

## AFTER THE VICTORIAN ELECTION

# LIBERALS DOWN FOR THE COUNT STRIKE THEM OUT



### UNIONS

Boom workers win through defiant action

### REFUGEES

Teachers walk out to #BringThemHere

### BOUGAINVILLE

Australia's mine worth killing for



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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

**Part of the problem with the politics of energy at least at the federal level, it has been bedevilled by what I would call, ideology and idiocy.**  
Former PM Malcolm Turnbull, speaking for the idiots

**They have been talking record profits from the wallets of hardworking Australians for years...**

Liberal Federal Energy Minister Angus Taylor, talking about Australia's largest power companies

**We're not the commonwealth, we're not Victoria, we're very different... We're a progressive, accountable, mojo state where we've got great outcomes happening for everyone.**

NSW transport minister (and Minister for bus privatisation), Andrew Constance, explaining that the NSW Liberal state government is progressive just like Victorian Labor.

**It would be a normal expectation that people would understand... You would think where a fee is charged a service would be delivered.**

Mike Wilkins AMP acting chief executive, although it was normal for AMP to charge fees for services that weren't delivered.

**The capitalist model is that businesses have no responsibility other than to maximise profits to shareholders... some people will say: 'but that doesn't mean that you can mistreat customers, because doing so might be... the short-term interests of shareholders, but not in the long-term interest of shareholders.' But even that approach sees customers... as the means by which shareholder profits are secured**

Ken Henry, former Treasury Secretary now Chairman of NAB at the banking Royal Commission

**We are nostalgic about the major policy reforms from both sides of politics (from 80s and 90s). We lament the difficulties our governments have in implementing major economic reform today and with its absence our prospects are diminished.**

A tale of woe from Grant King, President of the Business Council of Australia, looking for more corporate tax cuts at their annual dinner attended by none other than Scott Morrison and Finance Minister Mathias Cormann.

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# INSIDE THE \$YSTEM

## Iraq war protests led to army planning chaos

THE HOWARD government was so scared by opposition to the 2003 Iraq War that it derailed basic military preparations, newly released documents have revealed.

The secret study was produced by the army in 2008 and recently declassified. Academic Clinton Fernandes, who first obtained it, told the ABC: "What the document shows is that the Howard Government had decided early in 2002 that it was going to join the United States in any operation in Iraq whatever it might be, but it couldn't admit this to the public or even to the Australian Defence Force (ADF) at large".

Defence Force personnel were sent secretly to the US in 2002 to begin preparations—a year before Howard announced Australia would take part in the war. It also placed a firm cap on the level of Australian troops to be involved at 2058.

But the government's fear of letting the public know it had decided to join the invasion meant it kept this a secret even within the ADF. This meant many units were forced to deploy without their full crew and without proper equipment. One navy diving team did not receive any new change of clothes in their three months in Iraq, making do with three sets they arrived with. There were no laundry facilities where they were based. Other units did not have sufficient combat body armour or surgical teams.

It is a reminder of how mass popular demonstrations can shake governments and derail their plans.

## Liberals out to police uni research

THE LIBERALS have imposed a new "national interest" test as a requirement for university research funding. Academics will be required to show in 100-150 words that their research would provide, "economic, commercial, environmental, social or cultural benefits" to Australia.

This comes in the wake of revelations that former Minister Simon Birmingham intervened personally to block grants to 11 research projects in 2017 and 2018. All had won approval through the highly competitive Australian Research Council process. So much for academic freedom.

## Sudanese basketball event cancelled due to racist fear



TWO MAJOR annual South Sudanese basketball tournaments have been cancelled this year, due to "unrealistic" conditions placed on venue hire in Melbourne.

The South Sudanese Australia Basketball Association blamed the racist fear campaign from politicians and the media. "Stadium managers are afraid to host our event because of the African gang stories they see in the news", they said in a statement. "Some of our partner organisations have also had concerns towards our event because of the fear that has been created."

The tournaments have been held twice a year for 15 years, attracting players from all around Australia. Venue operators had demanded the organisers notify surrounding residents about the event, pay for buses to transport all participants in and out and restrict games to daytime hours. There have been two small incidents involving spectators from the event that attracted media publicity in the past, the worst being a brawl outside a venue in 2015.

Basketball Victoria said such conditions were, "scarcely demanded for other Victorian basketball tournaments and rarely required throughout the entirety of the sporting community".

## Jewish students in South Africa 'take a knee' to support Palestine

TWO JEWISH students at the United Herzlia Middle School in Cape Town, South Africa have courageously opposed Israel's treatment of Palestinians by "taking a knee" during the singing of the Israeli national anthem. The protest action was inspired by the "take a knee" protests against racism in the US by African American football players.

The two boys defied immense pressure from school authorities who declare that their, "inappropriate kneeling action demonstrated deliberate and flagrant disregard for the ethos of the school".

One of the students recorded an audio clip explaining, "I hope that our protest will show other students that there is another side, and that pro-Palestinians are not 'terrorists' but students just like us. There is a huge debate about politics and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the local Jewish community".

Former ANC Minister Roni Kasrilis praised their action, saying, "young Jews, not only in the United States but also in South Africa, are learning the truth and refuse to be part of this brainwash."

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

## Mining companies back do-nothing carbon pricing

MINING COMPANY bosses are backing a carbon price in an effort to avoid any serious action on climate change. In November Peter Coleman, chief executive of Woodside, Australia's biggest coal and gas producer, told ABC TV's The Business, "We need a price on carbon".

Woodside previously campaigned against the carbon tax introduced by Julia Gillard as Prime Minister. Mining companies Rio Tinto and BHP have also confirmed their support for carbon pricing.

A report released by BHP in October stated its view that a "market-based carbon price could minimise the costs of a low carbon transition"—presumably including the costs to BHP's profit margins.

The big mining companies can see that the climate deniers in the Liberal Party have lost the argument, and that some kind of policy to tackle climate change is coming. They want to make sure it happens with the least impact on their profits as possible. And they think a carbon price is the answer they need.

## Labor backs cuts to migrant welfare

A DEAL to cut welfare payments to migrants has been agreed between Labor and the Coalition. New migrants will now have to wait four years before receiving Newstart, Youth Allowance and Austudy, while the waiting period for parental leave pay and a carer's payment will be two years.

The cuts were first announced by the Coalition at the end of last year, and cut \$1.3 billion in spending over four years. The Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils Australia says there was enough support in the Senate to defeat the cuts entirely.

# EDITORIAL

## As Liberals' panic grows—more protest and stopwork action can bury Morrison

THE LIBERALS' crushing defeat in the Victorian election was a massive rejection of their divisive, racist, dog-whistling campaign. The result has produced panic and infighting throughout the party and confirmed that Scott Morrison is facing an electoral wipe-out at next year's election.

There are four federal seats in Victoria alone that the Liberals would lose on the strength of the swing they suffered—more than enough to lose the federal election.

The Liberals suffered dramatic swings against them—not just in marginal seats—but in the Liberal heartland. On primary votes, wealthy blue ribbon seats swung by 11 per cent in Brighton, 9.5 per cent in Sandringham and 6 per cent in Caulfield, nearly enough for the Liberals to lose them.

Liberal Cabinet Minister Kelly O'Dwyer put it well when she fumed that voters thought the Liberals were “homophobic, anti-women, climate change deniers”—because they are.

Scott Morrison's pack of bigots is tearing itself to pieces. So-called “moderate” Liberal MPs denounced the right of the party for knifing Malcolm Turnbull and costing them votes.

Senate President Scott Ryan, in a swipe at the right's claims to represent the party base, declared that, “voters who are our electoral base—this is our real base as a Liberal party—they sent us a message”.

Julia Banks, who called out sexist bullying and intimidation within the federal Liberals during the Turnbull leadership spill, has quit the party and moved to the crossbench. Scott Morrison, already in minority government, now has one less vote in the parliament.

The panic has already spread to NSW, where the state Liberal government faces an election in March. One poll in the *Sunday Telegraph* suggested Labor was ahead in the state by 51 to 49 per cent.

NSW Premier Gladys Berejiklian has already said that Scott Morrison “was not needed” to campaign in the state election.

But Morrison consistently backs up the hard right. He is still defending his proposal to shift the Australian embassy in Israel to Jerusalem. He used the NSW Liberal Party apparatus to ride roughshod over the moderates to save hard right MP Craig Kelly



**Above: The union mobilisation against the Liberals in Victoria was key to the result**

from a preselection challenge.

Morrison has sided with the right over allowing schools to discriminate of LGBTI students. Parliament will rise without the protections that Morrison promised because he would not back Labor's bill.

Meanwhile thousands of school students defied Morrison's pleas to stay at school, and walked out of school to protest against Morrison and the climate dinosaurs that run the country. It was another glimpse of the growing anti-Liberal anger and the mood for change seen in the Victorian elections.

### **Drive the Liberals out**

But we can't just sit back and wait for the Liberals to collapse. We need further protests and stopwork rallies to bury Morrison completely.

The two mass union delegates meetings and stopwork Change the Rules rallies in Melbourne this year were crucial to focussing the anger on the Liberals. Tens of thousands marched through the city a month before the election.

We need an immediate call for further nationwide stopwork rallies early next year.

Mass union protests can also make it clear that we are not waiting for Labor to deliver the changes we need over refugees, climate change or union rights. Labor is not talking about the right to strike, scrapping the fines against unions for “unlawful” strike

action, or allowing secondary boycott action to support other workers on strike.

Labor still won't commit to industry-wide bargaining except for limited numbers of low paid workers.

Morrison only narrowly avoided a humiliating defeat in Parliament over refugees in the last sitting week for the year. Changes moved by independent MP Kerry Phelps that would bring all children and families off Nauru and give doctors greater power over medical transfers for all refugees were passed in the Senate. Morrison was forced to close down parliament rather than have them carried in the lower house.

This bill won't close the offshore detention centres but it would be a political blow against Morrison and show the gathering momentum around the refugee issue.

The Palm Sunday demonstrations in April next year will fall just before the federal election. Large demonstrations will be a nail in the Liberals' political coffin and will send a message that the refugee movement will keep fighting to close the camps.

It will be struggle from below that will shape the next few months before the election and the prospects for real change after that. Stronger socialist organisation in every movement will build stronger struggles to challenge the capitalist system. Join us to be part of that fight.

.....  
**We need an immediate call for further nationwide stopwork rallies early next year**

# Victory at Boom cranes after defiant five week strike

By Caitlin Doyle and Miro Sandev

CRANE WORKERS have won a five-week strike against Boom Logistics through widespread action in defiance of the law.

The win brings their pay packets up to industry standard with immediate pay rises of between 8 and 26 per cent at the Port Kembla yard. The union covering the workers, CFMEU, said that workers at the Singleton and Newcastle yards won immediate pay rises of between 20 and 50 per cent. It combines three sites onto a single agreement.

Workers have also secured their original claim of 2.5 per cent pay rises every six months. This applies for the next year until the agreement expires, with the CFMEU hoping to roll it over afterwards.

Boom began advertising for scab labour through labour hire companies about a month before the strike began—aided by a Fair Work Commission decision that banned an earlier strike in August.

In Port Kembla workers stopped the scab operation early on by forming an illegal hard picket.

At the Singleton and Newcastle sites it required an ongoing fight against the scabs.

“A lot of those guys, once the union shut them down on the first day, said they didn’t want to work when there was industrial action happening,” Port Kembla CFMEU delegate Luke Jewitt told *Solidarity*.

In response the bosses sent an email to them saying, “we’re grateful for your work during these tough times,” gave them a \$100 a week pay rise and took them all out to dinner.

The company moved the cranes out of their yards and onto sites at mines and the coal loader where the company works.

Pickets spread out all across the Hunter to shut them down.

Workers parked in front of yard gates to prevent the company from moving its cranes around. If they spotted Boom cranes on the road, they followed them, entering yards and then boxing the cranes inside so they couldn’t leave.

For cranes that could only be moved at night because of their size, the CFMEU organised 24-hour pickets. While solidarity action in support of striking workers is technically



**Above: Boom workers on the picket line**

illegal, workers on organised CFMEU sites found ways of refusing to work with Boom Cranes if they showed up on site.

The CFMEU mobilised support across the union, levying all members to support the strikers financially and toured Boom workers to speak at union meetings.

## Conditions

Workers won improved working away from home allowances, including an increase of \$25 per day after three weeks away.

Port Kembla workers spend on average 75 per cent of their time working away. There are also redundancy improvements.

“The workers are happy to have got it done,” said Jewitt. “It’s a good result. But at the same time there are things that are not in our new EBA that have been there for a long time, which was a bitter pill to swallow. But the company had a bitter pill to swallow when they had to give us a bloody pay rise.”

Port Kembla workers had not received a pay rise for four years. It was even longer, six years, at the Newcastle yard.

Crucially all three yards are now on the same EBA which places them in a stronger position to fight in the next round of bargaining.

The bosses desperately wanted to

avoid that.

“They tried to play us off against each other, early in the piece,” said Jewitt. “They rang everyone in our yard, telling us if we went back to work they would give us the union EBA, but we would have to separate from the other two yards. But we said no.”

A significant loss for workers is that the company is no longer required to have a minimum of three people as part of every crane crew. Such a requirement is banned under the new federal Building Code introduced by the LNP government.

Previously, the CFMEU had vowed to fight the Building Code and to continue to fight for EBA provisions that were not code compliant, like the minimum three-person crew.

But last year the union took a decision to no longer fight the code, in the hope of electing a Labor government that would scrap it. The strategy has involved signing short-term EBAs with a view to changing them after Labor is elected.

“We wanted a three-year deal, but the [CFMEU organisers] said trust us. The Liberal Party have really handcuffed us,” said Jewitt.

This sets up a renewed fight under a Labor government right across the construction industry to restore conditions lost under the Liberals.

**.....**  
**If they spotted Boom cranes, they followed them, entering yards and boxing the cranes inside so they couldn’t leave**

# Liberals' thumping defeat in Victoria ends Morrison's last hopes

By James Supple

THE LIBERALS' rout in the Victorian election is also a massive defeat for Scott Morrison and the federal Liberal Party.

Morrison is on track for electoral humiliation next year. The Victorian result is a blow to Morrison's hopes that ramping up fear about terrorism and immigration might save him. The party's racist scare campaign about crime and "African gangs" failed completely.

Statewide Daniel Andrews' Victorian Labor government won a swing of 5.5 per cent, with thumping gains of 10 per cent in marginal seats in Melbourne's south-east.

Liberal leader Matthew Guy (backed by Peter Dutton) claimed that crime was "out of control" as he tried to drum up a law and order panic about "African gangs". But there was actually a 7.8 per cent drop in crime in the last year.

He also seized on Shire Ali's Bourke Street attack, claiming the Liberals would make changes that would have stopped his release on bail.

Guy ran a hard right campaign, promising to scrap the Safe Schools program, reintroduce religious education in government schools and shut Richmond's safe injecting room.

It all went nowhere. The dumping of Malcolm Turnbull as Prime Minister also damaged the Liberal vote in formerly safe seats.

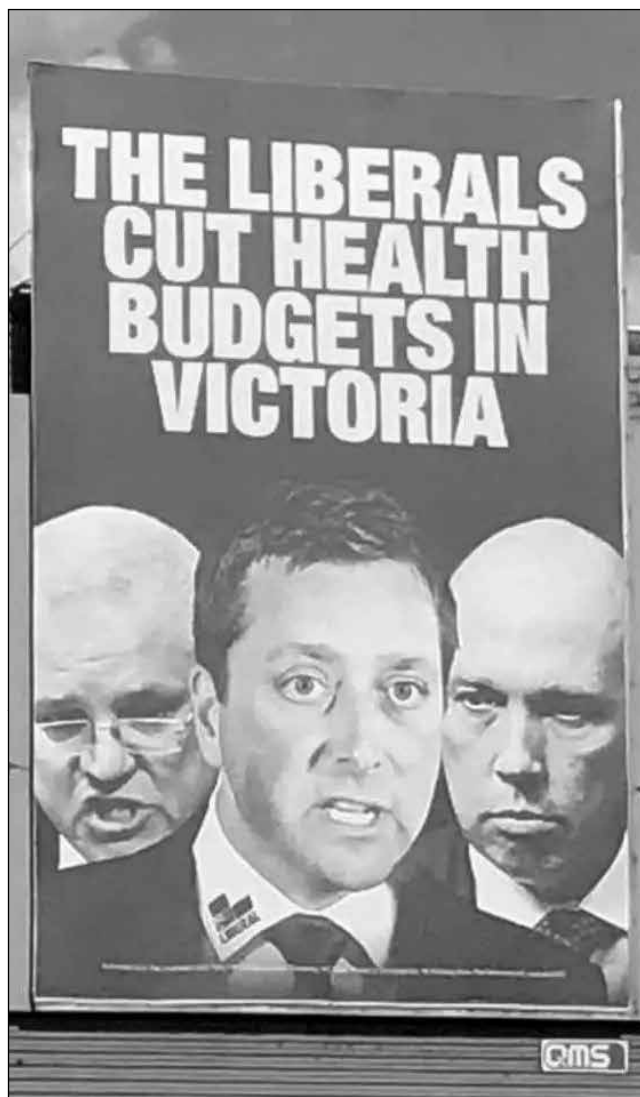
Labor produced billboards linking Matthew Guy to Scott Morrison and the right-wing insurgents Peter Dutton and Tony Abbott who plotted the leadership change.

The result has reignited tensions within the Liberals in Canberra, as the right manoeuvres to retain influence and "moderate" Liberals panic that moving to the right risks losing votes in inner city seats.

## Labor's campaign

Labor's shift to the left paid off. Its campaign on infrastructure and funding for hospitals, schools and TAFE won it support.

Daniel Andrews promised an extra \$1.3 billion in health spending to employ 1100 additional nurses and midwives and upgrade community hospitals, as well as a 50 per cent



**Above: Labor ran ads linking Matthew Guy to federal Liberals Scott Morrison and Peter Dutton**

**Liberal leader Matthew Guy tried to drum up a panic about 'African gangs'**

renewable energy target.

But the most important element of Andrews' win was the mobilisation by the union movement for his campaign—most crucially when tens of thousands marched to Change the Rules on 23 October.

But his promises to expand services do not go far enough. While he promised to build 80 new schools, the teachers' union estimates an additional 1600 teachers will be needed each year for the next decade. And Victorian government schools have the lowest rate of per student funding in the country.

It is going to take union struggles in the months ahead to win more teachers and more funding.

Anti-racist mobilisation was also important. Andrews made concessions

to the Liberals' law and order scare, toughening bail laws last year. But he dropped the "anti-association bill" that would have targeted black youth, in the face of anti-racist rallies backed by the Sudanese community.

There is an important lesson for Labor federally—to end concessions to the racism and neo-liberalism of the Liberals, and push further to the left. Andrews explicitly supported Safe Schools and provided support to the Let Them Stay campaign in 2016 to keep refugees transferred from Nauru in Australia.

## The tragedy of The Greens

The Greens had a disastrous campaign with a number of scandals over sexist comments and one candidate accused of rape. But the scandals don't explain the decline.

Ged Kearney's win for Labor in the federal seat of Batman should have been sufficient warning.

Logging old growth forests is an outrage, but simply campaigning on bike paths and forests won't win seats from Labor—environmental demands need to be connected to jobs and public transport.

Until The Greens seriously champion working class demands in order to win over Labor's voter and union base, they are going to keep going backwards.

In the upper house The Greens went from five seats to one. They won a lower house seat in Brunswick, but lost their other target seat in Richmond, as well as Lidia Thorpe's seat of Northcote.

The Victorian Socialists' Steve Jolly polled 4.2 per cent in the Northern Metropolitan upper house region but was unable to win a spot. In the lower house a Victorian Socialists' candidate also won 7.1 per cent in Broadmeadows where unemployment is 25 per cent.

The Liberal wipe-out in Victoria is a shot in the arm for everyone who wants to finish off Morrison.

We will vote to get him out as soon as we get the chance.

But it is by mobilising in the weeks and months ahead that we can kick out the Liberals, not just to get a Labor government, but to build stronger movements for union rights, the right to strike, for increased funding for public schools, for green jobs and renewable energy.

# Teachers step up the pressure as hundreds walk off for refugees

By Lucy Honan

A FANTASTIC 200 hundred teachers from more than 50 schools across Victoria, and 150 teachers from 20 schools in Brisbane, walked out to protest against the offshore detention of refugees on 20 November.

The atmosphere was charged with excitement as teachers, plus hundreds of supporters, filled the State Library forecourt in Melbourne to demand the government bring all kids and adults off Nauru and Manus immediately.

Some teachers had organised large contingents from their school. Nine out of 13 teachers walked out together at a Brunswick public school. Yeronga State High School in Brisbane had 47 teachers walk out!

There were union sub-branch banners from every stage and kind of school. Some arrived in smaller groups, representing many more who wanted to come, but whose principals had obstructed them.

Some teachers arrived on their own, but no one could have left feeling isolated. The hundreds of teachers in Melbourne were surrounded by hundreds of others in contingents from the union movement and the refugee campaign. Unions there in support included the CFMEU, HACSU, NUW, MUA, NTEU, VAHPA, ASU and ANMF, as well as contingents from Grandmothers against Detention, Rural Australians for Refugees, Labor for Refugees and Refugee Action Collective.

Hannah Clarke, a primary school teacher and a central organiser of the walk off, spoke about her experience teaching a student who had spent five of his six short years on Nauru. "Some media and politicians reckon we should stick to our classrooms and keep out of politics," she said.

"But the fact is these government policies are affecting our classrooms and affecting our students. It's falling on us to pick up the pieces of these young lives the government has broken."

And two Hazara High school students put it simply, "What we learned in Australian school is that detention is for if you have done something wrong. But refugees have done nothing wrong."

Justin Mulally, Deputy President of the Australian Education Union (Victoria) congratulated teachers who had walked off, saying, "Thank you



**Above: Teachers at the walk-off rally in Melbourne**

so much to all of you who have taken this step. As teachers, as principals, as support staff in schools, we can't stand by when we know that children are being traumatised, we can't stand by when we know their families are being damaged, and when we know that Scott Morrison is refusing to act."

## How we organised

The support of the union movement has always been an important part of the refugee campaign. But the two-state walk-off was a significant escalation for the movement.

Besides the Yeronga teachers' stopwork action in 2015 to support their detained student, Mojgan Shamsalipoor, the walk-off is the first explicit industrial action against government refugee policy.

In Victoria, a group of rank-and-file teachers, members of the Australian Education Union, took the initiative. The momentum of the #KidsOffNauru campaign set us in motion.

Our union's mobilisation of members for the Change the Rules rallies and delegates meetings meant there was a precedent for the walk off. We collected over 70 signatures from rank-and file-members calling on the AEU to support it. As a result union officials put a resolution endorsing it at a Branch Council meeting at the end of October.

The following weekend, the Queensland Teachers Union followed and passed a resolution to hold a Walk Off for Kids Off too!

Teachers for Refugees activists in Victoria used the networks we built up from the t-shirt and "selfie" actions over the last three years to contact teachers to start organising contingents.

We sent out "how-to-walk off" guides, and with the support of Mums and Grandmas for Refugees we produced a letter to parents about why we were walking off, and how they could support us.

We knew some principals were facing a backlash from parents, or losing their nerve in the face of intimidating and discouraging department circulars, or confusing advice from the union. So we organised for parents and members of the local community to call principals to let them know they supported the walk off.

We got hugely enthusiastic responses from across the union movement, including an invitation to speak at the CFMEU shop stewards meeting.

In Queensland, the teachers' union sent an email to all members encouraging them to join the action. In Victoria there was not the same level of organisational support from our union, which makes the turn out even more of a testament to the rank-and-file organisation around refugee rights.

The refugee campaign has forced Scott Morrison and the Liberals to start getting the children off Nauru to Australia. But this is nowhere near enough.

Teachers, unionists and the refugee campaign will keep escalating until the camps are closed for good.

.....  
**Teachers for Refugees in Victoria used networks built up from the t-shirt and 'selfie' actions to organise contingents**



# Protests can widen the cracks in offshore detention

By Ian Rintoul

AS *SOLIDARITY* goes to press, parliament was set to vote on Kerry Phelp's Urgent Medical Treatment Bill (see box).

But regardless of the outcome of the bill, the movement has taken some important strides forward over the last few months. The discussion is no longer just about getting the children and their families off Nauru. What is now at stake is the future of offshore detention.

In the days before the bill was tabled in parliament, over 700 actors and arts professionals signed a letter to Morrison and Shorten that called for, "the people held in the offshore detention centres to be brought to safety".

The Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) report, "Indefinite Despair," reveals the scale of the mental health crisis, not just among families, but right across Nauru. Their report shows that among 208 refugee and asylum seeker patients, 60 per cent had suicidal thoughts and 30 per cent attempted suicide.

Dr Stewart Condon, MSF Australia President, put it clearly, "living under a policy of indefinite processing creates a perpetual state of despair, making it impossible for asylum seekers and refugees to recover."

Amnesty International and the Refugee Council of Australia have produced another report, "Until when: The forgotten men of Manus Island," that documents the horrors of Manus Island, where attempted suicide has become a daily occurrence.

The teachers' walkouts and rallies in Brisbane and Melbourne (see opposite page) have set an example for the kind of union action the movement needs to build in the New Year, against Morrison and against a likely Labor government that will still be committed to offshore detention.

## Labor conference

All eyes will be on the Labor conference on 16, 17 and 18 December. However, it is already clear that Labor's number crunchers will ensure that existing policy of turning back asylum boats, and support for offshore detention, is retained.

Shorten has already said that a Labor government intends to get all asylum seekers and refugees off Nauru and Manus Island, but that position has a contradiction that he can't resolve. He can't say where the refu-



**Above: The campaign to get #KidsOffNauru has scored a major victory** Photo: Sharon Ung

## Morrison faces defeat on medical transfers

AS *SOLIDARITY* goes to press, Kerry Phelp's attempt to pass the Urgent Medical Treatment Bill amendments has stalled in the Senate.

The Morrison government, backed by One Nation and Cory Bernardi, abused parliamentary processes in the Senate while the government closed parliament for the year to avoid voting on the Bill.

The amendments would have brought all children and families from Nauru, and provided for the medical transfer of any adult (on Manus or Nauru) on the advice of two treating doctors.

Labor's vote against the government refugee policy is a small but not insignificant step away from its years

of bipartisan support.

The Home Affairs Minister does retain a veto over transferring anyone with a prior adverse security assessment. If the Minister refuses a medical transfer, the case must be referred to an independent health committee within 24 hours, and they must make a decision within 24 hours.

With the Bill stuck in the Senate, medical cases will still need to be prepared by lawyers and argued for one by one. The fight to get everyone off Manus and Nauru is still essentially a political fight, not a legal one.

But the cracks in the offshore detention policy that began with getting kids off Nauru are getting wider.

gees are going to find a safe country. One hundred and fifty should be able to go to New Zealand, but that leaves hundreds of others that Shorten has no answer for. That's why "Bring Them Here" needs to be a demand that the movement continues to push for.

As at previous conferences, there will be a fight over some aspect of Labor's anti-refugee policy, which will show that around 49 per cent of conference opposes Labor policy. If the left motion is defeated it will only be because some left unions vote against their union's policy to protect Shorten and the party leadership's electoral strategy of maintaining bi-partisan

support for offshore detention.

But regardless of the vote, Shorten can't claim a mandate. The contradictions in Labor's policy will grow wider in the aftermath of the Labor conference, as the demands to bring them here grow louder.

The #KidsOffNauru campaign has brought together the truth-telling, the advocacy, the protests and legal action, combined with the Liberals' political crisis, to deal a major blow to offshore detention. The scene is set for the next phase—the fight to create a crisis for Labor, to close Manus and Nauru and bring the refugees here with permanent visas.

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**On Manus Island, attempted suicide has become a daily occurrence**

# Morrison uses Bourke St attack to spread racism and fear

By Adam Adelpour

SCOTT MORRISON and Peter Dutton seized on the Bourke Street attack in Melbourne to scapegoat the Muslim community and try to whip up a new terrorism scare.

Morrison declared that, “The greatest threat to our way of life is radical, violent, extremist Islam”.

He branded Bourke Street attacker Shire Ali a “violent, extremist Islamic terrorist”. Victoria police similarly treated the attack as a “terror incident”. But acting deputy commissioner for national security Ian McCartney explicitly said there was no evidence of “direct contact” between Shire Ali and Islamic State or other jihadist groups.

But there is clear evidence that Shire Ali faced spiralling mental health problems. His sister handed Channel 9 a written note that said:

“Hasan suffered from mental illness for years and refused help. He’s been deteriorating these past few months. He has seen a psychologist and psychiatrist, but stopped as his paranoia and hallucinations led him to believe they’re ‘after him’.”

Yet Scott Morrison, determined to whip up fear, dismissed accounts of his mental health problems as “excuses”, saying the “real issue” is “radical, violent, extremist Islam”.

He also blamed the Muslim community for the attack, saying “more needs to happen” to deal with the threat and “there can be no excuses for looking [the other way]”.

Peter Dutton called on Muslim leaders to “step up” and even suggested the Muslim community wasn’t cooperating with the authorities, saying, “The idea that [Islamic] community leaders would have information but withhold it from the police or intelligence agencies is unacceptable.”

Muslim organisations were rightly appalled by the comments, with Muslims Australia responding that, “To suggest that Imams and leaders of the community are not doing what they can in this regard is untrue and extremely disappointing.”

All the government’s comments do, they said is, “foster an ill-conceived notion that all Muslims are somehow responsible for the actions of every individual within our community. This is not a burden that is placed on any other community.”

After a number of Muslim leaders refused to meet with him in protest,



**Above: Police in Bourke St after the recent attack**

Morrison accused them of “continuing down a path of denial” and making communities “less safe”.

## Encryption laws

The government then continued its scaremongering by announcing plans for yet another round of “anti-terror” laws.

Dutton suddenly demanded parliament pass new encryption laws before the end of the year, saying it had become “more urgent” and scaremongering that police were in “a position of vulnerability”. After accusing Labor of failing to support the laws, and brushing aside privacy and digital security concerns, the Liberals eventually compromised to pass them.

The laws will force technology companies to help police break into messaging systems like Whatsapp and Facebook messenger.

Dutton cited the arrest of three more people in Melbourne on terrorism charges following the Bourke St attack to insist they were necessary. Police claimed the use of encrypted messages made it harder to uncover their plans.

But it’s far from clear this was a serious terrorism attempt. Police admit the three men did not yet have a target in mind. Their main piece of evidence is the claim they attempted to obtain a semi-automatic rifle. The father of two of the boys says they wouldn’t know how to use one.

Scott Morrison also wants even more draconian powers to cancel citizenship. These are needed, according to Dutton, so that the government can

deport “a number of cases” of people.

The government can already strip Australian citizenship from dual citizens convicted of serious terrorism offences. The changes would lower the bar to any terrorism conviction, and mean the minister would only need to be “reasonably satisfied” they had another citizenship.

More Islamophobia and further draconian laws will only make things worse. The terror laws undermine democratic rights and increase racism through harassment and targeting of Muslims.

Scott Morrison has tried to blame terrorism simply on the “dangerous teachings and ideologies” of “radical extremist Islam”. But it is the experience of racism and social exclusion at home and the horrors of Western foreign policy in the Middle East that are the real drivers of “radicalisation”.

It is a heartening sign that the Australian National Imams Council and other Muslim organisations have publicly challenged Morrison’s racist scapegoating.

Another important response was the Stand United against Racism protest in Melbourne, which took place the day after the Bourke St attack in November. Around 500 marched to oppose the escalating anti-African racism in the lead up to the state election.

The rally united The Greens, Labor supporters and contingents from a number of unions. Despite racism being pushed to fever pitch in the wake of the attack, the strength and unity of this kind of anti-racist mobilisation shows how it can be fought.

**Morrison blamed the Muslim community for the attack, saying “more needs to happen” to deal with the threat**

# Forced adoptions will worsen racist ‘child protection’ system

By Paddy Gibson

ON 22 November, the NSW Liberal Government passed new laws designed to fast track children from the “out of home care” system into forced adoptions. The laws will have a devastating effect on families separated by Family and Community Services (FACS), particularly on Aboriginal children who are almost 40 per cent of the foster care cohort in NSW.

The Child Protection system punishes poor and black people for the social misery created by capitalism. Rather than provide resources to deal with the crises around homelessness, unemployment, mental health, addiction or family violence issues, children are forcibly removed from their families, mostly due to allegations of “neglect”.

As the Royal Commission into institutional child sexual abuse recently confirmed, the abuse of children remains rife within “out of home care” itself.

These new laws are designed both to make it harder for children to ever be returned to their families and to reduce the costs on the state of maintaining children in “care”.

Currently, parents seeking to be reunited with their children can bring an application to court, demonstrating that child protection concerns have been addressed. Under these new laws, an application may not even be heard if the Department can show the child is in a “stable” placement.

Most concerning are new provisions that make it possible for a “Guardian”, a long term carer appointed by the Children’s Court, to adopt the child without their parents’ consent. This would permanently sever any legal relationship with their birth family.

Also in late November, a Federal Senate Committee considering adoption reform recommended similar legislation be rolled out across Australia.

## Fightback

The new laws were introduced without warning, with less than three sitting weeks left of the NSW Parliament. Greens MP David Shoebridge and Labor Shadow Minister for Child Protection Tania Mihailuk immediately convened a meeting of Community Legal Centres, Aboriginal organisations and other social services concerned about the impact of the changes.

This coalition put up an impres-



**Above: Protesting the forced adoption bill outside the NSW Parliament** Photo: Sharon Ung

sive fight. An open letter denouncing the legislation for “repeating the mistakes of the past” was signed by more than 80 organisations.

In recent years, Aboriginal rights campaigners have been arguing that the practices of the Stolen Generations are being continued today through the operations of Child Protection. Protests have often been led by affected families themselves, particularly “Grandmothers Against Removals” (GMAR) groups.

The number of Aboriginal children in “out of home care” has more than doubled since Kevin Rudd’s Apology in 2008, with over 18,000 children now in care Australia wide. Despite an “Aboriginal child placement principle” mandated in every state, only a minority of these children are actually placed with their Aboriginal family.

During the campaign against forced adoptions, the arguments made by GMAR about the racism of the current system broke through into the mainstream. A full page advertisement in the *Sydney Morning Herald* by peak Aboriginal welfare body Absec demanded the NSW Government “stop removing Aboriginal kids from their communities”.

Most significant was the strident opposition of the Labor Party to the legislation, on the basis that it would make an already punitive system far worse. Federal Labor MPs on the Senate Committee also issued a dissenting report, saying forced adoptions would continue, “Australia’s reprehensible legacy of permanently removing First Nations children from their families”.

Three demonstrations were or-

ganised outside NSW Parliament, all of them attended by ALP representatives. Inside the Parliament, Labor and Greens politicians co-operated to filibuster right through until late on the final sitting night. Shamefully, Greens spokesperson on Aboriginal Affairs Dawn Walker, and other upper house members of the right-wing Greens faction, said nothing against the laws.

Labor Shadow Aboriginal Affairs Minister David Harris spoke about the shock he experienced when he learned that babies are currently being removed from hospitals straight after birth. He explained that Aboriginal women often avoid the health care system entirely when pregnant due to their fears of Child Protection.

Tania Mihailuk gave an epic speech that lasted more than six hours, which praised the rallies and committed Labor to repeal the legislation if elected next March.

Also significant was the participation of unions, particularly the PSA and ASU who represent Child Protection and community sector workers.

In Western Sydney, a snap meeting of Aboriginal workers from different organisations called a rally targeting Liberal MP Stuart Ayers in Penrith. Along with Aboriginal people and ASU members, the CFMEU brought building workers from a local site.

Some Community Legal Centres and Aboriginal services stopped work for the rallies. These efforts gave a glimpse of the kind of power that can build through an ongoing campaign, ensure these laws are repealed, and press on to radically transform the Child Protection system.

**An open letter denouncing the legislation for ‘repeating the mistakes of the past’ was signed by 80 organisations**

# Morrison's Jerusalem move sparks international blowback

By Ruby Wawn

DURING THE Wentworth by-election campaign, amongst growing fears that the government would lose the seat, Scott Morrison raised the possibility of moving Australia's embassy in Israel to Jerusalem. After a widespread backlash at the idea, he is yet to make a decision.

The right-wing of the Liberal Party strongly supports the move. In June the party's federal council voted in favour, following Donald Trump's controversial decision to move the American embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem in December 2017.

Julie Bishop, the foreign affairs minister at the time, remained firm that Australia would not be relocating its embassy to Jerusalem stating, "Jerusalem is a final status issue and we have maintained that position for decades". This stance was repeated by then Treasurer Scott Morrison. It was reported that the national security committee of cabinet had also formed a consensus that the risks associated with the move outweighed any positives.

The disputed status of Jerusalem has been a critical issue in the supposed "peace process" between Israel and the Palestinians. Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as the Israeli capital has meant dismissing the idea its status is still part of negotiations.

Israel has occupied the western part of Jerusalem since 1949 following the Nakba. In 1967, during the Six Day War, Israel invaded and occupied the rest of the city and later annexed it. Palestinians in Jerusalem have lived under violent military occupation ever since. In the days following Trump's announcement, dozens of Palestinians were killed by Israeli forces protesting the proposed move.

Australia's Muslim neighbours, notably Indonesia and Malaysia, have voiced their displeasure at the idea. Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim nation and a state that is explicitly pro-Palestine, has delayed signing its free trade deal with Australia until Morrison clarifies his stance.

There have also been protests outside the Australian embassy in Jakarta in opposition to the proposed move. Malaysia's Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad has warned that Australia moving its embassy to Jerusalem could encourage terrorism, triggering a war of words with Treasurer



**Above: Ivanka Trump unveils the new US embassy building in Jerusalem**

Josh Frydenburg and Liberal Senator James Paterson.

Morrison's decision is due by Christmas. He is now in a bind—does

he refuse the right in his own party or risk further diplomatic blowback? Either way there will be further egg on Morrison's face.

## Crisis for Tories as vote on Brexit looms

A CRISIS has struck at the heart of British Prime Minister Theresa May's government and the Tories.

MPs were beginning a five-day debate on the government's proposed Brexit deal as we went to press. It is likely to be defeated in a vote on 11 December.

May has met MPs in small groups in an effort to persuade them to back her deal, but without success. Some analysts predict May will lose by 200 votes—or even 400—in the House of Commons. The bigots of the Democratic Unionist Party that sustain the government have deserted it, and almost 100 Tory MPs have declared they won't back the deal.

It's hard to see how May could survive such a shattering defeat, although she has struggled on in the past. She hopes that predictions of economic devastation if there is not a deal might panic enough MPs into eventually accepting her plan.

A Bank of England report said that, in the worst case scenario, unemployment could double and inflation rise to 6.5 per cent.

The most likely result is that May loses and Labour moves a vote of no confidence in the government.

But most people don't think it will win. Instead Labour is increasingly moving towards arguing for a second referendum on Brexit as the "realistic" option.

What's utterly missing from all the debates is the interests and intervention of ordinary people.

May's deal preserves European Union (EU) regulations to protect big business and limit nationalisation, and it includes more anti-migrant laws. No socialist could support such a vision. Instead there should be active mobilisation to demand an anti-austerity and anti-racist Brexit deal.

And this has to be linked to demands such as to fund the NHS, raise wages and benefits, and fund education. For as long as the Brexit debate is about parliamentary manoeuvres, the Tories, if not May, have hopes of survival. Yet Labour and the unions have made no call to protest or demonstrate.

At a time of the greatest political crisis for decades, they mobilise nothing. The argument has to be removed from the dusty sphere of mainstream politics and taken to the streets and the workplaces.

**Charlie Kimber  
Socialist Worker UK**

**Australia's Muslim neighbours, notably Indonesia and Malaysia, have voiced their displeasure at the idea**

# Australia ‘steps up’ efforts to counter China in the south Pacific

By Tom Orsag

NOVEMBER’S APEC summit in PNG saw the Australian government increase its efforts to buy influence in the Pacific, with a raft of announcements designed to counter China.

Scott Morrison had already announced that Australia would help expand PNG’s naval base on Manus Island, turning it into a joint facility used by the Australian navy.

At APEC, US Vice President Mike Pence added that US would share in the cost of the upgrade, with US Navy ships to dock there as well. Pence, in barely veiled code, said the base would be part of upholding the “freedom of the seas and skies”—hinting that it was part of containing China.

*The Australian* reported in September that, “Australian officials have expressed concerns over Chinese interest in the redevelopment of four PNG ports, at Wewak, Kikori, Vanimo and Manus Island, fearing the Asian superpower is working towards gaining a military foothold in the region.”

APEC also saw a promise from Australia, the US, Japan and New Zealand to roll out electricity infrastructure to 70 per cent of PNG by 2030.

Earlier in November, Morrison outlined plans to “step up” in the south Pacific, committing \$2 billion to fund infrastructure projects and opening new diplomatic posts.

The PM said, “This is our patch where we have special responsibilities.” He denied the moves were designed to counter China. But Australia’s rulers have always seen the south Pacific as crucial to “forward defence” and sought to keep out other powers.

Morrison wants to use Australian aid to strengthen the security relationship with Vanuatu—where China was reported as wanting to build a naval base. In April, then PM Malcolm Turnbull met with the Vanuatu Prime Minister, Charlot Salwai, to get an assurance from him that he would “never allow” a Chinese-funded port in his country to be used a military base.

Turnbull also sought out the Solomons Island PM, Rick Houenipwela, to assure him Australia would fund an undersea internet cable, in order to freeze out a rival bid by Huawei, the giant Chinese telco.

Labor is also committed to spending up to neutralise China’s influence. Bill Shorten laid out his own plans at the end of October, promising to in-



**Above: Chinese President Xi Jinping meets with PNG Prime Minister Peter O'Neill**

crease foreign aid to the region and facilitate greater private investment in development projects to ensure Australia is the “partner of choice”.

We should oppose the imperialist jockeying in the south Pacific, and Australia’s efforts to dominate and control the region.

## China’s Uighur repression exposed

CHINA IS currently detaining close to one million mostly Uighur people and subjecting them to “re-education” camps. Former detainees have spoken out saying that the conditions in the camps are poor, and inmates detailing psychological and physical abuse.

The Uighurs are an ethnic Turkic Muslim minority of 11 million people inside China, and make up around 45 per cent of the population of the northern Xinjiang province.

The “re-education” program targets Uighur culture and the Islamic religion. Camp inmates are reportedly forced to denounce Islam and declare their allegiance to the Communist Party and Chinese state.

State surveillance of the Uighur people has even extended into the home, something that the Chinese government claims is designed to stop instances of extremism. Authorities in one city, Hami, issued an order that Uighurs should hand themselves in if they followed “problematic behaviours” such as abstaining from the consumption of alcohol.

This repression is the product of a long history of Chinese colonialism and imperialism in the area.

Beijing’s hold on Xinjiang began during the Qing Dynasty in the 1750s, through indirect rule which was frequently challenged by local Muslim revolts. In the 1930s and

1940s there were attempts to establish an independent East Turkestan republic, but the area was absorbed into the People’s Republic of China in 1949. It was made an Autonomous Region in 1955, recognising its distinct cultural and ethnic status.

Increasing Han Chinese migration has heightened discrimination against the Uighurs, feeding resentment and separatism. In a post 9/11 world, China has justified its repressive policy in the region as part of the “war on terror”, sending government workers into the homes of Uighur people to monitor behaviour.

China’s authoritarian policies against the Uighurs have attracted increasing attention in the West.

Recently the German human rights commissioner was refused entry into Xinjiang province to observe conditions inside the camps. China warned against attempts to “interfere in the internal affairs of other countries” after a letter was issued signed by 15 foreign ambassadors expressing their concern about the camps.

But the Islamophobia stirred up by the West has assisted China’s efforts to demonise the Uighurs.

We should support the right of the Uighurs, and all of China’s minorities, to full national and religious freedoms. But Western governments, with their own imperialist interests, are no allies in this fight.

**Tooba Anwar**

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**Morrison outlined plans to “step up” in the south Pacific, committing \$2 billion to fund infrastructure projects**

# TEN YEARS SINCE THE FINANCIAL CRISIS IS CAPITALISM HEADED FOR ANOTHER CRASH?

Ten years on, the world economy has not fully recovered from the 2008 crash, writes **Adam Adelpour**, and levels of global debt are again at record highs

TEN YEARS ago the 2008 Global Financial Crisis (GFC) shook global capitalism to its core. It was the most severe financial crisis since 1929. The economic and political fallout far surpassed that of the bursting of the dot-com bubble at the turn of the millennium.

George Magnus, a senior economic advisor to giant Swiss bank UBS, said, “the 2008/2009 financial crisis has bequeathed a once in a lifetime crisis of capitalism, the footprints of which can be found in widespread challenges to the political order, and not just in developed countries.”

The free market consensus that had dominated politics since the fall of the Berlin Wall was thrown into crisis.

The establishment figures who run capitalism were completely blind-sided. Former Chair of the US Federal Reserve and champion of the free market, Alan Greenspan, said, “The worst is over in the financial crisis or will be very soon” in May 2008. But this was just the beginning of the financial collapse.

The cataclysm that followed threw the legitimacy of capitalism itself into question. International Monetary Fund adviser Nouriel Roubini paraphrased 19th century German revolutionary Karl Marx in an interview with the Wall Street Journal, saying, “Marx was right about capitalism self-destructing”.

A decade on the underlying problems that led to the crisis have not been resolved. A massive expansion of cheap finance and debt has been used to buy a weak recovery. But this only paves the way for the next economic disaster.

The 2008 financial crisis was so severe it almost led to the complete collapse of the world banking system. When Lehman Brothers, the world’s fourth largest investment bank, filed

for bankruptcy on 15 September 2008, the world economy was brought to the edge of a precipice. This remains the biggest corporate collapse in US history. At the time Lehman had almost \$1 trillion in assets and 25,000 employees worldwide.

Lehman Brothers was a key player in the financial boom that preceded the crisis. It was at the centre of a web of financial institutions making a fortune by trading in bad debts.

The first signs of the crisis began to emerge in 2007 with the sub-prime mortgage crisis. Banks had borrowed huge sums on international markets and used the money to finance so called “sub-prime” mortgages; predatory loans to poor black and working class people who were unable to repay them.

The banks that made these dodgy loans then bundled thousands of them together and sold them on to investors. They gave them clever sounding names like “collateralised debt obligations” and “mortgage-backed securities”. They were a time bomb.

Immediately before the crisis this bubble of bad debt, the “mortgage bond” market, had swelled to an astronomical \$12 trillion Australian. Lehman Brothers was a clearing house for hundreds of thousands of these “financial instruments”. A multitude of other banks depended on Lehman to know who was owed what.

When they collapsed the whole banking system began to grind to a halt.

## **A crisis of profitability**

The Lehman Brothers collapse burst a much larger financial bubble. Underlying the massive expansion of financial speculation leading up to the GFC was a much deeper crisis of profitability in the capitalist system.

Followed the big crisis in 1973 governments around the world ad-

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**Underlying the expansion of financial speculation leading up to the GFC was a deeper crisis of profitability**

opted neo-liberal policies designed to boost business profits through cutting wages while forcing workers to work harder.

This allowed a partial recovery of profit rates. But when the US faced another serious crisis in 2001, the Federal Reserve resorted to slashing interest rates. This produced a wave of cheap debt that fuelled recovery through creating financial bubbles like subprime mortgage loans. But this only delayed the inevitable. The whole house of cards came crashing down in 2008.

As Karl Marx explained, capitalism goes through periodic cycles of boom and slump. This is because there is no overall plan for the economy. Companies individually pursue their own short term profit, but the overall effect is anarchy.

In a boom companies race to produce goods, hoping to grab a bigger share of the market. But this inevitably leads to over-production. Eventually some companies produce goods that can’t be sold, profits suffer and workers are laid off. This creates a vicious cycle as capitalists stop investing and workers have less money to buy goods.

Capitalism has undergone a series of major crises in recent decades, in 1973, 1990-93, 1998 and 2001-2. But the root cause of these crises is what Karl Marx called “the tendency of the rate of profit to fall”.

According to Marx, the amount of profit bosses get compared to the cost of their initial investment tends to diminish over time.

This is because real economic value comes only from the labour of workers. The wages bosses pay are only a fraction of the value workers produce, the rest is taken as profit. Marx called this profit “surplus value”.

But the drive to produce more

cheaply and undercut competitors pushes capitalists to invest in more and more complex machinery.

While this gives them a short term advantage, when their competitors catch up this advantage is lost. Investment in machinery increases and increases.

At the same time, the relative amount of labour that goes into production decreases. Since only labour actually creates “surplus value”, or profit, capitalists get less and less bang for their buck.

### Bailouts

In order to avert a complete economic meltdown governments in the US and the UK carried out some of the biggest bailouts and nationalisations in world history. They handed out hundreds of billions to the banks. In October 2008 the US passed the Emergency Economic Stabilization Act—a \$700 billion bailout.

Central banks also slashed interest rates to make borrowing cheaper and began a process called “Quantitative Easing” (QE) on a massive scale. QE pumped more money into the economy through the banks as part of their bailouts.

The recovery from the crisis has produced only weak and faltering economic growth. It is only this year that growth rates in the US have returned to pre-crisis levels—and this may not last.

The world’s other major economies are still stuck with rates of growth lower than before 2008.

The bailouts, QE and interest rate cuts stopped a complete economic collapse. But they also created even larger piles of debt that could lead to future crises. And the underlying crisis of profitability remains unresolved. The world economy remains in a “long depression” and vulnerable to future collapse.

### A growing debt bomb

In October US stock markets fell by 9 per cent in just three weeks. The falls on the Australian stock markets were even bigger over a slightly longer period.

In total \$346 billion was wiped off e-commerce giant Amazon’s market value. There were further falls in November. These jitters are a sign investors are incredibly jumpy about the future.

Although the world economy is still growing, policy makers have started to wind back the flow of cheap credit.



**Above: Stock markets have become more volatile this year as economists grow concerned about the future of the world economy**

The US Federal Reserve has begun increasing official interest rates from the historic low of 0.25 per cent, where they sat for over seven years, to 2.25 per cent today. This makes debts run up since 2008 harder to repay.

The cheap credit used to get out of the last crisis has just sowed the seeds of the next one. *Financial Times* columnist Martin Wolf marked the ten year anniversary of the GFC by worrying that, “Policymakers have mostly failed to notice the dangerous dependence of demand on ever-rising debt.”

In November the IMF sounded the alarm about levels of corporate debt. The \$1.3 trillion global market for so-called “leveraged loans” is now equivalent to the levels immediately before the 2008 crash.

These are loans to companies with weak credit ratings or that are already heavily indebted. They are described as “leveraged debts” because of the companies’ high ratio of debt to assets or earnings.

About 70 per cent of these loans are in the US but the debt problem is global. In 2016 the Economist warned that China’s GDP to debt ratio had risen 150 per cent to 260 per cent in a decade.

In Australia household debt is 200 per cent of GDP, one of the highest levels in the world.

### The US-China trade war

The political instability unleashed since 2008 has only added to the chaos. The far right is on the rise globally, channelling anger at cuts and unemployment against migrants,

refugees and minority groups.

The victory of far right Presidential candidate Bolsonaro in the Brazilian elections happened against the backdrop of the ongoing economic crisis.

Donald Trump’s win in the US Presidential elections has heightened tensions with China and led to a trade war between the world’s two biggest economies.

In March Trump placed tariffs on half of China’s exports to the US, leading to retaliatory measures by China. In September there was another escalation, with Trump announcing \$277 billion in new trade sanctions on Chinese goods and China hitting back with \$83 billion in tariffs on US imports.

UBS economists have forecast that the effect of tariffs on the Chinese economy could see up to 1.2 million workers in export related industries lose their jobs.

A protracted trade war would have global ramifications. China’s slowdown has already hit other emerging markets like Brazil. The trade war could cost also Australia \$36 billion over the next decade according to consultancy firm KPMG.

The weak recovery and massive levels of debt, combined with mutually reinforcing political and economic instability is a recipe for the next crisis.

Ten years on from the GFC the question is not if, but when. It will be up to the left to shape the response to the already well advanced political polarisation exacerbated by capitalism’s self-destructive tendencies.

# A MINE WORTH KILLING FOR AUSTRALIA'S BLOODY WAR IN BOUGAINVILLE

Thirty years on, **Tom Orsag** looks at how Australia funded the PNG government's ruthless war to crush resistance to the Panguna mine in Bougainville

IN LATE November 1988, indigenous landowners on the island of Bougainville, part of Papua New Guinea (PNG), blew up electricity pylons supplying power to the huge Panguna mine.

For years, they had put up with toxic pollution from the Anglo-Australian owned mine—and seen the profits enrich Australian investors and PNG politicians, not the local Bougainvillean people.

A bitter war for independence against the PNG government lasted almost ten years, at the cost of 20,000 Bougainvillean lives, about a tenth of the island's population. Disgracefully the PNG government's war was fuelled and funded by the Australian governments under Labor's Bob Hawke and Paul Keating.

Courageously, the Bougainvillians fought them to a stand-still. The mine has been shut ever since.

With a poor copper and gold yield per-tonne-of-soil, Panguna was an open-cut mine.

At the time it was the second biggest open-cut mine in the world—a large enough hole for the Central Business Districts of either Sydney or Melbourne to fit inside. This hole is on an island which is only 200 kilometres long and 80 kilometres wide.

The mine was imposed on Bougainville as a result of Australian colonial control of PNG. Australian control began in 1884 with the annexation of the southern part of New Guinea—Papua—and continued until independence in 1975.

Australia failed to develop PNG's economy so that the country remained poor. As academic Edward Wolfers wrote, "The primary aim of all colonial administrations in PNG until the 1960s was neither 'development' nor 'preparation' for self-government, but control."

By that time, with the de-coloni-

sation of much of the Third World, Australia was under pressure to grant PNG independence. But in 1966, the country did not have a single university graduate.

In the lead up to independence, the wealth of Panguna's copper and gold reserves was seized on as a way to fund the newly-independent government. Australian mining company CRA (now Rio Tinto) owned the mine, meaning Australia could take a share of the profits and retain economic control of PNG.

But building the mine meant seizing land from local landowners. Bougainville was a village-based society dependent on farm gardens and fishing, where access to land was at the centre of social life.

Almost 97 per cent of land in PNG is owned through customary law. PNG's system of customary land tenure means "ownership" is a community right which is granted to individuals and families by agreement. On Bougainville the concept of selling or acquiring land was totally foreign to the people.

The colonial authorities found out as early as February 1964 that they would have to ride roughshod over the local landowners to get the mine built.

Landowners confronted the mining company's geologist Ken Phillips when his team began entering their land, cutting down trees and constructing huts. The people did not want the mine.

A legal challenge in 1964 failed. The court was packed with expatriate Australian judges, who unsurprisingly ruled in CRA's favour. In 1965, villagers threw out an exploration team. The landowner opposition was so great that Australia's External Affairs Minister, Charles E Barnes, flew to Bougainville in mid-June 1966. His visit only inflamed the situation

**The mine was imposed on Bougainville as a result of Australian colonial control of PNG**

further. Barnes told Kieta villagers that the project would not benefit "them or their grandchildren" but PNG, "as a whole". They were not about to sacrifice their land for such an empty promise.

In the wake of Barnes' visit more and more local people refused CRA employees access to their land.

In spring 1968, protest meetings were held in the mountains and on the coast. Two hundred landowners marched on the mine site at Panguna.

Protests continued into 1969 when the coastal villages of Rorovana, Anewa and Arawa were acquired to build a deep-water port to ship out the copper and gold, and a township for a mainly expatriate Australian workforce.

On 1 August 1969, 100 police were sent to protect the surveyors as they marked the boundaries of CRA's acquired land.

A group of 65 unarmed villagers stood their ground as the Australian Colonial Authority's District Commissioner, Ashton, led PNG riot police to force people off their land. Ashton later admitted he had offered the locals a "mere pittance" for it.

After 150 tear gas shells failed to move them, riot police waded in with their truncheons.

An editorial by Adrian Deamer, in then left-leaning *The Australian*, said, "The use of tear gas and clubs to enforce alien laws on an uncomprehending people was a damning indictment of the Administration of PNG—which is to say of Canberra." It was a clear warning of what Australia was willing to do to force the Panguna mine on Bougainville.

In 1972, the year Panguna opened, Richard West in his book *River of Tears* prophetically warned, "damage to the physical, social and spiritual well-being of Bougainville... could cause political strife, even civil war."



Villages lost large areas of land to the huge open-cut mine. The copper pollution of nearby rivers was devastating to the overwhelmingly subsistence economy. It killed off animal and plant life in and around the water. People who hunted, fished and grew vegetable plots could no longer do so.

Between 1968 and 1974, the average amount of compensation individual landowners received was \$224. They received just 1.4 per cent of total profits between 1972 and 1989 in compensation and royalty payments.

### Rebellion

By the mid-1980s, a younger and more educated generation of landowners had become frustrated by the scale of the environmental damage, the pitiful royalties paid to landowners and by what they saw as a weak Panguna Landowners Association (PLA).

In 1987, Perpetua Seroro and her cousin, Francis Ona, won the elections to head the PLA.

Seroro, its new President said, “We have become mere spectators as our earth is being dug up, taken away and sold for millions. Our land was taken away from us by force: we were blind then, but we have finally grown to understand what’s going on.”

Francis Ona, its new Secretary, would later write to the PNG Post Courier, “Life will not exist on our island. Our very government is hiding this fact. It will sacrifice our lives for the sake of the PNG economy...”

The PLA demanded CRA pay multi-billion dollar compensation to landowners for the environmental damage, 50 per cent of all profits from the mine and the withdrawal of PNG security forces.

When CRA stalled on the PLA demands, they began sabotaging the mine. CRA executive Don Carruthers flew to Port Moresby to hold “urgent talks” with PNG Prime Minister Rabble Namaliu. In May 1989 the mine was forced to shut.

In response to the PLA’s campaign of sabotage the PNG government first sent in its notoriously brutal armed riot police and later the PNG military.

The new PLA became the nucleus of the Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA), formed to fight a guerrilla war against the PNG Defence Forces (PNGDF).

Sam Kauona, originally from Bougainville, was a Sergeant in the PNGDF. When he returned to Bougainville to visit his sick wife, what he saw and heard, led him to join Francis Ona and become the BRA’s military commander.



**Above: A member of the Bougainville Revolutionary Army looks down on the Panguna open cut mine**

The PNG government drew 16 per cent of its income from the mine, around \$1.5 billion over its period of operation. It was desperate to keep it open—and also feared that if Bougainville became independent it could encourage secessionist movements elsewhere in PNG.

Bougainville already had a history of demands for independence. The island’s population is ethnically and culturally closer to the Solomon Islands than to the rest of PNG. Located at the eastern-most point of PNG, it is just seven kilometres from the Solomon Islands but over 500 kilometres from the PNG mainland. It was only grouped together with Papua as a result of a deal between the colonial powers, Britain and Germany, carving up the area in 1899.

In 1962, the issue of secession was raised following a revolt on the northern island of Buka against a new tax. Even as PNG as a whole moved towards independence, there were demands for a referendum on Bougainville’s status inside PNG.

Representatives of Bougainville’s local government bodies made a unilateral declaration of independence in 1975, after the PNG national government refused their request for a degree of autonomy inside the new country. They were eventually granted their own provincial government in return for agreeing to remain inside PNG.

### Australian funding

In May 1989, when it was clear that the PNG defence forces were not

going to retake Panguna easily, the Hawke Labor government “lent” PNG four Iroquois helicopters, ostensibly for medical evacuations. The PNGDF promptly rigged them with machine-gun mounts and used them as gunships.

Australia later supplied PNG with an undisclosed number of machine guns, another 750 self-loading rifles, 6000 mortar rounds, 200 light machine guns, and 200 M-16 Armalite rifles and ammunition.

From 1989 to 1995, over half of PNG’s military spending was financed by Australia. By 1996, Australia had provided at least \$250 million to PNG for the war on Bougainville.

As a matter of routine, PNGDF officers were trained by the Australian Defence Force in Queenscliff. Those likely to be stationed on Bougainville would undergo “counter-insurgency” training at the Canungra army base in Queensland.

The Australian government had its own reasons for wanting to end the rebellion on Bougainville. It had opposed West Papua’s bid for independence from Indonesia in the 1960s and East Timor’s in the mid-1970s. Like the PNG government, it feared that Bougainville’s independence could encourage other similar movements, potentially creating a host of smaller states where other rival imperialist powers could establish a foothold.

Even before Federation, the emerging Australian ruling class had developed its own imperialist interests and sought to dominate the south

## FEATURES

Pacific.

Australia's initial reason for taking control of PNG in the 1880s was strategic. It wanted "to deny the use of the area to any other power", as External Affairs Minister Paul Hasluck put it in 1961.

PNG's position to our immediate north meant it was viewed as part of a "forward defence shield" for Australia and as an area that Australia's rulers had a right to dominate and exploit.

The profits of CRA and other Australian mining companies in PNG added to the bargain. Since opening in 1972 CRA had dug up \$7 billion of copper and gold. It was literally—for Australia, PNG and CRA—an asset worth killing for.

The Hawke Labor government, in particular Defence Ministers Kim Beazley and Robert Ray and the Foreign Affairs Minister Gareth Evans, played a despicable role in fuelling the war. The Bougainville war showed Labor's willingness to extend Australian imperialism and ruthlessly act in the interests of Australia's ruling class.

But the Bougainville Revolutionary Army, supported by the population, grew to the point where in March 1990 it forced PNG riot police and the PNGDF off the island. In May, Francis Ona, as head of the Interim Government, declared Bougainville independent.

PNG's response was a murderous naval blockade, cutting off supplies including vital medicines to the people of the island.

In April 1994, Labor Senator Stephen Loosely led a Parliamentary delegation to the re-captured parts of Bougainville. His report recommended the continuation of the blockade.

Australia advised PNG on "counter-insurgency" tactics which led to the setting up of "care centres", which were supposed to isolate the BRA from its civilian support base. Just over one-third of Bougainville's population were forced into 46 "care centres".

The PNG Government promised to supply them food, shelter and medical supplies—but they were systematically deprived.

### Solidarity movement

A solidarity movement with Bougainville developed in Australia. In 1993, the annual conference of the Waterside Workers Federation, part of today's MUA, and the NSW Labor Party branch both called for the lifting of PNG's blockade of Bougainville.



Then in January 1994, workers at the Port Kembla Grain Terminal voted unanimously to support a ban on exports to PNG.

The bans were in protest at the atrocities being committed by the PNGDF to recapture Bougainville. They led to the delay of a grain carrier, the Goplai, bound for PNG with Australian grain.

Pressure began to build up within the union movement such that Gareth Evans met Martin Ferguson, then the President of the ACTU, in order to overcome the "threat of more union bans" over the issue.

By May 1994, six Trades and Labour Councils had backed a resolution calling for a trade ban on PNG. More than 300 delegates at a 1994 NSW Teachers' Federation Council unanimously supported a ban on PNG trade and lifting the naval blockade.

After a war of attrition with the BRA fighting PNG to a standstill, Australia wanted to end the instability and brokered a peace deal in January 1998. In a defeat for Australian imperialism, the mine has remained closed, despite untapped mineral wealth worth at least \$7 billion.

The Bougainville government that emerged from the peace deal imposed an indefinite moratorium on any new mining. In recent years the Australian company RTG mining has won some landowners to its proposal to reopen it, but the question is far from settled.

But Bougainville is set for a referendum on independence in June 2019. Some in the government say revenue from the mine will be needed to fund a



**Top: Abandoned machinery at the Panguna mine**

**Below: Bougainville lies at the eastern edge of PNG, and is geographically and ethnically part of the Solomon Islands**

newly independent state.

Australian mining companies are desperate to make sure they grab a share of the potential profits. The Australian government will also be keen to ensure that it is Australia, and not other powers, that wields influence in Bougainville and PNG, and ensure that it is Australian multinationals that take the spoils of any mine.

The recent jockeying at the APEC summit in Port Moresby revealed the ongoing imperialist rivalries in the region. China tried to outbid the US, Australia and Japan in promising infrastructure to win influence with the PNG government.

The damage and destruction inflicted on Bougainville shows where this can lead—and why we have to oppose Australian imperialism.

Bougainville's resistance, with solidarity in Australia, defeated Australian imperialism last time. It can do so again.

# New book calls out dead end of ‘smug’ identity politics

**Trigger Warnings: Political correctness and the rise of the right**  
By Jeff Sparrow, Scribe, \$29.99

JEFF SPARROW'S *Trigger Warnings* argues that the left's abandonment of mass organising and its commitment to identity politics has allowed the right to gain ground in the US and Australia.

The book attempts to explain how a man like Trump, a billionaire who literally travels in a golden lift, came to power in the US on an “anti-establishment” platform.

Sparrow charts the decline in the level of working class struggle in Australia and the mass social movements throughout the West from the late 1970s. He looks at how the widespread pessimism produced by these defeats, as well as the absorption of a layer of radical activists into the professional class and academia, meant that the left turned away from mass organising towards bureaucratic strategies—what Sparrow calls “delegated politics”.

*Trigger Warnings* offers a valuable critique of the identity politics that emerged out of this period and its debilitating effect on the left.

Identity politics precludes the possibilities for the kind of mass, united struggles against oppression that existed in the 1960s and 1970s, because it is based on the idea that only those who experience a specific form of oppression can be relied on to challenge it. By extension, privilege theory holds that everyone, whether working class or ruling class, who doesn't experience a particular oppression necessarily benefits from it.

Sparrow argues that,



“In the past, the left had taken for granted the progressive credentials of the working class”. Indeed socialists have always seen questions of oppression and exploitation as inextricably linked and argued that workers have both the collective interest in and the power to fight both.

But identity politics led people to see questions of oppression as being separate to material questions like wages, working conditions and public services, rooted in something separate to capitalism.

Sparrow insists that much of the left has become dismissive and even contemptuous of the working class, and that, “progressives confirmed everything the culture warriors said: they openly embraced the condescending stereotype of the liberal elitist.”

Therefore, the left has looked increasingly to the state, or female, black or LGBTI politicians or even celebrities to challenge oppression.

This approach, according to Sparrow, means people like Pauline Hanson have been able to typecast the left as only interested in “minority”

**Above: Sections of the left focused on identity politics have embraced figures like Barack Obama and Julia Gillard, who have pushed through attacks on ordinary people's living standards**

issues and to claim that questions of oppression are the preserve of “progressive elites”.

Although the far right's strongest support is in the middle class, by seeing questions of oppression and economic struggles as counterposed, the left leaves the way open for the right to prey on the legitimate economic concerns of working class people. The popularity of Trump's promise to “bring back jobs” to the US, while he slandered migrants and women, is a frightening demonstration of this.

Sparrow makes the important point that the answer is not for the left to abandon struggles against oppression to fight for economic justice, but to recognise that they are one and the same.

## Oversimplification

However, Sparrow's emphasis on the role of identity politics means that there is sometimes an oversimplification of the political dynamics of the neo-liberal period.

John Howard, for example, did not win the 1996 election by decrying political correctness. He rode in on the back of years of Labor's neo-liberal attacks, which alienated working class voters.

Indeed, Howard's attempts to whip up racism as Liberal leader in the 1980s had flopped. It was only after his election that he began to rely on racism to drive through his deeply unpopular economic agenda.

There was also significant resistance to this agenda, led largely by the unions, which barely gets a mention. And when Howard introduced WorkChoices in 2006, it led to his defeat, partly through mass union mobilisations.

Howard did get away with too much, like the introduction of the GST and offshore processing of refugees, and changes to industrial relations laws. The unwillingness of the broad left to fight strongly enough to defeat these requires an analysis that goes beyond questions of political correctness.

The far right has grown not just out of the racism created by mainstream parties across the world, particularly against Muslims and refugees, but also the economic austerity meted out by those same parties.

It is also true that the left has “delegated” too many of its political struggles to Labor since the 1980s. But the book falls short of providing an image of what mass organising actually looks like.

The example Sparrow provides for grassroots organising is the Marriage Equality campaign. The Yes result was an important victory and did put pay to the idea that ordinary people are responsible for homophobia. But the mainstream Yes campaign focused narrowly on marriage at the expense of broader demands, like the rights of trans children and LGBTI teachers, and effectively demobilised the movement after marriage equality was introduced.

Nevertheless, *Trigger Warnings* is a useful critique of the identity politics that have demobilised the left at a time when mass struggles are so sorely needed to beat back sexism, racism, homophobia and neo-liberalism.

Sparrow's call for a politics that draws in wider layers of people on the basis of solidarity, rather than moralism and division, is one that should be heeded.

**Caitlin Doyle**



# STOP ADANI GREEN JOBS NOW

By James Supple

THOUSANDS JOINED the school student strike for climate on 30 November. “If you were doing your job properly, we wouldn’t be here,” Deanna Athanosos, a year 10 student, told Prime Minister Scott Morrison.

Despite increasingly urgent warnings, world leaders are failing to act.

A new UN Emissions Gap report has found that major countries including Australia, Canada, the US, the EU, South Korea, and the US will all miss even the woefully inadequate emissions targets they signed up to at the 2015 Paris climate summit.

Emissions reduction efforts need to be increased five-fold to hold warming to a safe limit of 1.5 degrees, it said.

That’s the background to Adani’s announcement it is going ahead with its new coal mine in Queensland. After failing to find investors willing to fund the mine it says it will self-finance the project from its own funds.

Adani has been forced to dramatically scale down the mine. Its CEO Lucas Dow claims it will “ramp up” over time to less than half the size first announced. Initial production will be just one-sixth what was planned.

The scale of the climate crisis means all remaining coal and gas needs to stay in the ground. We need a transition to 100 per cent renewable energy as quickly as possible.

Scott Morrison and the Liberals

are captive to the climate deniers. They now have no climate policy at all, after dropping the National Energy Guarantee. Resources Minister Matt Canavan’s response to the Adani announcement was typical, welcoming it as “great news”.

Labor leader Bill Shorten has announced plans for a 45 per cent reduction target by 2030, and funding to help ensure 50 per cent renewable energy by 2030.

But he also says, “there’s still a role for coal and for gas in our energy mix going forward”. Labor has refused to commit to stopping the Adani mine if it wins government next year.

And part of Shorten’s November funding announcement was \$5 billion for electricity transmission infrastructure, including an expansion of gas pipelines. But gas is not climate friendly. Mining gas releases large amounts of methane, meaning it is just as bad for the climate as coal.

Labor’s support for gas means an expansion of fracking, in a challenge to the campaigns that have halted it across the country. This would also require over-riding many Aboriginal people trying to defend their lands. Before Adani can proceed for example, the Queensland government would need to extinguish Native Title rights.

The NT government lifted a moratorium on fracking earlier this year followed by the WA Labor government in November, in defiance of the party’s own State Executive. In NSW

**Above: Opposing Adani at the student strike for climate action**

Santos is pushing to begin fracking in the Pilliga forest.

## Government investment

Australia needs to reach net zero emissions by around 2040, according to the Australia Institute.

We know this is possible. New wind and solar power are now cheaper than building coal plants. The Tesla big battery in South Australia is one example showing how battery storage can see them deliver 24 hour power.

But winning this requires building a mass movement that challenges the logic of capitalism and the market.

Energy companies care only about profits. Relying on a market mechanism, either Labor’s adoption of the National Energy Guarantee or a carbon price as proposed by The Greens, would see coal mining communities devastated by job cuts and risk higher power prices. Labor’s carbon tax failed to win public support because it meant increased power bills for ordinary people.

We need an immediate government plan to roll out 100 per cent renewable energy, as well as dramatic investments in public transport to slash vehicle emissions. The big companies who have profited from polluting the planet should pay the costs—through taxing the rich.

We need to fight for government investment and planning to make sure this means more jobs as well as cheaper power prices. These are the kind of demands that can build a mass movement for climate action.

**A market mechanism would see coal mining communities devastated and risk higher power prices**

**Solidarity**