

Solidarity

Issue No. 98 / January 2017

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**STOP BASHING THE POOR
MAKE THE RICH PAY**

**SACK ALL THE
LIBERAL RORTERS**



TRUMP

China threats, Russia
and US power

UNIONS

New retail and fast food
union interviewed

ABORIGINAL

Whitewashing the
Myall Creek massacre



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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 don't think that is an acceptable way to spend massive amounts of taxpayers' money. It really lacks imagination

Social Services Minister Christian Porter responding to ACOSS's call to increase Newstart because three million Australians are living in poverty.

They wanted to save a shitload of money and weren't interested in hearing what we thought about it.

Victorian Centrelink worker who told management their computerised debt recovery system would make massive errors

We're concerned by your comments. If u disagree u can ask for a review. If you need immediate support, call Lifeline 13 11 14.

Official message from Centrelink Twitter account to people concerned about its debt notices

Forget it. That plays great before the election. Now we don't care, right?

Trump tells supporters his slogan "lock her up" targeting Hillary Clinton was just a line for the election

If you can lose money running a casino, that takes some sort of skill—or lack of it.

Chris Mittleman, fund manager at Global Value Equity on Donald Trump

I read about this numerology theory that if you add the numbers that match the letters in your name you can change your personality. I worked out that if you added an 's' I would have an incredibly exciting, interesting life and nothing would ever be boring

Sussan Ley on why she added an extra 's' to her first name in her 20s.

Socialism is on the march and so it's terribly important that the Turnbull government and Turnbull himself is very, very strong about starting to understand about free enterprise and starting to pull that party together as an entity which can indeed fight against that socialist revival

Bronwyn Bishop on Sky News

CONTENTS

ISSUE 98 JANUARY 2017



Trump and the growth of resistance
12 Trump's dangerous games in Asia
20 Wave of opposition in the US



Genocide and ongoing assimilation

7 System still failing Dylan Voller
18 Whitewashing the Myall Creek massacre



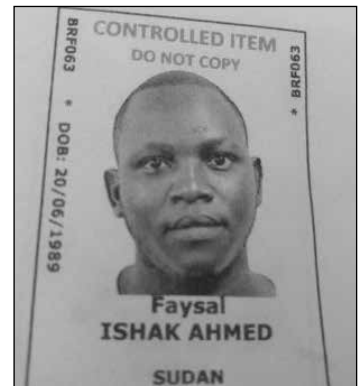
Features

14 Is a new union the solution for retail and fast food workers?
16 Aleppo and the defeat of a popular revolution in Syria

4 Inside the system

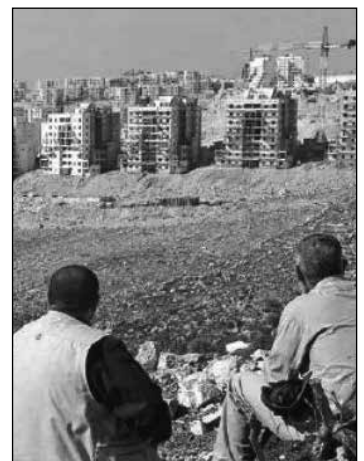
Reports

6 Left must get organised in NSW Greens
8 New horrors on Manus Island
9 Teachers defy threats to support refugees
10 CUB boycott no model for fighting unions
10 Murdoch Uni's brazen attack on staff



International

11 US and Israel divided over how to continue occupation
12 Mass protests in South Korea bring down president



INSIDE THE \$YSTEM

Obama drops three bombs per hour

A REPORT just published by the Council of Foreign Relations has calculated that the US military dropped an average of three bombs per hour in 2016.

President Obama was elected with a mandate to end Bush era wars. But according to the report Obama spent his last year in office unleashing a tsunami of 27,171 bombs in seven countries.

“This estimate is undoubtedly low”, the report notes “considering reliable data is only available for airstrikes in Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, and Libya, and a single ‘strike’ according to the Pentagon’s definition, can involve multiple bombs or munitions.” In 2016 the United States dropped 3028 more bombs than it did in 2015. Iraq and Syria bore the brunt of US strikes: Iraq was hit with 12,095 bombs, while Syria with 12,192.

More evidence of abuse in NT juvenile detention

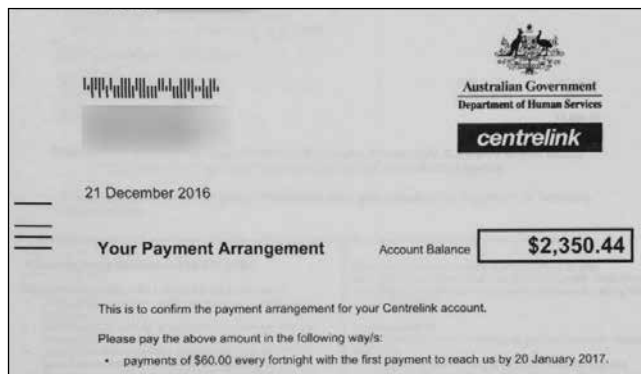
TWO FORMER juvenile detainees are bringing a class action against the Northern Territory government for abuse they suffered while imprisoned. The lawsuit was filed by Maurice Blackburn lawyers on behalf of Dylan Jenkins and Aaron Hyde. If successful it could lead to compensation for hundreds of other juvenile detainees who have been subjected to abuse. Their court application details cases of false imprisonment, battery and assault.

The document claims that Dylan Jenkins was thrown into solitary for two days after being, “punched, kicked and struck ... with batons and shields”.

In another incident 15-year-old Hyde says he was bashed by guards, had his head slammed into a door-frame and was handcuffed to a fence. In another he claims he was stripped naked and thrown into solitary confinement for three weeks with no permanent bedding or tap water.

His mother Tracey Hyde explained, “He was stripped naked and he’d been asking for a blanket and a guard told him to masturbate to keep himself warm”.

Centrelink bullies target the poor in phony debt scam



TURNBULL’S CRIMINAL Centrelink crackdown is forcing society’s most vulnerable to pay back mountains of bogus debt. Jack Rogerson is a 21-year-old with autism. According to *The Guardian* he was contacted by a debt collector employed by Dun & Bradstreet—a multinational with the \$10.8 million contract to collect Centrelink debts. Rogerson had heard nothing about his supposed \$3000 debt before this but he prepared to pay it anyway.

His mother, Nicole Rogerson, is Director of Autism Awareness Australia. She intervened after Jack mentioned the debt in passing in a phone call. Jack’s mother said the debt related to three months where her son received a disability benefit before taking an apprenticeship. She said the debt was false because he had no job in the period, and voiced concern about other intellectually disabled people targeted in the debt recovery fiasco adding, “This hard line of the government is just heartless to the core.”

In another case, a single mother was issued with a \$24,215 debt notice two weeks before Christmas. She had written the name of her employer in two slightly different ways when reporting her income. As a result Centrelink’s automated system deemed her ineligible for the parenting payment she had been receiving. “They want to get money back from us low-income Australians instead of the Murdochs,” she said. Even after lodging a dispute she was told she would have to begin paying back the mountain of debt at a rate of \$60 per week. Another single mum, Andrea Russel, was hit with a phony debt of \$11,800. She has also been forced to start paying the debt while gathering seven years’ worth of pay-slips from four different employers, including one that no longer exists.

Hillary Clinton throws party for millionaire donors

ONE OF Hillary Clinton’s first moves following her election loss to Trump was throwing a mega-party for her richest donors. Clinton’s exclusive “thank you” party only included a few hundred of the biggest donors who helped her raise up to \$1.3 billion for her failed campaign. The party was held in a columned, 446 square metre “Grand Ballroom” in the Plaza Hotel in New York. Clinton’s biggest single donor was S. Donald Sussman, a venture capitalist and hedge fund manager who donated a total of \$21 million to the top Super PAC supporting her campaign. Clinton used her short speech at the Plaza Hotel to blame Vladimir Putin for the election result. It is reported that some donors sobbed as she spoke.

Research and writing by Adam Adelpour

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

Elite US unit’s atrocities revealed

A JANUARY report in *The Intercept* has detailed horrific war crimes committed by Navy Seal Team 6. This is the celebrated US military unit hailed as heroes after they killed Osama Bin Laden. The report reveals an elite team of murderers, torturers and sadists who slaughtered civilians, committed atrocities and revelled in gruesome “war porn”.

This included the “wedding party massacre” in Afghanistan’s Paktia province in 2002. The US bombed a convoy of cars, who turned out to be civilians heading to a wedding, before deploying Seal Team 6. The group were targeted purely because one man was wearing a “flowing white garb” similar to Bin Laden’s, and also worn by millions of Muslim men.

Lt. Cmdr. Vic Hyder stood over an injured civilian who survived the initial attack. Hyder then shot him in the face and mutilated his body. By 2007 such desecration of the dead had become routine. One Seal said it became a “sport”. Horrific videos of Seals taunting dying men were circulated. “No one would do anything about them,” a retired Seal explained. One of the team was awarded the Medal of Honour by Obama in February 2016.

Top CEOs earn average year’s wage in five days

BY THURSDAY afternoon on 5 January Australia’s top executives had already been paid more than the average yearly income. Fairfax used the latest data from the Australian Council of Superannuation Investors to work out the average CEO pay at the top 100 companies on the stock exchange.

It came to about \$5.54 million a year. This breaks down to around \$15,000 per day for the 2015 financial year. The ABS says the average income in Australia is \$81,000, 68 times less than a top CEO. Adjusted for inflation, it took them only 5 days to pass this figure.

EDITORIAL

Liberal Minister resigns: one down—but they’ve all got to go

WHILE THE world prepares for the inauguration of Donald Trump, the good news in Australia is that one greedy, self-entitled Liberal former Minister for Health, Sussan Ley, has resigned.

The Liberals’ contempt for ordinary people is on full display, with the Centrelink debt recovery fiasco out of control while the list of Liberals rorting politicians’ allowances grows longer by the day.

The Liberals’ ongoing abuse of taxpayer funds on lavish meals and trips to New Year’s Eve parties and sporting events is truly jaw-dropping.

Health Minister Sussan Ley was forced to resign after claiming \$3125 of taxpayer funding for her trip to the Gold Coast where she bought a \$795,000 luxury apartment, supposedly an unplanned “impulse buy”.

It got worse and worse as she was exposed claiming money for 20 trips to the Gold Coast in the last three years, including one charter flight costing \$12,000. They included trips to attend New Year’s Eve parties hosted by a rich Liberal Party donor in both 2013 and 2014.

Incredibly, Ley was unrepentant insisting she had “followed the rules” and done nothing wrong. But there’s a whole gaggle of Liberal MPs with their snouts in the trough.

Julie Bishop claimed \$11,000 on trips for “ministerial business” when she attended the Melbourne Cup, Derby Day and the Portsea Polo. Minister Steve Ciobo spent \$1000 on airfares to attend an AFL grand final saying it was “absolutely... work-related”, while Kevin Andrews ran up \$2000 in flights to attend a prayer breakfast in the US. And Peter Dutton shelled out \$4000 on a “working dinner” for ten people at the Jefferson Hotel in Washington, while styles itself the city’s “most discerning hotel”. Now George (bookcase) Brandis is exposed for spending more than \$12,000 on a visit to western Queensland with his son last September.

But while government MPs live the high life at taxpayer expense, the government is punishing thousands of welfare recipients who are struggling to get by.

Around 230,000 have received Centrelink letters demanding repayment of sometimes thousands of dollars. And many of the letters arrived just before Christmas. It started with students and the unemployed. The government now plans to target



Above: Sussan Ley has regularly charged charter flights to the taxpayer costing tens of thousands of dollars

pensioners and the disabled.

The demand letters are being generated by a computer system that attempts to catch out people receiving Centrelink payments while they were working by “data matching” Centrelink payments with work income declared on tax returns. But since Centrelink payments are based on fortnightly, not annual income, the system can’t make proper matches.

The government admits that 20 per cent of the demand letters have been sent to people who do not have a debt. But it is likely almost all the letters are wrong. One Centrelink compliance officer told *The Guardian* that after reviewing hundreds of cases, only 20 had genuine debts. Yet the government has bluntly refused to suspend the process.

Ruling for the rich

Minister for Social Services, Christian Porter, says the system is “working incredibly well”, because it was saving the government money. The stress and anxiety for people on desperately low incomes, some pushed to the brink of suicide, means nothing to the government.

The Centrelink debacle itself is the result of cutting \$2 billion out of welfare spending and cutting the jobs of workers reviewing their computer system.

The Centrelink debacle exposes Turnbull’s agenda to rule for the rich.

More than a third of large companies paid no tax at all in 2014-15, according to Tax Office data. Others paid almost nothing, like Macquarie

Bank which paid just 1.5 per cent tax on \$8.1 billion in profits.

Yet Turnbull wants to rip money out of the pockets of the poorest people in the country, while he plans to cut corporate taxes and hand \$48 billion back to the bosses.

But Sussan Ley is only one of the Liberal rorters. Turnbull has appointed Greg Hunt to be health Minister. Previously Hunt was environment minister, the apologist for the Coalition’s climate (in-)action plan. Despite his promise of “rock solid support for Medicare”, no doubt he will push the Coalition and private health insurance agenda for Medicare cuts.

While Centrelink beneficiaries are ruthlessly audited, the government pours billions of unauthorised dollars into offshore detention of refugees.

Turnbull may have got rid of one rorter, but the government is full of them. They should all be sacked. The government is down in the polls and politically is on the backfoot. We have to keep them there.

With a lead from union officials, the disgust with the Liberals could be turned into struggle. We are still waiting for demonstrations against the ABCC, Turnbull’s construction union police. Union-called mobilisations against the Centrelink debt repayment scheme could kill it off and link up with the CPSU workers’ fight for a wage rise.

The best antidote to Trump, Pauline Hanson and Turnbull is to build the fight against every cut; to fight racism and Islamophobia, and to fight for black and refugee rights.

.....
Incredibly, Ley was unrepentant insisting she had “followed the rules” and done nothing wrong

Left inside Greens must fight for an activist party

THE FORMATION of the Left Renewal faction, to begin organising against the right inside the NSW Greens, has exposed the ongoing battle between left and right inside the party.

The NSW branch has been a bulwark against the rightward push of The Greens nationally. But 2016 saw a series of body-blows against the left. In August the right-wing candidate Justin Field won pre-selection in John Kaye's former seat in the NSW parliament, after his tragic death deprived the party of one of its most left-wing MPs. Then in December the left's candidate Kelly Marks lost to the more conservative candidate, Dawn Walker, in the pre-selection for another spot in the NSW upper house.

The right inside the party is increasingly confident. The left needs to get its act together, or the right will eventually take control of the NSW branch, and the whole party will slide even further to the right. Building a faction is not undemocratic; it is needed to fight for democracy within the party. The right essentially has its faction organised through MP's offices.

The attack by former Greens' leader Christine Milne on Left Renewal and NSW left-wing Greens MPs Lee Rhiannon and David Shoebridge is more evidence of the concerted and public campaign being waged by the right of the party.

Milne's demand that the two MP's "call out" Left Renewal and other critics of the party's direction is a continuation of what has become a concerted campaign by the national leadership and NSW right-wing MPs against the left of the party.

Last July, former leader Bob Brown called on Lee Rhiannon to resign as a Senator just weeks after her re-election. This was followed in September by NSW Greens Upper House member Jeremy Buckingham using the 7.30 report to attack supposedly "unaccountable officials" in NSW.

The Greens' national leadership has tried to move party policy to the right over issues like inheritance tax, funding for private schools, and with the recent deal with Turnbull over pensions.

Current party leader Richard Di Natale wants to move The Greens further in the direction of parliamentary pragmatism, using the party's parliamentary numbers to cut deals with the government to "get outcomes" and



Above: The further The Greens shift towards parliamentary pragmatism, the less they will stand for real change

focus exclusively on getting more MPs elected.

Bob Brown and Christine Milne began this shift to the "respectable centre", signing a deal with the minority Gillard government in 2010. Even after Gillard was discredited, The Greens continued to claim credit for the "achievements" of the Gillard minority government despite the failures of the carbon tax, the resource rent tax and worsening policies on refugees.

Getting organised

Left Renewal's Facebook page has attracted over 2000 likes and there is strong interest in their events precisely because thousands of Greens members and supporters are alarmed at The Greens moving away from involvement in the social movements and their protest roots. These grassroots members and supporters need to be organised into a much broader fight against the rightward drift of the party.

But it is not just a matter of getting the left organised. The Greens have consistently won support among those looking for a left-wing alternative to the conservatism and neo-liberal policies of the Labor Party.

The left in The Greens has to seek to organise them around a platform based on building the strong, fighting left party that they want.

Many NSW Greens MPs are vocal advocates of social movements and

regular speakers at demonstrations. But the record of the NSW Greens as an organisation is quite different. The party is geared towards electoral contests, and mobilising members and supporters to build movements and lead industrial struggles comes a very distant second.

The left needs to use issues like refugees, union politics and anti-racism to build a network of members with a shared vision for shifting The Greens to becoming an activist party.

Allies for this must be found in each branch and priority mobilisations selected that allow the left to begin to turn the branches into spaces that publicly build demonstrations and campaigns.

Focusing on the working class and taking up economic issues is also crucial to whether the party is to grow into a clearly left-wing force. There is serious disillusionment with Labor amongst many of its working class supporters, but The Greens are yet to become a natural home for working class people. Winning Labor's base means actively campaigning against the ABCC (the special police force for the construction unions), organising within the unions and focusing on issues like penalty rates, the right to strike, Medicare and welfare.

Unless the left gets organised and begins to fight for a political approach that goes beyond electoralism, the right will keep on winning.

.....
Current party leader Richard Di Natale wants to move The Greens further in the direction of parliamentary pragmatism

Dylan Voller still fighting for release from racist prison system

By Miro Sandev

DYLAN VOLLER, the youth infamously tortured at the Don Dale prison, has launched a searing indictment of the criminal justice system.

Footage of the systematic abuse of Dylan since his first jailing at 11 years of age aired on *Four Corners* last August sparked national outrage. The federal government sought to minimise the fallout by announcing a Royal Commission into child protection and juvenile detention systems in the Northern Territory. But the hearings have so far done nothing to discourage the abuse ingrained in the system.

Dylan is still in jail, despite being eligible for parole since October 2015. He is being controlled by some of the very same guards who tormented him in Don Dale.

Guards threatened violence if he testified and he was even escorted into court by guards who he says have previously assaulted him, without a word of protest from the Commissioners.

Colin Rogan, the father of another former Don Dale inmate Kenny Rogan, received a phone call on 11 January where “a person who sounded like he had some authority” threatened to “slit the throats” of Colin and Kenny if the youth testified at the Royal Commission. Kenny has alleged that while he was in Don Dale, guards stripped off his clothes with a knife.

Dylan bravely defied the threats made against him and gave a powerful statement to the Commission.

He told further harrowing details of his abuse including being routinely starved, denied water, sleep or access to a toilet. He said, “The problem is the justice system itself... young people need love and someone to talk to, not to be locked in a cell”. He also spoke out against the blatant racism common in prisons and juvenile detention centres.

Dylan’s long-time caseworker Antoinette Carroll told the Commission that he was not a violent boy before he was first forced into detention and abused by guards.

She said that he had never been given therapeutic or rehabilitative options despite pleading guilty to his crimes, and was “set up to fail” in a cycle of incarceration. Carroll said being raised in a violent prison envi-



Above: Dylan’s mother, Joanne Voller, at a protest in Sydney

ronment contributed to his later violent offending, for which he received a three year sentence.

Dylan was punished yet again by having his phone calls to family cut, as revenge for his stand against the system. To protest this, his mother Joanne stood in silence with duct tape covering her mouth at a Human Rights Day rally led by Aboriginal people in Sydney on 10 December. By speaking out and joining protests, his family have provided an important lead and helped the truth come out.

The Grandmothers Against Removals (GMAR) Sydney group

played a crucial role in the December 10 rally. Across NSW, GMAR has been successfully supporting Indigenous families who have had their kids taken by “child protection” workers to fight back against the department.

That’s why it’s crucial that there is a mass turnout at the 13 February rally on the anniversary of Kevin Rudd’s apology to the Stolen Generations, calling for the closure of youth prisons, Aboriginal control of Aboriginal child welfare and to bring the kids home.

Only a campaign of protest and public pressure can force change.

.....

Guards threatened violence if Dylan testified and he was even escorted into court by guards he says have previously assaulted him

Coroner goes soft on cops in Ms Dhu killing

THE CORONER investigating the death of indigenous woman Ms Dhu in Western Australia has decided not to call for criminal charges against police and other officials involved in her killing.

This was despite ruling that the 2014 death was wholly preventable and her life could have been saved by simple antibiotics if police had heeded her calls for treatment. The coroner criticised the police for being “inhumane” and “unprofessional” but, incredibly, ruled out any possibility that they had been racist in dealing with her.

But it is clear from the evidence in the coroner’s report and in the CCTV footage released that the police were recklessly negligent as

to whether Ms Dhu lived or died. She had complained constantly of pains due to her fractured ribs from the moment of being taken into custody and had spent most of the night screaming.

Nearly all of the police completely ignored her complaints, assuming she was faking it. One of the cops said to her, while she was lying lifeless against the wall: “You are a fucking junkie, you have been to the hospital twice before and this is not fucking on ... you will fucking sit this out. We will take you to hospital but you are faking it.”

The cops later dragged her incapacitated body across the cell floor and when they finally took her to hospital, told the resuscitation team “she’s faking it”.

By Ian Rintoul

ON CHRISTMAS Eve, Faysal Ishak Ahmed, a 27-year-old Sudanese refugee, died in Brisbane a day after being medivacced from Manus Island.

Faysal had been sick for months—he had suffered seizures for weeks, had requested medical help from IHMS, but had been turned away.

Just days before his death 60 Sudanese refugees had sent a letter to IHMS and Border Force pleading for Faysal to get medical assistance. He collapsed, fell and struck his head in the evening of Thursday 22 December, was brought to Brisbane on the afternoon of Friday 23 December and died on 24 December.

It seems Faysal suffered severe head injuries after he suffered yet another seizure and fell.

But regardless of the immediate cause of death, Faysal was killed by Australia's offshore detention system. The responsibility for his death lies with Immigration Minister Peter Dutton.

Like Hamid Khazaei, a Manus refugee who died from blood poisoning in a Brisbane hospital in 2014 after Border Force delayed approval for his evacuation, we will have to wait for the inquest to know the immediate role of IHMS and Border Force in Faysal's death.

But their responsibility is crystal clear. Faysal should not have been on Manus; he should have been in Australia. He should have got the medical attention he desperately needed.

Anger

Faysal's needless death sparked an immediate reaction on Manus Island. That night, angry refugees staged a protest, overturning tables in the mess area, forcing the Wilson security guards and Border Force officers out of Delta and Oscar compounds.

Faced with protests spreading throughout the detention prison, officers and staff also withdrew from Mike and Foxtrot compounds.

"For one night there was no Australian or PNG immigration in the centre," said Kurdish refugee Behrouz Boochani. "We had one night without seeing Australian and PNG faces. They must answer us why they killed Faysal."

Sickened by Faysal's death and the dismissive comments from Peter Dutton, hundreds of people attended vigils for Faysal held around the country. In Melbourne, following the vigil, protesters including the Sudanese

No end to the horror: death, violence and uncertainty stalks Manus Island



Above: Angered by Faysal's death, refugees on Manus overturned tables and force guards from their compounds

community blocked a city road.

2016 was bookended by the horror of Faysal's death in an illegal detention centre and the new year's eve bashing of two Iranian refugees by PNG immigration officers and police.

Like Faysal's death, the bashing highlighted the ever-present violence on Manus Island. With no legal aid, no lawyers, an arbitrary court system that has nothing to do with justice for refugees or locals, the PNG police are judge, jury and executioner because Wilson's Security and Broadpectrum have no lawful authority to regulate or detain.

Anxiety over US deal

To emphasise the refugees' precarious existence, in the aftermath of the bashings, Border Force held meetings announcing that refugees would only be considered for resettlement in the US if they moved out of the detention centre to the East Lorengau Transit Accommodation.

But there is nothing certain about the US deal and no reason for refugees to live in East Lorengau. Moving refugees to East Lorengau is something Border Force and PNG immigration have been trying to engineer since before the Manus hunger strike two years ago—to no avail. Life is even more precarious in the Transit Accommodation.

Anxiety over the US deal is also growing on Nauru. Despite US of-

ficials being on Nauru since 7 January, there has only been one round of interviews that ended in December last year.

As *Solidarity* goes to press, Donald Trump is due to be inaugurated. If the US resettlement deal survives Trump becoming president, there is still no guarantee that the deal will apply to anyone on Manus. What is certain is that the US deal will not resettle everyone.

That's why the movement still has to fight to bring all the asylum seekers and refugees to Australia.

The Senate Inquiry into offshore detention is set to investigate Faysal's death and is due to report on 30 March. It will potentially provide even more ammunition for the movement to campaign to end offshore processing.

The same day that a new report said that the Liberal government wants to claw back \$1.5 billion more from pensioners and the disabled with its Centrelink debt recovery scheme, the Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) found that there was no authorisation for \$1.1 billion spent on Manus and Nauru between September 2012 and April 2016.

The lawless indifference of the government costs money; and it costs lives. There will be no justice for Faysal until Manus and Nauru are closed. This year's Palm Sunday refugee rallies on 9 April need to be big.

.....
Just days before his death 60 Sudanese refugees had sent a letter for Faysal to get medical assistance

Teachers defy threats to take a stand for refugees

By Lucy Honan

HUNDREDS OF teachers across NSW and Victoria wore t-shirts carrying the slogans “Teachers for Refugees; Close the Camps, Bring them Here” during Human Rights week in December. Despite threats from federal and state governments, we wore them to class, at lunch time, or before school, and found ways to make sure the school community could see our message.

Thanks to the extreme response from the Turnbull government, and the calls to sack participants, staff-rooms were filled with discussion and debate about teachers’ right and responsibility to protest the offshore camps all week.

The debates cut to the core of what education is about. Turnbull was obviously terrified that a well trusted group of workers like teachers were opposing government refugee policy. They wanted us to stick to the pursuit of NAPLAN test scores and delivery of “the 3 Rs”.

But as Mandy, a primary teacher in South West Sydney put it, “Educators are responsible for teaching facts and fostering critical thinking and problem solving. Real life learning and leading by example is the most authentic way to engage students in learning. More importantly, caring, kindness and speaking up for fairness and equity must happen in action, not just words!”

Defiance

One Melbourne primary school teacher was told (as many of us were) that she could not wear the t-shirt as it would break the code of conduct that requires public sector employees not to comment on government policy. She wore it in the next day and explained to her principal that teachers at their school had a tradition of modelling compassion and refugee advocacy. The principal not only accepted her decision, she bought a t-shirt off her!

Other teachers weren’t able to get their principal’s support, but defied directives not to wear the t-shirt anyway. Dance teacher Daniella Olea wrote a reply-all response to an intimidating principal email: “I’ll be neutral about refugees when the government treats refugees neutrally”. Sixteen teachers from her school joined her in disobeying the principal’s directive.

Across NSW and Victoria teach-



Above: Teachers from a South-Eastern government school say Close the camps, during the week of action

ers were discussing the contradiction of being legally required to report suspicion of abuse of children in our schools, but being threatened with our jobs for speaking about the abuse of children kept in detention camps by the government.

Our t-shirts sparked conversations with students. A group of Year 8 and 9 students watched 30 teachers at our school walk out of the staffroom together, all wearing our t-shirts. “Why are you protesting?” one asked us—and another student jumped in; “for the refugees, didn’t you see!” Shouts of “great t-shirt miss!” followed through the corridor throughout the day. We were proud to set an example to our students of how to stand up for refugee rights.

Lilly, a primary school teacher at a school with many refugee families said she had sensitive and honest conversations with students about the rights refugees deserve. Parents picking up students gave her and the t-shirt clad teachers “big smiles” of encouragement.

Thach Ly, a physics teacher who had come as a refugee in the 1970s spoke at the Melbourne Teachers for Refugees vigil of how refugee policies and rhetoric had made him feel ashamed of his refugee heritage. But this week, he said, he felt proud to be a refugee and a teacher.

While we were setting a standard of anti-racism and solidarity in our schools, the Prime Minister, the Immigration Minister and the Education Minister were having conniptions

about losing their grip on the refugee debate, and teachers in general. They could not counter our arguments that the camps are inhumane and illegal, so they tried bullying and intimidation. While state education ministers caved in their pressure to direct teachers not to participate in the t-shirt action, this only meant more teachers decided it was time to take a stand. Each news report of “crack downs” on our action provoked a new wave of messages and phone calls from teachers wanting to get their hands on t-shirts.

Many organisations declared their wholehearted support for our action, including the Victorian Trades Hall Council, the Australian Education Union and the National Tertiary Education Union, GetUp, the Refugee Council of Australia and the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre. This makes it unlikely that any teacher will be formally reprimanded for their involvement.

We need to build on the momentum. Already, the Queensland Teachers Union have flagged they will be supporting a similar t-shirt action. Equivalent actions by nurses, social workers, construction workers, librarians and other groups could follow. Teachers for Refugees can encourage speakers and share teaching resources, defend students from deportations, and ensure refugees are not excluded from education because of their visas. And we will be looking for the next opportunity to put our collective pressure on the Turnbull government to close the camps.

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They could not counter our arguments that the camps are inhumane and illegal, so they tried bullying and intimidation

Relief at CUB but boycott campaign no model

By Feiyi Zhang

IN DECEMBER, electricians and fitters at the Carlton and United Breweries, known as the “CUB 55”, won a return to work on their previous wages and similar conditions.

This came after six months on the picket line, and an extensive nationwide campaign across the union movement to boycott CUB beers.

It would have been a serious loss for the union movement if employers had gotten away with slashing of wages by 65 per cent at this highly unionised worksite.

Although not all the details of the return to work are public, the unions greeted this as an unqualified victory for the strategy of boycotting CUB products.

The AMWU said the result showed “the power in our union”. ETU organiser for the CUB 55 Steve Diston told *Solidarity*, “This dispute is more than a win for 55 tradesmen in Melbourne, this is an example for working class people across the country.”

The workers involved showed absolute dedication and commitment to hold out for so long.

Long-time unionist and 67-year-old Alan Dinon campaigned throughout the six months but retired and handed over his position to a new apprentice.

Strain

But it was an enormous strain. Seven of the 55 had broken the strike and gone back to work. Workers told *Solidarity* they have faced difficulties at home, personal threats and intimidation themselves and even against their partners.

But the CUB “boycott” victory is unlikely to be repeated. CUB got a new owner four months into the dispute. Global brewer, AB In-Bev, was keen to get production going and under pressure offered jobs back to the CUB workers.

The boycott strategy was a way of avoiding serious industrial action and does nothing to boost workers’ confidence more widely to fight at a workplace level.

Several hundred unionised workers remained at work throughout the dispute.

If the union leadership had been



Above: Unionists rally outside the CUB brewery in Melbourne

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The boycott strategy was a way of avoiding serious industrial action and does nothing to boost workers’ confidence

willing to break the law and call out the other unionised CUB workers in Melbourne, or at CUB’s Queensland brewery, this dispute could have been resolved in weeks.

Whilst the new agreement apparently included some compensation for wages lost, it also meant a backdown from union members on a new rotating roster, meaning less control over their hours of work.

The win at CUB demonstrated the commitment of the CUB55 but a boycott strategy is no substitute for industrial action.

We need to draw the lessons from recent disputes at Harrison and Polar Fresh—if you strike you can win within weeks and start re-building workers’ confidence in their own power and organisation.

Murdoch Uni’s brazen assault on staff

AS THE holiday wind down began last December, management at Murdoch University in Western Australia delivered a nasty Christmas surprise that could have drastic implications for university workers across the country. They applied to terminate their agreement (EBA) with the staff union, the NTEU (National Tertiary Education Union) in the Fair Work Commission.

If the application is successful, workers will be forced onto award conditions, meaning:

- A 25 to 39 per cent wage cut;
- Cutting redundancy entitlements by one third for academics and 80 per cent for professional staff;
- Removing regulations on workloads (the regulation of maximum loads for teaching, research, and administration for permanent academic staff);
- Ending rights to academic and intellectual freedom;
- Eliminating employer provided paid parental leave.

Casual workers could lose their rights to facilities, library cards, email accounts, internet access, and payment for induction sessions.

Murdoch made their latest move after dragging out negotiations for a new agreement over seven months and 25 meetings. They were offering an insulting 3 per cent pay rise contingent on cuts to conditions. When

the union went on a half-day strike on 7 December, management threatened to discipline workers if they sent an out-of-office reply about the strike, and docked a full day’s pay.

On top of this, Murdoch are suing two union organisers on the basis of statements they have made in emails about the university’s bargaining strategy.

At the moment, the union has focused on solidarity messages and photos, emails to the Vice-Chancellor, raising funds, and pushing recruitment. A lunch time rally on 15 December at Murdoch drew over 100 workers. Gabe Gooding, the NTEU WA secretary, gave a message to management at rally, saying, “You are taking on the union movement ... we are all in this fight.” This statement must be turned into reality. The NTEU across the country can meet management’s dramatic attack at Murdoch with an equivalent escalation.

The news comes as union members prepare for the EBA negotiations at most universities across the country this year. What happens at Murdoch will be have flow on effects everywhere—if management’s bold attack is successful, other universities may adopt the same hardline tactics. With many universities entering bargaining, coordinated national action is both possible and necessary.

Amy Thomas

Divided over how to continue Israel's occupation

By Caitlin Doyle

A DISPUTE over illegal settlements in occupied Palestinian territory has exposed tensions between the US and Israel. In early January, outgoing Secretary of State John Kerry delivered the most critical speech about Israel ever given by a US government official. He argued that the continued settlement building and land grabs are motivated by “ideological imperatives” and threaten the future of a two state solution.

The row follows a resolution passed by the UN Security Council in December demanding a halt to settlement construction. The resolution reiterated that Israel's settlement building in Palestinian territory was a “flagrant violation” of international law.

In a surprising move, the US refused to veto the resolution and abstained from the vote.

The Israeli government furiously condemned the decision, telling New Zealand, which co-sponsored the motion, it was tantamount to a “declaration of war”. Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu called the US's decision to abstain “shameful” and has accused Obama of “colluding” with the UN against Israel.

Disgracefully, Australian Foreign Minister Julie Bishop hinted Australia would not have voted for the resolution if it were on the council, declaring that it does not support “one-sided resolutions targeting Israel”.

Bishop is keen to maintain good relations with the Zionist state. She has invited Netanyahu to visit Australia in the new year and he would become the first Israeli prime minister to do so.

The US and Israel

The US normally uses its veto at the UN to protect Israel, as it did in 2011 when a similar motion was tabled. For the past two decades the US has supported a “peace process” with the aim of a two-state solution in historic Palestine.

This would allegedly see a state of Palestine set up in the West Bank and the Gaza strip with a capital in East Jerusalem, effectively surrounded by Israel. It would mean giving up the rights of millions of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes after Israel's creation in 1948 brought widespread ethnic cleansing. And Israel itself would continue to be an apartheid



Above: Outgoing US Secretary of State John Kerry and Israeli President Binyamin Netanyahu

state with a Palestinian minority, who make up 20 per cent its population, continuing to face discrimination.

The promise of a two-state solution has been used to co-opt the Palestinian Authority (PA), led by Fatah, into policing Palestinian resistance. But the PA's failure to challenge Israel and its “security coordination” with occupying Israeli forces are making it increasingly unpopular. The continual attacks on Palestinians are fuelling discontent and unrest in the Palestinian territories.

Growing tensions

But it is becoming impossible to pretend that there is even a fig leaf of a peace process underway in historic Palestine. The Israeli state has accelerated settlement building on the land nominally set aside for a future Palestinian state, and now refuses to even negotiate with the PA.

Netanyahu's right-wing Likud party, which thrives on anti-Arab racism and attacking Palestinians, leads the coalition government. It won the Israeli elections in 2015 after promising to expand settlements in East Jerusalem. Its main coalition partner, the far right Jewish Home party, demands full annexation of the West Bank.

Meanwhile Israel routinely refuses Palestinians permission to build their own homes in the occupied West Bank. More than 1500 Palestinians were made homeless by demolitions last year—the highest number since the UN started recording demolitions

in 2009.

There has been tension between the Obama administration and Netanyahu since Obama took office in 2008 over the question of settlements.

Israel is a key US ally in the Middle East and a number of US politicians are concerned Israel's actions threaten the long-term stability of the occupation and threaten to further isolate it internationally.

Kerry argued that the US's decision to abstain was “about preserving the two-state solution”. In a period of massive political and military conflict throughout the region, the US are desperate to maintain Israel as their “watchdog” state—and in this instance it has meant pulling at the leash.

Donald Trump condemned the Obama administration's decision not to veto, saying it had treated Israel with “disdain and disrespect”.

Netanyahu has made clear that he is looking forward to working with a highly sympathetic Trump government. Trump's support will likely encourage the Israeli government to continue with its brutal expansionist policies and attacks on Palestinians. He has declared he will move the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, despite its status still being disputed under international law.

With the possibility of a two state solution disappearing, it is becoming increasingly clear that a single democratic, secular state encompassing all of historic Palestine is what is needed.

.....
It is becoming impossible to pretend that there is even a fig leaf of a peace process underway

Mass protests continue to rock South Korea



By Workers' Solidarity
South Korean socialist group

PROTESTERS BROUGHT in the New Year in South Korea with another mass protest to demand the immediate resignation of President Park Geun-hye. One million people protested in the capital Seoul with many staying after midnight.

Protests have been rocking the country since October—including the six weeks since parliament voted for Park's impeachment. They are the largest in South Korean history, with a record 1.7 million at the largest demonstration in early December.

Park's impeachment must still be ratified by the constitutional court in a process that can take six months, although the court wants to speed this up.

The protests were triggered by the revelation that Park has long kept a secret, unelected, superstitious "adviser"—Choi Soon-sil—who has meddled with all aspects of government from university admissions to key government appointments.

This was apparently based on a complex corruption network including big businesses and top government figures. These scandals are the straw that broke the camel's back.

During the December 2012 presidential election, the ruling class almost unanimously backed Park. She is the daughter of the former military dictator Park Chung-hee. Park has attacked democratic rights as well as launching market-oriented assaults on wages, job security, public spending and safety regulations. Her government is also trying to build yet more military ties with the US and Japan.

The KCTU trade union movement has been at the forefront of the struggle. Within a year of Park's election there was a rail workers'

strike which lasted for 23 days and broke the atmosphere of fear towards the government.

In 2014 a ferry disaster resulting from deregulation led to the loss of more than 300 young lives. Victim's families, mostly from working class districts, have been leading the struggle against the government's cover-up.

Park's attacks on wages and workers' rights last year were met by national protests which mobilized some 100,000 trade unionists in central Seoul. Eventually, in April, her party suffered a gigantic defeat in the general election.

Now the ruling class seems willing to sacrifice Park to save the rest of the regime and regain political stability.

It is demanding all political parties cooperate with prime minister Hwang Kyo-ahn, who was appointed by Park and is now acting president. But protesters demand his immediate resignation too because he is pushing through Park's policy agenda, a legacy which people call the "accumulated evils".

Trade unions are playing a significant role in this movement. Contingents from the KCTU union federation have led many of the protests and the KCTU called its own one-day strike in early December.

Such developments show the power of the organised workers' movement. But the workers are relying on bourgeois parties at the moment rather than taking the matter of changing society into their own hands and pulling other forces behind them.

To change such situation, it is important to encourage organised workers' activity from below by combining the bitterness at workplaces with the current political developments.

The radical left is working hard to cooperate on this task.

Socialist Worker UK

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They are the largest protests in South Korean history, with a record 1.7 million one rally in December

By James Supple

DONALD TRUMP'S preparation for office has been laced with a series of threats aimed at China and the US's NATO allies, underlining the uncertainty his election has injected into global politics.

At his boastful and at times bizarre press conference just before he took office, Trump even blamed US intelligence agencies for leaking a document detailing rumours about his ties to Russia.

He even likened his own intelligence agents to Nazis.

The intelligence brief alleges direct co-operation between Russia and Trump's campaign, and the existence of compromising material on Trump allowing Russia to blackmail him.

While there may be doubts about the details, it is clear that many within the US foreign policy establishment and the ruling class are extremely concerned about Trump's ties with Russia and his praise for Russian leader Putin.

Russia has effectively annexed Crimea, and Russia sidelined the US in Syria with its massive military and barbaric targeting of hospitals and civilian areas.

The US is not really concerned with interfering in elections. The US has routinely interfered in elections and its invasion of Iraq shattered an entire society, leaving over a million dead and entrenching sectarian divisions.

Their concern is with Russia as an imperial rival for influence and control of areas along Russia's borders in Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

Trump's apparent benign view of Russia, as a country the US can co-operate with, is at odds with the long-running US view of Russia as a competitor.

In the years since the end of the Cold War, the US has expanded NATO into areas of Eastern Europe formally part of the Russian sphere of influence, and it recently increased its number of troops in Poland.

Trump says his main military priority is to "get tough" on Islamic State, and has suggested that military co-ordination with Russia, for instance in Syria, might aid this.

Threatening China

More risky, perhaps, is his hawkish and arrogant language aimed at China.

First there was Trump's phone call with Taiwan's Prime Minister, designed to enrage the Chinese

Trump's dangerous games in Asia

government. Since 1979, when the US officially recognised the Communist Party rulers as the government of China, it ended official diplomatic recognition of Taiwan.

This is known as the “One China” policy, and Trump has since reasserted that he now considers it again under question.

Then Rex Tillerson, his nominee for Secretary of State, threatened China over its island construction in the South China Sea during his confirmation hearings, saying, “access to those islands ... is not going to be allowed”. China’s state owned *Global Times* responded by warning this risks a “large-scale war”.

Since 2015 there has been a stand-off between the two powers over China’s activities in the South China Sea, on a number of islands it claims as Chinese territory.

While the Obama administration has insisted on “freedom of navigation” in order to justify the US’s ability to sail wherever it pleases in the area, it has never tried to physically prevent China accessing islands that are under Chinese claim. Doing so would require the use of US military force. Trump could try to pressure China by increasing military sales to Taiwan.

In 2011 President Obama announced a “pivot to Asia”, shifting the weight of US military resources towards the Asia-Pacific, with the aim of containing China.

The US fears that China is on the way to becoming a second superpower, capable of rivalling the US in both military and economic power.

China is now the world’s second largest economy in GDP terms and growing at a much faster pace than the US.

Trump has promised a massive increase in military spending, to boost both the size of the navy and the army, aimed largely at China.

In addition, Trump’s incoming Secretary of Defence, George Matthis, has a long-standing obsession with Iran.

When Matthis was asked for his view on priorities as newly appointed commander of US forces in the Middle East in 2010, he replied, “Number one Iran. Number two Iran. Number three Iran”.

Matthis’ aim in the Middle East is not necessary war on Iran, but a more



Above: Trump holding forth at his press conference in January

aggressive approach aimed at forcing it into line.

So while he singled out Iran as the, “biggest destabilizing force in the Middle East” he also told the US Senate the country should “keep its word” over the deal on Iran’s nuclear program.

This is at odds with Trump’s talk of tearing up the deal.

Economic advantage

But Trump’s hostility towards China is also fuelled by the belief that is out-competing the US economically. He has accused China of manipulating its currency in order to harm US exports.

Part of Trump’s aggressive nationalism is his claim that US foreign policy is not delivering enough direct benefits to the US economy. He has denounced free trade deals like NAFTA and the Trans-Pacific Partnership as “bad deals” for the US.

And he has complained that US allies “don’t pay a fair share” of the cost of hosting US troops or relying on US

protection, suggesting he could downgrade the importance of NATO.

He seems to view threats and a more confrontational military stance as a way to boost the US’s declining economic role and force other countries to give the US what it wants and exact some sort of bargain over trade.

But military brinkmanship also risks miscalculations that could lead to armed conflict.

Australia is already involved alongside the US in military adventures in Iraq and Syria. The US military base at Pine Gap is used extensively for operations in the Middle East, and is sure to be involved in any conflict in the South China Sea as well.

The need to end the US alliance and kick out the US bases is now clearer than ever. The Trump presidency means the world has become an even more dangerous and unpredictable place.

New union no short-cut to mobilising the rank-and-file

By Lachlan Marshall and Adam Adelpour

THE NEW Retail and Fast Food Workers Union (RAFFWU) has been established to combat the poor pay and conditions fast food and retail workers face in Australia. It aims to establish itself as a rival to the conservative Shop Distributive & Allied Employees Association (SDA) which collaborates with employers to strip pay and conditions.

A fight against the SDA and employers is entirely justified. But setting up a new bureaucracy is no quick-fix for the terrible situation retail and fast food workers find themselves in. What is essential is struggle organised from the rank-and-file.

Forming separate breakaway unions has a long history in the labour movement as one strategy for overcoming the conservatism of the union bureaucracy.

In certain situations, such as in the case of the Industrial Workers of the World in the United States, where there was no competition from already established unions, this can result in the mobilisation of previously unorganised groups of workers.

American unionist and IWW founder Eugene Debs famously said “to talk about reforming these rotten graft infested unions which are dominated absolutely by the labour boss, is as vain and wasteful as to spray a cesspool with attar of roses”.

But a dual unionism” or break-away strategy tends to locate the barriers to militancy entirely at the top of the union. As a result the prescription can end up being equally top down—everything will be fixed if only an enlightened minority split.

However, on its own, forming a separate union does absolutely nothing to build the strong rank-and file organisation necessary for militancy. Worse, such breakaway or “dual unions” can also divide the workforce and separate the minority of militant workers who want action from the majority of workers who remain in mainstream unions. It can leave workers in the mainstream unions under the unchallenged influence of conservative union leaders, inadvertently strengthening the hand of the union bureaucracy and employers.

Many of the activists in the young Communist Parties formed in the 1920s argued for left-wing breakaway unions based on the radical minority

of workers.

In the wake of the German revolution of November 1918 bosses conceded the eight-hour day, and union membership tripled in a year. But German communists urged workers to “get out of the trade unions” and to join their own red unions.

Similar opinions were held by the American and Italian communists.

In *Left Wing Communism: an Infantile Disorder*, written in 1920 to address this trend, the Russian revolutionary Lenin explained that, “To refuse to work in the reactionary trade unions means leaving the insufficiently developed or backward masses of the workers under the influence of the reactionary leaders.”

Furthermore, revolutionaries needed to, “learn how to work legally in the ... most reactionary of trade unions” and “must absolutely work wherever the masses are to be found.”

RAFFWU

The SDA has been exposed in recent years for selling out its members by making deals with bosses that leave them worse off than under the basic industrial award, particularly over penalty rates.

The SDA notoriously negotiated an agreement with Coles in 2015 that cut the penalty rates of thousands of union members.

The SDA even pays Woolworths and Coles up to \$5 million a year to have union members’ dues deducted from the payroll, often without the workers knowing they are members. This boosts the SDA’s membership and increases its representation at state and national ALP conferences, where it pushes conservative positions like opposition to equal marriage.

RAFFWU can expect determined opposition from the SDA and the retail bosses. In May 2015 Coles and the SDA won a vote in favour of a single national enterprise agreement (now void) that would cover all employees, superseding all separate agreements covering Coles workers, some of which were better than the new one.

Prior to the new agreement meatworkers in the AMIEU working in Coles were covered by a separate agreement with better conditions.

The AMIEU ran a campaign to reject the new agreement, but this ran up against the combined force of Coles and the SDA, with the result

Winning better agreements for the foreseeable future will require organisation within established SDA workplaces

that only 8 per cent voted against the agreement.

As well as sending organisers to recruit members in Coles and Woolies, RAFFWU is planning legal challenges to various SDA agreements that traded away penalty rates.

But legal challenges can’t force employers to accept improved agreements. Last year Coles defied orders from the Fair Work Commission to lift penalty rates by scrapping the 2015 agreement signed with the SDA. Instead, the bosses have now rolled back a previous enterprise bargaining agreement, although on this occasion they decided to keep paying the higher base wage rate in the 2015 deal.

RAFFWU has been launched as a new union outside the SDA, the existing retail workers union, without a base among workers in the industry. It is not going to succeed without a substantial membership amongst rank-and-file workers.

Even if RAFFWU is able to recruit retail members, it risks becoming a small more militant union on paper, but separated from the bulk of union members still in the SDA.

Winning improved penalty rates and better agreements for the foreseeable future will require organisation within established SDA workplaces, organising to fight both the bosses and the SDA leadership. RAFFWU would need to build rank-and-file support in particular workplaces to defeat ballots on agreements supported by the employer and the SDA. Shop-committee style initiatives with workers who remain in the SDA would be a necessary part of any serious push around Enterprise Bargaining. It also means building enough support to take industrial action in defiance of the SDA trade union leaders.

Building an active and organised rank-and-file through site delegates and activists at big employers like Coles and Woolworths is an immense challenge. Coles alone operates 776 stores across Australia.

But building rank-and-file organisation is the only way to organise independently and to push union leaders to call action and support strikes.

Nobody would be sorry to see the conservative leadership of the SDA toppled. “Breakaway unions”, with a new bureaucracy can seem like a short cut, but the key to rebuilding the fighting unions we need is the militancy and consciousness of the rank-and-file.

Josh Cullinan: 'We needed a union for retail and fast food that would fight'

Solidarity spoke to **Josh Cullinan**, secretary of the newly-established Retail and Fast Food Workers Union

Why is a new union needed?

I worked in retail more than two decades ago and have represented retail and fast food workers in different ways, at different times, across the last 20 years. I have seen first hand the impact of SDA.

In 2015 I did the analysis of the Coles agreement and showed how the arrangements the SDA have put in place across the sector provide for massive wage reductions for retail and fast food workers, particularly those working at nights and on weekends. I was then engaged in the Fair Work Commission, representing Duncan Hart in the Coles case. We won that case.

The SDA chose to attack the decision as having somehow created new law. This is a blatant lie that SDA has continued to perpetrate against retail and fast food workers. They refused to take any form of decisive action either at Coles or Woolworths, McDonalds or any of the other major players and are actively opposing the termination of the Coles agreement which would return penalty rates to 75,000 workers. It became clear to myself and others that we needed to build a grassroots and member-led union for retail and fast food workers that would fight for their rights.

Why have you launched a separate union as opposed to trying to reform the SDA from within?

Of all the employee organisations they have the most undemocratic rules. There are numerous examples



and some include in Queensland the state secretary isn't elected from the membership they're elected from the state council. They've got old anti-communist rules, so that if you're a member of an organisation that calls for the overthrow of civilised government anywhere in the world, you're not permitted to run for, or hold, elected office.

We've also got a first past the post structure of elections so that winner takes all. That is non-democratic and heavily benefits incumbents, for elections for state council and national council. We came to the decision that it's not reasonable to ask workers in retail and fast food to throw themselves against that brick wall for another decade trying to democratise what is fundamentally unable to be democratised. These anti-worker rules combined with transient membership and enormous slush funds make member led change impossible.

What has response been and how are you aiming to build membership?

We launched seven weeks ago. Our strategy has been to engage with workers, obtain their contact details and talk with them outside worktime about what we're doing and how they can be involved. We're tackling all sorts of stores, from retail and fast food that the SDA has been involved in, but also smaller stores like Baker's Delight where workers haven't had any semblance of a union for a long time.

Those workplaces which can be more readily organised are going to be smaller. But to be in a sustainable situation requires us to have a base of membership across the sectors including in the major employers. At the moment we are focusing much of our

activity on Coles and Woolworths because we want to organise those stores and engage in processes to bargain for those agreements and terminate the old agreements.

We've done almost 100 store visits and we've had only two or three overzealous store managers, at the vast majority we've had no problem and we've had very positive conversations with workers. We've also been clear from the outset that our organisers will come from within. Where workers are organising themselves we're looking to support their organising with part-time organising jobs. We've already put on our first part-time organiser in Melbourne who works at Woolworths.

Is your immediate focus on more legal challenges in Fair Work?

We are aware that unless we organise the workers in these stores the employers will not hesitate as soon as the gaze is lost to slash conditions. You've probably heard about the Grill'd case where a socialist activist Kahlani was singled out at a Grill'd store for trying to organise her workmates. That led to everyone in that store being paid higher rates and getting better conditions in the short term. Kahlani moved on from the store, the media stopped looking and that Grill'd store then made an agreement which slashed penalty rates and other conditions. It was approved and then Grill'd rolled that out across the country at every other Grill'd store.

We will pursue legal efforts where appropriate, like termination of dodgy old agreements. In one of the Baker's Delight stores the workers' agreement is 12 years old. They get no penalty rates whatsoever. That agreement needs to go and simultaneously we need to identify representatives, get workers joined up to the union and plan collective action to get a new agreement once the old agreement is terminated.

How are you going to take industrial action if you are unable to register officially as a union?

There is a remarkable restriction of the right to strike in Australia. But the right-wing advocates who have individualised workplace rights have left us in a position where we can now collectivise those individual rights. So a bargaining representative, which we are for many of our members, is entitled to apply for a protected action ballot for the workers they represent. We intend to collectivise their individual actions to engage in industrial action. We're under no illusions about the task before us. This process is going to take a very long time.



SYRIA: THE DEFEAT OF A POPULAR REVOLUTION

While the most powerful forces in Syria are now the ruthless dictatorship and reactionary armed groups, the echo of the popular revolution is still visible, writes **James Supple**

THE ONSLAUGHT on Aleppo displayed the depth of the brutality of the Assad regime and its Russian and Iranian backers.

Russian and Syrian planes used unchallenged control of the skies to launch months of ruthless bombing of civilian areas, repeatedly targeting hospitals and schools.

During the final weeks of the assault the White Helmets, a volunteer group dedicated to trying to rescue the injured, reported, “streets and destroyed buildings are full with dead bodies”.

This is the savagery of a ruling class desperate to crush the last echoes of a popular revolution that threatened its power.

The recapture of Aleppo gives Assad control of all of Syria’s major cities. Since Russia threw its full military weight behind Assad last year, there have been a string of victories for the regime.

The US and other Western leaders condemned Assad and Russia’s assault. But these hypocrites support and arm other dictatorships across the region including Egypt and Saudi Arabia. And the US, with Australian support, is leading its own bombing campaign on the Iraqi city of Mosul, working alongside sectarian militias.

The capture of the eastern half of Aleppo in 2012 was one of the armed rebels’ biggest successes. But, as Syrian revolutionary socialist Joseph Daher has put it, eastern Aleppo has also been, “a symbol of the democratic alternative”.

Before the siege began this year, its grassroots revolutionary movement contested efforts by armed Islamist groups to impose their own control in Aleppo.

The most hardline Islamist groups were even forced out for a period. Islamic State was expelled from eastern Aleppo in 2014, and the Al Qaeda-linked Jabhat al-Nusra (now renamed Jabhat Fateh al-Sham) was pushed out in 2015 for almost a year. But as the siege tightened, Jabhat Fateh al-Sham

and similar groups returned as a component of the rebel forces, alongside groups backed by Saudi Arabia and the West.

Popular revolution

The rebellion against Assad began in 2011 as a popular revolution, with mass protests across the country demanding an end to Syria’s brutal dictatorship. The regime responded by shooting people down in the streets, killing 1000 people in the first three months.

The armed rebellion began as an outgrowth of this popular revolt. Local armed groups were joined by thousands of deserters from Assad’s army. But militarisation distorted the struggle. It allowed those with arms to dictate to the popular movement.

Groups linked to the democratic forces were denied any serious arms or assistance by outside powers. It was not in the interests of either the US or Arab dictatorships like Saudi Arabia to support revolutionaries fighting for democracy and popular power. Instead the Saudi Arabia and Qatar particularly supported and built up sectarian Islamist groups.

Alongside this jihadist groupings including Islamic State and Jabhat Fateh al-Sham emerged as the best armed and most effective fighters among the opposition. Both have captured and killed revolutionary activists, and set up their own systems of justice imposing supposedly Islamic measures, like forcing women from their jobs and to cover their bodies.

The regime also helped to turn the conflict into a sectarian war, releasing jihadist from its prisons and unleashing sectarian militias based on the Alawite Shia minority against Sunni areas.

Syria’s population is 55 per cent Sunni Muslim, but the regime is dominated by the Alawite Muslim minority, and there are other substantial minorities including Christians, Druze and Kurds. Turning the struggle into a sectarian conflict was designed

.....
Both the Assad regime and the jihadists are forms of counter-revolution viciously hostile to any form of democracy

to push minority groups behind the regime.

Support for Assad

As a result, some on the left have argued that a victory for Assad is now a lesser evil to a Syria controlled by Islamic State and other jihadists.

This is a false choice. Both the Assad regime and the jihadists are forms of counter-revolution viciously hostile to any form of democracy. Both mean a dictatorship allowing little space for a workers’ movement or any organised opposition. Islamic State’s repression of women’s rights, protests and LGBTI people is well known. But independent trade unions have been banned in Syria since 1959, all through the period of the Assad regime, and thousands have been tortured to death since 2011 in the regime’s prisons.

Others support Assad and Russia as supposed anti-imperialists or some kind of alternative to US imperialism.

It is right to oppose US, Australian and Western military intervention in Syria. But imperialist powers with their own agendas have been drawn in on the side of the Syrian government.

Syria hosts the only Russian naval base in the Mediterranean, at Tarsus. Russia has been determined to maintain the Assad regime in power, as its sole ally in the Middle East. Putin is also using the conflict to establish Russia as a more important broker in world affairs. It is now Russia that is negotiating ceasefires with the rebels and Turkey and talking about a deal to settle the conflict, completely bypassing the US.

Iran for its part is another backer of the Syrian regime, as a reliable supporter in its struggle against Saudi Arabia and other Western allies for regional dominance in the Middle East.

As in the Cold War, when Russia often sent troops to prop up allied regimes around the world, the left should oppose what are simply rival imperialisms.

A victory for Russia and Iran will

not lead to a progressive outcome. This would only embolden Russia to throw its weight around further and help ignite further conflicts and wars across its sphere of influence.

The logic of supporting Russian or Iranian intervention in Syria is that military action by these powers can somehow play a progressive role, not just in Syria but in other conflicts.

But there was nothing progressive about Russia's military onslaught on Chechnya in the 1990s that left between 50,000 and 250,000 civilians dead in an effort to prevent independence. Russia bombed refugee convoys, designated "safe areas" and civilian targets and used kidnapping and murder on a massive scale.

Imperialism

Imperialism must be understood as a system of many competing states, not simply the world's largest power, the US, dominating everyone else. This understanding flows from the theory of imperialism developed by the Russian Marxists Lenin and Bukharin at the time of the First World War. They analysed a world of many imperialisms, where there was both collaboration and competition between powers such as Britain, Germany, France, the US, Russia and Japan.

Modern imperialism, they argued, was a product of capitalism once it reached a monopoly stage of development. This saw individual companies based in a particular country reach such a size that they both dominated their domestic market as well as markets overseas, and required raw materials from outside national boundaries. This meant they required state action to safeguard and pursue markets and raw materials through diplomacy and war.

In an era of multinational corporations, this remains true, despite the end of direct European colonial rule. And it applies not simply to multinationals based in the most advanced capitalist states like the US. States like Russia, Saudi Arabia and Turkey all have their own multinational companies with interests abroad. Competition between states also plays out through geo-political competition to control territory and assert military superiority, even where there are no immediate economic benefits.

Far from simply an issue of Western dominance, the Syrian conflict shows the differing interests even between states within the pro-US camp.

Turkey, a member of NATO, has sent troops into northern Syria with the aim of preventing an independent



Above: Evacuating from Eastern Aleppo as the rebels prepared to surrender

Kurdish state there. It has even drawn closer to Russia in order to win assent for this intervention. This puts it at odds with the US, which sees the Kurds as its most dependable ally in Syria for fighting Islamic State, and is bombing targets in Syria in co-operation with them.

Saudi Arabia and Qatar, both US allies, have shown far more enthusiasm for arming rebel groups than the US. Both have more at stake in what happens in Syria than the US, and see weakening an Iranian ally in the region as key to boosting their own influence.

These dictatorial states also feared the consequences of movement for democracy in Syria and so were anxious to marginalise rebel groups supporting this.

The US, by contrast, has been prepared to work with Iran in military operations inside Iraq against Islamic State. Even in Syria its main focus is on operations against Islamic State, not Assad.

Syria also shows the limits to US ability to get its own way. The failure of its wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have made it more cautious about military intervention. The US never provided substantial arms to the rebel groups. Assad and Russia's monopoly on aircraft has allowed them to ruthlessly bomb rebel areas. Yet the US has consistently blocked its allies from supplying anti-aircraft missile systems, known as Manpads, that could allow them to shoot down planes. And it has limited supplies even of light

arms to a trickle.

While calling for Assad to "step down" the US has never pushed for the fall of the regime as a whole, hoping instead for a transition similar to that in Yemen in 2011, replacing Assad with a new leader and incorporating some opposition figures into the regime. At the end of 2015 US Secretary of State John Kerry even stated that the US was "not seeking so-called regime change".

The revolutionary mass movement in Syria is now effectively defeated. It faces enemies on all sides.

For now, the future of Syria is being determined mainly by the outside imperialist powers supporting Assad on the one side, and reactionary armed groups on the other. But, as Syrian revolutionary Ghayath Naisse told *International Socialism*, "The popular movement isn't dead... Though the organisations of the movement have been pushed back and severely weakened, they survive."

As recently as March last year, there were demonstrations across Syria when a major ceasefire brought a halt to the fighting.

Syria's immediate future is bleak. But a return of the revolutionary mass movement in Egypt, Lebanon or any of the major countries in the Middle East would have an impact in Syria, just as the toppling of dictators in Tunisia and Egypt did in 2011.

It is only a revival of the struggle from below that can deliver freedom and social justice for ordinary people in Syria.

Murder at Myall Creek—whitewashing the real history of the massacre

Murder at Myall Creek
Mark Tedeschi QC
Simon and Schuster,
\$32.99

Denny Day: The life and times of Australia's Greatest Lawman—The forgotten hero of the Myall Creek Massacre
Terry Smyth
Penguin, \$34.99

LATE IN the afternoon on Sunday 10 June 1838, twenty-eight Wirrayaraay Aboriginal men, women and children camping peacefully next to station huts at Myall Creek in northern New South Wales, were brutally slaughtered by a gang of stockmen led by a local squatter.

Because there were two trials of the men responsible, it is perhaps the most well documented atrocity in the long, genocidal war against Aboriginal people that stretched into the 20th century.

It is also significant because it is the only time in Australia's history that white men were arrested, charged, convicted and hanged for massacring Aboriginal people.

It is telling that the one person who escaped being charged was the person who led the massacre—John Henry Fleming. John Fleming was the son of a large land-holder and was superintendent of three properties owned by his older brother Joseph.

In the first trial, the jury found the 11 charged men were not guilty within 15 minutes.

But rather than accept the verdict and release them, the then NSW prosecutor John Plunkett immediately charged the

11 with the killing of an Aboriginal child, Charley, in the massacre.

In the second trial, the jury found the seven were guilty (the other four were remanded to a later date). Despite petitions for clemency from a large majority of the jurors of the first and second trials and a third from 450 residents, the seven were hanged in Sydney on 18 December 1838.

The colonial elite went to enormous lengths to subvert the trials. The boss of the Myall Creek station, Henry Dangar and Magistrate Robert Scott, another wealthy landholder (Magistrates of the day were all wealthy landholders), called a meeting of local property owners to form the "Hunter River Black Association" to raise money to pay for the defence of the 11 men.

Robert Scott even visited the men in prison to tell them to stick together, not give evidence against each other and they would be acquitted.

The media also played its role. The *Sydney Herald* strongly supported the charged men, saying "The whole gang of black animals are not worth the money the colonists will have to pay for printing the silly court documents..."

The media of the 1800s is not so different from the 2000s. The *Herald* was owned by Alfred Ward Stephens, a wealthy landowner, and a close friend of Magistrate Robert Scott.

In the second trial, the Black Association organised a boycott of jurors to try to prevent a jury being empanelled. The trial went ahead by the judge order-

The colonial elite went to enormous lengths to subvert the trials

ing the Court Sheriff to draw enough people "off the street" to make up the jury.

Even then, one of the people pulled off the street was William Humphreys, who had been a juror in the first trial and seemed to be a deliberate plant to rig the jury in the second trial.

As if this wasn't enough, on the morning of the trial, the police also interfered (probably at the behest of the Black Association) by arresting one of the main prosecution witnesses, William Hobbs, supposedly for non-payment of debts.

In spite of these efforts, the second jury found the seven men guilty.

It is an astonishing story and deserves to be told. It has mostly been remembered as a triumph for the law and the justice system.

Two books concerning the massacre have been recently published. *Murder at Myall Creek—The trial that defined the nation* focuses on the prosecutor John Plunkett and the judicial details and intrigues of the trial itself. Tedeschi (himself a barrister and former NSW prosecutor) describes Plunkett as, "possibly our most important advocate of human rights of all time."

Justice in the courts?

Tedeschi writes, "Those trials stand as an early demonstration that Australian courts had the capacity to protect the weak and disenfranchised ... including those on the margins of society."

Actually, the truth is quite different.

As Tedeschi says only

a few sentences later, "It [meaning the trial] would never happen again during the colonial period or even after the federation of Australian states in 1901."

Such was the backlash of the colonial elite, a trial of people for the mass killing of Aboriginal people would never happen again.

The four who were not hanged never even faced a trial. Davy, the Aboriginal stockman who had witnessed the massacre and was scheduled to give evidence, disappeared, almost certainly murdered by Dangar.

John Henry Fleming not only avoided arrest for his leading role in the massacre, in 1882 he became a magistrate.

The second book, *Denny Day: The life and times of Australia's Greatest Lawman*, concerns the Police Magistrate Captain Edward Denny Day, who was responsible for rounding up and arresting 11 of the 12 who were responsible for the Myall Creek murders. As mentioned earlier, the massacre leader, Fleming, avoided arrest, by fleeing the area, and apparently hiding on his father's property near Sydney.

The new Governor of New South Wales, Major Sir George Gipps called on him to investigate and arrest those responsible for the massacre after he had established a reputation by hunting down bushrangers.

The position of police magistrate had been created in 1833 to "keep the peace". They were more like a frontier police officer than a present-day magistrate. They were charged with tracking



Above: The memorial at the site of the massacre at Myall Creek

down criminals and suppressing “tumults, riots, breaches of the peace, public nuisances, etc.”

After the arrest of the 11 Myall Creek killers, Day walked them 200 miles in chains to Muswellbrook and then by cart to Sydney. Gipps asked John Plunkett to “personally prosecute the trial.”

Denny Day’s story of the investigation and arrests of the Myall Creek murderers should be told. In the story of the trials and convictions, there are individual stories (not least the second jury) of the courage to stand up to the establishment and public opinion that was whipped up by the landowners and the press.

But the real story lies in the fact that Myall Creek is such as exception.

Smyth’s book does a better job of explaining the particular role of the landholders in organising the extermination of

Aboriginal people. Too often, the genocide is presented as a frontier war of “white vs black”, rather than a campaign by the colonial elite, the emerging ruling class, to extend their wealth and power and impose a new social system on this continent.

The book provides important context, which shows this class power in action. Two days before the massacre, eighty-two “Colonists, Landholders and Proprietors of stock” sent a petition to Governor Gipps saying the time had come for coercive measures against the “outrages” of the blacks. Two of the signatories were the bosses of the two of the convict stockmen among the Myall Creek murderers.

Aftermath

In 1838, it did not take long for the real lesson of the Myall Creek trials to become established. Earlier that year, there had been an even worse

massacre of up to 300 Gamilaraay Aboriginal people at Waterloo Creek (both Waterloo Creek and Myall Creek are close to each other and close to Moree.) Denny Day was also ordered to investigate this massacre too.

But in the face of the social backlash to the Myall Creek trials, by early 1839 Governor Gipps backed off from the investigation. Day sent statements concerning the massacre to the Colonial Secretary but nothing happened.

When Day died in 1876, there was no mention of Myall Creek in any obituary; it was already being erased from history.

Both books in their own way try to paint the Myall Creek trials as a celebration of the glories of Australian law. Tedeschi writes that Myall Creek “stands a beacon of humanity and interracial justice to illuminate the way for Australia to develop as a civilised nation.”

Myall Creek is certainly a beacon—but it is to the abject failure of the law. The massacres went on until 1928

Myall Creek is certainly a beacon—but it is to the abject failure of the law. The massacres went on until 1928. And the deaths and dispossession continue. For a brief moment, it looked like the law might apply equally—but the system quickly reasserted itself. The law and the courts were the playthings of the rich and powerful. Even at Myall Creek it was the convict employees who were hanged.

The same is true of more recent examples from the Royal Commission into Black Deaths in Custody, the death of Cameron *Doomadgee on Palm Island*, the Mabo decision and Native Title; the death of Ms Dhu; the shooting of Mr Doolan in Cowra, and the never-ending deaths in custody.

Both the books throw some more light on the events surrounding the Myall Creek murders—but they are seriously flawed. There is nothing to cheer about; no justice system to celebrate. There is no justice to be had from the police and the courts. They are part of the state that still stands guarantor for the powerful and the privileged—the including the landowners and the mining companies. Justice awaits the overthrow of that system. Read and despair.

The definitive story of Waterloo and the Myall Creek massacres is still *Waterloo Creek: The Australia Day massacre of 1838* by Roger Millis (UNSW Press, 1994)—but don’t expect it to be on the shelves of your local bookshop.

On Invasion Day, this year, the Gamilaraay people are leading a march in Moree to mark the massacre and protest continuing racism and injustice inflicted on Aboriginal people.

Ian Rintoul

MILLIONS MARCH AGAINST TRUMP

By Ian Rintoul

THE DAY Trump is inaugurated as US President, millions will march in America against his racism, sexism, Islamophobia and his threat to health care. There will be marches in New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Birmingham and more than 60 groups have applied for march permits in Washington.

The Women's March on Washington, being held the day after the inauguration, is expecting more than 200,000 to demonstrate.

Tens of thousands also marched in the days leading up to the inauguration. In Los Angeles, Jorge-Mario Cabrera, spokesman for the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles, said, "We put the Trump administration on notice that we're not going to sit idly by while he destroys our community."

Al Sharpton, leading the "We Shall Not Be Moved" march in support of black, immigrant, refugee and Muslim communities declared, "We have lost an election but we haven't lost our minds."

"No one knows how to fight them better than us. We fought them [before], and we know how to fight them," he said, referring to the campaign for five black and Hispanic teenagers wrongfully convicted of rape in 1989 rape. The five were exonerated in 2014. But, at the time, Trump took out full-page ads in New York newspapers calling for the death penalty.

Trump takes office with his popularity at a record low; having fallen since he was elected.

Trump has shocked the US with his declarations that he will build the wall between Mexico and the US. Already the Republicans are moving to scrap Obamacare, admittedly a minimal and flawed health scheme. But with nothing to replace it, there are fears Trump will leave even more people without access to health care.

Trump is also a threat to abortion rights. Seizing on momentum following Trump's election, Ohio Governor John Kasich has signed a ban on abortions after 20 weeks' gestation of the foetus, with no exceptions for victims of rape or incest.

Gay rights are also under attack.



Above: Protests hit the streets as soon as Trump was elected

Months ago, Trump promised, "If I am elected president and Congress passes the First Amendment Defense Act, I will sign it..." That Bill would allow for legal discrimination against the LGTBI community. Businesses, organisations, individuals, even hospitals would be able to legally turn away LGBTI people.

Democrats

The marches and demonstrations are a fantastic response to Trump's election. But it would be a serious mistake to allow the massive discontent with Trump to be pulled behind the Democrats.

Overwhelmingly it was disappointment with Obama, the failure of the Democrats and horror at the prospect of Hillary Clinton being elected that allowed Trump to pose as an anti-establishment politician and gave a platform for his bigotry.

The Black Lives Matter movement and the "Fight for \$15" will need to mobilise independently of the Democrats if they are going to successfully fight Trump.

Trump's election will impact on global politics throughout 2017. His election boosted global right-wing forces. Politicians like Marine Le Pen in France, Geert Wilders, leader of the Dutch Freedom Party, and Nigel Farage of UKIP all welcomed Trump's

election. They hope his election will boost the far right in Europe.

Although Pauline Hanson has been caught lying about getting an invitation to Trump's inauguration (she touted around US politicians for a spare ticket), it was One Nation and right-wing Liberals like Cory Bernardi and George Christensen who toasted Trump's election.

Trump's foreign policy risks fuelling military tensions in Asia (see p12). And his policies will see new fractures in the world system.

Trump is not just more of the same. He wants to mainstream racism, sexism and homophobia. There must be a global fight against the right-wing forces he has encouraged. In Europe, tens of thousands will be part of women's marches and anti-racist demonstrations against Trump.

More than ever we need to build international solidarity. We need grassroots movements and socialist organisation.

In Australia, fighting Trump means taking up the fight against militarism and against racism. It means taking the fight to Pauline Hanson. But in particular it means taking the fight to Turnbull, whose policies on border security and refugees legitimise the anti-Muslim policies of One Nation. Trump and Turnbull can be beaten.

There must be a global fight against the right-wing forces he has encouraged

Solidarity