

# Solidarity

Issue No. 100 / March 2017

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## WA ELECTION

Liberals humiliated,  
One Nation setback

## MEDIA

Trump, lies and  
fake news

## UNIONS

Time to start the fight  
against penalty rates



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# SOLIDARITY: WHO ARE WE?

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

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

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

## SOLIDARITY MEETINGS AND BRANCHES

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## Things they say

**Our aim of the campaign wasn't to knock Brendon off or anyone else; it was to kill the tax and I think we have done that.**

Reg Howard-Smith, chief executive of the Western Australia Chamber of Minerals and Energy on their \$2 million campaign against the WA mining tax that cost Brendon Grylls, leader of the National Party, his seat

**Hopefully we don't have to run a campaign like this again. They're expensive by any yardstick, but I think it is money well spent.**

Howard-Smith again, declaring victory

**You can't rip up contracts with major international investors in the state and think everything is going to be OK—it won't be.**

Newly elected WA Labor Premier Mark McGowan explaining who really runs Western Australia and why he opposed the mining tax.

**I have a great relationship with business. If you name most of the business people on [St Georges] Terrace, I know them reasonably well.**

Mark McGowan again—we have been warned!

**What Sally McManus has said is the kind of anarchic Marxist clap trap we used to hear from anarchists at Adelaide University in the 1980s**

Cabinet member Chris Pyne's not happy about unions defying the law

**It's opening the door for more hours of employment... that's a gift; that is a gift for our young people to get a foot in the door of employment**

Liberal MP Gilmore Ann Sudmalis on why reducing workers' pay through cutting penalty rates is a "gift"

**It is true to say we do respect the commission but we do not support this decision**

Labor leader Bill Shorten, happy to have it both ways on the anti-union Fair Work Commission

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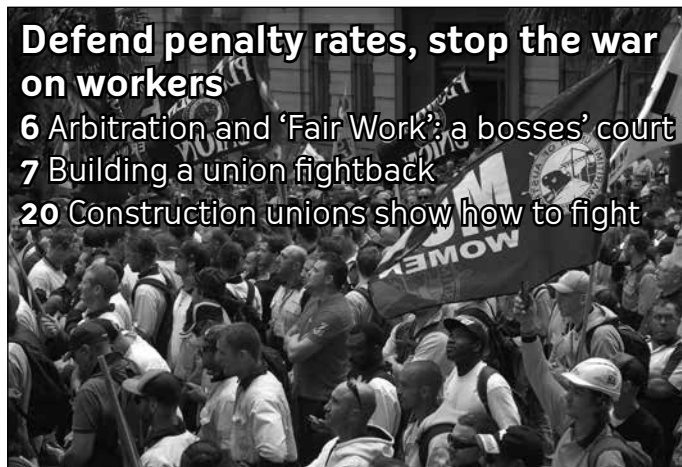


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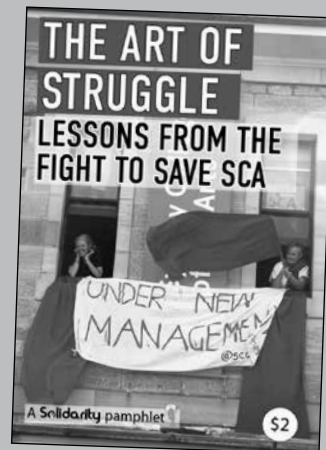
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### New Solidarity pamphlet:

The art of struggle—Lessons from the fight to save SCA

The SCA campaign was one of the most significant student campaigns against neo-liberalism over the past year. In this pamphlet we share our experiences of the strategy and tactics that made possible one of the longest student occupations in Australian university history.

**On sale for \$2 from Solidarity**



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# INSIDE THE \$YSTEM

## Australia Post tells workers to work around corpse

AUSTRALIA POST employees at a Sunshine Coast warehouse have been subjected to the horror of being forced to work around the corpse of one of their work-mates. The death of the 49-year-old Australia Post worker was called into Emergency Services at 2.55 am on 9 March, and the area around his body was cordoned off by police at 3 am. It took another three hours for an undertaker's car to arrive at the warehouse. During this time employees were told to work around his dead body. One female worker told News Corp witches hats were, "placed around the body and people were told to carry on working. They didn't see it as important enough to stop work," she said.

"It is really horrific. It is the most degrading, horrible thing for this man and his family. Then to distress the other people in the warehouse. They all know each other, they all knew this man."

Another worker who arrived at the warehouse was a colleague of 15 years to the deceased man. "It was quite disgusting," he said. "The whole work should have ceased operation."

An Australia Post spokesperson tried desperately to evade responsibility for the disgraceful incident, saying, "None of our employees were forced to work this morning as this very sad situation unfolded." Yet the spokeswoman admitted in the same statement that the, "The site remained operational".

## Michaelia Cash forgets \$1.4 million property

EMPLOYMENT MINISTER Michaelia Cash failed to declare a \$1.4 million investment property for almost three months.

Under existing rules any Senator who fails to make such declaration within 35 days, "shall be guilty of serious contempt of the Senate and shall be dealt with by the Senate accordingly". Cash took 109 days to fully declare the acquisition. The property is the fourth in her portfolio. She purchased it in the upmarket Perth suburb of Floreat in November last year.

## Gas giants pay no tax despite record boom



DESPITE THE boom in natural gas exports, multinationals exploiting gas resources in Australia are paying zero tax. The boom in natural gas exports is likely to see Australia become the world's biggest exporter within five years. Already gas exports were valued at \$16.5 billion last financial year. But the government's Petroleum Resource Rent Tax (PRRT) is collecting nothing from the gas companies. In fact, the combined LNG sector currently enjoys \$238 billion in tax credits, according to a recent ATO report to Treasurer Scott Morrison.

The rigged PRRT is set at 40 per cent of "taxable profit" rather than a flat rate on export value. This allows mega corporations like Chevron, Shell and ExxonMobil to write off capital and exploration expenditure at inflated rates to avoid paying. LNG plants in Queensland pay state royalties, but offshore gas plants in WA and the NT pay nothing, apart from the north-west shelf project.

Absurdly, export destination countries levy more tax from LNG extracted in Australia than the Australian government does. Japan is the biggest buyer of Australian LNG at 30 million tons a year. According to the International Transport Workers' Federation, Japan's import tax will reap \$2.9 billion over the next four years from LNG imports from Australia. The Australian government will take zero.

Last year Fairfax calculated that in 2021, when Australian LNG exports outstrip those of the current market leader Qatar, the Qatari government will take a whopping \$26.6 billion in royalties compared to Australia's pitiful \$800 million.

## US demands Cambodia pay 'war debt'

THE US has demanded that Cambodia repay \$662 million in war debt. The outrageous demand refers to a debt incurred under the US-backed government of Lon Nol who was in office before the Khmer Rouge seized power in 1975. During this period the US pulverised Cambodia's countryside with over 500,000 tonnes of explosives. The indiscriminate carpet bombing was aimed at wiping-out North Vietnamese supply lines during the United States' imperialist war in Vietnam. Just 200 nights in 1973 saw 257,456 tonnes of explosives hammer Cambodia in secret B-52 bombing raids.

The result of the bombing campaign was over 500,000 Cambodians dead—many of them children. Most of the debt paid for food in the war ravaged country. A diplomat posted in Phnom Penh in the period told Fairfax that the food sold to Cambodia was actually just unwanted from excess US food stocks. Because the so called debt hasn't been paid over such a long period it has effectively doubled in size.

Research and writing by Adam Adelpour

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

## Fruit pickers told to leave union or lose work

LABOR HIRE company MADEC has threatened seasonal fruit workers to pressure them to resign from their union. The workers, who pick tomatoes at Perfection Fresh in South Australia, were told they would stop getting work if they didn't leave the NUW.

The threats came after the 145 migrant workers from Vanuatu noticed "deductions" on their pay slips and started asking questions. One worker told Fairfax, "I was working five days a week, Monday to Friday, 38 hours, and my pay slip was around \$800 a week. But with deductions, I am left with \$500".

MADEC told the workers that they wouldn't be recruited for the Seasonal Workers Program in future unless they left the union. The firm then handed out 145 resignation forms to workers to fill in and give to the union. This blatant violation of the workers' right to free association was explained away as a "misunderstanding" by MADEC's Chief Executive. Perfection Fresh is a supplier to the major supermarkets. The NUW's Tim Kennedy pointed to the way the supermarket price wars are driving "systemic exploitation" in the agricultural sector. "They say they are doing audits, but the system is broken."

## Welfare discrimination against Aboriginal people

ABORIGINAL PEOPLE are forced to work up to three times longer than other unemployed people to access unemployment benefits. That's the impact of the Community Development Program in remote communities. And the penalty for turning up late or missing work is losing ten per cent of the already meagre payment of \$290 a week. Senate Estimates in March heard there have been 200,000 breach notices handed out since 2015.

# EDITORIAL

## Defy the law to defend penalty rates and fight Turnbull

NEW ACTU leader Sally McManus gave heart to unionists everywhere when she told the ABC that workers were right to break unfair laws.

The Liberals and the mainstream media have gone ballistic. While other union leaders and The Greens supported McManus, to their shame Bill Shorten and Labor distanced themselves, saying workers should try to change laws rather than break them.

But breaking anti-union laws is exactly what we will need to do to stop the attack on penalty rates, scrap the Australian Building and Construction Commission (ABCC) and win basic union rights.

The cut to penalty rates, backed by Malcolm Turnbull, is a threat to workers everywhere. If the bosses can get away with reducing penalty rates in retail and hospitality, they will come after workers in other industries.

There is outrage at Turnbull for refusing to overturn the cuts. Labor and The Greens are both promising to change the laws, but the federal election is two years away.

We can't wait to vote the Liberals out at the next election. The anger at Turnbull needs to be turned into action that can stop the cuts.

Unions NSW have agreed in principle to hold a combined unions delegates' meeting, following a call from the NSW CFMEU construction division Committee of Management.

The NSW lead needs to be taken up in every state and by the ACTU.

Combined unions delegates' meetings can bring together activists from across the union movement to organise a response. National mass stopwork protests like those held during the Your Rights at Work campaign against John Howard's WorkChoices should be the first step in a campaign.

There needs to be a united union campaign to target any employer, in whatever industry, that tries to take away penalty rates.

The combined unions delegates' meeting needs to happen soon. The penalty rate cuts are scheduled to begin being phased in from July.

The fight to defend penalty rates will also need to be fought workplace by workplace, industry by industry, in enterprise bargaining negotiations with individual companies. It will require strikes and industrial action at a workplace level to protect our pay.

But the mass union stopwork rallies are crucial in bringing the whole



**Above: New ACTU Secretary Sally McManus**

union movement together, to build confidence and take the fight to Turnbull. They will give strength to union activists in workplaces where union strength is weaker and can even draw unorganised workers into the fight.

Sally McManus's comments about breaking unjust laws were immediately focused on defending the CFMEU, and their right to defy the law and take industrial action. Construction unions are first in the firing line of Turnbull's attack on unions with the re-introduction of the ABCC.

But her words, "It shouldn't be so hard for workers in our country to be able to take industrial action when they need to", apply to all unions. The restrictions on the right to strike maintained in the mis-named "Fair Work Act" that Labor introduced in 2009 are designed to make effective strike action almost impossible.

We need to bring together the issues of penalty rates, the ABCC and the right to strike and insist that the union movement will keep fighting any government, including a future Labor government, unless the ABCC and all the anti-union laws are scrapped.

### **Racism and the right**

The Western Australia election has been a setback for Turnbull and for One Nation. Ironically both were damaged by the preference swapping deal between them. Yet Turnbull won't rule out future deals.

Opinion polls were predicting big gains for One Nation but it failed to get the upper house balance of power (although it won two seats), or win any lower house seats. But we can't be complacent. One Nation still polled 8.1 per cent in the upper house.

To push Hanson back, we need to take on the racism coming from Turnbull and the Liberal Party.

It is the Liberals' willingness to play political footsie with Hanson that is giving One Nation legitimacy. And Turnbull's move to amend section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act is just his latest move to keep the racists happy.

We can't rely on Labor to take up the fight for refugee rights or against Islamophobia. It remains committed to offshore detention and boat turnbacks.

The unions campaigned in WA to expose Pauline Hanson's support for penalty rate cuts, but its own campaign propaganda about jobs was tainted by racism scapegoating foreign workers on 457 visas for the state's high unemployment levels.

To effectively fight Turnbull and the bosses, we need to link the fight against racism with the fight to scrap the ABCC and the attempt to cut penalty rates.

That means building big union contingents for the Palm Sunday rallies and going all out to build a grassroots industrial campaign to beat the anti-union laws and the attack on penalty rates.

.....  
**Combined unions delegates' meetings can bring together activists from across the union movement to organise a response**

# 'Fair Work Commission' designed to benefit the bosses

By Tom Orsag

THE FAIR Work Commission's cut to penalty rates is the latest in a long line of Arbitration Commission decisions attacking workers.

Before unions established themselves in Australia, the individual colonies simply used the law to stop workers organising for better pay and conditions.

In 1822, James Straighter, a NSW convict shepherd, was gaoled for five years for "inciting servants to organise for higher wages and rations". By 1828, the Masters and Servants Act was copied from Britain, so that, "servants could be imprisoned and their wages forfeited for refusal to work." But as the factory system developed, unions were more able to stage effective industrial action. Arbitration emerged as a process where both parties would agree to be bound by the decision of an arbiter.

From 1886, the Inter-Colonial Trades Union Congresses debated the merits of arbitration. Those in favour argued there would be "less strikes". The main opposition came from the new industry based unions. The Shearers' Union boasted of 3180 strikes up to 1890. The Amalgamated Miners' Association won 28 of the 29 strikes it led up to 1890.

That industrial militancy and confidence suffered devastating blows in the 1891 lock-out of shearers and 1894 maritime lock-outs. With the state machine fully mobilised with police, the courts and anti-strike laws to defeat workers, support for arbitration grew among union officials.

With Federation in 1901, the more far-sighted sections of the ruling class supported arbitration as a way to incorporate union leaders. They included prominent Liberal politicians like Charles Kingston, Premier of South Australia, Alfred Deakin, Victorian Attorney-General and future Liberal PM and Henry B. Higgins, future Federal Attorney-General and High Court justice. A Federal Arbitration Commission was established in 1904.

As a way to sell arbitration, a "living wage" was awarded in the Harvester Judgement of 1907. The new Arbitration Court established a minimum standard of seven shillings a day for male labourers and ten shillings for skilled tradesmen. For labourers, it meant a 27 per cent wage increase. Arbitration "Awards" for each indus-



**Above: Unionists protest the decision of the "Fair Work Commission"**

try established a "basic wage" and a minimum set of working conditions. These were legally enforceable against the boss.

While unions gained official recognition and standing, arbitration was also designed to prevent strike action. There were fines and penalties if unions took industrial action to breach the Award agreement.

Arbitration is a process to manage class struggle. It is dressed up as an "independent umpire", despite being a body fully funded by the capitalist state. While the illusion is peddled that this court is neutral, its effort to balance the interests of workers and employers sits alongside the aim of ensuring capitalism's long-term continuation and maintaining the bosses' control of the workplaces. This means it leans towards the employers' side in disputes.

On the eve of the Great Depression in 1928 and 1929 the Commission forced cuts on three key groups of workers. In the timber industry, it increased working hours from 44 to 48 a week and cut wages by 10 per cent. When unions went on strike against the Award, the Arbitration Court imposed fines and they were eventually forced back to work.

The Arbitration Commission then cut wages for all workers by 10 per cent and cut pensions in 1931—with the support of the Labor government of James Scullin.

Labour historian Brian Fitzpatrick wrote, "For those in full time work; allowing for unemployment, 'real' wages levels from the beginning of the 1930s were lower than they had been

in 1901. This was all that had come of compulsory industrial arbitration."

## Balance of forces

However the strength of workers' industrial action can also influence the shape of arbitration decisions.

The most notable case, and one that still haunts our rulers, is the period from 1969-1974, when the Australian working class was one of the most militant in the world.

After 1969, when a general strike freed unionist Clarrie O'Shea from jail and broke the ability to impose fines, workers won pay rises and shorter hours. But when Bob Hawke was elected in 1983, the Arbitration Commission rubber stamped his wage cutting Prices and Incomes Accord with the ACTU. The Arbitration Commission attacked individual unions that breached it, like the Food Preservers' Union, the Builders Labourers' Federation (BLF) and the pilots union.

In 1992 Paul Keating introduced enterprise bargaining, undermining Awards by making wages dependent on deals struck at an individual workplace and company profitability.

With WorkChoices John Howard actually abolished the Arbitration Commission, only to see Labor restore it under the Fair Work Act.

The fact that the ruling on penalty rates is so awful reflects the balance of class forces in 2017 being in the favour of the bosses, with the numbers of strikes the lowest in decades. Increasing unions' ability to take successful industrial action is the only guarantee of protecting our penalty rates.

.....  
**Arbitration was also designed to prevent strike action through fines and penalties**

# Mass union campaign can stop the cut to penalty rates

By Miro Sandev

TURNBULL'S SUPPORT for the penalty rate cuts shows his commitment to anti-worker policies that benefit business and the rich. This is the issue that can put a finish to his government.

The Fair Work Commission ruling will hit some of the lowest paid workers in the country.

An immediate union response can stop the cuts before they begin to come into force from 1 July. The construction unions have already held successful stopwork rallies on 9 March against the Australian Building and Construction Commission.

Weekday combined unions delegates' meetings and stop-work rallies, like we saw at the beginning of the Your Rights at Work campaign, can kick off the fight. The largest national day of action in that campaign brought up to 500,000 to the streets across the country. New ACTU Secretary Sally McManus' defence of unlawful industrial action and breaking unjust laws has given unionists everywhere confidence to resist.

Malcolm Turnbull and the Coalition have been avid supporters of cutting penalty rates. When Tony Abbott was Prime Minister they set up a Productivity Commission report to prepare the way for it. Turnbull has backed the Fair Work decision and its unfounded claim that cutting penalty rates will create jobs.

The decision will leave people up to \$6000 a year worse off and will affect close to 700,000 workers, according to union estimates. Sunday penalty rates and penalties for public holidays will be cut across the hospitality, fast food, retail and pharmacy sectors. It comes at a time when wages growth is the lowest on record, yet corporate profits surged by 20 per cent between October and December

But this is only the thin edge of the wedge. If this attack succeeds the bosses will come after penalty rates for nurses, emergency workers and everyone else.

Labor leader Bill Shorten has called for legislation, "changing the rules that the Fair Work Commission will operate under", instructing it never to reduce the take home pay of any worker, as it has done through removing penalty rates. The Greens have advocated legislation to include penalty rates as one of the statutory minimum



**Above: Unions have seized on the issue of penalty rates, but we need a concerted industrial campaign**

National Employment Standards.

Legislation overturning this disgraceful Fair Work decision would be welcome. But that won't be possible until after the next federal election, at least two years away. There is a risk that penalty rates will just become an issue for the next election campaign. But the only way to guarantee penalty rates in every workplace is to build workers' ability to fight industrially.

## Fightback

It was the award review process created under Labor's Fair Work Act which allowed the Commission to reduce rates. Labor's Fair Work legislation instructed the Commission to promote "flexible modern work practices" and promote business "productivity". This led it to accept business' claims that reducing penalty rates would boost employment and allow them to open longer hours.

Dodgy agreements struck by the boss-friendly Shop Distributive and Allied Employees Union (SDA) created a precedent for penalty rates to be cut, making it much easier for Fair Work to make a general cut to the award. Even while penalty rates were still in the award they were traded away and workers on agreements with major employers, like

Coles, were actually left worse off than if they had been on the award. The law itself was not enough to protect workers. Only direct confrontation with the retail bosses through strikes can protect current rates and win even higher ones.

That's why a militant industrial campaign against the cuts is absolutely crucial. Bosses will only get away with cutting penalty rates if we let them. The ACTU has been running a "Save Our Weekend" campaign, but this has mostly been an electoral operation in marginal seats to get Labor elected.

The decision on penalty rates comes hot on the heels of the reintroduction of the union-bashing Australian Building and Construction Commission (ABCC). This is another attack on workers' conditions which is designed to boost business profits. Such a vicious attack on huge numbers of workers cannot go unanswered. We can't afford to wait for a Labor government to change the law, nor rely on Labor to keep its promises if it wins power.

A campaign involving stopwork rallies could help build union strength and workers' confidence to fight. It will also need to feed into campaigns based on strikes and industrial action in enterprise bargaining, to defend penalty rates at a workplace level, industry by industry. It's time to start the fightback.

**The only way to guarantee penalty rates in every workplace is to build workers' ability to fight industrially**

By Ian Rintoul

## Open the borders—Bring them here

TESTIMONY TO a Senate committee from Australia’s People Smuggling Ambassador, Andrew Goledzinowski, has confirmed the scale of uncertainty that surrounds the US resettlement deal.

Goledzinowski told the hearing that under the deal, the US could resettle no-one from Nauru or Manus and still argue it has honoured its deal with the Turnbull Government.

The revealing admission comes in the same week as Amnesty International stepped up its call for the camps on Manus Island and Nauru to be evacuated.

Amnesty stressed all the points that the movement has been making about the US deal: there is no time frame for resettlement of people who have already been imprisoned on Manus and Nauru almost four years; there are not enough places to ensure that all the refugees can be resettled and there are no plans for the hundreds who will be left behind even if the deal goes ahead.

Families that are already split between Australia and Nauru will be permanently separated by the deal. They have begun daily protests at the detention centre gate but with the US flag now painted out of their banner.

Meanwhile, US President Trump has issued another executive order with yet another four-month ban on any refugees entering the US, and no one is saying if that affects the refugees on Manus and Nauru. In any case, some refugees on Nauru had their first US interview four months ago and still do not know if they are accepted or not. A new notice being circulated on Nauru says that US officials from Homeland Security will be coming to Nauru to collect fingerprints from all those who “expressed an interest in resettlement”, for an initial security check. But there is nothing to say who has been selected or when there will be future interviews.

US officials left Manus in March after interviewing around only 300 refugees. Nobody is saying when they will be back. But the hundreds of refugees who were not interviewed are left wondering if they are even going to be considered.

The Australian government has no plans for those who will be excluded from resettlement in the US. Immigration Minister Peter Dutton says resettlement is solely an issue for the PNG government, although the agreement between PNG and the Australian government that put them there



**Above: Asylum seekers still in detention on Nauru**

was declared unlawful by the PNG Supreme Court a year ago.

### Manus deportations grow

Since then however, attempts to use the PNG courts to enforce its ruling have proved fruitless. In early March, this year, an application for an injunction to prevent forced removals from Manus was dismissed by the Supreme Court. A week later a Lebanese asylum seeker was forcibly returned. Lebanese asylum seekers are being offered \$30,000 to sign to return “voluntarily”, \$5000 more than the Nepalese.

But each forcible removal escalates the level of anxiety and intimidation, and turns the screws on others to sign to go back.

Yet pressure is building on the PNG and Australian governments. Ferrovial’s contract ends in October. There is no realistic prospect of PNG settling the refugees. The Australian government is content to let them rot.

And the ravages go on. At least three refugees have been medically evacuated to Australia from Nauru as an epidemic of dengue fever sweeps the island. And the bashings and muggings continue, although less and less reported.

But the need for the political campaign is as urgent as ever. A year ago, hundreds of people with the support of the trade union movement

in Queensland blockaded the Lady Cilento hospital in Brisbane to prevent baby Asha and her parents being sent back to Nauru.

Well over 300 asylum seekers and refugees from Manus and Nauru are still in Australia because of the defiance of the refugee movement.

The Turnbull government systematically uses refugees as scapegoats for its failed policies and to whip up concerns about national security.

At the end of 2016, Turnbull told the UN that Australia’s border protection policies (that means, boat turnbacks and offshore detention) “were the best in the world.” In January, Foreign Minister Julie Bishop emphatically declared that the Turnbull government would support Donald Trump’s “strong immigration and border protection policies”, despite their condemnation by the rest of the world.

As various European governments copy Australia’s policies by expelling asylum seekers and countries like Hungary resort to mandatory detention, refugee supporters and anti-racist protesters have taken to the streets to demand that Europe opens its borders. (see p11).

To keep up the fight against Turnbull and Hanson and to break Labor’s support for offshore detention, we need the refugee rallies on 9 April to “Bring Them Here” to be as big as possible.

**The Australian government has no plans for those who will be excluded from resettlement in the US**



# WA election: Liberals humiliated, One Nation flops

By Phil Chilton

AFTER TWO terms of government under Colin Barnett the Liberals have taken a belting in Western Australia. Anger at high unemployment and the threat of further privatisation has delivered the ALP a landslide win.

The enormous 16 per cent swing against the Liberals is another major headache for Malcolm Turnbull. Already in deep trouble in the polls, the result is another blow to an already weak government.

Labor needed to win ten additional seats to form government—but it picked up 20, securing a sizeable parliamentary majority. The Greens saw their vote stagnate, but still took three upper house seats.

Barnett's promise to privatise Western Power, the state-owned energy provider, backfired as Labor and the unions campaigned strongly against it.

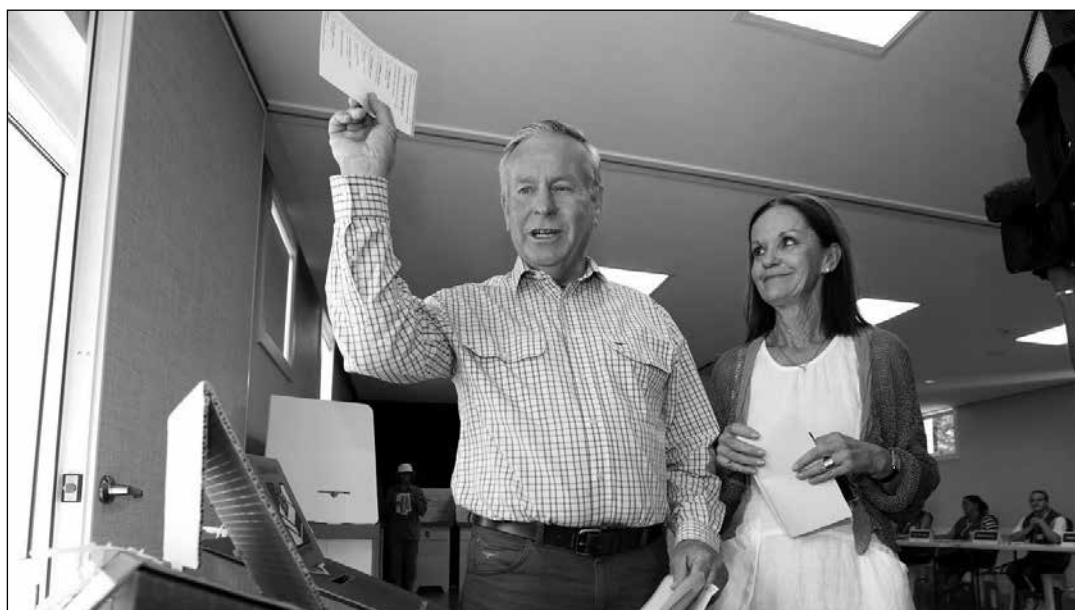
The Liberals have presided over fiasco after fiasco. The opening of Fiona Stanley Hospital was delayed due to IT problems. The IT blow-out cost \$150 million. Hospital service contractors Serco were still paid \$118 million during the delay while the hospital was without patients. The new Perth Children's Hospital had asbestos discovered on site, lead detected in the hospital's drinking water, and more than 900 door frames had to be ripped out after it was revealed that they did not comply with Australian fire standards. The hospital is still not open.

Finally there was Barnett's reckless commitment to build the Roe 8 highway extension. The project cut through the environmentally sensitive Beelihar Wetlands. The government manipulated the business case for the road and the environmental report to justify it going ahead.

Despite community opposition which included mass protests, "lock-ons" to machinery, and dozens of arrests, clearing of the land for the road went ahead. Barnett's hospital building projects made his government look incompetent; Roe 8 made it look overbearing and corrupt.

## One Nation stalls

One Nation was estimated at up to 13 per cent of the vote in opinion polls. Their result of 4.7 per cent in the lower house was far worse than the party had expected. But ABC elec-



**Above: Colin Barnett's government was thrown out in WA**

tion analyst Antony Green has pointed out that, because One Nation did not run in every seat, it polled an average of 8.1 per cent in the seats it did contest. It also managed 8.1 per cent in the upper house across the state, winning two seats.

One Nation's rise stalled, but they are far from finished. Their upper house vote was double their Senate result in last year's federal election.

But their preference deal with the Liberals undermined One Nation's outsider status and showed how hollow their talk of standing up to the political elite is.

The One Nation deal also seems to have added to the swing against the Liberals. But the federal Liberals are refusing to rule out similar deals with One Nation in future.

One Nation is being embraced and legitimised by the Liberals, as Hanson's party supports key Liberal policies in the Senate including welfare cuts and the anti-union Australian Building and Construction Commission.

Hanson and Turnbull are so close that when Pauline Hanson took out her phone to call Malcolm Turnbull in front of angry Queensland farmers in December, he answered straight away.

One Nation's campaign put the lie to the Liberals' disgraceful claims that the party is more "sophisticated" than 20 years ago. Their bigoted, far right politics were on clear display.

Hanson's bizarre comments on vaccination and her support for Rus-

sian strongman Vladimir Putin sat alongside continued racist outbursts against Muslims.

One of their candidates said growing support for equal marriage was the result of "Nazi-style mind control techniques" used by the gay community. Another said being a single mother was a "lifestyle choice" designed to grab welfare money.

Beelihar's Wetland Defenders, union members, public sector workers and many others can celebrate the departure of the Barnett government. Labor leader Matt McGowan has promised to stop the Roe 8 highway and the privatisation of Western Power.

But McGowan shares the same neo-liberal economic mind-set as Barnett. He has signalled his intention to rein in government spending on an already down-sized public sector. Labor even ruled out a proposal from the National Party to boost taxes on the mining companies through increased royalties.

There will not be any greater push for renewable energy (McGowan admitted as much), an end to the over-incarceration of Aboriginal people in the state or any further public housing.

Mobilisations like the Beelihar Wetlands campaign show the possibility of a real fight for change. It will be up to the unions and grassroots activists who helped push out Barnett to keep up the fight for jobs and against privatisation and racism, and redouble the fight against the ABCC and penalty rate cuts.

.....  
**One Nation polled an average of 8.1 per cent in the lower house seats it did contest and 8.1 per cent in the upper house across the state**

## South Korea: protests continue after President Park is impeached

By Workers Solidarity

Solidarity's South Korean sister organisation

DEMONSTRATIONS HAVE continued after President Park Geun-hye was removed from office in the middle of March.

The Constitutional Court ruled unanimously that Park should be ousted from her post because of “acts that violated the Constitution and laws”. She could now face charges of bribery, extortion and abuse of power.

People were greatly pleased by this achievement which they had accomplished with their own hands. Around 5000 people were watching a live broadcast of the ruling on a large screen just outside the court.

As soon as they heard the decision, they marched towards the nearby Presidential Residence, shouting “Now it’s time to arrest Park!”

The rail workers, whose strike was crucial for the movement in its early phase, have staged demonstration action at the central rail station against the government’s decision to discipline them and sack scores of militants. They were also watching the live news on the screen and they all burst into applause.

On the next day, Saturday, 650,000 people participated in the protest in Seoul, the capital city, which celebrated Park’s removal with fireworks. Similar actions took place in other cities.

In contrast the size of the demonstrations by Park’s supporters shrunk significantly.

The decision is wholly the result of mass pressure from demonstrations and strikes. These have caused splits at the top of society as well as strengthening the movement from below.

Protesters have taken to the streets 20 times to demand Park’s removal since October. Over 15 million people have participated.

Park has called her supporters onto the streets in recent weeks. Her lawyer said during a court hearing that “there will be blood on the road” if judges ratified the impeachment.

South Korea is a close ally of US imperialism and treats trade unionists and activists harshly. In October last year more than 20 trade union leaders and activists were in prison.

The government recently announced the sacking of 89 rail workers for participating in a two-month strike



**Above: Protesters in Seoul celebrate on hearing that Park’s impeachment has been confirmed**

that powered the movement in its early phase.

But repression has not saved Park.

Park was suspended as president after a vote in parliament to impeach her last December. It followed revelations of her corruption and further exposures have weakened her position.

A presidential election will take place within two months. Most of the ruling class want to regain political stability by sacrificing Park.

Accordingly, the Constitutional Court in its sentencing accepted the least among the various charges against Park. It portrayed big businesses who had bribed Park, including Samsung and Hyundai, as victims of “coercion”.

The court also ruled that Park’s failure to rescue lives in the 2014 Sewol ferry disaster was not a reason to impeach her.

### Continuing the fight

The mainstream press now argue that conflict should stop and that the country needs “national unity”.

But Park is insisting that she has done nothing wrong and says, “Time will reveal the real truth.” Most newspapers have commented that she is lying in an effort to rally her supporters.

More than four years ago, the ruling class was united in supporting Park. Now, the ruling class is divided about Park—although the faction supporting her now constitutes only a minority among them.

On the other hand, workers are excited about the prospect of changing the government in the upcoming election which is expected to take place in early May.

When Park was elected in 2012, many workers were frustrated and several activists even died by suicide.

The umbrella organisation that has been leading the movement, People’s Action, decided not to disperse until the election.

Until then, it will organise protests and continue to demand Park’s arrest, the prime minister’s resignation, and the cancellation of deploying components for the US Missile Defence system.

In setting such tasks, the organisation did not include the task of inspiring workers’ struggle, despite Workers Solidarity’s effort to have it included.

So it is important for the radical left to intervene to build workers’ and students’ struggle at workplaces, campuses and streets against their bosses. The left is arguing to fight to scrap labour “reforms”, demand better wages and conditions, oppose the US missile defence system and defend education—as well as demand political change.

Economic and geopolitical crises continue in South Korea.

Whoever wins the election will eventually attack the working class, and a significant contradiction will emerge in the midst of imperialist rivalry between US and China which will again lead to public anger.

**Protesters have taken to the streets 20 times to demand Park’s removal. Over 15 million people have participated**

By James Supple

## Europe resists racism and the far right as Wilders gains ground in the Netherlands

MARCHES AGAINST racism have been held across Europe, from Vienna to London, Warsaw, Athens and Paris, during a national weekend of action beginning on 18 March.

Donald Trump's election has encouraged racism as well as the far right across Europe.

But they suffered a setback with the defeat of Geert Wilders' anti-Muslim "Freedom Party" in the Dutch election in March. Early polling suggested Wilders had a chance of taking the most seats in parliament. He came second, but still with a concerning 13 per cent of the vote, up 3 per cent on the last election.

Wilders wants to shut down mosques and Islamic schools, and ban the Koran as well as all Muslim migrants and refugees. During the campaign his racist outbursts included the remark that, "there is a lot of Moroccan scum in Holland who make the streets unsafe".

Despite Wilders' defeat, conservative Prime Minister Mark Rutte, who emerged the winner, has already adopted many of his policies. Ewout Van Der Berg from the International Socialists in Denmark explained, "Mark Rutte has run a racist 'Wilders-lite' campaign. He recently wrote in major newspapers saying that if people from ethnic minorities weren't happy in the Netherlands they should leave."

Days before the election, his government sparked a row with Turkey by deporting a Turkish government minister in an effort to demonise dual Turkish-Dutch citizens.

Wilders was hoping to capitalise on anger at the austerity policies of the previous Conservative-Labor coalition government. This saw the Labor Party punished, crashing from 38 to nine seats. The main beneficiary was the Green Left party, which gained another ten seats.

### Anti-racism

Anti-racist protesters targeted Wilders throughout the campaign. "Whenever Wilders tries to go out on the street there are protests, not usually big but militant and loud," said Ewout.

"He's had to cancel a lot of appearances." The Saturday after the election 2000 people joined the rally against racism in Amsterdam.

In Greece, 15,000 marched in Athens, including hundreds of Syrian and Afghan refugees. Thousands remain stranded in camps across Greece due to the EU deal with Turkey to close



**Above: Marching against racism and fascism in Athens, where hundreds of refugees took part**

the borders. Buses were organised to the demonstration from the refugee camps around Athens.

"We want to end the isolation of refugees, welcoming them into the cities and closing down the camps," socialist and anti-racist activist Petros Constantinou explained.

There were also rallies in ten other Greek cities including on the island of Lesbos where nearly 4000 refugees remain in camps, some still in tents in freezing conditions.

Greece's anti-racist movement has successfully held back the fascist party Golden Dawn. Petros explained, "Already on trial for their violent attacks, a prominent affiliate group has dissolved and an MP has left the party, meaning it is no longer the third largest in the Greek parliament but the fourth. We finally won one of our most important fights against them in March, when a public TV station announced that it would stop giving Golden Dawn airtime."

In Britain, 30,000 rallied in London with another 3000 in Glasgow and 1000 in Cardiff. Racism has become one of the central issues in British politics following the Brexit referendum on leaving the EU last June. The referendum campaign was dominated by opposition to immigration, and migrants have reported an increase in hate attacks following the result.

The Tory government is saying it will put an end to free movement of people from the EU and refusing to guarantee the rights of three million

EU citizens currently in Britain.

Prime Minister Theresa May has bonded with Trump by scapegoating migrants, saying, "The sheer volume has put pressure on public services, stretched infrastructure and put downward pressure on wages for working class people."

But there has been a backlash to May's efforts to cosy up to Trump. In London 100,000 joined the Women's March the day after Trump's inauguration. Less than a week later, May announced she had invited him for an official visit to Britain. Another 40,000 hit the streets and a petition against the visit drew 1.5 million signatures. The Speaker of the House of Commons declared that Trump would not be allowed to address parliament.

Despite pressure from the right of the party, left-wing Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn has held the line in defence of free movement and residency rights for EU citizens.

All across Europe, cutbacks and austerity are continuing following the economic crisis. Both the far right and the political mainstream are using racism to scapegoat migrants and refugees for unemployment and the breakdown of public services.

In France, the far right National Front leads in the polls for the presidential election in April and May, and is almost certain to finish in the top two. The movement from below is crucial to undermining the racism, and strengthening the wider fight against unemployment and austerity.

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**Despite Wilders' defeat, Prime Minister Mark Rutte has already adopted many of his policies**

# TRUMP AND THE RISE OF FAKE NEWS: HOW POWERFUL IS THE MEDIA?

Trump’s attack on the media as “fake news” shows his authoritarian style, writes **Miro Sandev**, but the mainstream media itself reflects the values of the rich and powerful

EVERYONE IS talking about “fake news”. Many people are using the term simply to refer to articles they don’t agree with. The Democratic Party and sections of the left have argued that Donald Trump won the presidential election because of the spread of fake news.

Trump, in response, refers to stories and polls that don’t support him as fake news. So what is fake news? Has the news ever not been fake?

The “fake news” label was created by the mainstream media to describe far-right fringe media like Breitbart and Alex Jones that supported Trump, sometimes with completely fabricated reports.

These included articles claiming the Pope had endorsed Trump, that Hillary Clinton had sold weapons directly to ISIS, and that Trump had sent his own private plane to rescue stranded US soldiers.

But in any case, fake news was not why Trump won. The main reason he won was the failure of Obama to change the status quo and of the Democratic Party to inspire voters with any sort of progressive agenda. So their traditional voting base stayed home.

It’s true that Trump was able to win some counties that had previously voted for Obama, and that he had more support from working class voters and union members than pretty much any other Republican candidate. But these were both minor stories in terms of the number of voters involved.

The major story was the millions of left-leaning people who did not turn out because they could not stomach Wall Street’s best friend Hillary Clinton.

However Trump does want to promote the “fake news” outlets that push his own right-wing worldview.

## Trump wants to promote the “fake news” outlets that push his own right-wing worldview

He labels anything that is against him as “fake news”.

He cultivates the connections with Breitbart and other sources and uses Twitter to spread their influence. He prioritises taking questions from them and shuts down any voices that are critical in his press conferences. In that sense he is more authoritarian in his dealings with the media than previous presidents like Obama or even George Bush.

Still, Trump has no intention of destroying the capitalist media. In fact he is preparing a bill further deregulating the media industry, which will boost the profits of companies like Time-Warner, AOL and Verizon. He wants to make sure that the capitalist media serve him more often than he serves them.

## Mainstream media

Yet the whole concept of fake news suggests that the mainstream media is inherently truthful. This is a fiction. The capitalist media has been lying to people and pumping out fake news since it began.

You only have to think back to the Iraq War. The *New York Times* ran story after story in the lead up to the Iraq War arguing that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and was about to use them any minute on Western capital cities. So it was absolutely crucial that the US invade Iraq.

The TV networks all repeated these lies from the *New York Times*. Bush administration official Colin Powell was later forced to admit that there had not been any of these WMDs, and even some US officials apologised about misleading people. The *New York Times* refused to apologise about its deceitful coverage.

Mostly, however, the media presents a distorted view of the world

through more subtle means. This can include leaving out certain kinds of stories, like examples of unions successfully fighting workplace exploitation, or the weight given to particular viewpoints and opinions.

We live in a deeply divided class society with a tiny minority controlling all of the wealth and power, suppressing the majority.

There are two major ways they do this. Firstly through direct coercion with the violence of the police, army and the courts. The second is through consent—if not outright positive consent, then at least indifference or apathy. This is where ideology, promoted by the media, comes in.

One aspect of capitalist ideology is presenting the interest of one class as though it is in the interest of all classes.

Workers are encouraged to sympathise with the problems of their bosses—how to keep costs down, increase productivity and sales. The school system, universities, churches, advertising are all engaged in spreading capitalist ideology.

CEOs and pro-business analysts are the standard choice for interview subjects, while union representatives or consumer groups hardly ever get a voice.

The ABC peddles the same lies when it comes to business reporting—when the stock market is up, this is reported in a way that makes it seem like ordinary people benefit from this too.

Strikes are portrayed as disruptive, damaging to the economy, and ultimately driven by greedy unions, or they are simply ignored.

The bias shapes the way journalists frame interviews. A completely different tone is used when interviewing a respected, mainstream politician or business leader com-

pared to someone from The Greens or a person who challenges areas of bipartisan political consensus, let alone a left-wing activist or anti-capitalist. The latter are usually treated as extremists or labelled as a “controversial figure”.

The pro-capitalist bias is reflected in the reporting of left-wing demonstrations as well.

If the rally passes off peacefully, even if it is huge, then it receives basically no coverage at all. On the other hand, if there is some trouble or violence, the media will give it wall-to-wall coverage but will focus almost exclusively on that, rather than the size of the demo or what it is about.

All of this bias isn’t coordinated through some sort of central committee that sends out the line to journalists every morning. It’s not a conspiracy, because that sort of thing is not necessary.

Successful media people get where they are partly because they can sense the mood of the establishment, the ruling class.

They learn that in order to be successful you have to successfully censor yourself.

### **Not all-powerful**

Murdoch is frequently presented as an immensely powerful media baron.

It’s true that Murdoch controls 70 per cent of the capital city newspaper circulation in Australia, and many of these papers set the agenda for the media cycle. But it’s not true that Murdoch dictates on all or even most questions of politics.

The 2013 election showed the limits of the influence of Murdoch’s *Daily Telegraph* in Sydney’s Western suburbs, where its readers are concentrated.

Despite a vicious campaign against Labor and Kevin Rudd, the swing against Labor in Western Sydney was smaller than elsewhere, and Labor held most of its seats there.

Murdoch has an interest in exaggerating his influence as it can boost sales of his products, but also actually give him more leverage over politicians than is warranted.

Quite often, what his papers do is sense which way the electorate is already heading and simply tail the electorate, predicting the result of the election and endorsing the winner beforehand.

Then people incorrectly attribute the election win to the support given to the party by Murdoch, when they



**Above: Trump taunting the media at one of his press conferences**

probably would’ve won anyway, without the endorsement.

The political ideas of the mass of people are shaped by many factors, but the two most important ones are the ideas of the ruling class that they are bombarded with, and their own direct, personal experience of the world.

Generally, these two forces tend to pull in the opposite directions, and they produce in workers what Gramsci called “contradictory consciousness”.

This means that the strength of the media on a particular issue, at a particular time, will be related to how closely workers have direct experience of that issue.

A classic example is the issue of privatisation of public services. Pretty much all the mainstream media are in favour of privatisation and aggressively push it onto the population. But despite the propaganda campaigns, 80 per cent of people oppose privatisation because they have direct experience of the price increases when electricity is privatised, and of poorer services in other industries.

This points to the conditions in which the influence of the capitalist media would be at its weakest: when large masses of the population are drawn into direct action or struggle in mass demonstrations and/or strikes.

In these conditions millions of

people’s direct experience, their own actions, would be the news story. If the media refused to report the struggle they would notice it and draw conclusions; likewise if the media tried to distort or misrepresent the issues or conduct of the protesters or strikers.

The masses in struggle would also likely be part of groups, networks, and organisations that would provide alternative information and generate and support oppositional views.

We can look to the experience of the Egyptian revolution to see confirmation of these ideas. The great demonstrations that toppled Mubarak were enormous, with millions of people participating. The regime got spooked and responded by shutting down the internet networks in the whole country.

Mubarak also forced phone companies to pump out pro-regime propaganda to people’s mobile phones via text messages. But despite this—or maybe because of this—the revolutionary demonstrations that followed were even bigger than they had previously been.

The regime had already lost control of the streets and the workplaces, so they were unable to roll back the revolution simply through media propaganda. This is the only way to defeat fake news of all kinds—through the mass action of revolutionary workers.

# IMPERIALISM IN THE PACIFIC DOES THE US WANT WAR ON CHINA?

John Pilger's new film exposes the ruthless US military buildup against China, but also refuses to let the Chinese government off the hook, writes **Mark Gillespie**

CHINA'S OCCUPATION, and militarisation, of disputed islands in the South China Sea is seen as a massive provocation by the US and its regional allies.

John Pilger's new film *The coming war on China* takes an in-depth look at the real nature of the "threat". Pilger accuses the western media of "beating the drums of war" and focusing on China's unilateral and illegal actions while failing to shine a light on the role of the US in the Pacific, Asia and beyond.

Pilger's film aims "to break the silence". "What is not news", he argues, is that, "China itself is under threat" from American bases that, "form a giant noose encircling China with missiles, bombers and warships".

In 2002 the Pentagon set out to achieve "full spectrum dominance" by 2020. This meant a massive investment in the US military to ensure its overwhelming superiority on land, air, sea, space and in cyber space.

It is estimated the US maintains 800 military bases in more than 70 countries and territories around the globe. Britain, France and Russia, by contrast, have about 30 foreign bases between them.

China has always been seen as a potential rival in US strategic planning, and in 2012 the Obama administration upped the ante by announcing its "pivot to East Asia".

Part of the pivot involves shifting the majority of US military assets to Asia and the Pacific and strengthening the US's strategic alliances with other states in the region.

According to Deputy Secretary of Defense Bob Work, 60 per cent of US air and naval forces will be based in the region by 2020 including the latest equipment such as F-35 Joint Strike Fighters, P-8 Poseidon Maritime Surveillance Aircraft, and

the Zumwalt-class destroyers.

There is a concentration of bases in the East Asian region including in South Korea, Japan and the Philippines. China is the second biggest economy in the world and the world's biggest exporter. The vast majority of its imports and exports pass through the South China Sea, which is ringed by US bases.

In 2011 the Gillard government agreed to 2500 US marines being permanently stationed in northern Australia on a rotational basis. And the US has many other installations in Australia, like Pine Gap, that are central to their "full spectrum dominance" strategy.

The US also has alliances and bases to the west of China in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

## US bases

Pilger does not just look at the US's overwhelming military capacity, but also at how they established this string of bases by trampling on local populations.

He starts with the Marshall Islands, a sprawling chain of volcanic islands and coral atolls in the central Pacific just north of Nauru and the equator. Between 1874 and the First World War the Marshall Islands were a German protectorate. Germany lost the war so they were handed to Japan, which subsequently lost them in the Second World War when the US invaded.

From 1947 to 1986 the US governed the Marshall Islands as a UN trustee. Pilger's film outlines the appalling treatment of the Marshall Islanders by their US overlords.

The Marshall Islands became a major test site for US nuclear weapons. Between 1946 and 1958, 67 nuclear tests were conducted on various atolls, the equivalent of 7200

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**The US maintains 800 military bases in more than 70 countries and territories around the globe**

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Hiroshima bombs, making some parts of the Marshall Islands, "by far the most contaminated place on Earth".

But US officials weren't happy just dislocating people and destroying islands and their way of life. They also wanted to see the effects of radiation on humans and deliberately used the Marshall Islanders as "guinea pigs".

"It will be interesting to get a measure of human up-take when people live in contaminated areas," wrote one US official as the Marshall Islanders were told it was safe to move back into contaminated areas.

The most appalling health consequences followed.

Even though the Marshall Islands received independence in 1986 the US military still dominates it though a "compact" that gives the US absolute control of the country's foreign and defence policy.

The Marshall Islands are described as a "stepping stone to Asia" and the US has stationed the giant and secretive Ronald Reagan Missile test site there. The US military test their intercontinental ballistic missiles by firing them at the Marshall Islands from California.

Pilger visits the base on Kwajalein Atoll where a "small-town America has been created" for the military personnel complete with manicured golf courses, a yacht club, swimming pools and restaurants. He contrasts this with the living conditions of the Marshall Islanders on nearby Ebeye Island where more than 15,000 people, many forcibly relocated there, live on just 32 hectares in the "worst slum in the Pacific".

This is "apartheid in the Pacific" argues Pilger. People live without proper water, sewerage and electricity and are unable to eat the plentiful supply of fish because of the contamination.

They have the worst rate of diabetes in the world and commute daily to the base to flip hamburgers, water the lawns and take out the garbage.

Every missile fired at the Marshall Islands cost the US government \$100 million, but the people on Ebeye have just one dilapidated bus for the school kids that they can't afford to replace.

Pilger also visits the "front-line" islands of Okinawa (belonging to Japan) and Jeju (belonging to South Korea). Both are less than 800 kilometres from mainland China. A giant naval base has been constructed on Jeju for US ships, while on Okinawa there are 32 military installations.

On both islands there has been rigorous opposition to the bases from locals. On Okinawa it's almost impossible for the local people to move anywhere without coming up against fences and land confiscated for military use. GI rapes are common as is the danger of accidents since the "skies are full of planes and helicopters".

On Jeju Island the locals saw the navy base as a US-driven project aimed at China but were also concerned about its impact on the UNESCO designated Biosphere Conservation Area.

### Chinese imperialism

While exposing the US's imperial agenda Pilger is not fooled by China's claim to be "communist". "China," he says "has matched the US at its own great game of capitalism."

He rejects Professor Zhang Weiwei's (an aide to Deng Xiaoping, the architect of China's market deregulation) assertion that China is not a class society, and explicitly raises the bloody repression of workers and students in Tiananmen Square.

He exposes inequality in China and also records the class struggle telling us that, "strikes, and community protests and activism reached record levels", there in 2015.

One weakness of Pilger's film is his framework for explaining imperialism. A Marxist analysis of imperialism sees military competition as the inevitable extension of capitalist economic competition. By contrast, Pilger seems to suggest that the development of different capitalist powers could take place without the intense military competition currently seen around the world.

US aggression towards China is explained as result of the arms industry needing, "threats and false enemies that justify the business and



**Above: A US aircraft carrier and naval column in the Pacific**

profit of war". But Pilger attributes China's supposedly modest imperial ambitions to cultural factors. "The West with its Christian roots", argues Eric Li, a Chinese entrepreneur and social scientist, "are about converting other people to their beliefs". China in contrast, "built a wall to keep the barbarians out, not to invade them". Pilger lets these comments pass unchallenged.

But as China has risen as an economic power, it has inevitably needed to flex its own military muscles to secure its interests.

China's brutal occupation of Tibet, or the repression of the Uighurs in Xinjiang region, is not mentioned by Pilger. Nor is China's involvement in the new "scramble for Africa" where rival imperialist powers are jockeying for control over natural resources, political influence and strategic territories.

China is now Africa's largest trading partner, investing in mines to secure access to everything from oil, copper and timber to uranium. In April last year it even began constructing its first overseas base there, a naval installation in Djibouti.

Regardless of this weakness Pilger's

film does a good job of turning the spotlight on US imperialism in Asia.

Since the release of the film the Trump administration has stepped up the aggression toward China. Trump's new Secretary of State, Rex Tillerson, has talked of preventing China from accessing the disputed islands militarily and recently the US deployed Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) anti-missile systems to South Korea, much to the displeasure of China.

Pilger's film deserves a big audience in Australia, which is the major regional ally of US imperialism. US bases here play a key role in the global reach of the US military. Australia is an integral part of the US military intervention in the Middle East.

Pilger's film warns of the danger of war and the potential use of nuclear weapons, but does not end without hope. He reminds us of a, "third superpower... ordinary people everywhere, like the people on Okinawa, Jeju Island, the Marshall Islands, China, the United States" and asks, "can we really afford to be silent?"

**The coming war on China  
Directed by John Pilger  
In selected cinemas now**

# RUSSIA'S 1917 REVOLUTION WHEN WORKERS TOOK POWER

The October revolution is derided by establishment figures. But it saw workers overthrow capitalism and establish real democratic control of society, writes **David Glanz**

THIS YEAR is the centenary of the Russian revolutions and everyone who wants to defend the current order—from pro-Trump reactionaries to liberal intellectuals—will be out to belittle and denigrate the achievements of 1917.

They will quickly pass over the first revolution in February\*, which overthrew the monarchy, and concentrate their fire on the second revolution in October, which overthrew the rule of capitalism.

In doing so they will paint the revolution as a coup that led, inevitably, to dictatorship.

Their message: to dream of overturning capitalism is not just unrealistic but dangerous.

As former Labor MP turned Murdoch lapdog Gary Johns wrote in *The Australian* in January: “The story of February to October 1917 is the story of how Russia blew its chance to become democratic ... The Leninist Bolsheviks did not topple the tsar: they toppled the people.”

This is to turn history on its head, for it was the sustained, widespread and self-sacrificing participation of the poor of Russia—the so-called “dark people”—that brought down the tsar’s empire and the rule of the capitalists and the landlords. It was a deeply democratic process.

As the American socialist and journalist John Reed, reporting from St Petersburg in October, wrote: “It was the masses of the people, workers, soldiers, and peasants which forced every change in the course of the Revolution.”

## 1917: revolt breaks out

By 1917 the number of Russian soldiers who had died in the trenches was approaching 1.7 million or 1 per cent of the population, with another five

million wounded.

The vast majority of those casualties were from among the peasantry. Back home, their families were desperate for an end to feudal oppression by the nobility who controlled the land.

In the factories of St Petersburg (then known as Petrograd) and Moscow, workers were suffering under harsh discipline, longer hours and greater work intensity, leading to a huge rise in industrial accidents. Those who protested risked being sent to the front.

The situation was unsustainable. Women workers in St Petersburg made the decisive move. Thousands, along with housewives, surged on to the streets on International Women’s Day on 23 February (8 March in the west), demanding an end to hunger—and that male workers should join them.

The next day, 200,000 were on strike—half of all factory workers in the city.

Sickened by the war, whole regiments of soldiers went over to the side of the workers.

The Romanov Empire that had ruled for more than three centuries crumbled in days. On 3 March the tsar (emperor) abdicated.

Power was transferred to a Provisional Government made up of representatives of the wealthy who had reluctantly gone along with the dismissal of the tsar, all the better to win the war and tame the militancy of the workers.

## Soviets

In the factories, however, workers deepened the revolution, driving out hated bosses, tearing up the humiliating rule books and setting up factory committees, which sometimes took

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**It was the self-sacrificing participation of the poor of Russia that brought down the rule of the capitalists and the landlords**  
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control of workplaces where employers had fled.

On 27 February the St Petersburg soviet was convened. Soviets (councils) were made up of delegates elected from workplaces or barracks, responsible to their workmates or fellow soldiers and recallable if they did not carry out their wishes.

Soviets had first emerged in the defeated revolution of 1905. This time they were to spread nationwide, with soldiers, sailors and peasants instituting their own soviets.

There were now two centres of power in the country—the Provisional Government and the soviets.

In a sign of the workers’ and soldiers’ confidence, the St Petersburg soviet on 1 March issued Order No.1, central to which was that soldiers and sailors should obey their officers and the Provisional Government only if their orders did not contradict the decrees of the St Petersburg Soviet.

But while the soviets had economic and military sway, they lacked ultimate political control. Initially, most workers, taking their lead from the moderate socialist parties, were prepared to tolerate this situation of dual power.

As a resolution from the workers at the Izhora works put it: “All measures of the Provisional Government that destroy the remnants of the autocracy and strengthen the freedom of the people must be fully supported by the democracy.

“All measures that lead to conciliation with the old regime and that are directed against the people must meet with decisive protest and counteraction.”

It was a tension that would ultimately bring down the Provisional Government, which during its eight





**Above: A workers' meeting in the Putilov works, one of the largest factories in St Petersburg in 1917**

months of existence was to prioritise the needs of the capitalists, landlords and generals over the demands of the workers and peasants.

### Capitalist or socialist revolution?

The moderate socialists argued that the best outcome that could be expected would be a capitalist society with a parliamentary system. Socialists should support the Provisional Government and continue the war in the name of defending the revolution. Many key leaders of Lenin's Bolshevik party were caught up in this prevarication.

The situation changed only when Lenin arrived back from exile in April. He dropped a theoretical bomb into the debate.

Lenin argued: "The ... country is passing from the first stage of the revolution—which, owing to the insufficient class-consciousness and

organisation of the proletariat, placed power in the hands of the bourgeoisie—to its second stage, which must place power in the hand of the proletariat and the poorest sections of the peasants."

There should be no support for the Provisional Government and the war. From now on the Bolshevik slogan was to be "All Power to the Soviets". The socialist revolution was now firmly on the agenda.

By April, Russia was radicalising fast. Within weeks of Lenin winning over the party, the Provisional Government declared itself ready to continue the war until victory. Workers and soldiers poured on to the streets in anger, marching behind the Bolshevik slogans.

But the Bolsheviks were still far from having majority support. Millions of workers and peasants had moved into political action for the first time and they gravitated around the

largest moderate socialist parties.

Lenin argued among his supporters for patience.

Workers and peasants would have to learn through their own experience that overthrowing the tsar was not enough, becoming more radical as they tested each party in turn to see if it could help them deliver the core demands of the revolution: Peace, Bread and Land.

This approach was vindicated in July after the Provisional Government launched a new but short-lived offensive against the German and Austrian armies.

Workers and soldiers in St Petersburg were white-hot with rage. This is not what they had risen up for in February.

Some half a million flooded central St Petersburg, demanding that power be transferred to the soviets.

The Bolsheviks helped lead the demonstrations but urged caution, arguing that the rest of the country was still not ready for soviet government. If St Petersburg went alone, it would be isolated.

It was the right position but it came at a heavy short-term cost. For the moment, the right wing of the movement was back in the ascendancy, driving the Bolsheviks underground.

Workers were disarmed, and revolutionary military units in St Petersburg were disbanded or sent to the war front. The Provisional Government introduced a law introducing the death penalty for rebellion in the trenches.

The commander-in-chief of the Russian military, General Lavr Kornilov, sensed the opportunity to roll back the revolution even further. With the support of the new head of the Provisional Government, Alexander Kerensky, a moderate socialist, he marched his army on St Petersburg to "bring order".

At the last moment Kerensky realised that he would be swept away by Kornilov, too, and called on the St Petersburg soviet for help.

Just a few weeks earlier the Bolsheviks were facing persecution, with Lenin driven into hiding. Now in August they rallied workers and soldiers of all parties in a united front against Kornilov, arguing for unity against reaction.

In doing so they were showing workers and soldiers still loyal to the moderate socialists that the Bolsheviks could deliver what the moderates could not.

## FEATURES

As Lenin put it: “We ... are fighting against Kornilov, just as Kerensky’s troops do, but we do not support Kerensky. On the contrary, we expose his weakness.”

With Kornilov routed, support for the Bolsheviks began to grow rapidly. The situation was coming to a head.

### Was the October Revolution a coup?

Critics of the revolution focus on the final transfer of power to the soviets—the storming of the Winter Palace in St Petersburg on 25 October and the arrest of the Provisional Government ministers.

This, they argue, is evidence that the Bolsheviks seized control through a coup, the military action of few thousand of Lenin’s supporters.

This is to ignore the rising tide of revolutionary radicalism that was gripping tens of millions of Russia’s poor. The factory committees, directly organising in the workplace, provided the most sensitive barometer of rank-and-file workers’ opinions.

In St Petersburg, the heart of the revolution with the biggest industrial workforce, the Bolsheviks had overwhelming majority support at the city’s first conference of factory committees, held from 31 May to 5 June.

The Bolsheviks were still in the minority elsewhere, but workers were becoming more militant.

Tony Cliff, the founder of the tendency of which Solidarity is a member, wrote: “Lockouts and shutdowns often precipitated physical clashes between labour and management ...

“The director of a car plant in Moscow and his assistant were ... taken away in a wheelbarrow ... The workers in a Kharkov foundry seized their director, poured a bucket of heavy oil mixed with lead over his head, and carried the unfortunate man out of the plant amid shouts of ‘Hooray’.”

The defeat of the Kornilov coup in August was decisive. Almost immediately the Bolsheviks won a majority in the St Petersburg soviet, soon followed by the soviets in Moscow, Kiev, Odessa and other cities.

The Congress of Soviets of the North voted by a huge majority for all power to the soviets, as did the first All-Russian Conference of Factory-Shop Committees.

This tide of radicalism was fuelled by the fact that the Provisional Government would not and could not grant the core demands of the revolution.

John Reed wrote: “On the front

### Growing numbers of workers and soldiers began to agree with the Bolsheviks that the soviets had to take power

the Army Committees were always running foul of officers who could not get used to treating their men like human beings.

“In the rear the Land Committees elected by the peasants were being jailed for trying to carry out Government regulations concerning the land.

“And the workmen in the factories were fighting blacklists and lock-outs.

“Nay, furthermore, returning political exiles were being excluded from the country as ‘undesirable’ citizens; and in some cases men who returned from abroad to their villages were prosecuted and imprisoned for revolutionary acts committed in 1905.”

Growing numbers of workers and soldiers began to agree with the Bolsheviks that the soviets had to take power.

As Victor Serge, an anarchist who went on to join the Bolsheviks, wrote: “In front of the Bolshevik poster the wretched folk passing by in the street stop and exclaim: ‘That’s just it!’ ... This voice is their own.”

Bolshevik party membership grew massively—from 10,000 in February to 80,000 in April, and from 200,000 at the end of July to 250,000 by November.

Coups are plotted in secret. The October insurrection was openly debated in newspapers, in Bolshevik committees, in meetings of soviets, and in the streets. The Provisional Government was fully aware of preparations for the uprising. It did them no good.

A week before the seizure of power, the St Petersburg garrison of 60,000 men declared that it no longer recognised the Provisional Government. “The Petrograd Soviet is our government. We will obey only the orders of the Petrograd Soviet, through the Military Revolutionary Committee.”

The actual moment of insurrection, which was necessary to confirm the sovereignty of the soviets, was a formality because there were few left prepared to defend the regime.

As Julius Martov, the leader of the Menshevik Party, which had initially been far more popular than the Bolshevik Party, said: “What we have before us after all is a victorious uprising of the proletariat—almost the entire proletariat supports Lenin and expects its social liberation from the uprising.”

### From Lenin to Stalin?

The conventional view—and we will hear it many times again this year—

is that because Lenin’s Bolsheviks turned their backs on parliamentary democracy, they sowed the seeds of Stalin’s terror a decade later.

But Stalin’s demolition of democracy, his reversal of the gains of the revolution for women, gays and lesbians, national minorities and Jews, and his use of force against workers and peasants to develop the Russian economy—“Socialism in one country”—was a fundamental break with the aims of the October revolution.

Lenin and Trotsky had long argued that workers’ revolution in a backward country like Russia needed, first, the support of the peasants, and second the support of the international working class.

Their assumption was that revolution would spread to the advanced economies, in particular Germany.

It was a fair one.

The October revolution not only ended the First World War. It triggered revolutionary upheavals across Europe and beyond, leading to the fall of the German and the Austro-Hungarian empires.

However, while workers elsewhere shook the rich and powerful to their core they failed to overthrow them.

In Russia, the revolution endured three years of attack from pro-monarchist (“white”) forces and foreign armies. It survived but at enormous human and economic cost.

Isolated and weakened, the revolution’s leaders played for time. Stalin’s ascent to power represented their overthrow and the destruction of everything the masses had fought for from February to October.

None of this can erase from history the fact that, in 1917, Russia’s workers and peasants overthrew the existing order, not once but twice.

In doing so they scaled the highest point of human history to date—the first and so far only seizure of power on a national scale by the oppressed and downtrodden.

It is a history that our rulers today view with revulsion. It is one that we need to embrace with passion.

\*Russia in 1917 still used the Julian calendar, which was 13 days behind the (modern) Gregorian calendar.

So the dates of the two revolutions were, in Russia, February and October, and elsewhere, March and November. This article uses the Julian calendar.

# SBS documents racism in Australia that won't fade away

Is Australia racist?  
SBS

Screened 26 February

JOURNALIST RAY

Martin's documentary, part of SBS's "Face up to Racism" week, exposes the racism of everyday life in Australia. But it fails to target the source of racism in Australia in government and major institutions, and show how we can fight it.

The documentary films a number of "experiments" to test how people react to Anglo or non-Anglo people in different scenarios.

In one, a young white man and a young Aboriginal man cut off a lock from a bike at the same Perth shopping mall at different times. When the white man cuts off the lock, no one reacts.

When the young Aboriginal man Josh cuts it, people start filming on their cameras and security guards are called. Without even speaking to him, they slam him onto the ground, put their knee into his back and swear at him. As Josh explains, "When I go to the supermarket or the shops I get followed around a lot by the security guards. It happens every time I go to the shops".

The experiments depict just how intense and widespread racism is.

This is backed up by the findings of a major survey into racism and prejudice undertaken by Professor Kevin Dunn at the University of Western Sydney for the program. One in five Australians (five million people) reported experiencing racism in the last 12 months. And 77 per cent of Muslim women had experienced racism on public transport or in the street.

But the show also demonstrates that for the majority of people the



**Above: Jafri Ibra protesting outside Flinders Street station in Melbourne, who features in one of the documentary's "experiments" on racism**

question of whether they accept racism is contradictory and fluid. Four of five Australians said they support multiculturalism and agree that, "having a multicultural population has been good for Australia." In the documentary, many bystanders stepped in to oppose racist abuse in the experiments.

The malleability of racism is shown in an experiment contrasting how people react to differing portrayals of the arrival of boats of refugees.

In one portrayal viewers are shown a news segment describing refugees as breaching our borders, illegal arrivals and being potential terrorists. The response of the viewers was to argue that we need to control our borders and that we are too lenient in letting people into Australia.

When the same viewers were given a portrayal of refugees arriving with relief and happiness and families greeting each other, they responded in a completely different way. They all thought we should be helping refugees, albeit some reluctantly, and didn't want to see kids in danger. This "framing effect" changed

the opinion of 78 per cent of viewers.

## Source of racism

This is where the analysis from the documentary really stops. Where racism comes from and how it is perpetuated is a gaping hole.

The media does play a role in entrenching racism. But the source of the rhetoric about, for instance, the supposed threat of "illegal boat arrivals" and the hysteria about "Muslim extremism" has been government, and the political interests that drive it.

Refugees only became a major issue in Australia when the Howard government began locking them up in remote detention centres in 1999, running a campaign of demonisation and eventually sent the SAS onto the Tampa and turned boats around.

Similarly it was Australian government participation in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq after 9/11, and John Howard's claims that the Muslim community had failed to "integrate" and were responsible for terrorism that set the tone for Islamophobia from the media.

Sociological experi-

ments may reveal aspects of the manifestations of racism, but more fundamentally racism involves institutionalised discrimination. To fight racism, we have to target its roots in government policy and the biases of the police, the courts and the media.

The documentary ends by concluding that Australians as a whole are not racist and even claims that some kinds of racism are fading away.

But at the level of politics and the mainstream media, racism is on the rise. Recent years have seen a move back to assimilationist policy towards Indigenous people through policies like the NT Intervention, a surge in Indigenous child removals, rampant Islamophobia, and a bipartisan agreement about torturing refugees in offshore prison camps. Coupled with the economic failures of the system, this has created fertile ground for the resurgence of One Nation.

But the survey findings the program reports should give us hope. One third of Australians are susceptible to changes in their attitudes. More than three quarters of people think racism is a problem. This has important political consequences.

People do not simply absorb government policy or accept stereotypes uncritically.

This shows the importance of anti-racist movements like the refugee campaign, the fight against Aboriginal child removals or the horrors of Don Dale and black deaths in custody—and the need to take a stand against Islamophobia.

To confront and challenge racism, we need to fight the government and the system that creates it.

**Feiyi Zhang**

**The show demonstrates that for the majority of people the question of whether they accept racism is contradictory and fluid**

# ABCC, PENALTY RATES STOP TURNBULL'S WAR ON WORKERS

By James Supple

THOUSANDS OF construction workers defied the law to join stopwork rallies around the country on 9 March. This is the kind of action needed across the union movement to fight Turnbull's war on workers.

"This was the biggest national stopwork in construction since WorkChoices," CFMEU delegate Dennis McNamara told *Solidarity*.

"In Sydney there were lots of young workers on strike for the first time. The big union sites in the city were all completely shut down."

Over 10,000 took to the streets in Melbourne and around 3000 in both Sydney and Brisbane.

In Sydney, workers marched off sites through the CBD, taking over the streets as they made their way to the demonstration. Construction union delegate Dennis McNamara took the stage and announced a spontaneous march back to Town Hall square. On the way, the crowd spotted John Howard walking out of a building and followed him, chanting loudly.

The stopwork was called to resist the re-introduction of the Australian Building and Construction Commission (ABCC). But many workers were just as angry about Turnbull's refusal to protect penalty rates and eager to show solidarity with workers affected by the decision in retail, hospitality, fast food and pharmacies.

Construction worker Mark Toohey told *Solidarity*, "I'm so offended about the cuts to penalty rates. It's the poorest part of our society they're attacking. I still get weekend penalty rates, but we know they're coming after us next."

## Defiance

Nigel Hadgkiss, the head of the ABCC, warned that union members faced fines for striking to attend. Individual workers can now be fined up to \$34,000 for taking unauthorised strike action. In Sydney one big concreting company sent letters to their workers warning them of fines if they went out on strike. The threat was ignored.

"We're all breaking the law here



Above: Union members join the stopwork rally on 9 March in Sydney

at the moment", Victorian construction union secretary John Setka told the crowd in Melbourne. "Bad laws through history have been changed through people defying them."

The whole union movement needs to respond to Turnbull's attack with the same spirit. The Your Rights at Work campaign, which brought down John Howard, began with a series of week-day stopwork rallies. But this time around, the unions are simply focused on an electoral campaign in marginal seats—even though the next federal election is over two years away.

John Setka said in Melbourne, "There are unions that are not here today that have told their members not to come because it's illegal industrial action. Let me give a message to those unions: you'd better come out and fight".

That kind of defiance is going to be necessary to defend penalty rates and resist the ABCC. Under the special laws for the construction industry, workers can be sent to jail for refusing to hand over information or give evidence against their workmates. Last time around it was defiance by workers and union officials like Ark Tribe and Noel Washington, who refused to co-operate and were willing to risk jail, which forced its repeal.

The Commission is designed to cripple construction unions and keep them out of worksites. As John Setka said, "We go onto a site and try and represent workers, and make sure they go home safe. That now is a criminal act according to this government."

New guidelines for the Building Industry Code released in March confirm that it will ban clauses in enterprise agreements which impose requirements to employ apprentices, common wages for workers on the same site, and guaranteed rostered days off.

Many workers were enthusiastic for further action. CFMEU member Warren Speechley told *Solidarity*, "I've been part of the union for 28 years now and I'm 100 per cent behind them. I really think we've got to put our cards down and show them we're serious and stay on strike."

Mark Toohey said, "I'm all for the national strikes I think they should be expanded, we're at the point now where we have to have rolling strikes and get it through the government's head that this is unacceptable." The next step is to push for combined unions delegates' meetings in each state to discuss union-wide stopwork action. It's time to step up the fight.

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"We're all breaking the law here at the moment"  
Victorian construction union secretary John Setka