

# Solidarity

Issue No. 113 / April 2018

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# Break

THEIR

# RULES

# WE NEED

# THE RIGHT

# TO STRIKE

## PALESTINE

Israel shoots down  
Gaza protesters

## CHINA

Australia's rulers and  
the rising superpower

## FIRST WORLD WAR

Mutiny and rebellion on  
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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

**I was very concerned for Ms Topic. I didn't want her to hurt herself with that knife.**

NSW police Constable Tesoreiro explaining his concerns for a mentally unwell woman, Ms Topic, before he shot and killed her.

**From 1996... Pauline Hanson has been saying the unsayable, but it's often been the unsayable that we needed to hear.**

Tony Abbott fawns on Pauline Hanson

**We are not getting increases in our gross margin, so we are working ruthlessly to control and manage our wage costs... you have to be ruthless about wages**

Fred Harrison, chief executive of Ritchies, Australia's largest chain of independent supermarkets (most of them IGA branded), explaining how to keep up profits.

**It took the waterfront from the post-war arrangements that were very, very highly regulated into a modern economy.**

Greg Combet reflects on the outcome of the MUA dispute and why speeds up and productivity were great for Patrick's

**3 presidents are in my book: 2 help illustrate the values at the heart of ethical leadership; 1 serves as a counterpoint.**

James Comey sings the praises of George W Bush and Obama's "ethics"

**I mean we're not actually that far behind, truth be told**

Education Minister Simon Birmingham tries to put on a brave face after Turnbull notches up 30 Newspoll defeats

**Life is not fair.**

Tony Abbott muses on why he wasn't able to survive as leader after trailing for 30 Newspolls himself

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# INSIDE THE \$YSTEM

## BP: oil spill would boost economy

OIL AND gas giant BP argued that an oil spill in the Great Australian Bight would be economically beneficial to the local community as part of its bid to drill in a sensitive marine zone.

BP's plan to drill two wells off the South Australian coast raised fears of a potential disaster on the scale of the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. Documents obtained under freedom of information laws show that BP claimed that if such a disaster occurred, "in most instances, the increased activity associated with clean-up operations will be a welcome boost to local economies".

The statement was made in a March 2016 environment plan submitted to the National Offshore Petroleum Safety and Environmental Management Authority. The submission also said in regards to the environmental catastrophe of a large-scale diesel spill, "BP interprets this event to be socially acceptable".

## Rich Australians have biggest welfare bill

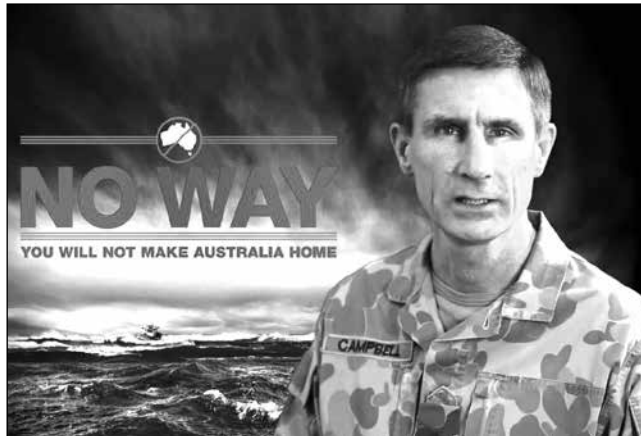
WELFARE FOR the wealthy represents the biggest slice of the government's welfare spending, a report commissioned by Anglicare Australia has found.

*The Cost of Privilege* report shows that an immense \$68 billion is spent every year on hand-outs to the rich. The cost vastly outstrips that of Newstart, disability support or the age pension.

Tax exemptions on private education and healthcare cost upwards of \$3 billion per year. Capital Gains Tax exemptions cost \$40 billion and superannuation concessions cost \$20 billion per year.

In contrast the cost of Newstart comes in at just \$11 billion a year. The report uses model households to illustrate its findings. A couple with two kids in private school, first class private health insurance and two investment properties will get \$99,708 in concessions from the taxpayer, or \$1917 per week. This is more than twice as much as a family with two kids on Newstart.

## Boat turnback commander promoted to Defence Chief



OPERATION SOVEREIGN Borders (OSB) Commander Angus Campbell has been promoted to Chief of the Defence Force. Campbell's track record of anti-refugee cruelty helped score him the promotion and its outrageous \$800,000 a year salary.

As OSB Commander Campbell was in charge of "stopping the boats" and turning back refugees to danger. He notoriously helped to protect the secrecy of the government's turn-backs by refusing to comment "in relation to on-water matters". In practice turn-backs meant violently cramming refugees into unsafe boats with no food or water and pushing them back towards Indonesia.

Turnbull poured praise on his new appointment, gushing about the "enormous trust and confidence" he has in Campbell. He was disgracefully echoed by Bill Shorten who welcomed Campbell's "well-deserved appointment".

## Goldman Sachs asks if curing patients a sustainable business

MULTINATIONAL INVESTMENT bank Goldman Sachs—Malcolm Turnbull's former employer—has lamented the fact that curing patients is unprofitable for biotech companies. Its 10 April report titled "The Genome Revolution" asks "Is curing patients a sustainable business model?"

Considering the potential commercial impact of new "one shot cure" gene therapies Analyst Salveen Richter writes: "While this proposition carries tremendous value for patients and society, it could represent a challenge for genome medicine developers looking for sustained cash flow."

Richter uses hepatitis C treatments developed by Gilead Sciences as a case in point. Cure rates of more than 90 per cent have shrunk the company's sales for the treatment from \$16 billion in 2015 to what is estimated to be less than \$5.1 billion this year.

He said, "In the case of infectious diseases such as hepatitis C, curing existing patients also decreases the number of carriers able to transmit the virus to new patients, thus the incident pool also declines... Where an incident pool remains stable (eg, in cancer) the potential for a cure poses less risk to the sustainability of a franchise."

Research and writing by Adam Adelpour

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

## International students living in library

IN MARCH Charles Stuart University's Port Macquarie campus evicted six international students found living in a 24-hour library. The students had to travel from Sydney to Port Macquarie to study and were unable to find accommodation.

Arjun Mathilakath Madathil, of the Council of International Students Australia, said he had heard many similar stories. "Some students stay at hostels or AirBnBs when they first get here", he told the ABC, "but once that is done, they become homeless and they feel safer to stay on campus, or in a campus library".

He said international students were often targeted by housing scams where they pay money and are promised a house on arrival in Australia, but once they arrive, "they realise there's nothing there, the room or house doesn't exist."

## 1 per cent to own two-thirds of wealth by 2030

A REPORT by the House of Commons library, the research arm of the British parliament, has found the richest 1 per cent of the world's population will own two-thirds of global wealth by 2030. They currently own around 50 per cent but their share is set to keep increasing, according to the research. Based on current trends by 2030 the total net worth of the 1 per cent will be \$391 trillion, more than double the \$180 trillion they control now.

## \$90 billion lost to gas companies

AUSTRALIA WOULD be \$90 billion better off, had it adopted European-style taxes on oil and gas production. Carlos Boué, of the Oxford Institute for Energy Studies, found our effective tax rate on oil and gas was 21 per cent, compared to 35 per cent in Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway and Germany.

# EDITORIAL

## Don't wait for Labor: we need to break the rules

MALCOLM TURNBULL is a walking dead man. As Turnbull notched up his 30<sup>th</sup> Newspoll defeat in a row, the jockeying for the leadership of the Liberal Party after Turnbull goes stepped up a notch.

Former deputy Prime Minister Barnaby Joyce nominated Christmas as the deadline for changing leaders if the polls don't move. Seven front-benchers declared their interest in taking over from Turnbull, including Peter Dutton, the darling of the right-wing.

The Coalition is split wide open over coal and renewable energy. While Turnbull pushes to keep the Liddell power station going, a right-wing cabal of Tony Abbott and 19 other conservative warriors has launched the "Monash Forum" to campaign for the government to build new coal power stations.

Almost every other day Dutton launches another racist campaign.

In February he opened the door to cutting immigration, blaming it for "overcrowded" cities and claiming it had already "come back considerably" under the Coalition, "and if we have to bring it back further... that is what we will do".

Turnbull was left looking like an idiot when he claimed he hadn't rebuffed any proposal to cut migration by 20,000. Dutton contradicted Turnbull, saying the cuts had been discussed.

Then it came out that Dutton was already cutting migration levels using his regulation powers.

Meanwhile Dutton and other Liberal MPs are still backing the racist marches to give "special attention" to white South African farmers (see p10).

Turnbull hopes to buy a bounce in the opinion polls with the May budget. Both Turnbull and Morrison are talking up personal tax cuts and infrastructure spending.

Turnbull is still trying to get the massive \$65 billion corporate tax cuts for the bosses through the Senate, while hundreds of thousands of low-paid workers face a further cut to penalty rates from July this year.

Every day that Turnbull is in office means more handouts for the bosses and more cuts for us, while they try to use racism to divide us.

The ACTU is beginning its Change the Rules campaign, claiming 25 rallies in April and May are kicking it off. But 24 of them are the usual May Day marches.



**Above: Unionists outside the Change the Rules delegates meeting in Melbourne—the only one held so far nationwide**

ACTU Secretary Sally McManus told ABC's *Insiders*, "enterprise bargaining is failing... because working people don't have the power to negotiate fair pay rises". The criticism of enterprise bargaining is a welcome recognition that there is a problem with it.

But while the ACTU is pushing for the right to bargain across a whole sector or industry, the more fundamental problem is that enterprise bargaining restricts the right to strike to a "protected period". It also requires ballots to authorise industrial action and for employers to be given advanced notice of any action.

### Right to strike

The restrictions on the "right to strike" limit our ability to fight for decent pay and conditions, whether at enterprise or industry level. Without the ability to take effective industrial action, unions have no bargaining power against employers.

There are countless disputes where obeying the law has crippled effective union action. At Oaky North in Queensland, workers spent 230 days locked out before they went back to work with little to show for it. The company ran the mine with a scab workforce the whole time.

Fear of the law stopped the union calling solidarity action at Glencore's other mines across the state. At Esso in Victoria, workers have now spent

300 days on the picket line.

The unrestricted right to strike has to be at the centre of the campaign to Change the Rules. But, so far, it is barely mentioned by the ACTU.

We are not going to Change the Rules, by playing by the rules. So far, apart from the May Day rallies, the campaign is limited to social media and TV ads.

We need an industrial campaign of national stoppages like the Your Rights at Work campaign that drove Howard out of office in 2007.

We need it to get rid of Turnbull. We need it to tell Labor that tinkering with the laws is not enough. But we also need it because workers can't wait for the next election. Bosses are using anti-union laws and the Fair Work Commission to cancel agreements and put a gun to workers' heads.

Workers at Esso, Australian Aluminium Finishing and at the Port Kembla Coal Terminal are just a few places that are having to deal with the anti-union laws now. The bosses' rules will have to be broken.

An angry mass delegates' meeting in Melbourne on 17 April pulled 2000 delegates together to vote for a stop-work rally on 9 May. All unions need to back the call to stop work.

We need stopwork rallies in every city. The power to beat Turnbull and the bosses is in the streets and workplaces.

.....  
**Almost every other day Dutton launches another racist campaign**

## Victorian unionists ready to fight—but what about the right to strike?

By Lucy Honan

TWO THOUSAND unionists filled Melbourne Town Hall and spilled out onto Swanston Street for the “Change the Rules” delegates meeting on 17 April.

The mood for a fightback against the Liberals and for workers’ rights was electric. But we will have to keep pushing for the right to strike to be at the centre of Change the Rules if we are to land any blows.

Troy Carter, one of the Esso workers locked out for 300 days, opened the meeting. He explained how current rules, “allowed our company to legally make 200 workers redundant... and the very next day offered our jobs back to us with a 30-40 per cent pay cut”.

He got a standing ovation after he talked about the toll the lock out was



Above: A capacity crowd of at least 1600 crammed into the delegates meeting, with 200 locked outside

### Bosses use termination threat to force Oaky North miners back to work

By Mark Gillespie

WORKERS AT Glencore’s Oaky North mine have voted 70 per cent in favour of a deal they’d rejected in January by over 90 per cent.

This vote ended the bitter 230 day lockout. But the outcome was not good for workers.

The deal includes an 8.24 per cent wage rise over four years, a freeze on accommodation costs and maintains bonus arrangements. But the dispute was never about money. Earlier the workforce had volunteered to go without a wage rise if they could maintain their current conditions.

The central issue was the increasing use of casuals and contractors that undermine job security. As mine worker Brian Lederhose told the ABC; “It’s happening at every other pit in the Bowen Basin. Everyone’s trying to use contractors because it’s easy to supplement and get rid of when they don’t need them anymore”.

Glencore managed to keep the mine operating during this dispute using staff and contractors. Every morning hundreds passed the union’s picket. Glencore will continue engaging these contractors.

This isn’t just a loss for the Oaky North workers but for everyone in the industry. Other companies will

follow Glencore’s lead pit by pit in the next round of bargaining and the union will remain on the defensive.

At every step the union fought within the law but this held them back. While the use of contractors and casuals is an industry wide issue, secondary boycott laws and the threat of being sued for massive damages ensured the union did not respond with industry wide action.

The contract workforce too were prevented from joining the action by the law even though they have an interest in seeing more permanency established.

But even these coercive secondary boycott laws weren’t enough for Glencore. They also turned to what employers call the “nuclear option” and applied to the Fair Work Commission to have the expired enterprise agreement terminated.

If successful all the wages and conditions the workers had accumulated over 25 years of enterprise bargaining would have been striped back to the much inferior Black Coal Industry Award allowing Glencore to retrench on the cheap.

This threat, combined with the union officials’ support for the January deal, wore the workers down. If the union movement is ever going to get back onto the front foot we have to discuss defying the law.

taking on his family.

Union leaders encouraged donations to the fighting fund and visits to the picket. But they stopped short of calling for solidarity strike action to pressure the company, or even explaining why it shows the need for sympathy strikes to be legal.

### Campaign plan

ACTU Secretary Sally McManus listed the many ways the rules are stacked against workers: labour hire loopholes, casualisation, pay inequality, restrictions on what workers can bargain about, and finally (to huge applause) the limits on our right to strike. But the strategy for winning change did not match the scale of the problem.

She called on delegates to “explain to your workplace what the Change the Rules campaign is about” in order “to move public opinion”.

From there the aim was “to change the government, to kick out Malcolm Turnbull” and get a Labor government into power—and finally to push new laws through the Senate that support workers, close legal loopholes and “re-empower the industrial empire”.

The ban on the Sydney train drivers’ strike has made it clearer than ever that “independent umpires” like the Fair Work Commission are stacked against workers.

Labor is proposing some limited changes to the law. But it is not talking about an unrestricted right to strike. McManus told the meeting that, “the rot set in with Mr Johnny Howard”.

But in fact significant restrictions

.....  
**There was extraordinary enthusiasm for the 9 May rally. But this isn’t clearly called as an all-unions stop work**

# Sydney meeting pushes for right to strike campaign



were introduced by Paul Keating when his Labor government brought in enterprise bargaining in 1993. And most of Howard's changes were not repealed by the Rudd and Gillard Labor governments.

Solidarity members and other rank-and-file union activists leafletting the meeting with a motion to put the unrestricted "Right to Strike" at the centre of Change the Rules. This garnered huge support in conversations with delegates. Every union activist has an experience of struggle that was frustrated by the legal restrictions on striking.

Some delegates still think that Change the Rules is about the right to strike. Her famous defence of the CFMEU's illegal action, arguing that "bad laws must be broken", has made McManus a symbol of the right to strike cause.

However, McManus only referred to it once in her speech, and the right to strike is not included in any of the material delegates were given for workplaces.

There was extraordinary enthusiasm for the weekday 9 May rally. But this isn't clearly called as an all-unions stop work.

While construction unions have a tradition of walking off the job for weekday rallies, rank-and-file teachers, nurses, public servants and other workers will need to push our union leaderships for stop work action to attend.

That's the sort of action needed for a defiant mass industrial campaign to win the right to strike.

**Above: The packed out right to strike meeting at the MUA offices in Sydney**

JUST OVER 100 people packed into the Maritime Union's Sydney office on 14 April to discuss the right to strike.

The meeting brought together groups of union members from the CFMEU, RTBU, NTEU, MUA, Teachers Federation and other unions.

The construction unions' NSW President, Rita Mallia, told the meeting, "workers have won everything that's worth anything by taking industrial action".

The CFMEU has been targeted with special laws and the industrial police of the Australian Building and Construction Commission to try to stop industrial action on sites.

"You can't sneeze on a building site without breaking these laws", Rita said.

"Just this week we had a company take us to the Fair Work Commission over our refusal to take down Eureka flags and CFMEU flags. We told them whatever you say they're not going to come down."

"We've got to repeal all the penal powers against all strikes", Chris White, former Secretary of the South Australian Trades and Labour Council, told the meeting.

Detailing how restrictive current laws are, he explained that, "If we had an unrestricted right to strike... existing employer legal sanctions to stop strikes and fine striking unionists would not be available."

"Unions should be free to organise and strike over any form of bargaining: enterprise, industry, national

bargains, supply chains, all of this has to be lawful."

Workers should be, "free to vote to strike democratically at any time", he argued.

## Rail strike

The catalyst for the meeting was the Fair Work Commission's decision earlier this year against Sydney train workers.

An RTBU delegate explained how, "recently we had our right to strike taken away".

"We jumped through the Un-Fair Work Commission's hoops and we gave Sydney trains and NSW trains notice, that if they didn't come to table with a fair offer we would strike for 24 hours."

"It took the Commissioner 30 minutes after hearing both sides of the story to make his decision."

One key reason was that the strike would "cause significant damage to the economy". As the delegate put it, "last time I checked that was the point of a strike."

"It was a sad day not just for the RTBU but for workers everywhere", she said.

"Instead of buying into the fallacy that we have no power, what we should have done was gone out anyway. The only instrument that the worker has to demonstrate their power is to withdraw your labour. And if we can't withdraw our labour, we're all slaves."

"The only way forward is to stop playing their games and by their rules because we're never going to win like that, they've made sure of it."

"The system is broken, we need to defy it and smash it and start again."

The meeting passed a motion saying it "supports the unrestricted right to strike to be a central demand of the ACTU's Change the Rules campaign".

A motion was distributed to move at union branches with the same demand, and for an industrial campaign to Change the Rules, with a combined unions delegates meeting and stop-work rallies.

The meeting laid the basis to start a renewed campaign for the right to strike.

For copies of the motion email [erima.dall@gmail.com](mailto:erima.dall@gmail.com) or message the Right to Strike page on Facebook

**"The only way forward is to stop playing their games and by their rules because we're never going to win like that"**  
—RTBU delegate

# Don't blame immigration for overcrowding and failing services

By James Supple

TONY ABBOTT and Peter Dutton have begun campaigning to cut immigration, whipping up a scare about population growth.

Dutton kicked this off by saying Australia's cities were "overcrowded" and blaming immigration levels for "gridlocked traffic in the mornings" and the state of hospital services.

Abbott joined in, using a speech at the Sydney Institute to blame immigration and population growth for "unaffordable housing and stagnant wages". He demanded immigration be cut almost in half by 80,000.

But, unlike most of Abbott's hard right policy ideas, this has drawn some wider support. NSW Labor leader Luke Foley backed him, saying Sydney was, "groaning under the weight of a surging population". And Greens leader Richard Di Natale said he would be "very happy" to debate immigration levels because of the need to consider "environmental limits".

Di Natale pointed out, accurately enough, that business wants high immigration levels in order to drive economic growth. But high immigration levels themselves are not a problem. It is the way governments and business have refused to pay for the infrastructure to accommodate this growth.

## Scapegoating

Calls to reduce immigration are no more than racist scapegoating. Failing infrastructure and unaffordable housing in Sydney and Melbourne are caused by government policies.

Blaming population growth or immigration for the state of our cities is no different from Dutton's racist efforts to say refugees "steal Aussie jobs" and use up welfare spending. It diverts the blame from those in government and big business who are really responsible for these problems.

And it comes at the same time as the government is launching a wider racist attack, trying to revive legislation imposing a more difficult English language test and proof that migrants support "Australian values" to gain citizenship.

Efforts by the Liberals to blame housing prices on migrants are particularly gross hypocrisy. It is rich investors who have driven prices to obscene levels, as a result of the negative gearing and capital gains



**Above: Overcrowded train services are a result of failure of government planning, not simply immigration**

tax discounts the Liberals themselves introduced. Following their introduction in 1999, house prices shot up as investors bought up second, third or fifth houses.

And the number of vacant homes has increased to 11.2 per cent of all houses around the country—an increase of 200,000 unoccupied homes in ten years.

## Government failure

Governments of all stripes are to blame for the failure on infrastructure, transport and health.

The addiction to neo-liberalism has seen governments reduce tax on big business, squeezing the revenue it has to spend. Australia is one of the lowest taxing nations in the OECD club of rich nations as a proportion of the economy. Turnbull wants to cut corporate tax further.

As a result governments are relying on privatisation to fund new infrastructure. The NSW Liberal government is funding the WestConnex toll road and other projects through privatising the power industry. It has also privatised the operation of ferries, buses, the Land Titles Office, ports and disability services.

Privatisation leads to worse services and job cuts as private operators try to boost profits.

There has also been a failure in urban planning. Australian cities have a low population density compared to cities in Europe. Transport planning academic Michiel Bliemer explains that, "the population density in London (80 people per hectare) and Paris (133 people per hectare) is significant-

ly higher than Sydney (36 people per hectare)". They are designed assuming a reliance on cars.

Australia's cities lack adequate public transport, according to the Centre of Urban Research. Only 35 per cent of homes in Melbourne, Adelaide and Sydney are within 400 metres of a public transport service running at least once every half hour during weekdays, and half that or less in Perth, Brisbane, Canberra and Hobart. And services are clustered in inner city areas.

A 2014 study by the Department of Infrastructure estimated that 89 per cent of urban travel in Australia's cities was by car. Yet there is no plan to shift this. Governments continue to invest in massive road building projects like WestConnex in Sydney.

Governments have known the extent of the population increases coming yet have failed to build the infrastructure needed.

Abbott and a number of others have denounced immigration as surging in the last year, with net migration growing to 245,400, around 50,000 higher than the year before. But net migration is not at a set level, because it includes temporary entrants such as international students, as well as the impact of those leaving the country.

The level of permanent migration has remained at around 190,000 for the last six years.

Blaming population growth threatens to further entrench the racism that has been pushed relentlessly by both major parties and the mainstream media against refugees, Muslims and migrants. It is the wrong target.

**.....**  
**Governments are to blame for the failure on infrastructure, transport and health**



# Police violence product of an institution rotten to the core

By Paddy Gibson

IN EARLY April, *The Age* in Melbourne ran a series of stories, including CCTV footage, exposing graphic, unprovoked violence by police during arrests in 2016 and 2017.

In the first story, police bash a disability pensioner. The man is held on the ground by six officers, struck repeatedly, pepper sprayed and humiliated by officers, who then laugh while they film themselves spraying him in the face with a hose.

The second story shows footage of the aftermath of an arrest of a Sudanese man holding up a chemist. Despite being handcuffed and securely in custody, police continued to bash the man in the head and stomp on his back. The final story featured an Indigenous man in Bendigo being thrown headfirst by police into a cell door. He was knocked out, bleeding profusely from the face.

*The Age* called for improved mechanisms for holding police to account, a call supported by the Law Institute of Victoria and legal advocates. The paper ran lengthy interviews with victims and lawyers despairing at the ineffective complaint system, which relies on a Police Professional Standards Command run entirely by existing police.

This system is worse than a farce. Assistant Police Commissioner Brett Guerin, the head of the Professional Standards Command, resigned in February after being exposed for making explicitly racist and sexist posts on social media under a pseudonym.

The comments targeted African people in particular, including one which said:

“I’m afraid this is what happens when the lash is abolished. The jigaboo runs riot and out of control. The ‘boo needs the lash... Deep, deep down the ‘boo knows the lash provides the governance and stability.”

Guerin’s position placed him in charge of overseeing—and dismissing—a large volume of complaints against racist policing made by African communities in Victoria.

Chief Commissioner Graham Ashton was quick to argue that Guerin’s behaviour was, “not consistent with our values”.

But there were numerous complaints about Guerin’s racism before he was appointed to the position. His ideas express perfectly the daily



**Above: Victoria Police beat a disability pensioner during his arrest**

practice of racially motivated violence and harassment meted out by the Victorian police.

## Rotten barrel

Violence directed at the poor and oppressed is part of the role of the police. Their central function is to defend a deeply unjust social order, protecting the sanctity of property in a capitalist system with extreme disparities of wealth and power.

Modern policing was born in Britain during the industrial revolution to force compliance amongst the newly formed working class. They attacked workers’ demonstrations and broke up picket lines—and still do so today.

But the police are also the only institution that exists to tackle violent crime, or investigate when children or family members go missing. This explains the mainstream idea that police exist to ensure everyone’s safety.

But police also spend most of their time dealing with the homeless, people suffering mental illness or living with poverty and violence. This explains the brutal police mindset, which refuses to tolerate any challenge to authority and dehumanises people marginalised under capitalism.

In Australia, police forces were created to discipline convicts and other lower classes. They also had a foundational role carrying out massacres of Aboriginal people, driving them off the land to make way for pastoral capitalism. Police have been central to upholding Aboriginal oppression ever since, enforcing racist Protection laws,

confining people on reserves and forcibly removing children.

In the NT, police have special powers to enter Aboriginal homes and vehicles without a warrant. And in many areas across Australia, the majority of police time and resources are spent targeting Aboriginal communities. Almost a third of people in prison nationwide are Aboriginal, despite making up only 2.5 per cent of the population. Aboriginal children are the majority in youth detention centres.

Black communities have also been in the forefront of resistance to police brutality. After a death in custody in 2004, protests on Palm Island burnt down the police station and court house. This forced the prosecution of killer cop Chris Hurley. Aboriginal Legal Services established in the early 1970s to deal with police harassment were the forerunner of a broader movement of community legal centres offering free representation.

When confronted with the revelations of brutality in *The Age*, Victorian Police Minister Lisa Neville defended the police involved, saying, “Policing is confronting... it’s not always pretty when you arrest someone”. The Andrews government is pushing ahead to give police new riot control equipment, semi-automatic weapons and discretionary powers.

This will bolster the confidence of police to mete out even more abuse. These problems won’t be solved by simply identifying so called “bad apples” through better accountability mechanisms. The entire barrel is rotten.

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**The Andrews government is giving police new riot control equipment, semi-automatic weapons and powers**

# White South African Farmers—Racists on the march

By Ian Rintoul

IF YOU wanted an example of how the respectable racism at the top of society shapes racism more broadly and encourages the far right, look no further than the campaign for white South African farmers being waged by the likes of Peter Dutton, Alan Tudge and WA Liberal MP Andrew Hastie.

Peter Dutton’s declaration that white South African farmers should get “special attention” and be fast tracked for refugee or humanitarian visas sparked right-wing rallies in Brisbane and Perth. The next rally for the white farmers is planned for Adelaide.

In Brisbane, in late March, the pro-white farmer rally was fronted by Liberal backbencher Andrew Laming and former One Nation, now independent, Senator Fraser Anning.

Around 2000 rallied for the white farmers in Perth on 8 April. Two days later, Hastie and Tudge both spoke at a forum supporting them. On Friday, around 50 people supported the attempt of the far right Australian Liberty Alliance to lodge a petition supporting the white farmers at Julie Bishop’s Perth office.

Dutton’s comments oozed racism, as he declared support for the white farmers who will “abide by our laws, integrate into our society, work hard,” while ignoring the hundreds of thousands of Rohingya farmers being ethnically cleansed from Myanmar.

Dutton’s comment that white farmers needed help from a “civilised country like ours” was atrocious. There is nothing “civilised” about a country in which the first people are imprisoned at a greater rate than South Africa under apartheid; to say nothing of the government’s treatment of refugees.

## No persecution

Dutton has already been slapped down by his own department in 2015, when it rejected the refugee claim of one white farmer and another white South African, finding that, “there was little evidence of racially motivated crime against white farmers or white South Africans.”

South Africa’s own statistics show, “that you are far more likely to be murdered as a young black South African living in a high-risk area.” White South African males are less likely to



**Above: Liberals MPs Andrew Hastie and Ian Goodenough, who spoke at the rally in support of white South African farmers in Perth**

fall victim to murder than black South African males.

The situation of white farmers in South Africa is a legacy of apartheid. The 1913 Natives’ Land Act gave ownership of 87 per cent of land to Europeans, confining the black majority to just 13 per cent of the entire country.

Today, white farmers control 73 per cent of arable land although only 8 per cent of the population is white, and even fewer are farmers.

Dutton’s campaign is out-and-out racism to both pander to specific constituencies in Liberal electorates and to also whip up the general level of racism in the run up to the federal election.

“PFP” (Packing for Perth) has become a commonplace among white South Africans. The number of white South Africans living in Australia has jumped by 75 per cent to 181,000 between 2006 and 2016.

After making timid noises about maintaining Australia’s non-discriminatory humanitarian intake, Turnbull and Bishop have let the racists run unimpeded.

Citizenship Minister Alan Tudge was still telling Sky News that the Coalition “may well be able to take some in.” And despite the facts, Hastie was still doing interviews about “persecuted” white farmers.

Not surprisingly, *The Australian*, the newspaper that campaigned to drive Aboriginal people from remote communities, is devoting page after page to boosting the white South Afri-

can farmers—and the right wing of the Liberal Party.

There is another sickeningly hypocritical element to Dutton’s campaign. Under present laws, white South Africans could not be accepted as refugees.

There would have to be special laws for them—an ironic echo of the “Whites Only” signs of apartheid.

Even if there was evidence of persecution on racial grounds, Australian law says that if a white farmer can reasonably relocate to another part of the country, then the case should be refused.

Many Afghan Hazaras are currently being rejected precisely because the immigration department says it is possible for them to relocate to other parts of Afghanistan. Even if they are found to be a refugee because of the dangers in one part of Afghanistan, Hazaras are being told they can live in Kabul.

There is a mutual appeal between the white farmers and the racist elite in Australia. The origins of both Australia and South Africa as white colonial settler states embedded a deep racism in the structure of both states.

The furore about the white farmers has lifted the lid on a particularly ugly current of White Australian racism that Dutton hankers for.

It is a stark reminder that there is a system that fuels the racism that the Liberals spew out over Indigenous people, refugees, migrants and Muslims. We need to fight the racism, and their system.

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**There would have to be special laws for the South Africans to qualify them for refugee status**

# Di Natale at the press club—which way forward for The Greens?

By Ian Rintoul

THE GREENS' latest proposal to legalise adult cannabis use will be widely welcomed. It is a very modest, sensible, and safe proposal. But it can't hide the fact that The Greens are in deep turmoil.

In New South Wales, the right wing challenge to David Shoebridge is underway. Cate Faehrmann, Di Natale's former chief of staff, has successfully used the Federal Court to allow her to nominate for the parliamentary position being vacated by Mehreen Faruqi (when she replaces Lee Rhiannon).

In South Australia, Robert Simms is challenging Sarah Hanson-Young for the top Senate spot. While, in Victoria, The Greens have begun their internal inquiry into the failed Batman by-election campaign to find the leakers responsible for, "backgrounding and leaking of sensitive and confidential party matters". That won't be pretty.

Then Richard Di Natale landed himself alongside Tony Abbott, re-opening the debate about population by accepting that the argument to cut immigration "was worthy".

The struggle in the NSW Greens is the sharpest and will be the most decisive. But they are all indicative of the malaise that is engulfing The Greens nationally.

Is the future of the party based on games in parliament or does the party explicitly shift left to focus on the unions, social movements and the struggle outside parliament?

## Press club speech

No doubt Richard Di Natale thought that his March National Press Club speech could re-invigorate The Greens and position them a little more to the left.

But Di Natale made his determination to put parliamentary manoeuvres at the centre of Greens politics very clear: "We know that negotiating to improve government legislation can come at a political cost." His efforts to strike deals with Turnbull over legislation like Gonski 2.0 have cost them support. But the cost is one that Di Natale willingly pays in the hope of one day being a serious parliamentary player.

Di Natale put forward two main things in his speech, a Universal Basic Income (UBI) and a People's Bank. They are designed to be headline, and



**Above: Richard Di Natale outlines his vision for The Greens at the National Press Club**

hopefully vote, catchers. But the demands reveal a completely top down approach to politics. Neither demand connects with any existing struggle or is designed to generate one.

Nobody believes that The Greens could actually implement such policies. So they seem to be just pie-in-sky demands that isolate them from the people they should be trying to connect with. Di Natale is left floundering.

The proposal for the People's Bank was designed to appear radical yet respectable at the same time. It was pitched as something that would, "inject some real competition into the banking sector", around mortgages. It didn't sound like anything that was going to end the rip-offs and the multi-billion dollar profits of the "Big Four".

The UBI proposal was panned by the right-wing press. But the fundamental problem is that it is completely removed from the kind of immediate demands that could strike a chord—like boosting Newstart, the single parent benefit and the aged pension.

While The Greens may not be in any position to actually increase the dole themselves, posing such concrete demands can pressure the Labor Party and point to the kind of reforms that would make a substantial difference to those forced to survive on welfare.

Similarly, at a time when a strong

argument can be made to re-regulate and re-nationalise power generation to stop the rampant profiteering by the private power companies, Di Natale's proposal was to, "re-nationalise parts of Australia's electricity system, starting with the critical interconnectors between states." Of course they should be re-nationalised but the demand does not connect with the urgency of bringing down power prices.

The most striking aspect of the speech is that Di Natale made no mention of the issues that are front and centre of Change the Rules—the industrial demands that are affecting millions of workers. Di Natale's speech came a week after ACTU Secretary Sally McManus's turn at the press club.

Di Natale had a fantastic opportunity to connect with Labor's voting base and identify The Greens with the working class campaign that is going to dominate Australian politics between now and the election. The gap between what workers need and what Labor will offer is a gap that The Greens could fill with radical proposals well to the left of Labor.

The limitations of Di Natale's electoral vision for the future of the party are increasingly being displayed. Rather than looking to the centre, The Greens need to look to the left. The fight in NSW has ramifications for the whole party and the left in Australia.

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**Di Natale made no mention of the issues that are front and centre of Change the Rules**

# Teachers strike wave spreads across three more US states

By Lucy Honan

THE TEACHER rebellion that started in West Virginia has now swept across three more US states. After a decade of effective wage cuts and public school starvation, they are showing that even in the heart of Republican-controlled Trump country, resistance can win.

West Virginia teachers won a 5 per cent pay rise for all public employees after a nine day illegal strike that defied union officials' attempts to compromise and end the strike early. Teachers in Arizona, Kentucky and Oklahoma are learning the lessons.

In April, rank-and-file teacher unionists in Arizona organised rallies, sit-ins and #RedForEd protests, where teachers wore red to school on Wednesdays to demand a 20 per cent pay rise and public school funding. To avoid planned walk-offs, Governor Doug Ducey gave in and promised a net 20 per cent pay rise by 2020 and \$1 billion of extra school funding. Since 2008, Arizona has slashed state funding for schools by 37 per cent. But the rank-and-file are pushing to go ahead with the strike.

"It's important to note that this is not legislation", said Dylan Wegela, a seventh-grade teacher and an organiser of the Arizona Educators United grassroots coalition. West Virginia teachers did not back down until legislation was passed, having learned from previous experience that promises were worthless unless they became law.

In Kentucky, teachers have used co-ordinated "sick-outs" to close schools and stage mass rallies. On Friday, legislators overturned the Republican governor's veto of a budget that increases public education spending, funded by a \$480 million tax increase. This was a partial victory for the teachers who had shut down 30 school districts with strikes, sit-ins and rallies. But the new funding comes from regressive consumption tax increases.

Teachers in Oklahoma staged a nine day walkout, with up to 50,000 converging on the state's capital. But on Thursday 12 April, Oklahoma's education union ended the walkout, saying lawmakers "won't budge an inch", and encouraging supporters to "turn our attention to the election season".

The \$479 million in extra school funding won is a fraction of the \$3.3 billion the union had demanded.



**Above: Teachers in Arizona are on the verge of winning pay rises and increases to education funding**

Many teachers are insisting they will not go back to work. Rank-and-file teacher organiser, Alberto Morejohn, who runs the influential Facebook page "Oklahoma Teacher Walkout—The Time Is Now!" is calling for the strikes to continue.

The "education spring" strike wave has broken open the possibilities of resistance across the US. Their

defiance of anti-strike rules, and taking the struggle into their own hands are a lesson for Australian teachers and unionists too.

As John Waldron, a Social Studies teacher from Oklahoma, put it, "Right now, we've got a lot of momentum. We're not just walking out for ourselves anymore—we're walking for everybody."

## Strikes hit France as Macron attacks rail workers

MASS STRIKES and escalating student unrest are creating a crisis for French president Emmanuel Macron's neo-liberal assault.

Rail workers have begun a series of national strikes, walking out for two out of every five days for the next three months—a total of 36 strike days. Services have been hit very hard with only about one high-speed train in five running.

The government wants to clear the way for privatisation, close unprofitable lines, raise fares and abolish the present rail workers' contract. This gives them some protection against redundancies and allows earlier retirement than most workers.

If Macron beats the rail workers—regarded as the best-organised section of French workers—then he thinks it will show he can defeat any group of workers.

Rail strikers aren't on their own. Refuse workers are holding intermittent strikes in many parts of France as they battle for national conditions. Air France workers and airport baggage handlers are striking over

pay. Electricity and gas workers are fighting privatisation.

Meanwhile students are occupying and protesting against plans to make it harder to go to university.

Macron was elected as the great new "centrist" hope last year. Now he is enthusiastically tearing into workers, boosting military spending and making racist laws even harsher.

One of his key weapons is division between workers. His message is that rail workers have better conditions than others, so they must be brought down to a lower level. Teachers have more holidays than others, so they must be cut.

Oliver Besancenot of the socialist NPA said, "If as a worker, employed, unemployed or retired, we begin to think that another worker, simply because he or she has something that we do not have, is a privileged person, then sooner or later, we will be the victim of the same kind of treatment."

The union leaders must not back off from confronting Macron.

**Charlie Kimber**  
Socialist Worker UK

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**Teachers in Oklahoma staged a nine day walkout, with up to 50,000 converging on the state's capital**

# Palestinian marchers massacred in brutal Israeli assault

By James Supple

PALESTINIANS IN Gaza have defied a murderous Israeli assault as they stage protests marking 70 years of dispossession.

Israeli soldiers have repeatedly opened fire on demonstrations with live ammunition and rubber bullets. At least 33 Palestinians have been killed and almost 3000 injured.

Despite mainstream media claims that the protests led to “clashes” not a single Israeli has been injured during the protests, nor has the border fence Israel claims to be defending been breached during the protests. Palestinian protesters with no more than stones and burning tyres have been shot by Israeli snipers in a calculated assault.

Mohammed Sabbagh said he watched as his younger brother was shot. “He didn’t do anything—he was standing next to me,” he said. “He asked me for a cigarette. I gave him a lit one, he took about two puffs and then a bullet shot him in the head and went out the other side.

“I carried him to the ambulance and he was dead.”

After the UN Human Rights Commissioner condemned its actions as “deplorable killings”, Israeli defence minister Avigdor Liberman dismissed the outcry. Israeli troops “did what had to be done” Lieberman said, adding, “All of our troops deserve a medal.”

Following the initial demonstration the Israeli Defence Force admitted the killings were intentional, tweeting that every shot fired was “accurate and measured, and we know where every bullet landed”. This was later deleted.

The Israeli massacres are the bloodiest since its last war on Gaza in 2014, which killed 2251 Palestinians.

Tens of thousands of Palestinians have joined the six weeks of protest, dubbed the Great March of Return, to demand the right to return to land they were forced from in 1948.

They are also calling for an end to Israel’s crippling blockade of the Gaza Strip. UN Middle East envoy Nickolay Mladenov warned in February that Gaza was on the verge of “total collapse”.

Since 2007 it has suffered shortages of electricity and drinking water, and its economy has been all but destroyed. Around 80 per cent of



**Above: Palestinians try to carry a protesters shot by the Israelis to safety**

the population survive on humanitarian aid.

## Dispossession

The protests will conclude on the day of the Nakba or “catastrophe”—this year marking 70 years since 750,000 Palestinians were expelled from their homes during the creation of the state of Israel.

Over 60 per cent of Gaza’s two million strong population are refugees or their direct descendants created during 1948 and subsequent expulsions.

The Israeli state was founded on violence and ethnic cleansing against the Arab population of Palestine. Large-scale Zionist settlement began in the early 20th century, as Jewish settlers from Europe arrived with the aim of establishing an exclusively Jewish state.

Zionist settlement was supported by British imperialism, which took control of the region after the First World War.

In November 1947 the UN decided on a partition plan carving the area up between a Jewish state and a Palestinian state. The division was grossly unfair—the Jewish population were given 55 per cent of the area, even though they were only one third of the population and owned 6 per cent of the land.

But the Zionists were determined to seize even more land.

According to Israeli historian Ilan Pappé, “Between February 1947 and March 1948, a final plan for ethnic

cleansing was prepared.

“The Zionist leadership defined 80 per cent of Palestine (Israel today without the West Bank) as the space for the future state.

“This was an area in which one million Palestinians lived next to 600,000 Jews. The idea was to uproot as many Palestinians as possible.”

This was achieved through a campaign of terror. On 9 April two Jewish militias attacked the village of Deir Yassin. They moved from house to house, throwing grenades into each one before shooting anyone left alive. At least 100 Palestinians were massacred, half of them women and children. This was only one of dozens of massacres at villages such as Saliha, Lydda, Abu Shusha and al-Dawayima.

Israel seized control of the West Bank, East Jerusalem, Gaza and the Golan Heights in another war in 1967.

The process of colonisation remains ongoing. Even since the “peace process” began in 1993, the number of Israeli settlers in the West Bank has grown from 100,000 to 435,000 living in 150 illegal settlements. Most are built on land simply stolen from Palestinian villages.

Donald Trump’s recognition of Jerusalem as Israel’s capital has all but ended the prospect of a two-state solution, since East Jerusalem was meant to be set aside for the Palestinians.

It makes the goal of a single, democratic state, where Jews and Arabs live together with equal rights, the only realistic solution.

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**Tens of thousands of Palestinians have joined the protest, dubbed the Great March of Return**

# NEW SINEWS OF WORKING CLASS POWER

American socialist Kim Moody's book on the restructuring of capital argues that the working class, far from disappearing, has renewed potential power, writes **Mark L Thomas**.

## On New Terrain: How Capital is Reshaping the Battleground of Class War By Kim Moody, Haymarket Books

THE DEFEATS suffered by the working class movement from the late 1970s onwards created a new common sense that saw the increased internationalisation of the world economy as having fragmented and dissolved the working class.

This train of argument held that as millions of the former industrial jobs were lost, the new landscape of work that emerged was made up of smaller workplaces, ever rising numbers of insecure workers and footloose employers able to shift production elsewhere with relative ease.

Kim Moody's new book tears apart this picture and presents a very different account that points to the immense potential for the renewal of working class power.

Moody dismisses claims that major increases in more tenuous employment now shape the world of work, creating a "precarariat" of insecure, casualised workers displacing more permanent, stable forms of work.

Moody's response is captured by the section heading "Precarious work: growth, but less than you thought". Temporary agency workers, those on short-term contracts, on-call work, bogus self-employment and involuntary part-time work made up 15.2 per cent of the American workforce in 1995 on the figures of the US Bureau of Labor Studies and 15.5 per cent

a decade later. This leaves most workers in the US in permanent employment.

Nor are workers constantly leaving or changing their jobs. Average job tenure, the time someone stays in the same job, has changed little since the early 1970s.

And the neo-liberal era has not seen workplaces getting smaller: "In 2008 altogether 24.7 million workers were employed in workplaces of 500 or more or 20 per cent of the employed workforce compared to 16.5 million, also 20 per cent, in 1986. Those employed in workplaces of a thousand or more rose to 16.5 million, or 14 per cent, of the total workforce in 2008 from 10.7 million, or 13 per cent, in 1986."

### Intensification

While the number of workers in manufacturing has fallen—due to rising productivity and not the offshoring of production and rising imports, as Trump (and many US union leaders) would have it—workers in the service sector have become concentrated in bigger workplaces and subject to greater levels of exploitation and work intensification.

Moody argues that the sharpening competition between rival capitals that marks the neo-liberal era initially saw large-scale restructuring, involving mass layoffs, destruction of some firms and the break-up of others. This splintered the old patterns of employment, including some of the centres of union power built in previous upsurges of working class struggle.

But the logic of

competition also created a counter-tendency. It drove a new round of consolidation—or the concentration and centralisation of capitals as Marx described it—with fewer and larger firms dominating industry after industry, increasingly tied together by just-in-time supply chains organised through "logistics clusters" highly vulnerable to disruption.

Such new concentrations of capital have also created new concentrations of workers with the potential to launch a new wave of working class militancy.

Moody also argues that the reorganisation of capital in the US has witnessed a shift since the mid-1990s away from the creation of multi-industry corporate "conglomerates" to consolidation within single industries, which are more favourable targets for union organising.

The US car industry led the way here. In the 1980s and early 1990s the "Big Three" car producers (General Motors, Ford and Chrysler) declined, ending car assembly on the East and West Coasts, shifting production to the US Mid-West with historically weaker centres of union organisation.

Parts suppliers then tended to cluster around these locations and, in turn, went through a process of consolidation with the number of auto components firms falling by as much as 80 per cent over two decades, creating an industry dominated by fewer and larger firms.

### Restructuring

By the start of the 21st century this process of consolidation spread across US industry. So

meat processing and packing saw drastic restructuring in the 1980s with a wave of takeovers and plant closures; by 2011 the biggest four companies controlled 75 per cent of meat production.

And similar patterns of brutal shakeouts followed by new rounds of consolidation took place in the US steel industry (where two companies now dominate domestic production); logistics (with five firms dominating rail freight and employing 80 per cent of the industry's workers, while UPS and FedEx alone employ 40 per cent of the US's 1.7 million trucking and delivery workers); the airline industry (where ten major firms a decade ago have been reduced to four) and telecommunications (with four firms controlling 90 per cent of the market).

Such trends also applied to service industries. Nearly three-quarters of former community hospitals are now part of large urban corporate chains, employing 4.5 million workers and with the average workforce size in community hospitals increased. A similar picture can be seen in US nursing care homes and the hotel industry, while the rise of Wal-Mart in the 1990s and of online businesses such as Amazon in the 2000s drove a major concentration into the hands of a few giant firms in the retail industry.

This process has also driven the reorganisation of supply chains and the "logistics revolution". New logistics clusters composed of "transportation hubs, massive warehouses and distribution centres, aerotropolises, sea

ports, intermodal yards, and sophisticated technology" developed, employing thousands of workers and either in, or next to, large urban centres.

Such "distribution cities" also have huge concentrations of workers. FedEx's superhub in Memphis, Tennessee, is the "largest cargo airport in the world" as well as a rail and trucking hub that employs 220,000 workers.

Such workers are under enormous pressure—subject to constant orders to speed up delivery times and minimise the time goods spend, unsold, in storage. But they also possess enormous potential power to disrupt US capital's crucial supply chains.

Far from being footloose, this provides, in Moody's words, "a more or less stationary target for unionisation and collective action". Indeed, Moody suggests that "logistics workers have at least as much leverage in the economy of today as auto-workers did in the 1970s".

Moody also makes confronting racism central to realising potential working class power. The US working class is more ethnically diverse today than four decades ago.

Moody not only insists the working class still exists but that its structural capacity to organise and paralyse production has grown as the restructuring and consolidation of capital has created a "new terrain" for the class struggle. Such a case is highly welcome to socialists who argue that workers possess the collective power to not just challenge capital but to break it.

**Abridged from Socialist Review UK**

# AUSTRALIA AND THE RISE OF CHINA

China's rise poses a dilemma for Australia's rulers, writes **David Glanz**. The left needs to oppose both imperialist powers, as well as Australia's own imperialist bullying

DEPENDING ON how you measure it, China is either the world's biggest economy or hot on the heels of the current leader, the US. Some economists (including the IMF and the World Bank) have China at number one, adjusted for purchasing power in local prices. On more conventional measures others have the US in the lead—but, given China's greater rate of growth, probably for only another decade or so.

Either way, the global balance of power is very definitely tipping. China's economic strength is increasingly being translated into influence, hard and soft. As Lenin put it: "Politics is the most concentrated expression of economics"—ultimately economic power is measured in trade, political and cultural influence, but also in submarines, fighter jets and aircraft carriers.

This poses a major strategic challenge for the Australian ruling class. For the first 150 years after invasion, the colonies and then the federated nation state looked to Britain for support, guidance and, ultimately, military backing in its efforts to dominate the region. World War Two made it painfully clear that the British Empire was in terminal decline.

On 27 December 1941, Labor Prime Minister John Curtin declared: "Without any inhibitions of any kind, I make it quite clear that Australia looks to America, free of any pangs as to our traditional links of kinship with the United Kingdom."

The failure of the British to defend Singapore from the Japanese in February 1942, followed by the bombing of Darwin, drove home the point. The alliance with Britain was secondary – from now on, Australia's alliance with the US took centre stage and remains there today.

The US emerged from the war the world's pre-eminent industrial and military power. In 1960, it generated 40 per cent of global gross domestic



**Above: Malcolm Turnbull takes a photo with Chinese Premier Xi Jinping, US President Donald Trump and Vietnamese leader Trần Đại Quang**

product. It bankrolled the post-war reconstruction of western Europe, ran a military machine with more than 800 foreign military bases, and provoked and won a nuclear arms race with Russia that helped bring down the Soviet Union in 1991.

Today, its share of global GDP is down by about half. While its military spending is still greater than that of the next eight military powers combined, defeats in Afghanistan and Iraq starkly show the limitations on its power—a fact underlined by the way the US has played second fiddle to Russia in Syria.

China under Xi Jinping is beginning to flex its muscles with greater confidence. Notably, it has advanced its claim to the bulk of the South China Sea by building military bases on atolls that are also variously claimed by Vietnam, the Philippines, Brunei, Malaysia or Taiwan. It now boasts its first overseas military base—in Djibouti, in east Africa and near the mouth of the Red Sea.

To the consternation of the Aus-

tralian foreign affairs establishment, Fairfax media reported on 10 April that China was looking to establish a base on Vanuatu in the South Pacific, Australia's "back yard"—a subject I'll return to later.

China's economic initiatives are strikingly bold. It is committing potentially \$10 trillion for its One Belt One Road initiative (OBOR, sometimes referred to as the Belt and Road Initiative or BRI), an amount which would dwarf the US investment in western Europe after World War Two.

At the heart of OBOR is the building of infrastructure for land and maritime trade—highways, high-speed railways and ports, involving 65 countries.

China is using surplus capital to project its power beyond its immediate region and to open up new supplies of minerals and other resources and new markets into which to sell.

This is a pattern that emerged in the last quarter of the 19th century as corporations, first in Britain, and then its main competitors, began to exhaust

## FEATURES

the possibilities for domestic growth. Strong nation states, defending the interests of their biggest corporations, began to expand globally in a stage of capitalism known as imperialism.

The process was characterised by two major features—rivalry between the imperialist powers and the economic and/or military subjugation of less developed economies in Africa, Asia and Latin America—rivalry that led to two world wars and countless other conflicts.

At each stage, the dominant power virtuously espoused “free trade”—in other words, no obstacles to it dominating markets. First it was Britain, then the US and now the mantle has passed to China. In a sign of its relative decline, the US under Trump is now instituting tariffs and risking a trade war.

### Ruling class debate

The world is becoming a more unstable and dangerous place. How is the Australian ruling class reacting?

There are a range of responses, all of which reflect that while Australia is firmly embedded into the US military and intelligence systems, China is Australia’s biggest trade and investment partner, with two-way trade in goods and services worth more than \$735 billion in 2016-17. China takes almost 33 per cent of Australia’s exports (primarily iron and coal) and provides 22 per cent of Australian imports (mainly telecom equipment, computers and furniture).

At one end of the spectrum are those who identify China as, essentially, the enemy. Academic Clive Hamilton has become their flagbearer, using his book, *Silent Invasion: China’s Influence in Australia*, to argue for a rejection of Beijing’s influence and for resistance to “betrayal by our elites”.

“There is a widespread view,” he writes, “that China’s rise is unstoppable, that our economy’s fate is in Beijing’s hands, and that China’s size means it must dominate Asia. So it’s best if we go along with this historical inevitability, because we don’t really have any choice, and it won’t be such a bad thing anyway.

“So we pursue ‘friendship and co-operation’, accept the flood of money, sell our assets, jump when China’s diplomats shout, look the other way when our technology is funnelled offshore, recruit Beijing’s agents into our political system, stay silent on human rights abuses, and sacrifice basic values like free and open enquiry in our universities.”

*Silent Invasion* is a throwback to a 1950s-style anti-communism, complete with lurid tales of apparent traitors, fifth columnists and dupes.

Sydney University academic David Brophy has been one of its most effective critics, pointing out that while, “the idea that Australia’s sovereignty is threatened by a vast Chinese conspiracy has been a popular talking point ... many of Australia’s China experts reject this narrative. More than that, they see it as divisive and dangerous”.

But while it’s easy to point out the one-sided nature of Hamilton’s argument, which by conflating the Chinese government with Australians of Chinese heritage risks feeding the existing racist narrative around Chinese who buy houses and farmland, he does highlight how sections of the Australian ruling class are indeed open to moving closer to China.

Bob Carr, for instance, former Premier of NSW and Minister for Foreign Affairs, is quoted as saying that Australia must leave behind its “sentimentality” for the US alliance, reduce its ties with an America in decline and focus on China’s enormous importance for the Australian economy.

Another Labor heavyweight, Sam Dastyari, damaged his political career by parroting China’s line on the South China Sea and seeking money from a pro-Beijing Chinese-Australian magnate before destroying it when he was caught warning another rich Chinese-Australian benefactor that his phone was probably being bugged by Australian intelligence.

There are others for whom the lure of profits from trading with Australia is decisive. Hedge fund billionaire Michael Hintze urged Australian business “to be more nuanced about our relationship and engagement with China”. If there were any doubt about what he meant, he told the same audience in Melbourne: “Follow the money.”

### US alliance

The majority of the ruling class is firmly committed to the US alliance. Responding to the claims about a Chinese base on Vanuatu, Malcolm Turnbull made clear that Australia would not accept such a development.

“The maintenance of peace and stability in the Pacific is of utmost importance to us, to Australia—it’s one of the key priorities of the foreign policy white paper,” he said.

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### The logic of regional tension is to try to draw the US in closer while at the same time boosting Australia’s military capability

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“We would view with great concern the establishment of any foreign military bases in those Pacific island countries and neighbours of ours.”

By foreign, he meant Chinese. There are no objections to US bases in Guam, Hawaii, Japan, South Korea and, of course, Australia. The French have a military presence in New Caledonia, again without Australian complaint.

The election of Trump means some in the ruling class are open to adjusting Australia’s stance while remaining in the US alliance.

ANU academic Michael Wesley, writing in the journal *Australian Foreign Affairs*, sums up the balancing act: “For the past quarter-century, Canberra’s policy has been to support American primacy and US efforts to prevent the rise of rivals. Trump’s election forces us ... to acknowledge the overwhelming reality that our future will increasingly be shaped by Beijing, not by Washington ...

“Australia’s alliance with the US undoubtedly gives us both the capabilities and the confidence to push back against those of Beijing’s activities we object to.

“This will become harder as China’s power grows relative to America’s; that is why we have started exploring our capabilities and techniques of asserting our interests.”

So the logic of regional tension is to try to draw the US in closer while at the same time boosting Australia’s military capability.

The Gillard Labor government welcomed US marines being stationed in Darwin as part of Obama’s “pivot to Asia”. Trump seemed to be critical of Obama’s pivot, arguing with countries, including Japan, that, “we can no longer be taken advantage of, or enter into a one-sided deal where the United States gets nothing in return”. But that hasn’t stopped the number of marines in each deployment in Australia increasing from 1250 to 1500.

The Turnbull government is going further, committing to increasing annual military spending from \$32 billion to \$59 billion by 2026 (2 per cent of GDP) and buying 12 new submarines and a fleet of frigates.

The Liberals have declared they want to see Australia become one of the top ten defence exporters by 2028—up from 20th biggest arms exporter today.

Turnbull is also exploring new alliances that might help restrict China’s advance. In January he visited Japan and agreed to promoting “deeper and



broader defence cooperation” including exercises, operations, capacity building and visits by the military forces of the two countries.

The two countries are involved, alongside the US and India, in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (known as the Quad). It has lain semi-dormant for a while—now Australia and Japan are re-committing to the loose alliance.

The Liberals have welcomed Indonesia’s suggestion that Australia join ASEAN—the Association of Southeast Asian Nations—many of whose members are acutely concerned about China’s expansion.

The government is also considering a “freedom of navigation” exercise in the South China Sea—following on from the US example of sailing warships close to the atolls that have been fortified by China.

### Balancing

Yet at the same time as toughening up their position on the military and diplomatic fronts, the ruling class knows the relationship with China, especially the economic relationship, has to be nurtured.

Turnbull has signalled that he is open to China joining a new version of the Trans-Pacific Partnership “free trade deal” now that Trump has dumped US involvement.

The Liberals under Tony Abbott took Australia into the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, an initiative by China to rival the Asian Development Bank and the World Bank. Australia committed \$3.7 billion to the bank’s founding capital, making it the sixth largest supporter out of the 61 member nations. The US declined to join.

And both Liberal and Labor have flagged interest in participating in China’s investment plans, in particular in concert with Australia’s development plans for the north of the continent.

Shadow Treasurer Chris Bowen said: “We will come to office if we win the next election with an open mind as to how Australia and China can best collaborate on the Belt and Road Initiative, with a clear-eyed approach to our respective national interests.”

The balancing act between economic collaboration and diplomatic and military rivalry is being constantly recalibrated. A Chinese company was allowed to buy a 99-year lease for the port of Darwin but Chinese telecom giant Huawei was blocked



**Above: A US aircraft carrier group, one of its key tools for power projection in the Pacific**

from tendering for the NBN and may be barred from taking part in the roll-out of Australia’s 5G mobile phone network.

The President of China, Xi Jinping, was warmly welcomed to Australia in November 2014 and addressed parliament. But Turnbull late last year tabled new legislation aimed at curbing foreign interference in Australia, including a ban on foreign donations to political parties and activist groups, and tougher rules for those lobbying on behalf of foreign interests—clearly aimed at Chinese influence.

This agonising will continue for years to come. Australia is caught between its traditional ally, which is in gradual decline, and a rising regional power, on its way to becoming a world power. For the Australian ruling class there is no easy answer.

For socialists, however, the position is much clearer. We are against both imperialisms—American and Chinese—and the tensions between them that fuel the risk of war. Workers have no interests in the success of either power bloc.

We also reject Australia’s sub-imperialism—its bullyboy treatment of Papua New Guinea and the South Pa-

cific island states, its growing militarism and its willingness to participate in US-led wars from Afghanistan to Iraq. We oppose the military alliance of Australia and the US and call for all US bases in Australia to be closed, and US troops to be withdrawn.

Rather, we are for solidarity with the workers and oppressed fighting back in the US and China—in the belly of both beasts.

We are with Black Lives Matter, the #MeToo movement, the West Virginian striking teachers and all those inspired by them, and with the millions on the streets against Trump.

And we are with the factory workers in Guangzhou, making luxury handbags for the US fashion label Michael Kors, whose eight-day strike in March ended in victory, with the workers at Apple’s supplier factory, Wuxi Green Point, who blockaded the factory over sackings, and with the peasants rioting over land theft and corruption.

As we edge back towards the kind of bipolar world system that dominated so much of the 20th century, and while Australia’s rulers worry about their imperialist alliances, our slogan should be: “Neither Washington nor Beijing, but international socialism.”

# THE WESTERN FRONT HOW WAR TURNED INTO REVOLT

As efforts to celebrate the role of Australian troops on the Western Front ramp up, **Lachlan Marshall** looks at how the horror of war gave rise to mutiny and revolution

AS THE centenary of the signing of the armistice approaches we can expect to see a flurry of nationalist myths about the heroism that Australian troops displayed on the Western Front.

According to Tony Abbott, “As a nation we have not given sufficient attention to our role on the Western Front where Australian forces made a disproportionate contribution to what proved to be, in the end, a great victory.”

One hundred years ago Australian troops joined Allied forces to defeat the last major German offensive, begun in March 1918.

To mark the occasion, the government is opening a new John Monash centre at the site of the battle of Villers-Bretonneux in France on Anzac Day, at a cost of \$100 million.

But the war was a horrendous crime organised by Europe’s ruling classes in pursuit of empire and profit. The horror and senseless loss of life produced not just blind sacrifice but mutinies and rebellions among Allied troops beginning in 1917, and the eruption of revolution in Russia. In Germany it was revolution which finally put an end to the slaughter in 1918.

There is nothing in the mindless slaughter of the Western Front to celebrate. Millions died there in the most deadly and protracted battles of the war.

And there was nothing noble in the behaviour of Australian troops on the battlefield. Military historian Anthony MaccDougall, although a believer in the troops’ “valour”, claims that by 1918, “the Diggers had gained a reputation for ruthlessness in battle, for shooting prisoners—something of which English soldiers were seldom guilty.”

The Battle of the Somme has become synonymous with senseless carnage and death. On the first day

alone in July 1916, 21,392 British soldiers were killed. Around 23,000 Australians were killed in the space of a few days.

By the time fighting ended in November, 600,000 Allied soldiers and 650,000 Germans had died. For all this sacrifice, battle lines barely moved.

Another 300,000 died that year at Verdun, the longest battle of the war, again with neither side gaining any territory. The battle did succeed in wiping nine towns off the map.

Verdun saw the first use of flame throwers, as well as poison gas by both sides.

One soldier recorded in his diary: “Humanity is mad. It must be mad to do what it is doing. What a massacre! What scenes of horror and carnage! I cannot find words to translate my impressions. Hell cannot be so terrible. Men are mad!”

The top brass thought nothing of condemning millions of people to death. In the planning of the Battle of Passchendaele General Haig allowed for 100,000 deaths a month, and Lord Milner, a member of the War Cabinet, thought that, “to get the enemy away from the Belgian coast was worth half a million men.”

It was impossible to expose soldiers to this level of trauma without provoking resistance. Sometimes it was individual, such as soldiers self-harming so they could be sent home. Throughout the war 600 French soldiers were executed for deliberately shooting themselves. Others fled to neutral Spain.

Eventually mass mutinies would explode.

## **Soviets on the Western Front**

Russia was first to rise up in revolution on 23 February 1917, when women workers began protesting

By 9 May 1917 half of the French army were refusing to fight, with soldiers shouting “down with the war.”

bread shortages. Soldiers sent to put down the rising joined the revolution instead and the Tsar abdicated on 2 March.

News of the Russian revolution was greeted with peace demonstrations in Britain, Germany and across Europe. The revolution helped inspire a wave of mutinies and revolts amongst soldiers on both sides of the conflict.

Class divisions were stark in all the armies. Troops knew that while they died in the mud the generals were safe and warm, eating turtle soup.

In early 1917 50,000 Italian troops mutinied. On the German side, a seaman wrote that “A deep gulf has arisen between the officers and the men. The men are filled with undying hatred for the officers and the war.”

The incompetence of the generals and their indifference to the mass slaughter they unleashed produced deep disgust.

## **Aisne offensive**

In April 1917 French General Robert Nivelle planned a major attack designed to break the stalemate. But the battle plans fell into the hands of the Germans. French soldiers walked into a bloodbath. Refusing to admit any error Nivelle continued to send soldiers to their deaths.

For the French soldiers this was the final straw. On 29 April a battalion refused orders to return to the front. The mutiny was contained briefly after the ringleaders were arrested and shot. But by 9 May half of the French army were refusing to fight, with soldiers singing the Internationale and shouting “down with the war.”

The mutiny lasted two months. The presence of Russian troops instilled a spirit of revolution and soviets were formed by both French and Russian troops.

French soldiers drew up these demands: “We want peace... We’ve had enough of the war and we want the politicians to know it. When we go into the trenches we will plant a white flag on the parapet. The Germans will do the same and we will not fight until the peace is signed.”

The mutiny was eventually put down through a combination of repression and concessions: Nivelle was replaced with General Petain, who promised an end to the suicidal offensives which had led to massive loss of life, while 3500 soldiers were court martialled, 550 sentenced to death and 49 executed.

### Etaples mutiny

Later in the year there was another major mutiny among NZ, British and Australian soldiers. On 9 September 1917 a New Zealander was arrested for overstaying his leave, prompting a crowd of 2000 to surround the police station that held their comrade. Five days of insubordination followed, with military police evacuated while soldiers held meetings and demonstrations.

General Asser, sent to Etaples to restore order, recalled, “Discipline ceased to exist. Reinforcements would not get into their teams and a great mob of about 10,000 broke out then and in subsequent evenings and marched into Paris Plage. The place seemed as if there was a big strike on, crowds loafing about and so on.”

Eventually the generals gathered enough troops from elsewhere to bring the mutiny to an end. Over 50 soldiers were court-martialled, three imprisoned for mutiny and one executed by firing squad.

But the British ruling class realised that they had to offer concessions. So in October soldiers in Flanders received a pay rise and the notorious training grounds known as “bull rings” were shut down.

### German revolution

The war finally ended in November 1918, not simply through events on the battlefield, but when mutiny and revolution spread through Germany to the point where it could no longer fight.

In early 1918 there were mass strikes against the war in Vienna and Budapest within German ally Austria-Hungary. Workers’ councils were elected in Vienna. A strike by two million workers followed across Germany itself, beginning in Berlin.

The Bolshevik Party, after secur-



**Above: Australian soldiers on the Western Front wearing respirators to protect from chemical weapons**

ing the support of a majority in the Russian soviets, seized power in October 1917 and withdrew Russia from the war. German workers’ delegates met in Berlin and demanded that the government accept the peace proposals of the Bolshevik government.

With the Russians no longer fighting, the German High Command shifted its focus to the Western Front, launching a number of offensives.

But many soldiers had simply had enough and were starting to see the sense in the revolutionaries’ slogan, “the main enemy is at home”. One officer told General Ludendorff that, “he thought he had Russian Bolsheviks under him, not German soldiers.”

The German army experienced mass desertions, described as “the hidden military strike.” Between mid-1917 and the armistice over two million German soldiers deserted.

Even though it was clear that the war was lost for Germany, the naval high command decided to launch a last desperate attack on the British. In late October 1918 sailors in Wilhelmshaven refused orders to embark on what was a suicide mission. The sailors were arrested but thousands of other sailors and port workers in Kiel joined demonstrations, sparking the German revolution.

By early November the military authorities were falling like dominoes as workers’ and soldiers’ councils took over across Germany.

On 9 November a general strike

began in Berlin. Reliable units sent to put down the uprising in Berlin joined it instead, and the Kaiser was forced to flee to Holland.

The revolutionary Karl Liebknecht, who had just been released from prison, led a throng of workers and soldiers to the imperial palace where they declared “the socialist republic and the world revolution.” Two days later on 11 November the armistice was signed.

This year the Australian ruling class will commemorate the “sacrifice” “our” soldiers made in defeating Germany 100 years ago.

But the end of the war saw many of the rank-and-file soldiers and working people at home rise in revolt against the rulers responsible for the bloodshed and suffering on a scale never seen before in history. They recognised that the workers of other countries were not their enemies, but rather that “the main enemy is at home.”

It is this anti-war tradition of mutiny, protest and revolution that we should celebrate, not the war that condemned millions to slaughter.

The danger of imperialist conflict continues today, as the world powers feed the bloodbath in Syria, and Donald Trump issues threats to China and North Korea. Capitalism is as dangerous as ever. The revolutions that ended the First World War contained the hope of a socialist society based on human need, not profit.

# WESTERN ATTACKS ON SYRIA WILL ONLY BRING MORE HORROR

By James Supple

THE US, Britain and France have launched new airstrikes against targets in Syria.

Malcolm Turnbull gave his full support to the attack, saying the, “use of chemical weapons... under any circumstances is illegal and utterly reprehensible.”

But this grandstanding about preventing chemical attacks is gross hypocrisy. The West has no concern for the hundreds of thousands of Syrians killed at the hands of the brutal Assad regime.

Turnbull has held Syrian refugees who fled the regime on Nauru for almost five years.

More Western bombing only increases the chances of the war escalating even further. The US wars in Iraq and Afghanistan caused the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people, and helped produce the nightmare across the region. All of this had the full support of the Australian government.

Last year, the US sold \$650 million of weapons to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates for the barbaric war in Yemen, against the Iran-backed Houthis.

In April last year US President Donald Trump fired 59 cruise missiles against a Syrian airbase. “This time”, according to US Defence Secretary Jim Mattis, the US and its allies, “have struck harder”. Three targets allegedly involved in the manufacture and storage of chemical weapons were hit, following a suspected chemical attack on the rebel-held town of Douma.

The Assad regime has used chemical weapons on dozens of occasions, alongside the ruthless bombing of hospitals and heavily populated civilian areas together with its Russian ally. It has been waging a brutal assault on one of the last rebel-held areas in Eastern Ghouta.

The regime is responsible for the bulk of the over 500,000 people killed in Syria since 2011. For all the brutality of groups such as Islamic State, it is only Russia and the Syrian regime that

have an airforce capable of bombing strikes across the country.

Western powers are not motivated by the appalling death toll among ordinary Syrians. They have stood by for seven years as the regime first shot down demonstrators during a popular revolution then unleashed terror on civilian areas controlled by the opposition. The US last year used white phosphorus in both Syria and Iraq and its bombing, with Turnbull’s support, has killed thousands of Syrians in Raqqa and other places.

In recent months the US has turned a blind eye to Turkey’s military operation against Kurdish areas in the north of Syria.

## Imperialist scramble

Syria has become a battleground where major powers from across the region are jockeying for influence. The rebel groups backed by Gulf States like Saudi Arabia and Qatar as well as Turkey are facing defeat.

The Assad regime has only survived as a result of support from Russia and Iran. The Iranian military is looking to develop a permanent presence across the country—including near the Golan Heights, Syrian territory that Israel took control of in 1967.

Israel has launched a number of missile attacks against Iranian and regime targets inside Syria in recent months.

Foreign imperialist intervention

**Above: Syrian Civil Defense dig through the rubble after US bombs hit the village of al-Jina last year**

increases the danger of a more serious clash between regional powers like Israel and Iran.

The US has 2000 troops inside Syria as part of its campaign against Islamic State.

Trump has talked of withdrawing them, but the US missile strikes are a way of demonstrating the US’s continuing military power. They will embolden Israel to step up its attacks, and also increase tensions between Russia and the US.

Socialists should demand the withdrawal of all foreign troops from Syria. The hope in Syria lies in rebuilding the democratic struggle that Assad, Russia and other imperialist powers have tried to drown in blood. Mass protests in Iran raised demands against their own rulers and their involvement in Syria during the uprising in January this year.

In the West, the best support we can give to the people of Syria is to oppose the bombs of the US, UK and France. In Australia we oppose the Turnbull government’s cooperation with, and support for the US attacks on Syria.

Australia joined the bombing campaign in Iraq and Syria in 2014 and only ended its involvement in January. There are still around 500 Australian military personnel involved in training roles in Iraq.

Western intervention can only increase the bloodshed and horror in the Middle East.

**Socialists should demand the withdrawal of all foreign troops from Syria**

**Solidarity**

