. They carry air-to-air missiles, cruise missiles and guided bombs.

Then there are 12 new submarines. Their potential for “surveillance and protection of our maritime approaches” will secure sea lanes and enforce Australia’s claims at sea.

Plus, there will be a new long-range rocket system for “increased firepower”, and millions for drones.

US alliance

The paper explains that Australia will “seek to broaden and deepen our alliance with the United States”.

Australia already hosts the US spy base Pine Gap, which has been used to target drone strikes across Pakistan and Afghanistan. Under former Labor Prime Minister Julia Gillard, Australia committed to a base for US troops in Darwin.

Reading between the lines, it’s clear Australia is siding firmly with



Above: Turnbull is going on a spending spree on military hardware, buying personnel carriers, fighter jets, submarines and drones

the United States against China.

The US “pivot to Asia”—focusing military resources and seeking alliances in the region in a bid to encircle China—is endorsed through praising the US’s “critical role in underpinning security in our region”.

Half the world’s trade passes through the South China Sea. The route has long been guaranteed by the US Navy, but now China, reliant on the routes for the majority of its trade, is expanding its military presence there.

Despite the economic links between the US, Chinese and Australian economies, Australia will continue to line itself up with the global hegemon to protect its “territory and interests”.

Australia’s long-standing interest in controlling its “backyard” will mean being the “principal security partner for Papua New Guinea, Timor-Leste and Pacific Island Countries in the South Pacific”, meaning Australia will continue to act as a neo-colonial bully, enforcing Australia’s economic interest over small, impoverished nations.

More war

Despite the quagmire that faces Western imperialism in Iraq and Syria, Australia will commit to “practical and effective military contributions to global security operations”.

That means more war and intervention.

The Australian military is currently deployed in 28 countries, and “the overseas presence of Defence personnel will be gradually increased over time”.

That means increasing the size

of the military. In fact, the report notes that the Defence workforce will expand to its “largest size since 1993 ... offset by ongoing reductions elsewhere in the APS [Australian Public Service] workforce.”

The paper turns bizarre when it comes to discussing terrorism, saying, “Never before has there been a time when external threats so distant from our shores have had the capacity to so quickly affect our direct interests.” Perhaps Defence believes its own propaganda about the terror threat. But they’ll continue to spread it—by increasing their support for US wars in places like the Middle East.

Refugee boats are treated as a security threat. Operation Sovereign Borders will get “more capable offshore patrol vessels, new manned and unmanned aircraft and a new large-hulled multi-purpose patrol vessel, the Australian Defence Vessel Ocean Protector.”

But they’ll do it all with “cultural change”, “gender equality” and more female participation, an effort to restore the damage done to the Defence force’s reputation after repeated scandals over sexual assault and hazing rituals.

Australia is an imperial power in its own right. Its alliance with the US is about having a powerful partner to help it maintain security and stability for Australian capitalism in the region.

And the commitment is bipartisan with Labor: as Anthony Albanese assured us on Insiders, “... defence should be above partisan politics ... we’ve supported the thrust of the White Paper.”

The government will hand an extra \$29.9 billion to defence

Senate reform snared in fight over anti-union ABCC

By David Glanz

MALCOLM TURNBULL'S plan to change the way people vote in Senate elections has triggered a complex political fight.

It is designed to stop micro-parties winning seats through harvesting preferences, and ensure fewer cross-bench Senators are elected in future. Senators like Ricky Muir of the Australian Motoring Enthusiasts Party, elected in Victoria in 2013 with just 479 primary votes, would be wiped out.

If passed, it is likely that only the Coalition, Labor, the Greens and Nick Xenophon would win Senate seats.

The Liberals are proposing that voters be allowed to allocate preferences between party lists above the line, and that those who vote below the line would not need to number every box.

Parties would not be able to lock in preference flows, meaning that someone voting 1 above the line could no longer find that their vote had trickled down to a party they opposed.

The change is supported by the Coalition, the Greens and Nick Xenophon. It is opposed by Labor, the micro parties in the current senate, and the union movement.

Anti-union ABCC

Meanwhile, the debate about electoral process has become enmeshed in Turnbull's drive to bring back the anti-union Australian Building and Construction Commission, introduced by John Howard and abolished by Julia Gillard.

The aim of the ABCC is to terrorise construction union officials and members through the threat of jail and major fines.

As Professor George Williams of the University of NSW put it: "The ABCC can force people to answer questions in secret ... disobeying is punishable by six months in jail ...

"A person can be compelled to hand over personal phone and email records, reveal memberships of a union or political party, and report on private meetings."

Turnbull is claiming that the reintroduction of the ABCC is of vital importance—so important that he's prepared to call a double dissolution election.

His problem is that at a double dissolution election, all Senators are up for election, reducing the vote



Above: Unrepresentative swill—crossbench Senators Nick Xenophon, Bob Day, David Leyonhjelm and John Madigan

needed to win a seat to just over 7 per cent, rather than the normal 14 per cent.

So he has rushed through Senate reform, to guarantee that no micro party sneaks in to frustrate his plans.

But Turnbull is prepared to be flexible if it helps his anti-union agenda. He hinted to the micro party senators that they might save their parliamentary careers if they passed the ABCC legislation that they, Labor and the Greens have blocked in the senate.

The Greens are now paying a terrible price for collaborating with the Liberals on Senate reform in the spirit of leader Richard Di Natale's pragmatism.

They showed that they were willing to risk the micro party Senators cracking under Turnbull's pressure and passing the ABCC legislation, which they oppose, in order to get Senate reform.

And if Turnbull goes for a double dissolution election, the Liberals can then pass the ABCC legislation at a joint sitting of both houses of parliament, an option available to deal with blocked legislation after a double dissolution.

The electoral reforms may be more democratic, because they stop micro parties winning seats by accident as a result of backroom preference deals.

But The Greens are also driven by their desire for greater control of the balance of power in the Senate for themselves, through cleaning out the

cross-bench.

Labor is concerned that the majority of votes that currently go to micro parties will find their way to the Liberals, costing Labor seats and benefiting the conservatives.

The ACTU, meanwhile, called on The Greens to, at a minimum, postpone the vote on Senate reform until May 12, when it would have been too late to call a double dissolution election.

ACTU Secretary Dave Oliver told *The Australian* that the union movement was concerned about a "raft of anti-worker legislation" should the laws be used to clear out the Senate crossbench.

Oliver is right to worry. But he should also remember that the union movement has defended itself best from attacks – whether in the Maritime Union of Australia dispute of 1998 or while facing WorkChoices in 2006-07 – when workers have taken to the streets and the picket lines.

The Senate is a fundamentally conservative institution, technically there to represent the rights of the states but in practice established – like all upper houses – to act as a brake on a potentially radical lower house.

Former Labor Prime Minister Paul Keating was right on the money when he described the Senate as "unrepresentative swill".

Tinkering with the voting mechanisms will not change that fundamental fact.

The Greens are now paying a terrible price for collaborating with the Liberals on Senate reform

How Pell put Church and career above action on child abuse

By James Supple

GEORGE PELL didn't know, and he wasn't interested. That was the essence of his testimony to the Child Abuse Royal Commission about rampant sexual abuse by priests in the Ballarat Diocese, while he was based there in the 1970s and 1980s.

Pell had other interests. He has found plenty of time throughout his career to turn his mind to battling homosexuality, contraception, championing climate change denial and defending Vatican orthodoxy.

Questioned about notorious paedophile Gerald Ridsdale, Pell ventured that, "It was a sad story and of not much interest to me". Yet Pell sat on the church committee that was responsible for perpetually moving Ridsdale around parishes in Ballarat, to avoid his crimes ever getting to the police.

He admitted to hearing "rumours" that Brother Edward Dowlan, based at St. Patrick's College in Ballarat, was abusing children. One former student says he told Pell directly in 1974. Pell says he spoke to the school chaplain but left it to the Christian Brothers to deal with the issue, and did no more.

As David Marr has written, it was a convenient approach to take for someone with big ambitions in the Church. Defying the hierarchy to demand action against paedophile priests would have been dangerous so early in his career.

As Marr put it, "Pell is seeing out his career as cardinal in charge of the Vatican's finances. But what would have happened to his mighty career if early on he had crossed those bishops?"

Cardinal Pell defended himself by claiming that, once he had risen through the ranks, he tried to put things right, saying, "The church has made enormous mistakes, but is working to remedy them."

He pointed to his efforts as Archbishop to establish the "Melbourne Response", a framework for dealing with child abuse complaints and compensating victims. But this also had other aims: keeping abuse allegations out of the courts and limiting damages payments to victims.

In exchange for a payout, victims of sexual abuse were required to sign away their rights to sue. They were also discouraged from going to the police, the Royal Commission has found.



Above: George Pell (finally) fronts the Royal Commission

Victims received an average of just \$36,100 compensation. *The Sunday Age* estimates this saved the Church up to \$62 million. The alternative to accepting the tiny sum the Church offered was a gruelling court battle. Victims were promised that claims would be vigorously defended.

Pell was true to his word, spending more than \$1 million fighting victim John Ellis in court after he moved to Sydney. The Church argued, successfully, that it could not be sued because it does not exist as a legal entity. Church assets have been safely secured from claims by a legal device.

Yet the Melbourne Archdiocese, according to the Royal Commission, still has assets of \$222 million, a fund for Church activities of \$102 million and a financial surplus in the millions.

Moral quest

George Pell has risen to high places in the Church through his vigorous defence of conservative doctrine. Defending the assets and teachings of the Church have been far more important to him than basic compassion and decency towards the victims of priests' sexual abuse.

Even before he became an Archbishop he was demanding the Church to take up the fight against the modern world and be, "a mite more confrontational and certainly much less conciliatory toward secular

values". His inspiration was the Cold War warrior Bob Santamaria.

He even claimed, "Abortion is a worse moral scandal than priests sexually abusing young people." He has an obsession with defending homophobic bigotry.

Pell was in his element crusading for the conservative values championed by Popes like John Paul II and Benedict XVI. And he was well rewarded, with posts in a series of Vatican committees defending doctrine, the position of Cardinal and now the job as head of the Vatican bank, making him supposedly the third most powerful man in the Catholic Church.

He obviously enjoys where all this has taken him. Pell is a man who mixes in powerful circles, and clearly enjoys it. During his time in Melbourne he was a member of the notorious Melbourne Club, frequented by the city's elite. He has boasted that numerous politicians have sought his counsel.

At the Vatican Pell built himself grand lodgings at the newly-established "Domus Australia", a "pilgrim house" restored and refurbished with a chapel, 150-seat auditorium and rooms for paying visitors. Pell paid for the fit-out with funds from the Church in Perth, Melbourne, Sydney and Lismore in 2011.

Pell's inaction on church abuse destroyed people's lives. But he has been well-rewarded.

.....
He even once claimed that "Abortion is a worse moral scandal than priests sexually abusing young people"

What's the point of Malcolm Turnbull?

By Ian Rintoul

SO RAN a recent headline in the *Financial Review*. The ruling elite is getting worried.

It's more than six months since Turnbull was elected leader, with the overwhelming support of big business, after Abbott was unable to deliver for them. But with an election looming, under Turnbull, the Coalition's opinion polls have fallen from a 54 to 46 per cent lead in two party terms to 50-50.

The Coalition is no longer an election shoo-in, yet Turnbull has not delivered anything that matters to the top end of town.

Turnbull sold himself as a replacement for Abbott on the basis that he could deliver "economic leadership" and make the case for a new round of cuts and attacks on workers. Increasing the GST looked good for a little while—and new Treasurer, Scott Morrison started out to sell it. But Turnbull and Morrison backed off quickly when polls showed it was electoral poison.

Turnbull went so far as to call the Business Council of Australia's push to use a GST increase to cut company tax a, "go into the study, get out your service revolver and blow your brains out" political option.

The new Coalition tax policy, that is meant to cut corporate tax and the tax rates for highest earners, is nowhere to be seen. Reducing the massive tax write-offs available to investors who negatively gear their property investments was initially being considered by the government. But as soon as the Labor Party put forward a concrete proposal, the Coalition backed off at a rate of knots. It is now attacking the Labor Party, scare-mongering that house prices will rise and investment will fall if Labor's policy is implemented.

Similarly, over penalty rates, the government has not been able to deliver for its business supporters. The business elite desperately wants to cut them. The Coalition would like to cut them. But Turnbull is acutely aware that cutting penalty rates is deeply unpopular. So while Turnbull and hatchet Minister for Employment, Michaela Cash, make positive noises to reassure business, the government ducked the issue and did not even make a submission to the Productivity



Above: Turnbull is gaining a reputation as a do-nothing

Commission inquiry.

Now, Liberal Party supporters are despairing about whether or not Turnbull is going to call a double dissolution election.

Budget backlash

The real point about Malcolm Turnbull is that the lessons of the defeat of Abbott's 2014 Budget and the dramatic fall of Tony Abbott are deeply etched into the Liberal Party consciousness. It was the active response to Abbott's spending cuts and the attack on Medicare that killed the Abbott government. And Turnbull knows it.

Turnbull wants cuts to re-establish a budget surplus; he wants to cut penalty rates; he really wants to cut corporate taxes – but the government is paralysed because any of these moves risk re-igniting the active opposition to the Coalition government. What happened to "one term Tony" could just as easily be Malcolm's fate.

But there are precious few indications that Labor or the unions have learned those lessons anywhere near as well. While Turnbull's popularity falls, instead of ramping up industrial action, protests and demonstrations, the Labor Party has put its eggs into the electoral basket.

The unions' penalty rates campaign consists of asking unionists to hand out "Thank you" cards to workers working over Easter. Aston-

ishingly there is no mention of the on-going public servants' dispute with the government that could see strikes at airports over the Easter period.

The ACTU is rightly concerned about the possibility of the government re-introducing the anti-union building industry watch-dog the ABCC. But their campaign is an electoral one, directed at The Greens.

There is no sign of the union-wide strikes and demonstrations that could really put an end to the ABCC. A rejuvenated "Your Rights At Work" campaign could take the fight against Turnbull into every workplace and onto the streets.

The ALP's response has been to launch an absurd, all-out attack on The Greens. NSW ALP Senator Sam Dastyari has labelled the Greens "a cancer on progressive politics". But it is Labor that have voted with the Coalition 38 per cent of the time (including over refugees), compared to the Greens' 6 per cent.

Turnbull is running scared of the polls. He is haunted by the spectre of Abbott's fall. But he is squeezed by the demands of big business who are increasingly despairing that Turnbull can deliver for them. The gloss of his three-word mantra of "Excitement, innovation, agility," has worn off.

Their despair is our opportunity.

A real fight over wages, penalty rates and Medicare could see Turnbull thrown out.

.....
The lessons of Abbott's 2014 Budget and the dramatic fall of Tony Abbott are deeply etched into the Liberal Party consciousness

Blackmail charges latest front in war on CFMEU

By Tom Orsag

TWO LEADING officials of the Victorian branch of the CFMEU Construction Division faced court in March on ludicrous charges of blackmail, for industrial action against Boral, a building supplies company.

Secretary John Setka and Assistant Secretary Shaun Reardon were charged in December last year, after dramatised arrests on a Sunday.

Mike Kane, head of Boral, suggested the charges of blackmail be laid while giving evidence to the Trade Union Royal Commission in 2014.

The CFMEU's lawyer described him in court as "an industrial warrior of the first magnitude".

The charges are ludicrous in the context of industrial action but carry a maximum of 15 years' jail.

They come as the Construction Division in Victoria gears up for a new Enterprise Bargaining Agreement (EBA) with major builders and safety remains a real issue on building sites. This means the union can take protected industrial action.

In February, a Melbourne construction worker fell 20 metres to his death when a platform gave way and a crane caught fire and collapsed.

While the union organised a strike and rally for the first court appearance of Setka and Reardon in December, there was no action this time. The next court appearance is not until November. The union is seeking to fight the charges mainly through the courts, with Setka downplaying the threat, telling a union monthly branch meeting, "It is what it is."

The real reason for charging two union officials is the long standing hatred building companies have for the union's ability to extract decent wages and conditions for its members. The charges are part of a concerted attempt to discredit and weaken the union.

Malcolm Turnbull wants to go further by reviving the anti-union Australian Building and Construction Commission if he wins the election.

In the *Herald Sun* last year, Mike Kane claimed that, "We have the largest construction union in this country under control of criminal elements".

The government, the Royal Commission and the courts are trying to discredit the CFMEU by repeatedly throwing flimsy charges at it. Four charges referred by the Royal Com-



Above: CFMEU members rally against the charges in Melbourne in December

mission have already failed.

In early March a charge of intimidation brought against ACT CFMEU Secretary Dean Hall was dropped, over a safety dispute with a Worksafe inspector. Another charge of intimidation against NSW official Michael Greenfield resulted in a verdict of not guilty in February.

"These actions seem to be designed to create a storm of negative publicity for the union without amounting to anything", Dave

Noonan, CFMEU National Construction Secretary rightly commented.

The union needs to turn its slogan "Touch one, touch all" into a reality and mobilise the rank and file in defence of Setka and Reardon at every possible turn.

This is the only way to send a message to the courts and to the bosses that there will be consequences for jailing union officials and taking on the union. We can't leave the decision up to the courts.

Federal public servants strike again

FEDERAL PUBLIC sector workers will strike on 21 March and across Easter as the government continues to push attacks on conditions and pay offers below inflation.

The government's effort to strip domestic violence leave out of agreements in up to 30 public service departments made headlines on International Women's Day, showing the hypocrisy in Malcolm Turnbull's claim to respect women.

Workers in Immigration and Border Protection, including Customs workers at airports, will strike for 24-hours on Easter Thursday, and rolling stoppages in the three weeks following are on the table. This will result in disruption of international flights over the busy Easter period.

CPSU members elsewhere will strike together for the day on 21 March including across the Bureau of Statistics, the Tax Office, Bureau of Meteorology, Department of Human

Services and Defence.

Workers in Immigration and Border Protection rejected the government's offer in a second ballot in early March, with 80.9 per cent voting against. Staff in the Bureau of Meteorology voted no by a 68.3 per cent margin in February.

The union campaign is making headway, with the head of the Tax Office agreeing to drop demands for an extra 45 minutes at work each week, tougher rules of taking sick leave and the axing of a \$300 annual health and well-being allowance.

But the union is again refusing to call meetings or rallies during March's 24-hour strike. This is a missed opportunity to build members' confidence to keep campaigning, and escalate the dispute.

Industrial action is the key to forcing the government to shift—and the union needs to do everything it can to build its ability to take action.

Students in India resist nationalist crackdown

THE BIGGEST wave of student unrest for 25 years has hit India following the arrest in Delhi of Kanhaiya Kumar, a student union president at Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU).

Cops seized Kumar after he addressed a demonstration in February and charged him with sedition.

Far right students, linked to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government, had accused him of making “anti-national” statements during the protest held to mark the execution of Afzal Guru—a Kashmiri convicted of a terrorist attack on the Indian parliament in 2001.

They were backed by the BJP Home Minister who declared, “If anyone raises anti-India slogans and tries to raise question on the nation’s unity and integrity, they will not be spared.”

Kumar insists he did not organise the protest and only attended to try to defuse conflict between opposed groups of students. JNU has a strong tradition of left-wing activism and charges against Kumar and other student appear to simply be aimed at a crackdown against student activism in general.

Eight other JNU students have also been accused of sedition and suspended from the university, and two of them remained in police custody as *Solidarity* went to press.

Thousands have joined protests in response to Kumar’s arrest. These took place at colleges across the country, from Udaipur in the north to Chennai in the south.

The students say that raising slogans does not constitute sedition, and that the crackdown is simply an attack on freedom of speech. They are demanding the repeal of the sedition law, a hangover from the colonial era.

More than 10,000 students from across Delhi blocked city streets.

Elsewhere, scores of protesters were held by cops as they tried to march in Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s Varanasi constituency. Meanwhile, demonstrators clashed with right wing student activists in the southern city of Hyderabad.

In Patna, students stormed the BJP headquarters and tried to vandalise the offices of the hard-right party.

Some students were injured as police drove them out with baton charges.



Above: Students join a protest in defence of the Jawaharlal Nehru University student leaders

The tempo of struggle rose dramatically after a large group of BJP lawyers threw rocks at Kumar and journalists covering his court case after a hearing, as police stood by.

The BJP lawyers waved Indian flags and chanted “Glory to Mother India” and “Traitors leave India”.

This is not the first time students have been under attack by the BJP and its nationalist hysteria.

Last year five student activists were indefinitely suspended from Hyderabad Central University in the south of India following pressure from a government minister after being labelled “anti-national”.

One of them, Rohith Vemula, a dalit who had faced continual discrimination, killed himself in January. The student movement has been demanding action against those who drove him to this ever since.

Pogroms

The BJP is the political party of the RSS, a tight-knit Hindu nationalist organisation. It promotes the idea of Hindu superiority over the country’s Muslim minority and has incited repeated pogroms against minority groups. These include a notorious anti-Muslim riot in Gujarat in 2002 that left 2000 people dead.

BJP leader Narendra Modi has been the country’s president since

2014.

Since his election the BJP has stepped up its nationalist campaign, passing laws banning the sale of beef in several states, cancelling a performance by a Pakistani singer in Mumbai and re-writing school history textbooks.

This has led to further vigilante actions against Muslims and those considered “anti-national”. Late last year a Muslim man was beaten to death near Delhi after rumours that he had eaten beef at home. Academic Dr. MM Kalburgi was shot and killed a few months before for his criticism of Hindu rituals.

The BJP is desperate to whip-up anti-Muslim tensions in the run up to state assembly elections later this year. They calculate that by polarising Indian society they can rally right wing voters into their camp.

As one student from Jawaharlal Nehru University said, “Until the time Kumar is released, we will continue this struggle. Unless they drop the sedition charges against our comrades we will carry on with our strike.”

The spread of the student protests to the millions of workers and poor who are being attacked by the government is the best way to ensure the BJP’s plans turn to dust.

Adapted from an article by Simon Basketter, Socialist Worker UK

Far right students, linked to the Bharatiya Janata Party accused Kumar of making “anti-national” statements

Pensions battle sees general strike in Greece—against Syriza

By Jean Parker

AN ENORMOUS general strike in February saw tens of thousands of people march in Greek cities against an attack on pensions—now coming from the Syriza government.

Transport, schools, banks and courts closed. In some places the protests were bigger than those in 2011-2012 when protestors occupied the squares like Syntagma in central Athens.

Eurozone leaders are insisting the government cut pensions so that Greece can meet the terms of the \$125 billion bailout President Alexis Tsipras negotiated in July last year to avoid default. The Syriza government is stuck between the intransigence of the Eurozone leaders and resistance on the streets.

Greek workers are fighting for their lives. With 25 per cent official unemployment and 50 per cent youth unemployment, pension payments often provide meagre sustenance for several family members.

2015 opened with the election of the radical left party Syriza to government for the first time, on a strong anti-austerity platform.

Syriza promised to tear up the hated austerity deals imposed by the European Union, the European Central Bank and the IMF in the wake of the global economic crisis of 2008.

The resulting cuts to schools, hospitals and public service jobs have helped deepen Greece's catastrophic crisis, producing Depression-era conditions.

But by the time Tsipras went to the polls again in September last year Syriza had promised Europe's leaders that it would implement a deep package of cuts and privatisations.

The re-election of the Syriza-ANEL government even after this historic capitulation has solved nothing.

The instability created by years of deep crisis and crippling austerity continues. Europe's leaders are again talking of Grexit—forcing the country out of the single European currency. Meanwhile 36,000 refugees are trapped in Greece as Macedonia, Slovenia, Croatia and Serbia close their borders.

Many commentators saw Tsipras's re-election, and the small vote for Popular Unity—the new party dominated by those who broke to



Above: Greek workers take to the streets during the massive general strike in February

the left of Syriza—as evidence that Greeks had accepted the necessity of austerity. The struggle against Syriza's proposed pension reforms shows the Greek resistance has not been broken.

Where many neo-liberal governments were able to rationalise European pension schemes in the 1980s and 1990s, the strength of the workers' movement successfully protected Greece's scheme. But since the crisis in 2009 governments have forced through 11 rounds of cuts and restructuring resulting in a 40 per cent cut in the average monthly pension payment.

On top of these cuts Tsipras has promised the IMF to cut another \$2.6 billion from the scheme—the equivalent of 1 per cent of Greece's GDP.

Syriza now only has a majority of three in the Greek parliament, and some speculate that many of its own MPs will not vote for the pension cuts.

Resistance from below

The fight against the pension laws started in late 2015 with pensioners themselves taking to the streets. The main union leaders tried to stall action until the pension bill was in parliament.

But public sector unions called pre-emptive strikes in December that pulled other sections of the union movement and community into action.

Farmers are being hit by both pension cuts and increased taxes. They have organised mass road blockades across the country and sent tens of

thousands to Athens for militant protests and sit-ins. Low-income professionals are also going to be savaged by the cuts. Their resistance has been coined "the movement of the tie" as engineers, doctors and lawyers struck and marched.

Lawyers staged an indefinite strike in January that is now in its third month!

There are many other smaller strikes over both pensions and workers' specific issues.

According to Greek socialist Panos Garganas, "Sections of the movement are escalating—such as the ferry workers and possibly soon the electricity workers. The workers with the most to lose from the bill are those with the best pensions. These are the fruit of decades of struggle, so those workers are often the best organised."

Port workers are also fighting privatisation, with another 48-hour strike held on 17 and 18 February. The government is trying to privatise the port of Piraeus, near Athens, and Thessaloniki, as part of \$75 billion in sell-offs.

Previous rounds of strikes brought down conservative pro-austerity governments and laid the basis for the emergence of a new left that was embodied in the election of Syriza. Now people are fighting the very government they had pinned their hopes on.

The strikes pave the way for deeper radicalisation and the prospect for a solution to the crisis that relies on workers' self-activity and resistance.

The struggle against Syriza's pension reforms shows the Greek resistance has not been broken

Protests rise from ashes amid Syria truce



By Lachlan Marshall

SYRIANS IN opposition-held territories marked the fifth anniversary of the revolution with protests in over 100 locations, declaring “the revolution continues.”

In 2011 Fridays always saw the biggest protests against dictator Bashar al-Assad. So on the first Friday following a truce brokered by the US and Russia crowds took to the streets in Aleppo, Homs, Daraa and the Damascus countryside, reviving the slogans of the 2011 uprising: “The Syrian people want freedom”, “the people want to overthrow the regime” and “death rather than humiliation.”

In Idlib and Maarat Al-Naaman protesters were attacked by soldiers from the jihadist group Jabhat al-Nusra.

The protests are a reminder of the continuing opposition amongst the Syrian people both to Assad and the jihadist groups. The uprising began when peaceful demonstrations, inspired by the Arab Spring, called for the end of the Assad dictatorship. But ruthless bombing and repression from the regime turned the revolt into a civil war, allowing jihadist groups to establish a foothold and opening the door to imperialist intervention.

The initial revolution and its aims of a free, democratic Syria without sectarian divisions has retreated in the

Above: The break in bombing has allowed renewed protests on a modest scale in places like Aleppo

face both of Assad’s bombs and reactionary Islamist groups like Islamic State and Jabhat al-Nusra.

Most recently, Syria’s largest city, Aleppo, which remains in opposition control, has been utterly decimated by regime and Russian bombs, displacing 200,000 people.

Aleppo is now effectively encircled by the combined forces of Russia, the Syrian regime and Shia sectarian militias of Iran, Iraq and Lebanon.

Russian intervention

Syria is now increasingly a plaything of foreign imperialist powers. The commencement of bombing by Russia last September shifted the balance in favour of the regime, and despite claiming to target Islamic State (IS), Russian airstrikes overwhelmingly hit other rebel groups.

The offensive has fragmented opposition territory. As *Foreign Policy* magazine described, “Russian airpower allowed Assad and his allied paramilitary forces to finally cut off the narrow, rebel-held ‘Azaz corridor’ that links the Turkish border to the city of Aleppo.”

Idlib, another rebel-held province is also cut off from vital supply lines. The regime is strangling the life out of these rebel holdouts, in a manner that has been on graphic display in Madaya, whose population is dying of starvation under siege.

This strategy allows the regime to wear down its opponents without

exposing its own forces to significant risk.

Russia’s deployment also frustrated Western efforts to build up their own influence in Syria, by targeting rebel groups looking to them for support. This is designed to force a settlement with the West that leaves a Russian-backed Assad regime in power.

Russian support for Assad is designed to secure its influence in the Middle East—Russia’s only Mediterranean naval base is in the Syrian city of Tartus.

Russia also hopes to use Syria as a bargaining chip to pressure the US and EU to drop sanctions over Russia’s 2014 annexation of Crimea from Ukraine. Its intervention in Syria shows it can still throw its weight around on the world stage.

Truce

Fighting has temporarily halted under the ceasefire that came into effect on 27 February, despite a number of violations. This is the first nationwide truce in the conflict, although it does not include jihadist groups Jabhat al-Nusra or Islamic State.

UN-sponsored negotiations between the regime and opposition were resuming as *Solidarity* went to press but are deadlocked over the issue of political transition. Assad claims to be introducing reforms like setting a date for parliamentary elections and proposing a “national unity government” that would co-opt members of the opposition but leave the presidency untouched. The opposition won’t tolerate Assad remaining president.

At least a quarter of a million people have lost their lives in this war. But with so many global and regional powers invested in Syria, the conflict still threatens to escalate.

Turkey and Saudi Arabia are considering bombing campaigns, and even sending in ground troops.

Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev warned that the commitment of Saudi troops could result in a “new world war,” adding that “a ground operation draws everyone taking part in it into a war... The Americans and our Arab partners must consider whether or not they want a permanent war.”

Some are speculating that the only viable option may be partition. But top-down negotiations won’t end the bloodshed or remove the dictatorship.

Only a revival of the revolutionary movement in Syria and the wider Middle East can deliver the freedom and justice Syrians fought and died for five years ago.

UN-sponsored negotiations are deadlocked. The opposition won’t tolerate Assad remaining president

REFUGEES' FIGHT FOR FREEDOM FORTRESS EUROPE: OPEN THE BORDERS

Governments across Europe are shutting the door to refugees. **James Supple** argues they can welcome the boats and open the borders

LAST YEAR European people opened their doors to asylum seekers as the Syrian refugee crisis worsened. Germany took in 1.1 million refugees alone.

The wave of refugees is continuing. At least 100,000 arrived in Greece in the first two months of this year, with 2000 more joining them every day.

But governments across Europe are now moving to restrict the arrival of refugees. Macedonia, Slovenia and Croatia have closed their borders, preventing refugees moving from Greece through to permanent resettlement countries like Germany and Sweden.

Austria too has moved to seal its border and announced a cap on arrivals of 37,500 this year, less than half the number that arrived last year.

Denmark has cut welfare benefits to refugees by 45 per cent and delayed family reunions by three years.

Shockingly, it is also seizing any valuables carried by refugees above \$2000 value at the border. Switzerland and some southern German states have introduced similar laws to confiscate belongings. This is reminiscent of measures taken in Nazi Germany against Jewish refugees.

Sealing off the borders is trapping increasing numbers of refugees inside Greece. Despite its own desperate economic situation, the majority of Greeks continue to demonstrate a deep compassion and support for the refugees.

In early March 10,000 people in Athens contributed eight truckloads full of food and clothes, as part of a public event in Syntagma Square.

In many places government services for refugees are in a state of collapse, with volunteers filling the gap. Manolis Tzanetos, who runs a company serving meals to refugees on Lesbos, has continued the service despite government funding being cut

off in September. He has kept providing free meals with support from NGOs and volunteers.

In Greece the efforts to divert anger about jobs and the collapse of public services onto refugees have failed. This is a testament to the anti-racist movement that has isolated the fascist party Golden Dawn and the continuing impact of the massive strike movement against austerity.

There are 14,000 people waiting at the Macedonian border and at least 30,000 in Greece as a whole. Thousands are living in tents at the border town of Idomeni in muddy fields and alongside railway tracks.

"Many people here are soaking wet and cold from having to sleep out in the open, it still dips below 10 here during the night," said Caroline Haga from the International Red Cross.

"We are already seeing a lot of flu cases, especially among children... It could turn into a very serious health problem."

Marwan, a Palestinian, has tried to cross the border three times. "If the regular police catch you it's all right. But if you run they beat you. Sometimes they shoot at you too. If the army catches you they take everything: your money, your mobile," he said. "We walked for three and a half days and were caught 30 minutes from Serbia."

Rightwing scapegoating

There was strong support for the refugees across Europe late last year when large numbers began arriving. A poll in Britain in September showed one in three people had donated money or time to help refugees.

Recently attitudes have hardened, with the number in Britain saying the country should accept more refugees dropping from 40 to 24 per cent.

This is a result of efforts by

People in Athens contributed eight truckloads of food and clothes

right-wing politicians and the media to stir up racism and xenophobia. The far right in Germany seized on sexual assaults carried out on New Year's Eve in Cologne to campaign against refugees. In Sweden there has been a racist scare campaign about refugees committing rapes and other crimes, yet statistics show they have been responsible for just 1 per cent of complaints to police since September.

But this is being contested across Europe by anti-racist campaigners. Major anti-racist demonstrations are taking place on 19 March in Greece, Britain, France, Poland, Spain, Austria, Denmark, the Netherlands and Germany.

As Greek anti-racist organiser Petros Constantinou says, "It's a big opportunity to send a crucial message to our leaders: open the borders; refugees are welcome; we'll stop the Nazis, and stop the war."

Europe can take more

Even President Angela Merkel in Germany, who was widely praised last year for her decision to allow refugees in, now wants to stop more coming. European governments say that they simply cannot cope with so many refugees. There are now over 4.5 million refugees who have left Syria alone.

But in reality Europe is nowhere near the limit of what it could cope with. As the UN refugee agency's Carlotta Sami put it, "Even though this influx is the largest migration wave since World War II, one million people represent only 0.2 per cent of Europe's population.... Europe has the means and resources to cope."

Refugee arrivals in 2015 were unevenly distributed, with some countries refusing to take any substantial number. Clearly countries like Britain, which says it will accept just 4000 additional Syrian refugees a year, could



Above: Refugees attempting to cross the border from Greece to Macedonia are stopped by riot police

do more.

But even the two highest intake countries in Europe are still well within their means to cope. Sweden accepted 190,000 people last year, which equates to 2 per cent of its population.

This is exactly the same growth rate the Australian government aimed for in the years following the Second World War. Even today Australia's population is still increasing at a rate of 1.4 per cent a year—because of both migration and new births.

Germany's intake of 1.1 million refugees last year was around 1.4 per cent of its population.

The European Union is one of the world's richest areas, with an economy estimated at \$18.5 trillion a year. It can easily afford to help these refugees.

It is clear that this massive movement of people is driven by the need to escape death and impossible living conditions, not simply the prospect of a better life.

Almost 80 per cent of refugees that reached Europe in 2015 were from just three countries: Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq. This surge in refugee numbers is a result of the devastating wars in the Middle East, showing that it is overwhelmingly "push factors" that drive global movements of refugees.

Syria, responsible for half of all

refugees in Europe last year, is a human tragedy of immense proportions. It is clear that the millions of Syrians are genuinely in fear of their lives from war, starvation and terror.

Open the borders

The situation shows the need for open borders—and how it is possible.

The alternative to Europe, and other rich countries like the US and Australia, opening their doors is to leave much poorer countries bordering Syria like Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey to cope.

This is exactly what European governments are now demanding. The EU has signed a deal with Turkey to take back refugees who try to enter Europe in exchange for \$8.8 billion in aid to help pay its costs. Europe says it will also accept another refugee in exchange for every one sent back—in a move similar to the failed Malaysia people swap deal proposed by Julia Gillard.

Turkey is following their example, attempting to close its border with Syria to stop refugees fleeing the fighting in Aleppo.

Conditions for the 2.5 million Syrian refugees in Turkey remain poor. In January the government announced plans to make it easier to apply for a work permit. Five years after the Syrian crisis began just 7300 work permits had been issued. Refugees

without a permit have to try to work illegally, and therefore face exploitation and low wages. No wonder so many want to get to Europe.

Let the boats land

The efforts to keep out refugees are also causing deaths at sea by making the journey more dangerous. A razor wire fence built at the land border between Turkey and Greece to keep people out forces refugees to travel by boat across the Aegean and risk drowning.

Last year 3770 people died in the Mediterranean, including 805 crossing the Aegean Sea from Turkey to Greek islands.

In November footage emerged of a Greek coastguard vessel attempting to sink an inflatable dingy with 60 refugees on board. The Greek vessel then sailed away and left the boat to be rescued by the Turkish coastguard and returned to Turkey.

Human Rights Watch has also raised concerns about armed, unidentifiable masked men attempting to disable boats and return them to Turkey.

In recent months patrols of the sea border have been stepped up, with EU border agency Frontex joining Greek government patrols and NATO sending warships to assist.

But this is not a humanitarian mission designed to save lives, but an effort to prevent refugees coming. US defence secretary Ashton Carter explained the need for NATO involvement by saying, "There is now a criminal syndicate that is exploiting these poor people and this is an organised smuggling operation."

This rhetoric, and the efforts to "stop the boats", mirror the policies of the Australian government. But people smugglers do not drive refugees to seek protection—they spring up in response to the need to escape war and persecution. Refugees throughout history have been forced to use people smugglers when government put up barriers to their escape.

Australia's response to the Syrian crisis has been as miserly as anywhere. The government has accepted just 26 Syrian refugees in five months, despite agreeing to provide 12,000 additional places.

Canada has already accepted over 20,000 refugees from Syria over the same time period. Even Britain under right-wing Prime Minister David Cameron was able to welcome 1000 arrivals before Christmas last year.

The demand to open the borders has never been more urgent.

THE REBELLION THAT SHOOK BRITAIN: IRELAND'S 1916 EASTER RISING

100 years ago, a rebellion in Ireland fought for freedom and justice in British-controlled Ireland. **Phil Chilton** tells the hidden revolutionary history of the rebellion

ONE HUNDRED years ago on Easter Monday in Dublin 1300 insurgents rose in rebellion against Britain's colonial domination of Ireland.

The rebels declared an Irish Republic and held central Dublin against the forces of the crown for about a week. Despite their defeat, the uprising created shockwaves around the world and led to a mass movement which would secure independence within five years.

This year in Ireland will see many bourgeois politicians line up to pay homage to the brave women and men who fought and died for the liberation of Ireland in 1916.

The official commemorations are crafted in such a way so as to make sure that the revolutionary aspirations of the rebels are diluted, hidden and safely consigned to a time since past. What these professional hypocrites cannot admit, let alone commemorate, is that the 1916 Rising was as much a rebellion against established Irish politics as it was against the British Empire.

Frederick Engels described Ireland as "England's first colony". Since at least the 12th century Ireland was a source of plunder for English kings and nobles. Although invaded many times Ireland was not finally conquered by England until the 16th century.

The severity of Ireland's conquest is perhaps best characterised by Oliver Cromwell who sought to re-consolidate English control. In 1649 Cromwell sacked the town of Drogheda and massacred those who resisted. Cromwell wrote: "I believe we put to the sword the whole number of the defendants. I do not think 30 of the whole number escaped with their lives."

Between 1846 and 1851 Ireland suffered a devastating famine. Out of a population of eight million it is estimated that nearly one million died of starvation. Another million people left the country, mostly destined for the slums and sweatshops of Britain, America and Australia.

The British ruling elite's response to the famine was conditioned both by their anti-Irish racism and their free market ideology.

Bans on food exports which would have saved many lives were opposed, food programs were ended and the burden of paying for famine relief was pushed onto an already struggling Irish economy.

The British Assistant Secretary to the Treasury, Charles Trevelyan, declared that it was not the function of government to provide food to the starving. Trevelyan explained to an aristocratic counterpart that "the real evil with which we have to contend is not the physical evil of the famine, but the moral evil of the selfish, perverse and turbulent character of the [Irish] people."

Thousands of people abandoned their land after famine relief was denied to anyone holding more than a quarter acre. Thousands more poor farmers were forcibly evicted when they could not pay their rents.

Nationalist movements

British savagery provoked a succession of armed nationalist movements, from the United Irishmen in the wake of the French revolution to the Irish Republican Brotherhood, or Fenians, formed in 1858 in the aftermath of the famine.

After an attempted Fenian uprising was crushed, the focus of Irish nationalist politics moved to an effort to

British savagery provoked a succession of armed nationalist movements

secure Home Rule legislation through the British parliament. This sought a measure of self-government for Ireland within the United Kingdom. An Irish Parliamentary Party was formed, with the aim of using the balance of power in parliament to press the British government for Home Rule. Irish Home Rule legislation was defeated in 1886 and 1893 but by 1912 it seemed as if it might finally come to pass.

British loyalists within Ireland began to arm—in Belfast in particular. Big capitalists in the north east wished to retain their ties with the British Empire, maintaining their access to imperial markets. They dragged behind them many Protestant workers who pledged loyalty to Britain and opposed any form of Home Rule.

The Ulster Volunteer Force was formed in 1912 with the stated aim of, "using all means which may be found necessary to defeat the present conspiracy to set up a Home Rule Parliament in Ireland."

Supporters of Home Rule responded by forming their own armed group, the Irish Volunteers: 75,000 had joined by 1914. The moderate Irish Parliamentary Party managed to secure effective control of its leadership.

But when war broke out in 1914 the Home Rule Bill was put on hold for the duration of hostilities. The war exposed the conservative, compromising politics of the Irish Parliamentary Party. Its leader, John Redmond, took eagerly to the task of recruiting Irishmen for the British Army, in an effort to demonstrate his loyalty to the British Empire. He hoped that British gratitude would secure Home Rule at the end of the war.

As the war dragged on and thousands of Irish soldiers died, support



Left: A mural commemorating the Easter rising in Northern Ireland

for the bloodshed, and for the Irish Parliamentary Party, began to ebb. The Irish Volunteers split over whether to support the war. The remaining Irish Volunteers opposed joining the British Army and prepared to fight for Home Rule.

A section of them, with links to the old Irish Republican Brotherhood, secretly planned for a rising. James Connolly too, urged the rebels on. The conspirators took Connolly into their confidence and an insurrection was planned for Easter 1916.

Class and socialism

Connolly was a life-long revolutionary socialist. He returned from the United States where he had been an organiser for the Industrial Workers of the World, joining the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union (ITGWU) as its Belfast organiser in 1910. The militant tactics of the ITGWU won significant improvements in wages and conditions for workers. The union grew quickly from 4000 members in 1910 to 22,000 by 1912.

He was at the centre of the Dublin lockout of 1913, when Ireland's employers, led by the Dublin capitalist and former Irish Parliamentary Party MP, William Martin Murphy, moved to smash the Transport Union and its militant allies.

In order to defend strikers Con-

nolly formed the Irish Citizen Army. Its few hundred members joined the uprising in 1916.

Connolly combined an understanding of the necessity for class struggle with an abiding belief in Ireland's need to free itself from colonial domination. For Connolly, "The cause of labour is the cause of Ireland, the cause of Ireland is the cause of labour. They cannot be dis severed."

Connolly never dropped his commitment to socialist and working class politics, and recognised the limitations of those who launched the uprising. He warned, "In the event of victory, hold onto your rifles, as those with whom we're fighting may stop before our goal is reached. We are fighting for economic as well as political liberty."

Rebellion isolated

When it came, the uprising drew little support.

The conspiratorial methods of the rebels lead to confusion. Orders for the mobilisation of the Volunteers were countermanded by leaders who did not support the plot. Attempts to smuggle arms to supply the rebels were botched.

Perhaps crucially James Connolly failed to use the methods of class struggle; no strike was organised to support the rising, and many of Dublin's workers watched the fight with

bemusement. Only a relatively small group of fighters took on the forces of the British army. Outnumbered and out-gunned, they were defeated after six days.

It was the shocking scale of the British repression that turned the leaders of the uprising into heroes. There were 3500 arrests, many of people who took no part in the uprising. Internment camps were set up.

Sixteen of the rising's leaders were put to death. Connolly was the last to be shot. Badly wounded, he had to be tied to a chair to face the firing squad.

The killing of the rebels sounded the political death knell for John Redmond and the Irish Parliamentary Party. His support for the war and for a British state that could not be trusted to implement Home Rule saw his party obliterated at the election two years later in 1918. Irish Republicans demanding independence swept the polls, refusing to take their seats in Westminster and establishing a rebel Irish parliament.

The Irish Volunteers were reorganised as the Irish Republican Army, and fought the British until 1921. Negotiations resulted in the shameful partition of Ireland, with a sectarian state in the North remaining part of Britain.

The Russian revolutionary Lenin defended the Easter uprising as a blow against imperialism, despite its weaknesses. He wrote that, "Their misfortune was to have risen prematurely, when the revolt of the European working class has not yet matured." The Rising helped to break the grip of a conservative politics that had dominated for decades.

In 2016 we see that conservative grip broken again. Last month's elections saw the two main establishment parties, responsible for running governments in Ireland since the civil war, down to 50 per cent between them from 74 per cent in 2007.

The real inheritors of the revolutionary spirit in Ireland 100 years later are not the establishment politicians, but the ordinary working people who fought against austerity on the streets in the water charges campaign and voted for a left alternative at the ballot box.

The words of James Connolly cry out: "Starting thus, Ireland may yet set the torch to a European conflagration that will not burn out until the last throne and the last capitalist bond and debenture will be shrivelled on the funeral pyre of the last war lord."

Now that would be a fitting commemoration of 1916.

A RED IN THE WHITE HOUSE? BERNIE SANDERS, SOCIALISM AND THE DEMOCRATS

Bernie Sanders has shown radical ideas can find a serious audience in the US. **Peter Jones** looks at what he stands for and where his campaign for president is headed

BERNIE SANDERS has shaken the Democratic Party establishment, railing against the hold of Wall Street and big money on US politics. He has drawn enthusiastic crowds of thousands of people at meetings across the country, far larger than those of Hillary Clinton.

Sanders has put the idea of socialism back on the map, proudly identifying himself as a “democratic socialist” and calling for a “political revolution” to take on the power of Wall St and the “ruling class”. He has tied this to demands for free healthcare, free university (college) education, action on climate change, and something approaching a liveable minimum wage (\$15 an hour).

Against the odds, Sanders has won remarkable success in his campaign to win the Democratic Party’s nomination. A surprising win in Michigan has kept hopes alive that he can still win.

He is a long way behind Clinton: at the time of printing he had won 9 states to Clinton’s 13, and has less than half as many delegates. But for now he is still in the race, and may get a boost as the campaign focuses on more of the northern states, where he has performed better.

In conditions where the US economy has barely recovered from the global financial crisis of 2008, many Republican and Democratic voters are looking to candidates who seem to stand for an alternative to neoliberal orthodoxy.

Unlike Clinton, he voted against the Wall Street bailout, and he’s worked hard to expose her links with the wealthy elite. When matched up in polls against Trump’s brand of authoritarian protectionism, Sanders continues to outperform Clinton.

Sanders’ socialism

When asked what he means by socialism, Sanders points to the example of countries like Denmark. Most of his

program was fought for and won in advanced capitalist economies outside the US during the post-war boom of the 1950s to the 1970s, even if it has been wound back to greater and lesser degrees.

It’s a vision of social democratic reform, not socialist revolution. Genuine socialism means workers taking control of society themselves, setting up new forms of democracy, and seizing the wealth of the ruling class to put it under popular control.

As Sanders himself points out, no US president could implement measures close to what he is proposing on their own. US companies do not want to make major investments through taxes in the health and education of their workers when they still have plenty of unemployed people to choose from and their profit rates are low.

Winning these demands would take a sustained, mass movement of strikes and protests to win a struggle against not only the power of Wall St and the capitalist class generally, but Congress, the states, the Supreme Court and unelected state officials.

The key question confronting Sanders, his supporters and the US left generally is how to translate the momentum his campaign has generated into something of more lasting significance.

The danger is that when he drops out of the race with Clinton he will endorse her. He’s completely ruled out running as an independent.

If his supporters are not won to the importance of struggles beyond elections, Sanders is likely to lead them into the dead end of campaigning for Clinton and the Democratic party machine.

Sanders’ supporters showed their willingness to mobilise in Chicago, where a mass rally of thousands shut down a planned Trump rally at a university. Thousands of victorious protesters filled the university auditorium

.....
The danger is that when Sanders drops out of the race with Clinton he will endorse her

and chanted “We stopped Trump” and “Bernie”. But while Sanders’ said “What caused the protests at Trump’s rally is a candidate that has promoted hatred and division against Latinos, Muslims, women and people with disabilities,” he was careful to say his campaign didn’t organise the protests.

Sanders’ campaign has helped to popularise support for progressive reforms. But they won’t be achieved by an election.

Deepening and broadening the struggles is the key to social change—and to showing people that they could run society themselves. The Black Lives Matter movement and the struggle for a higher minimum wage are radicalising an important but small minority.

If Sanders doesn’t use his platform to bolster those struggles, or if his supporters fall into backing Clinton, his campaign inside the Democrats could help reinforce, rather than upend, the dominance of two equally capitalist major parties in US politics.

Democratic Party

Compared to the Australian or British Labo(u)r parties the Democrats have much stronger, direct links with business, and much weaker links to workers through the unions. The party takes most of its money from big business and has always loyally served US capitalism.

Barack Obama has been no exception. He won the presidency in 2008 by promising “hope” and describing his campaign as a movement to take on Washington and the powers that be. That changed to widespread disillusionment as he continued US militarism abroad, bailed out Wall Street and agreed to massive budget cuts.

The Democratic party is at once looser and more tightly controlled than, for example, the ALP.

In most states anyone who votes Democrat can vote in a primary, and

they can volunteer to help with a campaign. But there is no membership structure through which they might hold officeholders accountable, or which might be a home for an activist left wing.

People who are elected as Democrats are more or less free to vote however they like on any given issue, and securing funding for re-election as an individual is a very significant consideration.

Democratic presidents can't expect Democrats in Congress and the Senate to support them out of party discipline. So even if the Republicans lost their majorities and Sanders won the presidency his scope for implementing reforms "from above" would be very narrow.

The presidential primary system itself is also rigged against challengers from the left. Unelected "super delegates", picked by the party establishment control 15 per cent of the vote.

While the party's legitimacy would take a hit if Clinton fell behind on the popular vote but won through super delegates, given the political distance between Sanders and the party machine, they'd probably think the price was worth it.

Unfortunately Clinton looks like she will win the popular vote in any case. The big problem for Sanders' campaign is the pledged delegates he has already lost, especially in the south, where Clinton has won the majority of the black vote. Sanders' win in Michigan shows that this isn't because non-white voters refuse to vote for a white male, as Clinton's campaign has insinuated (Michigan, a northern state, has a relatively large black population).

The more likely reason is that Sanders and his campaigners are mainly based in the north, while the Clintons have built up networks of support and patronage in the south. Their support from the Democratic Party establishment also gives them backing from the layer of middle class blacks who have built careers in the party.

As Sanders himself says eloquently, the electoral process is stacked in favour of candidates who people with power and money think will support their interests.

Sanders' limits

Sanders hasn't always been a Democrat. He was part of the civil rights and anti-Vietnam war movements in the 1960s and ran in various elec-



Above: Bernie Sanders has drawn large enthusiastic crowds across the US

toral campaigns against Democrats in Vermont in the 1970s and 1980s. But as the left retreated he shifted closer to them, and was elected to Congress with their backing in 1990.

This went along with adopting a number of positions supporting US imperialism. In response to his decision to back Bill Clinton's 1999 Kosovo War, activists occupied Sanders' office. He had them arrested. Sanders voted for a resolution giving Bush Jr. carte blanche to invade any country he decided was connected to the September 11 attacks.

While he rightly opposed invading Iraq in 2003, he supported the deadly sanctions that led up to it. He supports US bombing in Syria and wants closer US co-operation with Iran and by extension Russia and Assad. Compounding this is the way he has framed this position as a way of getting Muslims to do the fighting against ISIS, dog whistling to the idea that all Muslims bear some responsibility for their crimes.

Sanders has been a consistent supporter of Israel's wars, voting in the Senate to support their most recent bombing campaign against Gaza. In his campaign speeches he often links American nationalism with anti-Chinese sentiment, tying opposition to free trade and Chinese military and economic competition with opposition to US job losses.

Nevertheless, throughout his campaign Sanders has opposed Trump's attacks on Muslims and Mexicans and Obama's deportations of immigrants. On the Black Lives Matter movement he has been slow to come on board, sympathising with police for having "a very, very difficult job". As mayor of Burlington, Vermont he relied heavily on the support of the police union, and has described the police as a "socialist institution".

But more recently, he has taken up the issue, saying in one campaign ad focused on police killings, "I want to see an America where when young black men walk down the street they will not be harassed by police officers, they will not be killed, they will not be shot."

Sanders' politics are part of his orientation on winning elections. Too often he starts and finishes with the narrowly "economic" issues he thinks will win the most votes.

As an expression of opposition to the rich and Wall St, his campaign is a very positive development. But the real test will be whether his campaign is able to build the strength of the movements to win the changes his supporters want.

As Howard Zinn said, "what matters most is not who is sitting in the White House, but whose sitting in, and who is marching outside the White House, pushing for change."

Republican voters could trump party elite

By Alex Callinicos

DONALD TRUMP'S sweeping victories in the US primary elections have thrown the Republican Party into "a state of pandemonium", according to the *Washington Post* newspaper.

Horrified by Trump's success in laying waste to his rivals for the Republican presidential nomination, party grandees are mobilising in a last-minute effort to stop him.

Mitt Romney, who unsuccessfully ran against Barack Obama in 2012, has denounced Trump as a "fraud". Money is being poured into attack ads in the states where primaries have still to take place.

Katie Packer of Our Principles, a stop-Trump operation funded by the billionaire Ricketts family, told the *Post*, "We have a very target-rich environment. He has left quite a wake of victims in his path."

The panic about Trump isn't confined to the US.

Martin Wolf, chief commentator for the *Financial Times* newspaper in Britain, declared, "The US is the greatest republic since Rome, the bastion of democracy, the guarantor of the liberal global order. It would be a global disaster if Mr Trump were to become president."

Wolf put his finger on the key issue. The Republican establishment represented by Romney and two of Trump's hapless opponents, Jeb Bush and Marco Rubio, broadly support the strategy pursued by US imperialism since the Second World War.

This is to build an international network of alliances underpinned by US military power to maintain a global liberal capitalist order through which capital and commodities can freely flow.

Trump is challenging this order. Apart from wanting to build a wall along the border with Mexico, he is promising to force US corporations such as Apple to repatriate their production from China and other low-wage economies. He has also questioned the worth of the US alliance with Japan.

This is anathema to the mainstream of the US ruling class. Sixty Republican foreign policy experts signed a letter saying Trump was unfit to be president.



General Michael Hayden, George W Bush's last director of the Central Intelligence Agency, has warned that US military commanders might disobey his orders if they violated international law.

Tradition

Trump's general stance is in fact quite recognisable to anyone familiar with US political history. It is an example of what the Republican commentator Walter Russell Mead has called the Jacksonian tradition.

Andrew Jackson, president 1829-37, was very happy to use force to expand the US, notably against the Native Americans. But he was also a populist opponent of Wall Street and suspicious of foreigners.

Jackson was president of the US when it was still pushing out from the eastern seaboard and was an economic semi-colony of Britain.

Remarkably, Trump has revitalised this brand of aggressive nativism, racism, and populism in the very different circumstances of 2016, when the US is the dominant capitalist state.

The fundamental reason for his success is obvious enough, and it's what drives Bernie Sanders's campaign for the Democratic nomination—the state of the US economy.

Real household median income is the same as it was 20 years ago.

The mortality rate among middle-aged white men is rising. No wonder Trump says, "I love the poorly educated." They are the chief victims of an economic crisis that a majority of people in the US believe is still going on.

David Perdue, Republican senator for Georgia, said, "The main pendulum in American politics is no longer swinging from left to right. It's swinging between insiders and outsiders."

If true, this poses a big problem for the party establishment.

If they succeed in slowing down Trump's advance and denying him the nomination at the party convention in July, they may well be punished by the voters who rallied to him.

But it's a problem for Trump as well. Scenting victory, he's already starting to clean up his act.

A few weeks ago he issued a statement promising to be guided by international law in the orders he would give the military as president.

But if he abandons his utopian promises to shut the US off from global trade and migration, he will be betraying his supporters. Where will they turn next?

Socialist Worker UK

Trumbo: jailed for his beliefs in the 'land of the free'

Trumbo
Dir: Jay Roach
In cinemas now

WHEN MALCOLM Turnbull visited Washington in January he waxed lyrical about the US alliance and the US's willingness to always serve "freedom's cause". Politicians from both the major parties simply take it for granted that in any situation America will be the good guys. They really do believe that America is the "land of the free".

This month a new movie and newly published book help to remind us just what total piffle this view of America is.

Firstly there is the sparkling new film, *Trumbo*. Director Jay Roach and his star Bryan Cranston have produced a film from that most rare of genres—a left-wing feel-good movie. It tells the horror story of what America did to a generation of its best writers and artists through the fate of Dalton Trumbo.

In 1945 Trumbo was one of the highest-paid screenwriters in Hollywood, but he was also a Communist. When Uncle Sam needed Uncle Joe during the Second World War this had been tolerated, but in post-war America the ruling class determined to stamp out dissent by any means necessary. So Trumbo and nine other Hollywood insiders were summoned to appear before the House on Un-American Activities Committee and in 1947 the Hollywood Ten were sent to prison.

It is important to remember here that the US Communist Party was a perfectly legal organisation and belonging to it was, by definition, not a crime. The movie makes it quite clear that Trumbo



and his comrades were banged up for being lefties.

Blacklisted

Driven by the studio bosses in the Motion Picture Alliance for the Preservation of American Ideals and cheered on by right wing blowhards like John Wayne and Walt Disney, there followed a merciless jihad against anyone in the US media who dared to think for themselves. Tens of thousands of American radicals were sacked and then blacklisted in the name of freedom.

On his release from prison Trumbo carried on doing what he did best—either producing scripts for Poverty Row no-budget producers or working under pseudonyms. This produced the farcical moment when the 1953 Oscar for best script went to one "Robert Rich", a man who didn't exist. It was a made-up name to hide the fact that the blacklisted Trumbo had written it. Finally in 1960 Kirk Douglas (no less) insisted that Trumbo be given on-screen credit for the script of *Spartacus*. Just this once Kirk really was *Spartacus*.

Significantly the final

words on that script are, "I will return and I will be millions." Trumbo had been blacklisted and dishonoured but he had never been broken—and this defiance is captured superbly in *Trumbo*.

Fittingly it has exactly the kind of script that Trumbo himself produced: a classic narrative story arc, witty dialogue and a deft humour, rich characters giving actors the

Trumbo and nine other Hollywood insiders were summoned to appear before the House on Un-American Activities Committee and sent to prison

chance to shine and all in the service of a deeply serious theme—the injustice of the American system.

In case you think things have improved since then, Jane Mayer's new book *Dark Money* suggests just how wrong you are. Mayer's subtitle says it all: *The Hidden History of the Billionaires Behind the Rise of the Radical Right*.

Mayer is a *New York Times* reporter and she spent five years researching the secretive, malevolent Koch brothers (the fifth and sixth richest men in the US).

This Voldemortian pair use their obscene wealth to promote what Irvine Welsh calls "shit-in-the-bed neo-liberalism". Less scatologically Milton Friedman once admitted it was "socialism for the super-rich".

The Koch's dark and dirty money finances anti-abortion campaigns, attacks on welfare provision, anti-union drives, the curtailing of minority civil rights and campaigns to trash the science of global warming.

They sell this through compliant think tanks and sock-puppet academics and through their wholly-

owned front, the Tea Party. In the 2016 presidential race the Koch machine is spending \$900 million to sell whatever neanderthal the Republicans run—as long as it isn't Trump, because he is not conservative enough for the Kochs.

Naturally the Kochs peddle their right-wing poison with the usual catchism of "freedom" sanctified by the usual hillbilly Guns 'n' Moses bullshit. But in truth they are just capitalist predators on the make. As Mayer says, "It is impossible not to notice that the political policies they endorsed benefitted their own bottom lines first and foremost".

Mayer says simply that their plan is to "repeal every major reform of the 20th century" and use their wealth "to impose minority views on the majority". In what world is this "democracy", let alone "freedom"?

Chillingly, Mayer reveals that the Kochs learned their politics from their father Fred, a Nazi fanboy who made his fortune building oil refineries for his idol, Adolf Hitler.

What links the Hollywood witch hunt to the Koch conspiracy is the understain of systemic racism. One underexplored aspect of the blacklist was that almost every black actor with a toehold career in Hollywood was sacked and blacklisted.

Later Fred Koch would baldly say, "The coloured man looms large in the Communist plan to take over America."

Today American cops use black youths for target practice. Only in a land as racist as the US could the words "Black Lives Matter" be a controversial statement rather than a simple truism.

Bob Light
Socialist Review UK

NSW CRACKS DOWN ON MINING PROTESTS

By Paddy Gibson

FEBRUARY WAS the hottest month on record, prompting Australia's Chief Scientist to declare, "we are in a climate emergency".

But the Baird Government in NSW is working overtime to clear the way for unfettered expansion of fossil fuel mining, introducing serious new penalties, including a potential of seven years in prison, for protestors disrupting mining or fracking operations and new police powers that could be used to crack down on demonstrations across NSW.

Hundreds of people rallied against the new laws, in heavy rain, outside NSW Parliament House in Sydney on 15 March, with speakers from unions, Labor and Greens MPs and Aboriginal and environment groups.

The laws passed through the parliament later that night.

A Unions NSW briefing paper explains, "Currently, the Law Enforcement (Powers and Responsibilities) Act provides an unqualified right to industrial action, protest, processions and assembly without police direction. The amendments empower police officers with discretionary powers to disperse protests and give 'move on' directions."

These changes will have less effect on protests in NSW where police are given seven days' notice through a "Schedule 1" form, outlining any planned march route. But if no "Schedule 1" has been submitted, or if a protest deviates from its original plans, police will have greater powers to shut it down as an "unauthorised assembly".

Mining companies

A number of changes have been introduced specifically at the behest of mining and fracking companies such as Santos, facing determined opposition to their attempt to establish 850 gas wells in the Pilliga forest in North West NSW.

Amendments to the Inclosed Lands Protection Act will see a 1000 per cent increase in fines and potentially long jail time for anyone "locking on" to equipment or disrupting operations.

At the same time, Baird has re-



Above: Kooma and Gomeroi man Bogaine Spearim leads the crowd in a protest against the new protest laws outside NSW Parliament House Photo: Jarek Gasiorek

Mining company Santos is facing determined opposition to their attempt to establish 850 gas wells in the Pilliga forest

duced the maximum fine for companies caught "mining without authority" from \$1.1 million to just \$5000.

Union representatives addressing the rally also said changes to the Act could be used against workplace action. Damage to any "structure" associated with a mine now carries stiff penalties, a broad power that could potentially include putting posters on a mine fence, according to a Unions NSW briefing paper.

Other changes include the introduction of an offence to "interfere with the conduct of a business" on any "in-closed land", including shops, schools or factories, a power that will clearly impact on industrial action and other forms of civil disobedience.

Bogaine Spearim, a Kooma and Gomeroi man, traveled to the rally from a protest camp on his country, attempting to stop destruction of sacred sites by the Whitehaven Coal Mine.

He said the Inclosed Lands Protection Act has always operated to stop Aboriginal people accessing their lands. He helped lead protestors onto the road at the conclusion of the speeches, calling for a campaign of defiance to stop the new laws, "we

can't be thinking about the risk of getting arrested, we have to think about the risk of not having a generation that has access to country, song, dance and story".

The proposed laws in NSW come as Liberal governments across the country move to crack down on the right to protest.

Draconian laws proposed by the Barnett government in WA could see a year in prison for anyone participating in peaceful civil disobedience found to be "physically preventing a lawful activity".

The laws will also allow police to arrest people simply on the "suspicion" that they were going to act "unlawfully" and places the onus on the person arrested to prove they had no such plans.

The laws have been widely condemned, including by the UN office of Human Rights. Former Greens Senator Bob Brown was arrested and is currently challenging in the High Court laws passed in 2014 in Tasmania which are very similar to those proposed in NSW.

As it has in the past, defiance can make these laws a dead letter and defend our right to protest.