

Solidarity

Issue No. 106 / September 2017

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BEAT BACK THE BIGOTS, TOSS OUT TURNBULL MARRIAGE EQUALITY NOW



GREENS

Right backs Faruqi to
knock off Lee Rhiannon

CHARLOTTESVILLE

US rejects racism, Trump
and the far right

HOMOPHOBIA

From equality to LGBTI
liberation



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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

As institutions that were built on public service models there are cost structures embedded which are not always as efficient as possible
Education Minister Senator Birmingham's urges university bosses to follow Murdoch University and move to slash wages and conditions

Urgency is a relative concept.
Commonwealth Solicitor-General Stephen Donaghue at the Same Sex Marriage High Court challenge on the definition of "urgency".

An exercise in practical love
Turnbull on the punitive cashless welfare card

The party for pedophiles
Billionaire Twiggy Forrest throws a tantrum against The Greens for not supporting his cashless welfare card

Everything we said seemed to fall on deaf ears
Clinton Pryor on his meeting with Turnbull after his 5000 kilometre Walk for Justice

We'll see
US President Donald Trump when asked if he would bomb North Korea

The reference to the High Court was not done for any reason other than to give the court the opportunity to clarify this area of the law
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INSIDE THE \$YSTEM

Poor bear the brunt of Hurricane Harvey

The death toll from hurricane Harvey in the US has reached at least 60, with 316,000 households without electricity, and 130,000 meals being delivered by charity the Red Cross by the end of August. The disaster shows again how the world's wealthiest country refuses to protect its own people.

The poor have borne the brunt of the carnage in Houston, the US's fourth largest city. Houston has a history of unplanned, corporate urban development. The city has no zoning laws so many of the poorest residents live directly adjacent to a vast petrochemical industry.

There are reports of residents being gassed and soaked in toxic chemicals released by the floods. Greed has made the city a death trap. Mayor Sylvester Turner told people to stay home because of the "crazy" logistics of evacuation. Yet Houston is known as known as the "Bayou City" because it is riddled with swamps, rivers and creeks that make it prone to flooding. There is no excuse for the lack of evacuation planning. When the hurricane hit Customs and Border Patrol officials initially said they would set up checkpoints to check people's papers as they fled north. The message to the undocumented was drown or get deported.

Elite jobs run in the family

A NEW study by Andrew Leigh has shown that it's not easy to move from poverty to riches in Australia. The study created Australia's first long-run estimates of social mobility, based on data on rare surnames in elite professions from 1870 to present.

Amongst the 500 rare surnames are A'Beckett, Brissenden, Clubb, Westcott and Zwar. He found even today that people with the same rare last names as previous university graduates were 76 per cent more likely to gain a uni degree than people with surnames like Smith. By examining names on the Australian Medical Pioneers Index he found that today those with rare surnames are 28 per cent more likely to be doctors than the rest of the population. It has been assumed that social mobility in Australia was better than the US or UK. This study puts that in doubt.

Workers in UK stage first ever McStrike



MCDONALD'S WORKERS have launched the first-ever strike at the multinational in Britain. BFAWU union members at two stores—Cambridge, and Crayford in south east London—mounted picket lines on 4 September. Their action is part of the Fast Food Rights campaign's national day of action for £10 an hour minimum wage and union rights.

Stephanie was the first McDonald's worker to walk off shift to cheers of fellow workers and supporters. "I was overwhelmed by the amount of people who were there to support us," she told *Socialist Worker*. "This is the first time I've done anything like this. Normally when I've had a problem at work I've just got another job, but now I'm making a difference, not just for me but other workers."

Shen, a BFAWU member at the Crayford store, said, "I'm striking to fight for a better living wage for every single person and better treatment of McDonald's, fast food and service workers".

The workers voted to strike by 95.6 per cent over a number of issues in the stores. Shen said, "It's McDonald's that has led us to this point, it's the way McDonald's treated us and allowed bullying and sexual harassment to carry on. If we all come together, we can change things and win."

They are showing that it's possible to build the union and fight in a sector that's hard to organise.

BFAWU president Ian Hodson told *Socialist Worker*, "McDonald's have been given notice. They can look at pay and the other issues or this will spread across the country—it's two stores today, it could be 20 tomorrow, 40 next year."

As Shen said, "This is the first of many strikes and we need the support of everyone to be able to win. I want everyone to support us because we can't do it alone."

Tomáš Tengely-Evans, Socialist Worker UK

Arms companies exempt from anti-discrimination

ARMS MANUFACTURERS have been given exemptions from anti-discrimination laws in order to refuse jobs to people born overseas or citizens of another country. Six companies in NSW have been given the exemptions, at companies including Raytheon and BAE Systems. The permission has been granted in order to meet US export restrictions on American technology.

Foreign employees can even be forced to wear coloured badges signifying their lack of higher level security clearance.

Research and writing by Adam Adelpour

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

Leaks reveal Pine Gap's role in drone killings

LEAKED US National Security Agency documents have revealed how intelligence from Australia's Pine Gap spy base is being used on US battle fields. The documents leaked by NSA whistle-blower Edward Snowden show the base outside Alice Springs provides detailed geo-location intelligence for the US military. The information is used to locate targets for US special forces and drone strikes.

US drone strikes have led to hundreds of civilian deaths in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Syria, Yemen and Somalia. One leaked document titled "NSA Intelligence Relationship with Australia" is labelled "top secret". It reads, "Joint Defence Facility at Pine Gap (RAINFALL) [is] a site which plays a significant role in supporting both intelligence activities and military operations." Another says, "One of RAINFALL's primary mission areas is the detection and geo-location of Communications Intelligence, Electronic Intelligence and Foreign Instrumentation signals."

Emily Howie, the director of advocacy and research at the Human Rights Law Centre, says Australians at the base could be prosecuted for war crimes as a result of Pine Gap's operations.

Research shows why you can't live on Newstart

RESEARCH AT UNSW by Professor Peter Saunders has shown why it's impossible to meet basic living costs on unemployment benefits. A single person needs \$100 a week more than Newstart provides to meet these basic costs, they found.

Couples without children were \$107.50 behind, while single adults or couples with one child were around \$50 short.

Newstart recipient Johnny Windus from Perth told the ABC, "You end up having to forfeit food, or putting your electricity bill off for another fortnight and it just goes on and on."

EDITORIAL

Turnbull backs bigots and the rich—drive him out

TURNBULL IS facing disaster at every turn. The parliamentary dual citizenship debacle has left the government looking incompetent and paralysed. The cloud hanging over the heads of its MPs and Senators—most importantly Deputy Prime Minister Barnaby Joyce—won't lift until October 12 at the earliest, when the High Court hears the issue.

And with the government's majority in the lower house so slim, it cannot afford to lose a single MP.

The campaign on the marriage equality postal vote will be another embarrassment for Turnbull. He has imposed the ridiculous postal vote in a pathetic effort to hold his own party together. In doing so he has given the bigots a chance to go on the offensive. Turnbull is so cowed by the hard right of his party that, although he supports marriage equality, he says he won't be campaigning for it.

If Labor and The Greens had refused to accept the postal vote, and called demonstrations demanding an immediate vote in parliament, it might have been stopped. The LGBTI community rejected the original plebiscite plan as completely unnecessary, and a capitulation to the homophobes in the right of the Liberal Party. The same thing is true of the postal vote.

The postal vote has already seen the bigots air homophobic TV ads. But the "yes" campaign is well under way, and has had a surge of support. We need to use this support to build a huge "yes" vote for equal marriage and an even bigger movement against homophobia.

Liberal desperation

The Liberals looked like they had lost the plot as they launched an attack accusing Labor leader Bill Shorten of "socialist revisionism" and even being a "red".

It was a measure of their desperation at the polls and the way Labor's focus on inequality has struck a chord.

They are also continuing to reach for racism whenever they can. Last year the #LetThemStay campaign stopped them sending 267 refugees back to Manus and Nauru. Peter Dutton's decision to cut off income support and throw around 60 of them out of accommodation at three weeks' notice is simply petty cruelty.

But there is increasing opposition to this. Even Bill Shorten, who generally says nothing on refugees,



Above: Sydney Uni is preparing for more strikes, fighting pay cuts and Turnbull's funding cuts

called Dutton's latest move a "new low". Their laws making it harder for migrants to gain citizenship have also been stopped in the Senate.

Labor has taken a turn to the left, promising to increase tax on people earning over \$180,000, on family trusts used by the rich to avoid tax and on housing investments. And they are also committed to reversing the cuts to penalty rates.

But no one believes Shorten is a socialist radical. He could not even maintain his call to add a new inscription on statues of James Cook, recognising the cost of colonisation for Aboriginal people, for 24 hours. Labor still believes there need to be cuts to balance the budget. It took a swathe of cuts to the last election and agreed to a \$6.3 billion cuts package with Turnbull late last year.

The Liberals are doing their best to increase inequality, continuing their war on workers and unions. They are pushing new legislation to increase fines for secondary boycotts and solidarity strikes to \$10 million, further restricting the right to strike.

University bosses nationwide have been emboldened by the Fair Work decision to allow Murdoch University to terminate its enterprise bargaining agreement. It is using the threat of a hefty pay cut and losing conditions through being pushed back onto the basic Award to try to force its staff to accept a lousy deal.

Education Minister Simon Birmingham has egged the university bosses on, urging them to seize

the opportunity to tighten their "cost structures" through slashing pay. The government still hopes to pass its \$2.8 billion in cuts to university funding through the Senate too.

Almost immediately, Sydney University decided to test the waters on holding a non-union ballot on its new pay deal, only to lose its snap poll with a 61 per cent "no" vote. James Cook University has already gone down this route.

There needs to be a national response from university union the NTEU to halt these attacks. Sydney University is leading the way, striking on Open Day and again on 13 September. Western Sydney University and UTS are also preparing for industrial action.

But the CFMEU has stepped back from confronting the government's Building Code, through starting to negotiate compliant agreements. This is a missed opportunity. Continuing to refuse to renegotiate on existing agreements could have created a crisis for Turnbull, through locking out major builders from lucrative government contracts. A campaign backed with stopwork demonstrations could have forced Turnbull to blink.

In NSW the construction unions, the MUA and others are set to hold a united stopwork rally, now to be held on 16 November. This can bring together opposition to all the aspects of Turnbull's war on workers, including penalty rates and the Australian Building and Construction Commission.

We need to mobilise to force Turnbull out.

.....
Turnbull has imposed the ridiculous equal marriage postal vote in a pathetic effort to hold his own party together

It's left versus right in the NSW Greens pre-selection

By Miro Sandev

THE SENATE pre-selection contest between Lee Rhiannon and Mehreen Faruqi in the NSW Greens is not your usual contest—anything but.

The assault by the federal leadership of The Greens and the right-wing of the NSW branch on Lee Rhiannon has turned the pre-selection into a vote that will determine the future of the party as a party of protest.

It is now obvious that the right-wing of the NSW Greens will support NSW MP Mehreen Faruqi as their best chance to remove left-winger Lee Rhiannon and decisively shift the party to the right.

The right-wing of The Greens has waged a vicious campaign against Lee Rhiannon in the aftermath of her opposition to dealing with Malcolm Turnbull over his Gonski 2.0 schools funding plan. She was excluded from the Greens federal party room in June, while hostile sources inside the party attempted to discredit her through the media.

This was followed up on Four Corners on 14 August, with former federal leader Bob Brown bluntly crowing, “it’s the end of Lee’s reign, the end is nigh.” Tasmanian Senator Nick McKim backed Brown, saying that the attacks on Rhiannon were “growing pains” that would lead to a more “professional party.”

Right-wing NSW Greens MP Jeremy Buckingham labelled Rhiannon and “her faction” as enemies of party democracy. But in reality he is the one who scorns party democracy, openly ignoring decisions of the State Delegates Councils (SDC) whenever they don’t align with his own conservative views. For instance Buckingham maintains his membership of the “Parliamentary Friends of Israel” despite the NSW Greens’ strong support for the Palestine solidarity campaign.

For some months Faruqi had been promoted as a “compromise candidate” that both left and right could support to provide a smooth transition from Rhiannon. But the political challenge to Rhiannon from the right has changed what is at stake in this vote.

Right backs Faruqi

Although pre-selection rules have been ratified and campaigning is well underway nominations do not formally close until October. So far, the right has not nominated its own candidate.



Above: Mehreen Faruqi has a strong anti-racist record, but is being pushed by the right in the hope of removing Lee Rhiannon as Greens Senator

Faruqi is already being promoted by the right through a series of public appearances alongside right-wing MPs and invitations to speak at right-aligned local groups.

It was such local groups that were the bedrock of support for previous right-wing pre-selection candidates like Justin Field and Dawn Walker. The Byron Greens group hosted Faruqi to speak at a special dinner in Mullumbimby in June.

More recently, Faruqi visited the Central West Greens branch, controlled by supporters of right-wing MP Jeremy Buckingham and hostile to Lee Rhiannon and left-wing NSW MP David Shoebridge.

Faruqi also appeared with Jeremy Buckingham and Dawn Walker at the launch of the Ryde-Epping Greens council election campaign and visited Ballina Greens, with NSW MPs Dawn Walker and Tamara Smith, in the heartland of the conservative faction.

Faruqi herself is not a right-winger and has a strong history of anti-racist advocacy as well as support for grassroots democracy in the NSW party. She was not part of the right-aligned bloc of four NSW Greens MPs.

It is likely she will indicate her respect for the NSW Greens’ democratic structures, including decisions of the SDC.

But in the context of the internal offensive against Lee Rhiannon, part of a concerted right-wing push to consolidate The Greens as a party of parliamentary pragmatism, a defeat

for Lee Rhiannon would be a serious blow for the left.

Fight the right

The looming struggle will be crucial in determining The Greens’ future. Federal leader Richard Di Natale and his supporters primarily want the party to win seats by playing parliamentary games and cutting deals, even with the Liberals, to promote the party as able to “get outcomes”.

Rhiannon and her supporters want a party more closely connected to trade unions and social movements, and would have The Greens stand clearly against the political establishment.

In recent years, the right faction in NSW has been better organised and gaining ground. They have already won the last two pre-selections in NSW, indicating both an effective apparatus and a certain level of support in the membership.

The left need to call meetings to mobilise and cohere the support for Rhiannon, using issues like her principled stance on Gonski 2.0 to draw teacher unionists and others into the campaign.

That support can be channeled into arguing for a party that raises working class demands, that orients to the trade unions, champions social movements as the basis of change and doesn’t shy away from anti-capitalist politics.

The rise of Jeremy Corbyn and Bernie Sanders shows there is a huge appetite for this kind of politics.

Faruqi is already being promoted by the right through a series of invitations to speak at right-aligned local groups

Equal marriage campaign must take on the bigots

By Lucy Honan

THE LIBERALS' postal survey on equal marriage is going ahead, after a High Court challenge failed to stop the move.

The growing demand to make equal marriage law has pushed Malcolm Turnbull into a corner, after his endless efforts to delay, appeasing the hard right of his party.

His resort to a postal vote is ridiculous and unnecessary. The whole exercise is homophobic—demanding LGBTI people submit their relationships to a test of public approval. And the fact the whole thing is voluntary, and has to find people at the right postal address, ensures it will produce a distorted and unfair result. A “yes” result is not assured.

But marriage equality's move to political centre stage has shown again the overwhelming support for it. Enthusiasm for the “yes” campaign saw close to a million people update their address or register to vote before the electoral roll was closed.

A rally of up to 20,000 people in Melbourne, and another of thousands in Canberra, were important demonstrations of solidarity.

Seeing the city filled with rainbows, and hearing the united commitment of the Greens, Labor and the union movement to fight for marriage equality made our side feel strong, and Turnbull and his cabinet of bigots seem like the relics they are.

The “yes” campaign will be most effective if it is an active, visible campaign that involves further large protests and union actions at work, to build enthusiasm and a sense of momentum. We can't simply rely on door-knocking and TV ads aimed at getting the vote out.

Bigots surface

As predicted, the plebiscite has created opportunities for homophobia and transphobia from the right. The Melbourne Equal Love rally chair called on “no” supporters to show respect in their campaign, but as the hateful posters, graffiti, conservative commentary and TV ads have shown, there is nothing respectful about a “no” position.

The “no” campaign's first TV ad attempted to whip up a moral panic about trans kids and the Safe Schools program, with a parent claiming her son's school had told him, “he could



Above: Melbourne's rally of up to 20,000 showed the surge in support for marriage equality

wear a dress next year if he felt like it”.

The no campaign's fearmongering that marriage equality will lead to “the removal of gender from society more broadly” should be exposed as the cover for bigotry and discrimination that it is.

Trans kids exist. The prejudice and transphobia they face has to be confronted. A study released in August revealed that 80 per cent of surveyed young transgender people had self-harmed and 48 per cent had attempted suicide.

Tragically, in their rush to get the “yes” vote out at all cost, the conservative official marriage equality campaign has thrown transgender people and the Safe Schools program under the bus.

In an official counter to the “no” ad, Dr Kerryn Phelps says, “the only kids this will effect are gay kids”, through giving them the right to marry.

The yes campaign could use the surge in support for marriage equality to build momentum for reversing the Coalition's attacks on Safe Schools, and to further isolate homophobia and transphobia.

Such a response can also open up space to discuss how rigidly enforced, socially constructed gender roles harm everyone.

Instead, GetUp, the Equality Campaign and others want to narrow the campaign to talk simply about the right to marry, and present marriage

equality in the conservative framework of modernising family values.

GetUp released another marriage equality ad with a mother talking about voting yes based on her family's values of “fairness and kindness”, reassuring us that a yes vote has “nothing to do with what these two [her children] learn at school.”

It is right to point out that equal marriage is an issue of equal rights and ending discrimination. But the campaign for marriage equality will be the most effective blow against homophobia and transphobia in general if it takes on the wider bigotry as well.

Even winning the postal vote won't be the end of the fight for marriage equality. The hard right of the Coalition are demanding wide “religious freedom” exemptions in any equal marriage legislation, so people can discriminate against LGBTI couples and their weddings.

The Catholic Church is talking of sacking anyone working in Catholic schools and institutions who marries their same-sex partner.

The fight for marriage equality needs to be linked with the need to fully implement the Safe Schools program and the fight for full workplace rights for LGBTI people.

We need to galvanise the enthusiasm to fight and make sure that we put the Coalition for Marriage's worst nightmare, a wider challenge to homophobia, transphobia and gender roles in society, on the agenda.

.....
As predicted, the plebiscite has created opportunities for homophobia and transphobia from the right

Dutton's callous cuts for 'Let Them Stay' refugees

By Ian Rintoul

IMMIGRATION MINISTER Peter Dutton's announcement that he was going to cut the income and housing support from around 100 refugees brought to Australia from Manus and Nauru for medical treatment has created outrage.

Around 60 single men and women have had their paltry \$100 a week allowance cut and have been given three weeks to get out of their present community detention housing. They have been issued with a six month bridging visa (with the right to work and Medicare) and told that they are expected to return to Manus, Nauru, or to their home countries.

Typically, there was no logic to the Immigration Department's announcement. Women who are victims of sexual assault, cruelly held in detention for two years and released into community detention for just two months were expected to find houses and jobs. Others who have on-going medical issues were summarily cut off support, while others who had been living in the community for a long time and are fit and well, were ignored.

But if Dutton thought that his latest piece of nastiness would be meekly accepted, it wasn't. His decree galvanised all those who have been involved in the "Let Them Stay" campaign since February 2016. The churches who offered sanctuary in 2016, offered it again. The head of the Anglican Church, Archbishop Philip Freier, called Dutton's decree, "a callous attack on vulnerable people".

Hundreds of people have responded with offers to help to make sure that everyone that Dutton cuts off will be supported and have a roof over their head.

The grassroots movement that stood up to Dutton to say, "Let Them Stay" (most dramatically outside Brisbane's Lady Cilento hospital to stop baby Asha being sent to Nauru) is not going to allow Dutton to make them homeless and send them back.

This time too, the Labor Party opposed Dutton. Bill Shorten called the government's move, "cowardly and cruel." Labor is still committed to the also cruel, offshore processing, but Shorten went on to say the people from Nauru and Manus should be settled in the US or "other countries in our region", putting a small gap



Above: A snap rally against Dutton's attack on the "Let Them Stay" group in Sydney

between Labor and the Coalition.

A day before Dutton's announcement, Labor members of the ACT parliament supported The Greens motion, "that the ACT government is willing and ready to settle refugees and asylum seekers from Manus Island and Nauru in Canberra as part of a national program of resettlement."

So far, of the 400 people brought from Manus and Nauru for medical care, only about 60 refugees have had the income and housing support cut. Dutton may end up cutting support from more of the "Let Them Stay" group of asylum seekers and refugees. If he does, even more people will step up to support them.

Of course, the refugees and asylum seekers should never have been

sent to Nauru or Manus; they should never have been in community detention. They should have had the right to work and been given permanent visas and every assistance to settle in Australia.

Nonetheless, Dutton's move to grant them bridging visas is an admission that he cannot force them back to Nauru or Manus. To that extent, it is a small victory for the "Let Them Stay" campaign and the legal action that has prevented Dutton removing them to Nauru and Manus.

Dutton has labelled the lawyers involved in filing such cases "unAustralian"—a label we should proudly wear considering what Dutton and "Australian values" mean to those held on Manus and Nauru.

Dutton's decree galvanised all those who have been involved in the "Let Them Stay" campaign since February 2016

Dutton's cruel abortion veto has to go

AS *SOLIDARITY* goes to press there are still three pregnant refugees on Nauru waiting to hear if they will be allowed to have the terminations they requested weeks ago. One of the women is now 18 weeks pregnant, yet she requested a termination when she was just six weeks.

Because abortion is unlawful on Nauru, a request for a termination has its own form of Newspeak, and is referred to as "a gynecological procedure unavailable on Nauru."

Under new rules imposed by Australia's Border Force department, IHMS (the medical provider) can no longer approach Border Force direct-

ly with abortion requests; requests for "a procedure unavailable on Nauru" must be referred to Nauru's Overseas Medical Referral (OMR) committee. Border Force will only consider a request from the OMR.

Dutton's twisted ban on abortion targets refugee women in the most barbaric way imaginable. But the barbarism is a direct product of the government's paranoid determination that no refugee will ever come to Australia.

Dutton's use of the OMR to ban abortions must be fought. And the fight to bring them here just got that much more critical.

Despite leadership wobbles, bus drivers still fighting privatisation

DESPITE AN aggressive state Liberal government, and court orders against industrial action, the fight by Sydney's inner west bus drivers against privatisation is very much alive.

A three month ban on industrial action from 17 May to 17 August had just elapsed, when the NSW Industrial Relations Commission (IRC) again issued orders against the RTBU and bus drivers taking industrial action against privatisation for another three months from 18 August.

The latest move to ban industrial action came as the campaign against privatisation began to ramp up.

The NSW government ran to the court on the same day that the RTBU announced that bus drivers' were "ready to walk", and would take action to "keep public transport in public hands."

A 24-hour stoppage on 18 May was absolutely solid and then a very popular fare-free day on 1 June had the government deeply worried. In a spiteful attempt to stifle the industrial action and divide the workers, on 2 June, NSW Transport Minister Andrew Constance cut the drivers' industry allowance—an allowance paid for adhering to an official "disputes resolution procedure". Although the allowance has since been reinstated, up to \$150 a week was cut from all Sydney drivers' pay packets, even though only Region six drivers in the inner west took strike action.

Union leadership

Despite the hit to their pay packets, drivers' remained determined to fight privatisation. But the fines and the IRC orders put the frighteners on the union leadership. Following the latest orders, RTBU officials convened another delegates meeting and invited Unions NSW Secretary Mark Morey and national RTBU Secretary Bob Nanva.

Support from Unions NSW for strike action would have been an enormous boost to the confidence of the drivers and made it clear to the government that strike action had union-wide support. A clause in the award also provides some protection from the government removing the drivers' industry allowance if strike action is directed by Unions NSW.

Unions NSW has produced glossy anti-privatisation fact sheets and its officials have been prominent at the depot protests handing anti-privatisation petitions to politicians.



Above: The RTBU and Unions NSW have been running a "community campaign" against privatisation

Region six delegates remained unanimously in support of strike action, but the meeting was not so clear about the feeling at depots outside Region six.

After the meeting, RTBU officials argued that strike action might result in the union being fined and there wasn't enough support for an industrial campaign.

But as the word spread among the drivers, so did the anger. Everyone knew that there was widespread support for strike action. After the successful strike action in May followed by community meetings, some members felt the union had let down the campaign. Some were so disgusted they resigned in protest.

The three community meetings called to oppose privatisation—in Leichhardt, Marrickville and the city—were packed. More than 30,000 people, mostly in Region six, have now signed a petition against the NSW government's privatisation moves.

There is a determination among the drivers for a campaign that goes beyond a "community campaign" of petitions and door-knocking in marginal electorates. Depot meetings with Unions NSW officials would quickly establish the mood amongst the members.

The drivers are up against a very ideologically-driven government. Media reports have revealed that the NSW government sabotaged efforts by the State Transit Authority to improve

on-time running in 2015.

Constance recently told a recent business gathering, "I have a very clear view... that, into the future, government will no longer be providing services when it comes to transport—there's no need," he said. But there is a very big need. Public transport is already under strain—and a privatised bus service would slash routes, close bus stops and cut around 1200 jobs.

The government got away with privatising Newcastle's buses. Newcastle drivers' jobs are only guaranteed for 18 months. In August, the new corporate owner, Keolis Downer, underpaid more than a dozen bus drivers. Others missed out on entitlements. There are numerous reports of bus cancellations.

"We are not going to let that happen in Sydney, fines or no fines. The union needs to know that drivers are determined to keep the fight going," one driver told *Solidarity*. Bus drivers are keenly discussing the next steps in the campaign.

Although the date is still to be set, Unions NSW is calling a combined union delegates meeting in September. The anti-privatisation campaign and the demands of the bus drivers should be a central part of that meeting. The Unions NSW stopwork rally on 16 November can back drivers' strike action on the day and put the fight against privatisation at the middle of NSW unions fight against the Liberals' war on workers.

.....
Everyone knew that there was widespread support for strike action

Construction union ends non-compliance with Turnbull's Code

By Jean Parker

THE CFMEU's (Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union) defiant stance against signing enterprise agreements that comply with the anti-union "Building Code" came to an abrupt end in August.

After federal Labor's move to strike the laws down in the Senate failed, the union has rushed to sign code compliant agreements, particularly in Victoria and NSW. The union is demanding a big boost to penalty rates and pay to extract a high price from the construction bosses, while they pin their hopes on a future Labor government repealing the law.

This is a flawed strategy. Construction workers know only too well that "waiting for Labor" didn't work last time, and the Rudd Labor government left the ABCC anti-union police force in place. The union leadership's back-down is also a slap in the face to the tens of thousands of workers who defied threats from the ABCC and risked fines to walk off the job for two rallies this year against the Code.

Those rallies showed the power to beat Turnbull and his anti-union laws.

The Building Code legislation requires companies that want to tender for federal government building contracts to be "code compliant", gutting hard-won conditions.

Code compliant agreements remove controls over casualisation, rostered days off, union flags and even notice-boards. Clauses that ensure the relevant unions can enforce the agreement are outlawed, allowing non-union "workers' representatives" to be inserted where unions are not well organised.

The union could have called Turnbull's bluff in early June in NSW. A strong majority of the 100 workers at Boral subsidiary, De Martin & Gasparini, voted to reject a code compliant agreement. In September the Federal Court ruled that Boral's threat to sack the workers was illegal and fined the company. Boral workers' stand could have been the beginning of industry-wide action against the construction bosses and Turnbull's war on workers.

The CFMEU is attempting to "box clever" by signing agreements that only run until July 2018, in the hope that Labor will win the next election, and by raising casual loadings to 80 per cent after six weeks on the job, to keep a lid on casualisation.

But code compliance will spread



Above: Rallying against the Construction Code and the ABCC in Sydney in June

worsening conditions throughout the industry, widening the gap between union and non-union sites.

The CFMEU have been at the forefront of the fight against Turnbull's war on workers. Dropping the fight against the Code is a setback. But we

can still win the war. We still need to keep up the militancy and fight on every site and workplace.

Unions NSW has called a stop-work rally on 16 November. It will be industrial action that can defy the law, beat the ABCC and beat Turnbull.

Trump's Afghan strategy more of the same

DONALD TRUMP has announced a "new strategy" for the war in Afghanistan, which after 16 years is America's longest running war. His strategy is anything but new. It's a rehash of what was tried and failed under Barack Obama: sending more troops.

There are 8400 US troops currently in Afghanistan. Trump will add 4000, breaking an election promise to withdraw. But the presence of over 130,000 coalition troops in 2010-2012 wasn't enough to defeat the Taliban. They now control almost half the country and are gaining ground. The war has cost the US over a trillion dollars, and killed 100,000 Afghans and 2300 American soldiers.

Trump has appealed to US allies for greater assistance. Malcolm Turnbull came out in full support, pointing out that Australia announced an increase in troops to 300 in May.

The brutality of the war has driven many to take up arms against Western forces. It was revealed in July that Australian soldiers murdered an Afghan boy collecting figs, dumped the body and never reported it so it wasn't investigated.

An Australian special forces veteran revealed how there was a culture amongst soldiers that aimed to "get kills up." Units would compete

to reach the highest body count.

In 2012 US forces incensed ordinary Afghans when they incinerated copies of the Koran at a military base. US troops then shot dead 20 protesters. In October 2015 a US airstrike on a hospital in Kunduz killed 19 people. It's no wonder some regard the Taliban as the lesser evil and tolerate them as a form of protection.

Corrupt government

The US aimed to defeat the Taliban by winning "hearts and minds." But the US-backed President, Ashraf Ghani, has allied himself with brutal warlords like General Dostum.

In Kunduz, which fell to the Taliban in September 2015, local residents complained that militias linked to the government were worse than the Taliban. There were regular reports of extortion by government officials and the local governor was notorious for expropriating people's land.

In some areas government officials have colluded with the Taliban, selling them arms, while corrupt judges have been known to release Taliban fighters from prison.

The West can offer Afghanistan nothing but more war and violence. Rather than sending more troops, they should be leaving the country.

Lachlan Marshall

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Code compliance will spread worsening conditions throughout the industry

By Clare Fester

US rejects Trump and the far right after murder in Charlottesville

ON 12 August white supremacist James Fields ploughed his car into counter-protesters in Charlottesville, killing 32-year-old anti-fascist activist Heather Heyer and injuring at least 19 others.

This was the shocking end result of the most significant mobilisation of the US far right in recent memory.

White supremacists, members of the Ku Klux Klan, neo-Nazis and other far right organisations had gathered for a “Unite the Right rally” to protest the removal of a statue of Confederate general Robert E. Lee. The civil war general married into one of the richest slave-owning families in Virginia and was known for his staff brutally beating recaptured slaves.

The day before, the right descended on the University of Virginia campus carrying KKK-like torches and chanting “blood and soil” (echoing the Nazi slogan “*blut und boden*”), “white lives matter” and “Jews will not replace us.” Formerly relegated to the margins of American society, Donald Trump’s election has encouraged these racists out into the open.

Trump at first would only condemn violence “on many sides”—knowing full well that the only people who committed murder in Charlottesville were from the right. Under pressure two days later he made a mechanical announcement stating “racism is evil.” The following day Trump went back to endorsing the far right, claiming, “you had people that were very fine people on both sides... Not all those people were neo-Nazis, not all those people were white supremacists”.

Trump’s response provoked widespread outrage. Even prominent Republicans condemned his comments. Business leaders joined the chorus—the CEOs of Merck Pharmaceuticals, tech company Intel, clothing giant Under Armour, and multinational conglomerate 3M, all resigned from Trump’s manufacturing council. The Strategic Policy Forum, representing some key players in the capitalist class, disbanded. CNN reportedly struggled to find anyone willing to go on air to defend Trump.

Trump’s flirtations with fascists didn’t begin with Charlottesville. His recently departed chief strategist Steve Bannon is well-known for his white supremacist views as editor of far-right news site *Breitbart*. At Trump’s Inaugural Ball, White House deputy assistant Sebastian Gorka wore



Above: Part of the enormous crowd of 20,000 in Boston that marched against a pathetic far right “free speech” rally of just 15 people

the medal of a Hungarian organisation that collaborated with the Nazis during World War II, and still holds strong connections to vicious anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant organisations in Hungary.

Both Bannon and Gorka were strong supporters of Trump’s protectionist “America first” foreign policy and trade agenda. While both have now been removed from their White House posts, they will return to *Breitbart*. In his departure letter, Gorka wrote, “the best and most effective way I can support you, Mr. President, is from outside the People’s House.”

United response

In the aftermath of Charlottesville, the far right’s attempt to go on the offensive was met with overwhelming resistance from ordinary people.

In Boston more than 20,000 people marched against the right’s 15-person “free speech” demonstration on 19 August. Since then the right has been forced to cancel 67 rallies across 36 states.

In northern California’s Bay Area more than a hundred organisations, including the Berkeley Federation of Teachers, branches of the unions representing service workers and public sector employees, Black Lives Matter, Muslim Students Associations, the International Socialist Organization and the Democratic Socialists of America, came together to protest the right on 26 and 27 August. In the face of such a united front, the right cancelled both its rallies in Berkeley and San Francisco.

This kind of broad left response, grassroots organising, and mass mobilisations are key for resisting the right on the streets and Trump in the White House.

There is an important debate about how to take on the right. Some organisations like the Southern Poverty Law Center, which documents hate crimes in the US, argue that we shouldn’t mobilise against the right as it only gives them the publicity they crave. But this only allows them to march unopposed, and spread their ideas without challenge. Others in the movement call for “black bloc” tactics, where small groups of masked militants fight Nazis and the police. But this elitist strategy cannot mobilise the kind of numbers needed to confront and isolate the right.

Our best weapon is huge, mass protests to send these Nazis back into the sewers they crawled out of. And to link the fight against the far right to fighting the Trump administration and the racism around deportations and his Muslim travel ban, that has encouraged them.

What’s more, we need a political vision that looks beyond the straight-jacket of mainstream politics. US politicians have spent 40 years lurching to the right. Democrats and Republicans alike have done nothing about racist police; both parties have used anti-immigrant racism and Islamophobia to ram through austerity and war. We need a socialist alternative to the spineless Democratic Party that long ago abandoned working people, women, and people of colour.

Grassroots organising and mass mobilisations are key for resisting Trump and the right on the streets

By Mark Goudkamp

VENEZUELAN PRESIDENT Nicholas Maduro is being challenged by an emboldened right-wing opposition as the country spirals into disaster.

Elections for a National Constituent Assembly, dominated by his party as a result of an opposition boycott, have given him a short-term reprieve.

But the immense economic, social and political crisis in Venezuela is not going away.

After Hugo Chavez was elected president in 1998, the government delivered significant improvements for workers and the poor through diverting Venezuela's oil wealth towards health, education, and housing. But this relied on a surge in oil prices, which has now ended, throwing the economy into chaos.

Chávez failed to diversify the economy or plan to deal with a drop in oil prices. As a result a staggering 95 per cent of Venezuela's external income comes from oil, up from 67 per cent 20 years ago.

Poverty is soaring, with inflation at 700 per cent, producing a chronic decline in workers' purchasing power. Almost 90 per cent of the population cannot buy enough food, and there's been an average weight loss of eight kilograms.

Research by the teachers' union in late 2016 found that it now takes 17 minimum wage jobs to pay for a basket of basic goods and services.

The crisis has been seized on by the wealthy and the right-wing opposition who never accepted Chavez or his successor, Maduro. Their hoarding and black market trading have worsened the shortages of basic goods for ordinary people.

The opposition has staged months of large protests against Maduro, although they appear to have died down for now. Violence both from government security forces and right-wing vigilantes has killed at least 126 people since April, according to the respected Venezuela Analysis website.

Neither the government nor the opposition have any solution to the country's crisis. Maduro's control of the National Constituent Assembly simply sets up a stand-off between the new body and the opposition-controlled National Assembly.

Donald Trump has also weighed in, labelling Venezuela a "dictatorship", and threatening a "military option". He has banned US banks from new dealings with the Venezuelan state and the state-owned oil company PDVSA. The

Right-wing opposition prepares end game as crisis engulfs Venezuela



Above: Venezuelan President Nicholas Maduro

main opposition coalition, the MUD, welcomed the US sanctions.

Corruption

Widespread corruption among the Chavista state bureaucracy has bred disillusionment with the government, as officials pocket state funds for personal gain. Last year, Chávez's ex-minister of finance, Jorge Giordani, published a statement showing that \$500 billion in state revenue had disappeared.

Government institutions, like the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) operate as instruments of patronage and political control. A new "patriotic card", only obtainable from the PSUV, is now required to access state services, pensions, and passports.

In some Chavista areas, like Caracas's La Vega and El Valle, the local population have driven out government ministers, and organised their own anti-government protests.

Maduro has increasingly turned to the armed forces to protect his power.

Faced with his growing authoritarianism, the failure to act over the murder of trade unionists and other grassroots leaders, and the growing violence, many previously committed Chavistas are politically paralysed.

Socialism

Venezuela's crisis cannot be put down to the failure of "socialism". The problem has not been too much socialism, but not enough. Venezuela's oil wealth meant that Chavez could expand social programs without

fundamentally challenging the wealth of the elite, who retain control of most of the economy. Between 1999 and 2011, the private sector's share of economic activity increased from 65 to 71 per cent.

Under Chávez development of the Amazon was rejected for environmental reasons and in recognition of indigenous communities' human and territorial rights. Now, Maduro has revived foreign investment in mining and forestry—centred on Venezuela's Amazon region—as the way out of his budgetary woes. Last summer, Maduro agreed to repay multinational corporation Barrick hundreds of millions of dollars in compensation for Chávez's mine nationalisations and grant it a ten-year tax holiday.

Real socialism would mean taking control of the wealth of the rich to address poverty and establishing mass democratic control over investment and economic planning.

It was a mass movement from below that allowed Chavez to rise to power and pushed the revolutionary process forward. In 2002 hundreds of thousands of slum dwellers in the "barrios" came out and prevented a military coup attempt. Oil workers and their allies derailed a bosses' strike aimed at shutting down production.

The return of an independent movement of workers, together with the urban and rural poor, is going to be needed to revive any impulse towards socialism, to reject the Chavista corruption and fight the right. Without this, Venezuela's future looks bleak.

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Widespread corruption among the Chavista state bureaucracy has bred disillusionment with the government

Revolutionary constructivist art one hundred years after 1917

Call of the avant-garde: Constructivism and Australian art
Heide Museum of Modern Art
Until 8 October

A NEW exhibition in Melbourne celebrates the constructivist art that emerged out of the Russian Revolution.

Artworks by Australian artists sit alongside those from Russia, continental Europe, England and Argentina, tracing the influence of constructivism over the last century. The movement continues to inspire artists today.

This exhibition is one of the many around the world marking the centenary year of the 1917 Russian Revolution, a defining time for art.

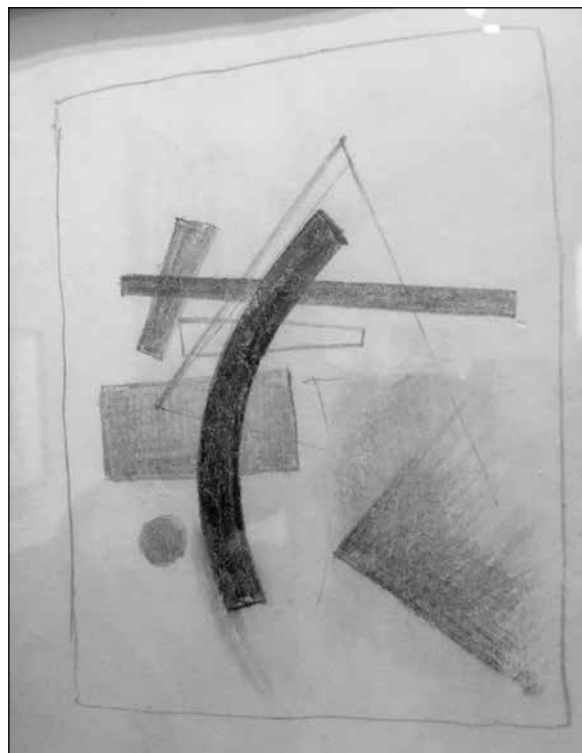
Before going to the exhibition I wondered whether the works would reflect the dynamism of revolution and whether the later works would fit with the original artists from revolutionary Russia.

It became clear in the combined works of the exhibition how the two women curators, Sue Cramer and Lesley Harding, applaud the revolutionary artists' aspirations for a better future. Works by the great names in Soviet art, such as El Lissitzky, Vladimir Tatlin, Kasimir Malevich, Alexander Rodchenko, give a feeling for the time of openness and creativity following the revolution a century ago. Placing them alongside other works through the last century helps show their influence internationally on art through to today.

Constructivism built on earlier forms of avant-garde art, experimenting with abstract designs and new industrial materials. At its core was a deeply motivated conviction that the artist could contribute



Above: Australian photographer Max Dupain's Pymont Silos 1933 and Russian Kasimir Malevich's Untitled 1915



to the material and intellectual needs of the whole society by engaging with architecture, building, graphic design, photography, theatre, and clothing design.

Their aim was not simply political art but art that served the whole society. The constructivism threw themselves into the service of the revolution and its aim of constructing a new society.

After the revolution in 1917 artists of the constructivist era designed festival decorations, posters, brochures, painted buildings, trains and ships, made films and photographs.

Among their proposed designs was Tatlin's famous tower, intended as a working headquarters as well as a monument to the Third International. It was never actually constructed.

Constructivism shared with other modern art movements a belief in geometric abstractions as representing modernism and optimism for the

future. They threw out the constraints of tradition, with abstractions and blank forms representing the exhilarating void of the unknown and a springboard for the imagining of new tomorrows.

The curators bring an integration of ideas across the various art forms, and show the strong role taken by women artists who, because of the revolutionary period, were playing a more active role. The later works represent women artists well too.

Subversive

To many critics in the 1920s modern art was dangerous, as a result of its association with Communism. The *New York Times*, for example, reprinted an article on the subject in their 3 April 1921 edition. The Reds in art, as in literature, they wrote, "would subvert or destroy all the recognized standards of art and literature by their Bolshevik methods".

The Heide Exhibi-

tion is a reflection on the importance of constructivism for many Australian artists.

Australian photographer Wolfgang Sievers' *The Gears* 1967 is rooted in the early constructivism. Although his work shows a movement away from the political implications of the revolution, the simplicity of the abstract constructivist forms remains. Max Dupain's *Pymont Silos* 1933 is a perfect example of the forms, shapes and shadows in the formal abstraction of constructivist art.

Sue Cramer argues that constructivism still has a particular relevance today because, due to developments in global politics, "people are looking at different ways to create a better world". This emphasis makes for a dynamic selection of artists internationally and from Australia who are developing the original aims of constructivism.

Constructivism though separate from the revolu-

tion has at its core the idea that anyone can be an artist and that art is a part of life.

Among the leaders of the Constructivist movement were painters such as Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin, the son of a maid and a shoemaker, and Gustav Klutis, from a peasant background. There's also the artist who invented photomontage, Pavel Filonov—the sixth son of a cab driver.

You don't have to know about the concepts or the history to just go along and immerse yourself in the beauty and the intriguing, cups, broaches, plates, film, paintings, clothes and sculptures.

The catalogue, which lists all 233 works, is a useful companion to the show. The call of the Avant-Garde: Constructivism and Australian Art is on at the Heide Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne from 5th of July till 8th October and is worth the visit.

Melanie Lazarow

THE ROOTS OF HOMOPHOBIA: WHY EQUALITY WON'T BRING LGBTI LIBERATION

Winning equal marriage will be a blow against bigotry, but homophobia and transphobia will persist until we get rid of capitalism and the family, write **Amy Thomas** and **James Supple**

WITHIN MONTHS, equal marriage could be law. It has been a long wait, 13 years since then Prime Minister John Howard changed the Marriage Act to declare that marriage could only be between a man and woman.

Support for equal marriage has grown steadily since then. We know that an overwhelming majority now back it, with 63 per cent in a recent Newspann saying they would vote “yes”.

This shift is part of a long trend of growing acceptance of LGBTI people’s rights, begun by the gay liberation movement of the late 1960s and 1970s in Australia. Much of the formal legal discrimination against LGBTI people has gone.

Winning equal marriage rights will be a blow against homophobia and those who oppose LGBTI rights in general. But it will not bring an end to it.

Equal marriage is already law in 26 countries. Among them is Donald Trump’s America, where a reactionary homophobe is President, who recently signed an order banning trans people from the military.

The wave of growing acceptance and visibility of LGBTI people over the last few decades sits alongside homophobia and transphobia that continues to blight people’s lives.

Sixteen per cent of LGBTI people between the ages of 16 and 27 say they have attempted suicide, as well as 42 per cent of transgender people, according to a new study by the Telethon Kids institute.

In 2012 LaTrobe Uni academics found that 61 per cent of young LGBTI people had been verbally abused, and 18 per cent physically abused because of their sexuality. At work, almost 40 per cent of LGBTI people still feel forced to hide their sexuality or gender identity.

The gutting of the Safe Schools program last year was another

example of the continuing bigotry. Malcolm Turnbull caved into a bigoted campaign by the hard right of his party and the Australian Christian Lobby who denounced Safe Schools as, “a radical program that encourages kids to explore gender theory and sexual practices”.

Behind this was the idea that being gay or trans is abnormal, and that openly discussing gender and sexuality might encourage more people to come out.

Teaching material featuring stories about how LGBTI people have come out, dealing with depression and accepting your sexuality and gender identity have been banned as supposedly “radical” and dangerous for children.

Its support for transgender kids was a target of particular attack, denounced by the likes of Tony Abbott as “social engineering”.

The reality is the anti-bullying program saves lives, with young LGBTI people six times more likely to attempt suicide than their peers.

This homophobia is not simply a product of reactionary ideas. The oppression of LGBTI people is structured into our society because it delivers enormous benefits to capitalism.

The family

Right-wing conservatives have always opposed equal marriage as part of an effort to reinforce conservative values, including the idea that LGBTI people and their relationships are inferior, and even some kind of threat to society.

At the time he made equal marriage illegal in 2004, then Prime Minister John Howard said it was necessary because marriage between a man and a woman was “a fundamental, bedrock institution of our society”. He claimed that, “marriage is not only the best emotional environment in which to raise children, but it is also the best

The importance of the family has long been an obsession for the political establishment

and most efficient social welfare system that mankind has ever devised”. This was part of defending the model of the heterosexual nuclear family, made up of a man, a woman and their children.

More recently, Liberal Senator Eric Abetz (who once said the decriminalisation of homosexuality in Tasmania would lead to incest) similarly wrote in Christian Democrat MP Fred Nile’s newsletter that equal marriage would “destroy the family—destroy the nation”.

The importance of the family has long been an obsession for the political establishment.

Former Labor Prime Minister Kevin Rudd too paid it homage as, “the incubator of human capital”. British Conservative leader David Cameron, who himself supported the introduction of equal marriage in the UK, declared that, “nothing matters more than the family”. This echoed Margaret Thatcher, who famously rejected all other collective organisations when she said, “there is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women, and there are families.”

Conservatives are obsessed with maintaining the nuclear family because it remains of key importance to capitalism as a whole.

Rise of capitalism

The efforts by the ruling class to promote the family developed out of the experience of the industrial revolution in Britain.

In the early industrial capitalism of the 1800s, men and women flooded into workplaces and cities. But businesses did not provide for the welfare of their workers, and infant mortality rates were so high that they threatened the ongoing survival of the workforce.

One 1842 report showed that life expectancy among factory workers was just 17 in Manchester, 16 in Bethnal Green in east London, and 15

in Liverpool.

As late as 1840 the majority of factory workers were women, who managers considered more obedient than male workers, and just as suited to the labour in the new factories.

The more far-sighted capitalists became concerned that action was needed to improve the health of the workforce and to ensure the reproduction of the next generation of labourers. Without this, their ability to continue making profits in the long term was under threat.

So the state stepped in, working very hard to establish the nuclear family. Laws were passed from 1842 banning women from underground mining work and in 1844 and 1847 restricting the hours they could work each day.

Alongside this went the promotion of Victorian ideals of family life, including an obsession with sexual restraint and a morality that looked with horror on any kind of sexuality outside the nuclear family.

The disintegration of the family among the working class, caused by the horrors of factory life, was seen as breeding immoral sexual activity and fuelling revolt.

The new emphasis on the family meant enforcing the role of women as caregivers in the home and men as breadwinners in the workforce, and justifying this on the basis of gender stereotypes.

Employers in both France and Britain made efforts to promote family life, control sexuality and encourage orthodox gender roles. Attempting to “naturalise” gender roles, and justify them scientifically, became an obsession of science.

In this climate, a new Criminal Law Amendment Act was passed in Britain in 1885 that increased the age of consent in an effort to crack down on prostitution, and also made any sexual acts between men a crime.

The trial of Oscar Wilde under the new laws in 1895 whipped up homophobic hysteria and popularised the idea that homosexuality was a “condition” found in a particular type of person.

In Australia, some of the earliest laws concerned marriage—and the criminalisation of homosexuality. The “family wage”, enshrined in Australia in the Harvester judgement of 1907 as one of the pillars of workplace law, was designed to establish a male wage high enough to support a wife and children.

Women were to stay home and take on the burden of raising the next



generation of workers. The ruling class has benefited because women perform this task within the family unpaid.

Today, unpaid labour in the home is worth around \$24 billion per year, according to the Bureau of Statistics. Without the family, the system would have to take on more of the costs of raising children itself through government spending on childcare, accommodation, cooking and cleaning. This is a threat to the rich and powerful because it would hit corporate profits.

There have been important changes since the era of the industrial revolution. Women now play a much greater role as part of the workforce.

There has also been a marked increase in single parent families, now making up one quarter of all households with children. But the financial pressure for single parents to stay within the nuclear family remains, with 23 per cent of all children in single parent families below the poverty line. Cuts to welfare payments for single parents in 2012 have made things harder.

Both this economic compulsion, laws that benefit couples, and the lack of alternative arrangements for bringing up children, all keep the family unit going.

We know from history that there isn't anything in human nature that predisposes us to nuclear families, monogamy, exclusive heterosexuality, or the gender expectations of capitalism.

Patriarchal families and the oppression of women only developed some 5000 to 6000 years ago follow-

Above: The nuclear family is not just product of 1950s values but remain key to capitalism's ability to secure the reproduction of the labour force

ing the rise of agriculture. The hunter gatherer societies in which humanity has spent most of its existence did not contain nuclear family structures.

Diverse forms of sexuality and gender expression were accepted in many previous societies.

Cross-gender transfer was common among the Indigenous people of the Americas—where someone born into one “gender” could transition into another. Two-spirit people of North America, the katoey of Thailand, or the hijra in India, are examples of “third genders” that have existed historically.

In Ancient Greece and Rome, sex between men was regarded as perfectly acceptable, within defined limits.

Maintaining gender roles and the nuclear family, and arguing that they represent some natural human state, remains very important to capitalism. LGBTI people threaten that, and so they remain—even if the era of widespread acceptance—a “problem” for capitalism.

It is also why the fight for equal marriage must be about more than just incorporating gay and lesbian couples into the institution of marriage. It must also take on the right's attacks on gender fluidity and the rights of trans people, because it is traditional gender roles that help keep homophobia and transphobia alive.

The fight against homophobia and transphobia must continue, even after we win equal marriage and full equal rights.

Equal marriage will help loosen their grip. But the fight for full liberation is still to be won.

TRUMP, CHINA AND THE NEW WORLD DISORDER

The decline of US power has led to increased imperialist tensions and war, with the rise of Donald Trump a new element of instability, writes **James Supple**

NORTH KOREA'S determination to develop nuclear weapons, and US President Donald Trump's continual threats against them, have produced a deepening stand-off.

The North's Kim Jong-un recognises that actually striking the US or its allies would be an act of suicide, with US retaliation certain to topple the regime.

But Trump's threat of "fire and the fury like the world has never seen" should they keep up their boasts about firing missiles only takes the two sides closer to actual war.

Malcolm Turnbull has added to the sabre rattling by pledging that Australia would join a war should North Korea attack the US.

The North Korean crisis is caught up in the game of imperialist rivalry, with China supporting the existence of the regime as a buffer state between the US troops in South Korea and its own territory.

Trump's election has added a new note of unpredictability and danger to these power games.

Imperialism

Tensions and conflicts between the world's powers are structured into the capitalist system.

The key to understanding this is the Marxist theory of imperialism pioneered by the Russian revolutionary Nikolai Bukharin around the time of the First World War.

It involves two distinct but intertwined forms of competition: economic competition between rival capitalist firms and geo-political competition between nation states.

Today's giant multinational corporations compete with each other for control of markets and resources on a global scale.

But the vast majority of them are still based in a single country, with a large portion of their product sales or production based there.

Companies use the assistance of the state in their home country to

advance their interests internationally through diplomacy and trade deals, backed ultimately by the threat of military force.

This economic competition spills over into a game of competition between rival powers like the US, China and Russia. But this competition between states also has its own logic which can extend beyond immediate economic motives, into control over territory and spheres of influence.

This means imperialist competition is not simply an issue of the strongest power, the US, attempting to dominate everyone else. Imperialism is a system where all the large states compete to advance their own distinct interests.

Although we live in an increasingly globalised world, the power of nation states has not disappeared, as some predicted. In fact the world has become more chaotic and conflict prone, with increased tensions between rival powers.

US decline

One reason for this is that the US, the world's dominant power, is in long-term economic decline relative to its rivals.

At the end of the Second World War the US was responsible for half of the world's manufacturing.

Its combined military and economic strength meant it could construct a global free trade system that benefited the US, forcing other countries to remove barriers against its goods.

But during the post-war boom West Germany and Japan in particular began to out-compete it, experiencing more rapid economic growth.

By the end of 1980s the US share of world manufacturing was down to 25 per cent.

The US maintains overwhelming military dominance, spending more than the next eight countries combined.

But the Afghanistan and Iraq wars

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China's share of the world economy has rocketed from 2 per cent in 1980 to around 17 per cent today

have also exposed the limits of its military power.

Invading Iraq was supposed to give the US control of the country's oil reserves and establish a reliable client government.

Instead Iraq's government is now dominated by Shia sectarian parties allied with Iran. US troops are still in Iraq 15 years on, and the Middle East wars have cost well over \$3 trillion.

The key challenges to US power today are from China and Russia.

Despite Trump's admiration for Russian President Vladimir Putin, and his view that they could work together, the clashes between the two powers continue.

Trump even launched airstrikes against Russia's ally, Syrian President Bashar Assad, something her predecessor Barack Obama avoided.

But Russia is essentially a regional power, able to assert itself militarily on its periphery, in places like Ukraine and Central Asia.

China poses a much more serious threat. Its population and rapid economic growth mean its power could potentially eclipse the US.

On one measure the Chinese economy is already larger than the US's. Its economy grew at an average of almost 10 per cent annually between 1978 and 2012, compared to US economic growth since 1976 of less than 3 per cent a year.

China's share of the world economy has rocketed from 2 per cent in 1980 to around 17 per cent today.

As China's economic power has grown, it has pushed against the arrangements established as result of US dominance of the Pacific since the Second World War.

We have seen this pattern before. The emergence of Germany as a major power in the early 20th century brought it into conflict with the division of the world into rival empires controlled by France and Britain. The result was two world wars.

China's growing economy has

made it much more important as an export market for other countries, particularly in East Asia. Australia and its mining exports are one example.

It is also playing an increasing role as an investor abroad, for instance in Africa, Pakistan and Egypt. According to the UN Committee and Trade and Development, “Chinese companies already own a large part of the FDI [investment] stock in extractive industries in countries such as Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan.”

Its “One Belt, One Road” project is similarly designed to draw countries along its trade routes into a closer relationship with China.

China’s rising economic strength has also encouraged a more assertive military stance, aimed at safeguarding its trade routes and pushing the US navy back from its coastline.

In the South China Sea its construction of military installations on disputed islands has drawn strong protests from the US.

Under President Obama the US responded with a “pivot to Asia”, moving 60 per cent of its naval assets into the region and attempting to encircle China through alliances with its Asian neighbours and India.

Trump and China

During his campaign, Trump promoted an “America first” policy based on abandoning free trade for protectionism.

Trump labelled Chinese trade terms with the US “the greatest theft in the history of the world”, and threatened to impose a 45 per cent tariff on Chinese imports.

But his pursuit of protectionism has been constrained by the hostility of the US ruling class. Steven Bannon, one of the key supporters of protectionism in the administration, has been forced out.

Trump did scrap the push for a Trans Pacific Partnership, a free trade deal designed to draw Asian countries closer to the US by offering them access to the US market. But there have been few other concrete moves towards greater protectionism.

He has also flirted with withdrawing from NAFTA, a free trade deal with Canada and Mexico, which he described as the “worst trade deal ever approved in this country”. Instead Trump has decided to renegotiate it, under pressure from US manufacturing, agricultural and other business interests.

His opposition to free trade, and other global deal like the Paris climate



Above: Trump has used wild and unpredictable language but his foreign policy has been largely conventional

Accord, has only isolated Trump on the world stage, for instance at the G20 summit in Berlin.

Nor has Trump’s belligerent America first approach worked in extracting concessions on trade with China.

He has had to recognise his need for China’s help to resolve the stand-off over North Korea. The US has few other options. Even North Korea’s conventional artillery is capable of killing hundreds of thousands of people in the South Korean capital of Seoul within days.

Trump has pursued a more aggressive and unpredictable approach to foreign policy.

But his actions have been remarkably conventional. After suggesting the US should pull out of the Middle East, he has reversed himself and backed an increase in troops in Afghanistan.

In a sense the North Korean crisis works to the US’s advantage, giving it an excuse to build up its military forces surrounding China.

Despite the tensions, a direct military clash between the US and China is unlikely. China’s immediate aims are deterring a US attack by boosting its defensive capabilities.

There is also considerable economic inter-dependence between the two powers. While the US has now run up a large debt to China, China benefits from this because it allows the US to keep buying Chinese products.

The US enjoys other advantages against China, in particular its alliances with Europe and Japan that have allowed it to incorporate the world’s two other major economic powerhouses.

But the decline in US power has opened a greater space for other powers to assert themselves. This applies not just to China but also a host of smaller players.

In Syria powers including Iran, Saudi Arabia and Turkey have all joined the scramble for influence.

Saudi Arabia’s power plays, for instance, have caused problems for its US ally. It has launched a blockade and threats targeting Qatar, host of the largest US airbase in the Middle East.

We now live in a world of increased conflicts and tensions between rival powers.

This means a greater likelihood of wars on the periphery of the great powers, as in Syria, the wider Middle East, and Africa.

The involvement of so many competing actors increases the danger of miscalculations, causing conflicts to spiral beyond what the powers intend. And it can feed and sustain bloody and destructive conflicts like the Syrian war.

The destruction and human misery of war remains hard-wired into capitalism. The only way to put an end to them is to get rid of the system behind them.

OUT FOR THREE MONTHS FOR NOTHING LATROBE VALLEY'S 1977 POWER STRIKE

Workers in Victoria's Latrobe Valley showed their clout when they shut down the power, writes **Tom Orsag**, but the support they needed to win was never mobilised

WHEN 2300 maintenance workers in Victoria's power stations went on strike in August 1977, they knew they were in for a fight.

The Liberals' Malcolm Fraser had been installed as Prime Minister in November 1975 after Gough Whitlam's sacking. He aimed to take on the unions and restore the profits of Australia's bosses.

The profit share of the economy had fallen from a traditional 13-15 per cent in the 1960s to 10 per cent by the early 1970s, as workers staged a record strike wave and pushed for higher wages.

When international recession came in 1974, crunching profits further, the bosses went into apoplexy. They wanted action to cut government services, restrain wages and break union power.

Fraser's first major attack was to destroy Medibank, the precursor to Medicare and one of Whitlam's key reforms, despite a one-day national general strike in June 1976.

He then used an interventionist Arbitration Commission, the equivalent of today's Fair Work Commission, to hold down wage rises. One by one, some of the strongest unions challenged these "wage indexation" guidelines, but failed to win higher pay rises.

The government wanted to make an example of a group of workers and inflict a serious defeat. It chose the Latrobe Valley power workers.

While the power workers' pay claim was large, it was undeniably just. They were \$20 a week behind their NSW and Queensland counterparts. And they were \$40-\$60 behind the same workers in private companies.

Worst off were the trades assistants. Some took home just \$109 a week—five dollars below the poverty line for a two-child family.

Maintenance workers lodged a

log of claims with their employer, the State Electricity Commission (SEC), in late March. With the state government under Liberal Premier Dick Hamer behind it, the SEC refused to negotiate.

Power workers responded by voting for overtime and availability bans at a mass meeting in June.

When the SEC stood down two workers for imposing the bans, 200 workers at their Morwell depot walked off the job. A mass meeting of maintenance workers from across the Valley's power stations then voted for a week-long strike. They agreed to put this on hold if the Arbitration Commission would hear their case promptly. By the end of August, after continual stalling, they had had enough.

They had four big strengths on their side. The Valley produced the vast bulk of Victoria's electricity. By turning off the power they could shut down one-third of Australian manufacturing.

They had strong workplace delegate organisation and were capable of running the dispute themselves.

Their distance 160 kilometres from Melbourne meant they had been forced to develop a certain self-reliance, and even suspicion of union officials from Melbourne as "outsiders".

The Valley, been built around the power industry and its coal mines, was intensely class conscious. Yalourn North, for example, was Australia's strongest Labor town—with around 85 per cent Labor voters.

One weakness was that the SEC had previously split off the key dredge operators from the rest of the workforce, by handing them improved pay and conditions.

Dredge operators could stop the power supply immediately by refusing to load coal to the power stations. Without them, the maintenance work-

By turning off the power they could shut down one-third of Australian manufacturing

ers had to strike for about six weeks before machinery broke down and power supplies were disrupted.

The SEC sat out the first six weeks hoping to starve the maintenance workers into giving up. Then it tried to use scab coal, and the Valley erupted into picketing outside power station entrances.

By week seven severe power restrictions hit Melbourne and employers had to stand down half a million workers.

Liberal Premier Dick Hamer threatened to declare a state of emergency and send strikers to jail.

But it was largely a bluff. The government was too scared that this would risk an even larger strike demanding their release, like that only eight years previously when union leader Clarrie O'Shea had gone to jail.

Union officials

The key problem was the power workers' union officials.

Even the most left-wing union officials retain a loyalty to Australian capitalism. They were nervous about a total shut down of one third of Australia's manufacturing, no matter how just the Valley workers' pay claim was.

And they were committed to electing a Labor government as the key to delivering change. The disruption of a major industrial confrontation, the workers were told, would damage Labor's chances in a snap election, tipped for November or December.

The Communist Party would write in their paper *Tribune* that power workers were, "playing right into Fraser's election plans."

The full-time trade union officials are professional negotiators between workers and employers.

Removed from the pressures of work under the bosses' control, they become conservatised by their role

turning off industrial action in order to strike deals.

Just as the strike was beginning to bite, John Halfpenny, the leader of their union the AMSWU, proposed a return to work at a shop stewards meeting. Not one of the 40-odd stewards present agreed.

In order to demobilise the strikers, Halfpenny set about doing two things.

He encouraged them to drive to Melbourne, not to build support in Australia's second biggest city, but to attend hearings at the Arbitration Commission.

The hours of tedious legal argument and stonewalling from the SEC would exhaust and begin to demoralise the stewards.

He also tried to create the feeling that there was no outside support and that public opinion was against them. The union officials claimed that stand downs caused by power outages would turn other workers against them, leaving them isolated and liable to defeat.

The geographical isolation of the Valley meant many of the workers and stewards did not know the depth of support they had around Australia until it was too late.

In fact the strike enjoyed widespread support. Many Victorian and interstate workplaces collected for the power workers' strike fund, raising \$200,000, an Australian record at the time.

Eventually Halfpenny managed to win over the stewards' secretary Sammy Armstrong.

Halfpenny, as well as Armstrong and a number of other stewards, were all members of the Communist Party of Australia (CPA). But Halfpenny's real loyalties were to the rest of the trade union officials, and through them to the Labor Party.

The union officials' main concern was not to win the dispute but to divert it into Arbitration. After nine weeks Bob Hawke, then head of the union movement as ACTU President, came up with a plan to run an "anomalies" case in the Arbitration Court.

Sammy Armstrong convinced first a stormy shop stewards meeting, then the rank and file, to return to work while it was heard.

The strikers went back to work for three days while three judges, on 15 times their pay, contemplated whether there were "anomalies" that justified a pay rise.

Both Hawke and Halfpenny would have settled for a token \$5-10 rise.



Above: Power workers picket out scab coal attempting to get to a power station

The judges, thinking the strike was finished, gave them nothing. Furious, the power workers walked out on strike again.

A major crisis was now brewing, with talk of the police occupying the Valley. Fraser offered the army to run the power stations.

Twenty of the more susceptible shop stewards were taken to meet ACTU President Bob Hawke, personally.

He told them bluntly other unionists would desert them if they kept causing stand-downs and demanded they go back to work in exchange for a new Arbitration "work value" case. According to Max Odgen, Education Officer of the AMSWU, Hawke told them, "We might have to withdraw our official ACTU support if you don't accept".

Hemmed in both by their own officials and the ACTU, the Valley shop stewards recommended a return to work.

Four months later the Arbitration Court awarded them pitiful pay rises of \$2 to \$5 a week, with 30 per cent of the workforce getting nothing at all. The strike had cost them \$2000 in lost wages.

Lessons

The dispute was a turning point. The level of strikes in Victoria in particular plunged, as workers drew the conclusion that winning pay rises was impossible.

It helped usher in a major downturn in industrial struggle from which workers in Australia are yet to recover.

The tragedy is that the strike could have been won. The industrial muscle, the shop-floor organisation and wider working class support was there. It was never fully mobilised. The trade union officials made no effort whatsoever to build outside solidarity or support.

This would have required a kind of organisation among the rank-and-file that was missing. A rank-and-file network, prepared to act independently of the union officials, could have sent strikers to tour workplaces across the country seeking solidarity and donations to reinforce strikers' morale.

The few stewards who did speak at meetings outside the Valley came back heartened.

When two stewards were finally sent to Newcastle and Wollongong to raise funds after 11 weeks on strike, they were so impressed by the support that they rushed a telegram to the final mass meeting, urging workers to stay out on strike.

The tiny handful of socialists and shop stewards who attempted to organise this were unable to carry it out alone. By its end, most of the Valley workers couldn't see any hope for winning the strike.

The union officials are willing to sacrifice working class interests to Labor's electoral needs, mixing in circles where they feel the influence of capitalist ideas and power more keenly than the workers they represent.

The Latrobe valley strike shows the need for rank-and-file organisation within the unions, backed by socialist organisation.



FIGHT FOR JOBS AND PAY AT UNI RAMPS UP

Above: Staff at Sydney University during their Open Day strike

By Vivian Honan

THE TERMINATION of the Enterprise Bargaining Agreement (EBA) at Murdoch University has sent a shock through the university system. The Fair Work decision gives university managements across the country a new weapon against staff and the NTEU—just the latest example of how the law is stacked against unions.

Management at Murdoch has agreed to maintain pay and conditions for six months, as talks on a new enterprise agreement continue. But if agreement is not reached in that time, salaries will fall as much as 39 per cent and superannuation, redundancy payouts and paid leave will all drop back to the basic Award levels.

The same tactics could be used in an effort to force staff at other universities into accepting worse EBAs. Liberal Education Minister, Simon Birmingham, crowed that the decision, “should be seized, and hopefully could be replicated elsewhere”.

Universities are always crying poor when it comes to staff wages and conditions. But last year, the 38 public university Vice-Chancellors around the country were paid an average salary package of \$890,000 each. They are getting rich as they use international students as cash-cows and work staff, often on casual contracts, to the bone.

A co-ordinated fightback is needed across the sector to win better conditions and to send a clear message to Fair Work and university management that the Murdoch ruling

will not be accepted.

Sydney University strikes

Staff at Sydney University are leading the way, kicking off a campaign of strikes in the fight to win a better EBA. A strike during the university Open Day in August was a huge success. Union members refused to staff stalls or give mini-lectures, forcing heads of schools and management to do much of the work themselves. Over 100 union members picketed major entrances to leaflet prospective students, and university shuttle buses were also stopped and leafleted.

Management then tried to cut the union out of negotiations and force a terrible agreement on staff by holding a snap online poll, asking employees if they wanted to directly vote on the university’s offer. They were embarrassed as staff made their opinion clear with a 61 per cent no vote.

A further strike is planned for 13 September as the campaign escalates. Management has refused to budge on four core issues.

The first is pay. Staff have put in extra hours to get a new curriculum ready that the university is eager to show off. Yet management wants us to accept a pay cut of 1.9 per cent over the life of the agreement.

Management also wants to introduce 220 teaching-only positions that would threaten academics’ right to research time. And they are also still refusing to provide sick leave and 17 per cent superannuation for casuals.

Job security is another core issue. With a restructure already in motion at Sydney, the no forced redundancies

clause is a particularly important one to win. Sydney College of the Arts (SCA) has been gutted. Staff in the Science Faculty say they are scared to take leave, fearing their position might disappear.

Redeployment rather than redundancy for all staff is very feasible considering there are more students and more work than ever before. Management claim that around 95 per cent of staff who want to stay on after a restructure are redeployed. But management prefers the “spill and fill” method of making whole work areas redundant and then inviting staff to re-apply for similar positions, sometimes on less pay.

Sector-wide fight

Restructures and mass redundancies are taking place across the sector, including at Western Sydney University (WSU) where 100 administration jobs are threatened, and in the education faculty at Melbourne University. Malcolm Turnbull’s \$2.8 billion university cuts, announced in this year’s budget, are resulting in job cuts and attacks on staff nationwide.

Given the Murdoch ruling, the restructures taking place, and the Liberals’ cuts, there is a real need for a co-ordinated fightback in the sector.

In NSW alone, UTS, Sydney University and WSU are all currently in EBA negotiations. A joint strike day, with demonstrations at other universities, would step up the pressure on management to sign better EBAs, and could start the fightback against the increasing attacks on funding and working conditions in the sector.

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Given the Murdoch ruling, restructures, and the Liberals’ cuts, there is a real need for a co-ordinated fightback

Solidarity