

CAPITALISM IS COSTING US THE EARTH

BACK THE CLIMATE STRIKE



RIVER CRISIS

Corporate profits to blame for environmental crisis

THEORY

Why capitalism fails and the socialist alternative

STUDENT DEBT

Thirty years since the end of free education



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SOLIDARITY: WHO ARE WE?

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

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

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

SOLIDARITY MEETINGS AND BRANCHES

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Things they say

When all is said and done, I helped to make the thing happen. I set up the process which opened up the possibility and even the likelihood of change.

Now that it has happened, I absolutely accept the outcome. It's the law of the land and that's the way it is.

Tony Abbot, now he faces the prospect of losing his seat knowing that 75 per cent of Warringah voters disagreed with him on equal marriage

The English fought a civil war over this matter. The civil war between King Charles I and the Parliament was over the right of the Parliament or the King to make the appropriations.

Chris Pyne's weird history lesson in a failed effort to stop the refugee medivac bill

Australians should be outraged at AGL's announcement of a \$537 million half-yearly net profit. The big energy companies continue to take record profits, while Australian families and business continue to struggle under the burden of high energy prices.

Liberal Energy Minister Angus Taylor

I'll do my homework when you do yours
Placard by a high school student, at a rally of 12,500 in Belgium, on their fourth "Fridays for Future" walk offs

If we lose that vote next week, so be it...I will simply ignore it and we'll get on with the business.

Scott Morrison before the week before the Medivac Bill

The law will be abided by as it always is.

Peter Dutton, after the vote

[Chris Bowen] lived in the shadow of Paul Keating for a long time. He even used to wear a grey suit—wear dolphin grey. And he used to wear that suit into question time—seriously.

Peter Dutton telling Sky News what's wrong with Chris Bowen.

It is an unfortunate consequence of war that these civilian casualties occur... this is not lost on us.

Air Marshall Mel Hupfield, Chief of Joint Operations, on the ADF's air strike in June 2017 that allegedly killed 18 Iraqi civilians

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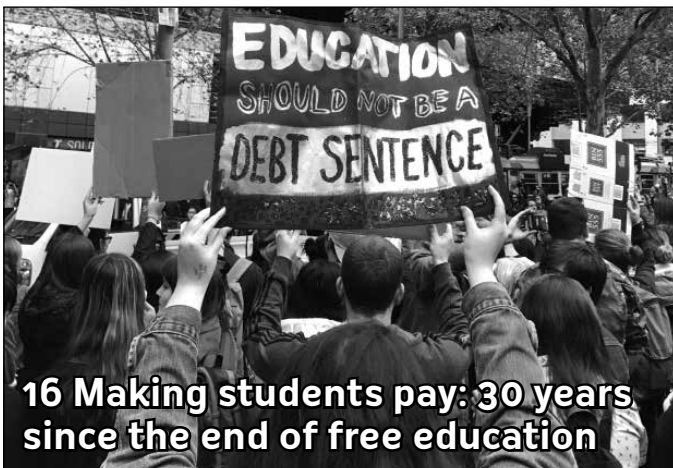
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INSIDE THE \$YSTEM

Coal power failures caused blackouts

OUTAGES AT coal-fired power stations led to a day of rolling blackouts as Victoria sweltered through extreme heat in late January.

Three electricity generation units in the Latrobe valley went off-line, with two unexpected outages and one on scheduled maintenance. This took 1800 megawatts out of the grid, equivalent to one large power station.

Temperatures reached 46 degrees at Melbourne Airport, pushing power demand beyond what was available. More than 200,000 consumers experienced blackouts.

Failures at coal-fired power plants across the country are becoming increasingly common as the generators age. NSW also saw failures at the Liddell and Eraring coal plants just as power demand spiked in the January heat.

Despite claims renewable energy isn't reliable, it provided an above average 9.1 per cent of Victoria's energy on the day of the blackouts. Solar generation tends to run at full tilt during days of extreme heat when power is most needed.

A survey by the Australia Institute recorded 135 break downs at coal generators in 2018—more than one every three days. And to make matters worse, coal power stations are particularly prone to failure during extreme heat.

American genocide cooled the planet

THE SCALE of the genocide of America's indigenous people helped cool the planet, contributing to the "Little Ice Age" that began around 1650, new research has found.

There were 56 million people killed during the colonisation of the Americas from 1492 to the beginning of the 1600s, academics at the University College London have estimated. This represented the death of 10 per cent of the global population at the time, and 90 per cent of the indigenous population of the area.

The collapse of farming in the Americas that resulted saw forests reclaim so much land that it took large amounts of carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere. This effect had already been recorded in ice cores recovered from Antarctica.

Banks' multi-billion dollar profits to keep ballooning



BANK SHARES surged when the Royal Commission's final report was released—showing it will do next to nothing to stop them making obscene profits.

As Tony Boyd put it in the *Financial Review*, "The big four banks can cheer because there is nothing in the Hayne report to prevent them earning about \$30 billion this year and even more thereafter."

The banks' rotten and predatory behaviour was exposed for all to see. They charged fees for no service, fees to dead people, ripped off the disabled and destroyed people's lives in pursuit of profits. The banks have already been forced to pay back \$850 million over the fees for no service scandal.

Commissioner Kenneth Hayne said it himself in his interim report—banking greed is the result of, "the pursuit of short-term profit at the expense of basic standards of honesty".

Yet there is no indication that a single banking executive is going to jail. The only scalps from the final report have been NAB's CEO Andrew Thorburn and Chair Ken Henry—not for any crimes committed but because were too arrogant in the witness box. And Thorburn is set to pick up a million dollar handshake on his way out.

There were 24 cases referred for further investigation by authorities. A few are likely to reach the courts, but bank profiteering will go on as usual after the dust settles.

Nor was there anything to stop the obscene CEO salaries at the banks. Westpac's Brian Hartzler pulled in \$5.5 million last year, the Commonwealth's Matt Comyn \$8.4 million, ANZ's Shayne Elliott \$3.15 million and NAB's Thorburn \$7.94 million, not to mention Macquarie's Nicholas Moore on \$25.2 million (his bank escaped scrutiny at the Royal Commission entirely). A maximum wage banning multi-million dollar pay packets would have been a start.

Some reforms were proposed, like a ban on cold calling to sell superannuation and insurance, a limit of one default super account over a person's working life, and some new oversight mechanisms for the corporate regulators.

But the Commission's final recommendations were widely seen as modest. Capitalism might have been on trial in the Royal Commission. But big business was already shrieking about the damage a reduction in bank lending was starting to do to their profits. Ultimately, the banking oligopoly is too important to Australian capitalism for our rulers to do very much about it.

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

Shonky security firms profits on Manus

THE AUSTRALIAN government has paid hundreds of millions of dollars to a shadow security firm to run new detention facilities on Manus Island.

Paladin has now won \$423 million for 22 months work on Manus, after its contract was extended in early January. The *Financial Review* says this equates to \$20.8 million a month.

Until recently, the company's registered address was a beach shack at Kangaroo Island. Its founder, executive Craig Thrupp, is now banned from entering PNG and another local director, Kisokau Powaseu, was recently charged with misappropriating funds and money laundering in PNG. There are also "allegations of deception, lying during the tender process and questionable payments" against the company, the *Financial Review* says.

Last July the UNHCR reported that accommodation on Manus it provided was below international shelter standards with leaking pipes, inadequate fire alarms and showers that weren't working.

Aboriginal homes sold off in Toowoomba

Over 100 Aboriginal tenants in Toowoomba are homeless after accommodation, formerly social housing, was sold from underneath them. The 37 properties were originally owned by the Downs Aborigines and Islanders Company Ltd, set up to provide secure housing for the local Aboriginal community. But they were transferred in 2016 to a new company. Stewart Levitt of Levitt Robinson Solicitors told NITV that the circumstances around the transfer were suspicious and should be investigated by ASIC for breaching the law.

Many of the homes were sold at auction in early February, despite a protest on the day by many of the residents. The Queensland state government has refused to step in and buy the properties.

EDITORIAL

Climate, refugees: Dump the Liberals and fight now for change

THE LIBERALS are in chaos as they head for a crushing defeat at May's federal election. The reopening of parliament delivered further humiliation for Prime Minister Scott Morrison—and a win for the refugee rights movement over the medical transfers bill.

While the country has suffered a summer of extreme heat, bushfires and floods, Scott Morrison refuses even to utter the words climate change.

Globally, last year was the fourth hottest on record, behind only 2016, 2017 and 2015. This year, Australia has seen record breaking heat including Adelaide's hottest ever day of 46.2 degrees in late January.

Rivers in NSW have dried up in the drought, killing millions of fish and leaving towns without drinking water. Tasmania has been consumed by bushfires of a kind rarely seen before the last decade. Climate change is threatening the existence of wilderness areas there that will never recover if they burn.

The government is prepared to spend \$50 billion building 12 new submarines, but refuses to spend a cent on the renewable energy transition we need to avert climate catastrophe.

The Coalition is packed full of climate deniers determined to keep coal power stations running for as long as possible. It was Morrison himself who proudly waved around a lump of coal in parliament.

It has even allowed the Vales Point coal power station in NSW to apply for money that would extend its life under the government's Emission Reduction Fund, money that is supposed to go to tackling climate change.

But they panicked and shut down debate in parliament when The Greens moved to amend their new "big stick" electricity legislation to stop them funding new coal power stations.

Scare campaigns

The Liberals are growing increasingly desperate, resorting to scare campaigns and hysteria against Labor on tax, the economy and refugees. But their hypocrisy is astounding.

The Coalition has spent \$160,000 of taxpayers' money running a parliamentary inquiry into Labor's franking credits plan. Not only is this a blatant misuse of parliamentary resources



Above: Targeting Scott Morrison and the Liberals at last November's School Strike 4 Climate

for a Liberal Party attack campaign, but Tim Wilson, the Liberal MP running the operation, also collaborated with multi-billion dollar investment firm Wilson Asset Management to turn the hearings into a Liberal election stunt.

He even arranged the inquiry's schedule to align with the company's "roadshow" sessions so they could march their clients over to protest against Labor outside the hearings. All this shows just how much the Liberals are working for the 1 per cent at the top of society.

Build the fight now

We need to get the Liberals out. But it's not enough to just wait and vote to get rid of them. Action now will shape the period ahead.

We need further union stopwork rallies before the election. Melbourne's mass demonstration of tens of thousands on 23 October helped to deliver a thumping win for Labor in the Victorian election. Yet we are still waiting for the union leaders to call similar rallies before May's federal election, or the March state election in NSW.

Large demonstrations can make it clear to Labor that we will fight to "Change the Rules" and prepare the ground to win far more than what Labor is currently offering. Labor is yet to commit to union demands for any form of industry-wide bargaining or removing restrictions on the right to strike.

High school students are showing the way, calling a second Strike for Climate on 15 March.

University students and some unions have announced they will join them.

This needs to be the start of a movement that fights for the real action we need—like the students' demand for 100 per cent renewable energy in ten years.

The refugee rights movement will also hit the streets in April for the Palm Sunday rallies.

This can help counter the Liberals' lies and scaremongering about refugees. Morrison's claims that refugees on Manus and Nauru coming here for medical care could be criminals could have come from the mouth of Donald Trump.

After more than five years, it's time to bring everyone here.

Yet Labor is still committed to maintaining offshore detention. And it accepts the Liberals' boat turnback operation, refusing to stand up to the Liberals' racist fear campaign about refugees—so it's up to the grassroots movement to counter their lies and prepare to fight on after the election.

The strength of the grassroots struggles will determine whether we can win real change.

We need socialist organisation to strengthen each fight and build a challenge to the capitalist system as a whole. Join us and help to fight for a world run in the interests of ordinary people and the planet.

.....
High school students are showing the way, calling a second Strike for Climate on 15 March

Climate strike organiser: ‘the politicians aren’t listening’

SOLIDARITY SPOKE to Vivienne Paduch, a Year 10 student at Manly Selective School and one of the organisers of Sydney’s Strike for Climate last year about why students have called a second Climate Strike.

What did so many students join the Climate Strike in December?

The reason our movement has gained so much traction amongst the youth is that people are really scared. In the past the climate argument has always come from scientists and academics who put very logical and reasonable arguments but this is the first time people have been fighting with their hearts. All the emotion that was part of the strike was a huge reason it’s gained so much momentum.

What did you think of Prime Minister Scott Morrison’s statement that “kids should go to school” and demanding “less activism in schools”?

It was infuriating, it really just proved how much the politicians aren’t listening to us, how much of a disconnect there is.

So many people pointed out that if there was proper climate action being taken in parliament, we wouldn’t need to protest. So the ball is in your court Scott Morrison.

What kind of action are you calling for to deal with climate change?

We know that the climate crisis is mainly caused by non-renewable energy sources and in particular coal, so the biggest and easiest transition we can make is no new coal plants. The school strike has three key demands: Stop Adani, No new coal and gas, and 100 per cent renewable energy by 2030 with the goal of Australia being carbon neutral.

It shouldn’t really matter what party is in government the fact remains we need to take climate action now.

What is planned for the second Climate Strike?

The next strike is 15 March and this time it’s a global strike. They are happening in all the capital cities in Australia plus more than 20 rural towns and cities.

The reason there’s a second strike is because the message of the first strike has not been followed. We gained a lot of traction but we’ve got to keep fighting until our three demands are met and Australia takes



Above: Vivienne Paduch, a Year 10 student helping organise the School Strike 4 Climate

Top: Last year’s Climate Strike on 30 November

climate action.

We know that our message resonates with a lot of people. The issue of

climate change crosses party boundaries and affects everyone. We think that the movement will just keep growing.

Demand government investment in renewables

LAST YEAR, school students gave an electric shock to the climate movement when they walked off school for climate action.

They went further than the existing campaigns—for example against Adani’s Carmichael Coal Mine—and went to the heart of the issue. We have 11 years to limit the worst impacts of climate change; we need a zero carbon economy and that means building renewable power and stopping all coal and gas expansions.

Students decried the Liberals who still refuse to back any climate policy whatsoever, and mocked their climate denial.

This should be a wake-up call for every workplace and university. We need a climate movement built around solid demands on the government for renewable energy, and we need to step up to force real action now.

Demands for real change

With a likely Shorten government waiting in the wings, we need clear demands. Labor at least have a climate policy, and Shorten is unlikely to take lumps of coal into parliament to prove his allegiance to the coal industry. It will take more than anger at the Liberals to keep up the fight.

Labor’s National Energy Guar-

antee only proposes regulation on energy retailers. But coal stations—all built by the government—and gas currently provide 85 per cent of power. They need to be closed down as soon as possible. Labor would allow them to keep operating until their 50 year lifespan is up, meaning there would still be coal plants operating 30 years from now. Changing that will take direct government investment in publicly owned renewable power.

This means least 130,000 green jobs in construction, manufacturing, operations and management to get to 100 per cent renewable energy in ten years. On top of that we need jobs on the front line, fighting increased risk of fires, and guaranteeing water to communities like Walgett currently experiencing dire water shortages.

To have any hope of a transition to a zero carbon economy, we need a climate movement built around real demands for green jobs now, for direct government investment in 100 per cent renewable energy, and for an end to all new coal and gas. These demands need to be taken up at our universities and workplaces, as activists build the strength to walk off with the school students on 15 March.

Daniel Cotton

Corporate irrigation profits drain towns and rivers of life

By James Supple

TOWNS ARE running out of water and fish are dying in alarming numbers in Western NSW, providing a glimpse of what is at stake as the climate crisis drives temperatures to record levels.

A long, harsh drought has put enormous pressure on river systems, but it is mass irrigation by agribusiness corporations that has pushed the Barka, as local Aboriginal people call the Darling River, to complete collapse.

Walgett, a town in northern NSW on the Namoi and Barwon Rivers which feed the Barka, ran out of water in January when its water system broke. This shut off many air-conditioners as temperatures that month hit an average high of 40 degrees.

The town has relied on dangerously poor quality bore water since the local dam dried up 18 months ago.

Donations of bottled water are being delivered to Walgett, as well as other towns along the Darling River including Menindee, Wilcannia and Pooncarie, where emergency bore water is hazardous to drink. All these towns have large Aboriginal populations.

Mass fish kills near Menindee have seen up to a million fish dead along the river. Lack of water, which has turned the river into a series of muddy pools, produced algal blooms that sucked oxygen from the water, killing the fish.

The state of the Barka is a source of great pain for Aboriginal communities, “It’s our lifeblood—without water we have no name, no culture—nothing”, Barkindji elder Badger Bates from Wilcannia told the *Sydney Morning Herald*.

SEED—an Indigenous youth climate network, joined with other Aboriginal activists to sit in at Parliament House in Canberra on 13 February, part of a “Water is Life” convergence. The protest demanded recognition of Aboriginal rights to manage water, the release of water used by irrigators back into the Murray-Darling, along with an end to fracking and mining projects draining and contaminating waterways across the country. The NSW Aboriginal Land Council network is also co-ordinating a day of protest on 3 March.

The damage to the rivers is a product of the warped priorities of



Above: The Darling River has been reduced to a series of muddy pools

capitalism. The Morrison government, including National party figures like Barnaby Joyce with control of water management, ensure large amounts of water are in the hands of a small number of huge agribusiness companies. Agribusiness favours water hungry crops like cotton as they are the most profitable, with Cotton Australia chief executive Adam Kay telling *The Weekly Times* this year that, “historically prices [for cotton] are still sensational”.

One property, Cubbie station in southern Queensland, controls a licence for up to 460,000 megalitres, equivalent to all of the irrigation entitlements downstream in north-west NSW.

Despite the lack of water downstream, storage dams at cotton farms in southern Queensland have been full of water. According to a statement by 12 leading scientists, “as much as 75 per cent of all surface water diversions” in the northern section of the Murray-Darling basin may not be metered at all, meaning there is no proper record of how much water is being taken.

Big business rorts

The federal government is spending \$13 billion to buy back water allocations from farmers and fund more efficient water use. This program has been plagued by rorts and profiteering.

One agribusiness company, Webster Ltd, chaired by union-buster Chris Corrigan, received almost \$80 million in compensation and payments to surrender water allocations from one of its properties, immediately announc-

ing a \$36 million profit on the deal.

Another big company, Eastern Australian Agriculture, received \$80 million for water rights in 2017, 25 per cent more than what it offered to sell them for.

Some of the purchases have involved buying water rights that only existed in years of exceptionally heavy rainfall. This means that most years they deliver nothing back to the environment at all.

A *Four Corners* report in 2017 also uncovered evidence that agribusiness was engaging in water theft through tampering with meters.

“It was clear that not just one property was involved”, Jamie Morgan, a Former Manager with the Department of Primary Industries Strategic Investigations Unit told *Four Corners*, “there was basically an entire river system that was seriously lacking accountability”.

A Royal Commission in South Australia, which reported on 31 January, exposed systemic failures in implementing the multi-billion dollar Murray-Darling Basin Plan. To placate agribusiness, the Murray-Darling Basin Authority has failed to follow the best available science on necessary water flows and ignored the impact of climate change in reducing available water.

The failures were so appalling that the Commission accused the Authority of breaking the law.

As long as the Murray-Darling is managed in the interests of corporate profits and the huge agribusiness corporations, the catastrophes we have seen this summer will continue.

.....
Large amounts of water are in the hands of a small number of huge agribusiness companies

Wharfies strike back to stand up to Hutchison's attacks

WHARFIES IN Sydney and Brisbane are a month into their campaign of industrial action to secure a decent Enterprise Agreement (EA) with Hutchison Ports.

They are fighting for improvements to safety, training, a roster, and a right of return in case of future redundancies.

Hutchison has declared ambitions to become the “Tiger Air of the waterfront”. They opened negotiations with claims to slash existing conditions—everything from meal breaks to the roster, outsourcing core roles and further automating the port.

So far, the workforce has taken two 24 hour strikes and continues with daily 30 minute stoppages every two hours, along with bans on overtime and upgrades.

The strikes forced Hutchison to back off from cuts to long service leave, redundancy payments and superannuation. However the company now say this is “conditional” on cost concessions and more flexibility. The MUA (now the Maritime division of the CFMMEU) is pursuing a claim for a roster for the entire workforce. Currently, half the workforce have a roster, while the rest wait for daily text messages for their shifts. The company wants to eliminate any roster at all, making everyone slaves to their phones.

Hutchison are spinning an argument they cannot afford the union's claims and their Australian operations are losing money. But they are refusing to agree to many cost-neutral claims.

And they are an enormous multinational company with ports in 51 countries and assets in telecommunications, retail and infrastructure. They were the third company to set up in Port Botany and did so expecting to lose money on that investment for at least ten years while they establish themselves.

Protected action?

Already, the so-called “Fair Work Act” that governs industrial action has created difficulties for wharfies. “Protected action” is the small window of time negotiating an Enterprise Agreement when strike action is “legal”. But this process is covered in paperwork and legal hurdles.

In December, the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) refused to send out the protected action ballot in the lead up to Christmas, claiming



Above: Protesting during one of the 24 hour strike at Hutchison in Sydney

there was too much post!

Wharfies at Hutchison Sydney implementing supposedly “protected” 30 minute stoppages have been accused of taking unlawful industrial action.

Maintenance workers have different breaks and therefore took their 30 minute stoppage at a different time. It is unheard of for wharfies to work without maintenance coverage, so all wharfies stopped too. Yet the company refuses to accept this as a safety issue, claims the stoppages were “illegal”, and is docking four hours pay per shift in penalty. The workforce sat in for four hours every shift over three days—no pay no work!

The Fair Work Act stipulates a minimum of three days’ notice must be given to the bosses of any planned action. This gives the bosses time to organise scab labour, outsource work, stockpile, or reschedule and make the strike as ineffective as possible. Companies can also appeal for up to seven business days’ notice.

Hutchison applied to the Fair Work Commission (FWC) for five days’ notice and thankfully lost this application. However, DP World, another terminal operator entering a bargaining period, has just won an identical claim.

Outsourcing

To undermine industrial action, Hutchison has been outsourcing ships to neighbouring terminals Patrick and DP World. Due to secondary boycott laws, it is illegal for wharfies at other

terminals to refuse to work these ships.

On the first strike day on 24 January, Hutchison wharfies marched from their carpark down Foreshore road—stopping two lanes of trucks—to the neighbouring Patrick terminal to protest this outsourcing. They were met with a wall of riot police with horses and dogs and two people were arrested, including Branch Secretary Paul McAleer.

Traffic chaos and a sit-in in front of police lines meant wharfies due to start the 2pm shift at Patrick could not enter the site for another hour and a half, severely disrupting the ship.

The latest ship to be outsourced went to DP World. This was not during a strike period and is a clear attempt to cancel shifts and starve the workforce—a version of a lock out. DP wharfies found significant safety issues with the ship and demanded maintenance before working it. Union branch officials were refused entry to the terminal. The ship was still languishing in the port as *Solidarity* went to press.

Hutchison wharfies are digging in for a long fight. It will require a major escalation to force concessions from the company.

With DP World also now balloting for action, it is set to be a hot few months on the waterfront. Crucial to any victory at both terminals will be co-ordination of action across the waterfront and a willingness to defy the laws currently shackling union power.

.....
The so-called “Fair Work Act” that governs industrial action has already created difficulties for wharfies

Coal workers' strike wins big victory against casualisation

By Tooba Anwar

WORKERS AT a coal mine in NSW have won a big victory against casualisation after four days of strike action.

The 70 workers from the Wongawilli mine southwest of Sydney will be switched over from casual roles to fixed-term permanent contracts and won 12 per cent pay increases, moving them from being the lowest earning workers in the region paid \$300 a week less than other miners to the highest among labour hire companies.

Through workers "flexing their collective muscle" they were now "now permanent employees on pay and conditions consistent with the area", the CFMEU's local divisional vice president Bob Timbs said.

They will also benefit from annual leave, carers' leave, accident pay and long service leave entitlements—most of which they did not receive before the strike.

The workers at the mine owned by Wollongong Coal have their jobs contracted out through a separate labour hire company. The CFMEU says the tactic is becoming more and more common in the industry.

The workers had initially planned a two week strike, but won what their union called a "spectacular victory" in only four days.

It had told members to prepare to strike "for the long haul" after the labour hire company said it could not afford their claims.

But significantly, Wollongong Coal agreed to step in and "assist [labour hire company] CAS by offering a higher contractual rate to enable them to meet demands", the company's secretary Sanjay Sharma said. This shows the power of strike action to win proper pay rises and decent conditions.

The campaign built union membership at the mine from 13 to 80 in less than a year. The two year agreement is the first enterprise agreement the union has won at the site.

The dispute shows how unions can organise to beat casualisation and low pay as well as win decent conditions.

And it proves the power of strike action to shut down production and force bosses to find the money for decent pay.



Above: Workers on strike at the Wongawilli coal mine

.....

The workers had initially planned a two week strike, but won what their union called a "spectacular victory" in only four days

Port Kembla Coal Terminal fights on as termination looms

WORKERS AT Port Kembla Coal Terminal (PKCT) continue to fight to protect their jobs.

In April last year the Fair Work Commission sided with the bosses and terminated the workers' enterprise bargaining agreement. The termination comes into effect on 29 March. If no agreement is made before then, 51 workers will go back to the industry Award and face a 40 per cent pay cut as well as major cuts to conditions.

After three years of negotiations and over 100 meetings, PKCT workers have made significant concessions, such as losing control over staffing rosters. But they remain determined to retain a key employment security clause. The clause prevents management from using labour hire or casual contractors in place of permanent staff.

In mid-February PKCT management attempted to pressure its workforce into a meeting without any union representatives. They responded with a three day strike and have rejected meeting with management until the company commits to retaining the employment security clause.

"They've obviously got an agenda to replace us with contractors, casuals and labour hire. What they want is to be able to use the threat of sacking us over any issues we raise at

work. It's about busting the union up so the workforce isn't able to fight," a PKCT worker told *Solidarity*.

PKCT management has claimed that the current employment security clause is crippling their operations. But during the course of the current agreement management has poured \$300 million into new equipment and reduced the workforce from 102 to 51. Management have locked workers out for over 30 days this year alone, spending enormous amounts of money paying scab labour \$900 a day, \$1200 a night and \$1800 for public holidays.

Workers at PKCT are also concerned about further cuts to conditions. "We've been told they want the ability to use us flexibly and apply the day work rate to Saturdays, Sunday and night shifts. Management are looking to use the time-off-in-lieu system to force workers to come in on a Sunday and a work a normal day rate, and then allocate a day off on a weekday.

"We're not going to give up. I think about our kids; their futures are at stake."

If PKCT workers are going to secure their jobs and a decent agreement, they will have to be prepared to defy the law, and build support to shut PKCT operations down.

Matt Meagher

Women in parliament won't lead a fight against sexism

By Ruby Wawn

THERE IS no doubt that women in politics and in parliament experience sexist bullying and harassment.

Sexist bullying inside the Liberal Party pushed Julia Banks to quit and move to sit as an independent MP. Only 25 per cent of Liberal MPs are women, and the party could be left with just five female MPs after the election.

Even Cabinet Minister Kelly O'Dwyer conceded that the Liberals are widely regarded as "anti-women".

Greens Senator Sarah Hanson-Young has also endured years of sexist comments inside parliament, including David Leyonhjelm's disgusting comment they she should "stop shagging men" during a Senate debate about violence against women.

But her suggestion in December that it was time to form a women's caucus in Federal Parliament to combat the culture of sexual harassment and bullying completely missed the mark.

The women in Parliament who include Liberals, One Nation's Pauline Hanson, right-wing anti-abortion Labor MPs like Jacinta Collins as well as more progressive Labor and Greens MPs, are no more "sisters" than female CEOs like billionaire Gina Rinehart and working class women are sisters.

In a 2014 address to the National Press Club, Julie Bishop declared herself to be no feminist, and said that she was "first and foremost a parliamentarian and minister" creating a clear distinction between her position of power and her identity as a woman.

Bishop also echoed the capitalist merit argument stating that she would "never blame the fact that I'm a woman" if she could not advance in her career.

She joins the ranks of Liberal women such as Concetta Fierravanti-Wells, Linda Reynolds and Fiona Scott who see no benefit to the collective struggle of women because of the capitalist logic says that if you work hard enough, you'll achieve your goals.

Fierravanti-Wells says she won her, "preselection for Parliament fair and square after five attempts".

Women like this have no interest in addressing the issues that affect the



Above: Liberal and National Party MPs in Scott Morrison's Ministry—no allies in the fight against sexism

majority of working class women, such as the rising cost of living, stagnant wages, and the challenge of balancing the need to survive with the responsibility of being an unpaid carer.

Liberal women in parliament live in a completely different world and do not represent the majority of working class women.

Instead, they represent themselves, their careers and, usually, the interests of the ruling class.

Ruling class women

The liberal feminist aim of increasing the representation of women in positions of power, such as on corporate boards or in parliament, does nothing for the material lives of working class women.

Women in positions of power did not get there by lifting up other women along the way with them. They got there by playing the game and mitigating the risk they present to capitalism. Women in positions of power are not interested in dismantling the economic underpinnings of sexism.

Ruling class women and women MPs experience sexism. But they are more likely to be able to afford enough childcare, or a nanny, to reduce the burden of domestic labour.

Women who sit in positions as bosses of thousands of workers or as government ministers also benefit from the sexism that leads to lower wages for women workers and cuts to public services that make working women's lives harder.

The parliament is not a workplace.

It is an institution integral to protecting the interests of capitalism and the ruling class.

It routinely reflects the values of capitalism by enshrining endemic sexism in legislation.

In NSW, we have seen the closure of countless women's shelters and refuges as part of the Liberals' quest for privatisation.

Women are spending up to 80 per cent of their pay check on childcare and can barely afford to continue working while childcare workers themselves, over 90 per cent of them female, are earning well below the national average. And the Gillard government, the government of our first female Prime Minister, cut access to the Single Parenting Payment forcing more single mothers to live on the dole.

The Forced Adoption laws pushed through NSW Parliament late last year is yet another example of the sexism of the state.

Under these laws, children who have spent only two years in out of home care can be adopted without the consent of their families.

These laws will punish women but Aboriginal mothers in particular whose "motherhood" does not meet the expectations of government bureaucrats.

The success of capitalism is predicated on the ability of the state to minimise spending on public services that have the potential to liberate working class women.

And as the managers of capitalism, most women in parliament are no sisters of the working class.

Women in positions of power are not interested in dismantling the economic underpinnings of sexism

Resisting the imperialist coup in Venezuela

By Héctor Puente Sierra

THE ONGOING right-wing offensive to oust Venezuelan president Nicolás Maduro came to a head on 23 January, with National Assembly leader Juan Guaidó appointing himself as interim president in a calculated move during a massive anti-government rally.

Within hours the governments of Donald Trump, Jair Bolsonaro and other right wingers had issued statements recognising Guaidó as president and demanding the resignation of Maduro. Support followed from Australia, Britain, Canada and the European Union.

In addition, the US has imposed new sanctions targeting the state oil company PDVSA, cutting off the main source of Venezuelan government revenue to put more pressure on Maduro to step down.

This could be the culmination of the long onslaught by the Venezuelan right to remove Maduro and reverse what survives of the gains made by the Bolivarian revolution in the early 2000s.

This attempt by western capitalist powers at regime change follows a long and bloody history of US-backed coups in Latin America. Socialists everywhere should unconditionally reject this imperialist intervention.

The welfare of ordinary Venezuelans is the least concern of the US and the other powers. They hope to gain better access to Venezuela's oil reserves, the largest in the world, and remove a government seen as an obstacle to neo-liberalism and US domination in Latin America.

However, what steps the right will take following Guaidó's self-appointment remains unclear. The move seems designed to stir the opposition forces and deepen the situation of ungovernability, creating a context where an intervention by sections of the military could become justified.

But Maduro, like Hugo Chávez before him, has been careful to keep the military close.

This is not just a conciliatory gesture to the Venezuelan powers; the military is part and parcel of the ruling party PSUV and the state apparatus. They sit in ministries and the boardrooms of state companies, and military officers such as Diosdado Cabello are part of Maduro's inner circle holding state power.

Meanwhile, support for the op-



Above: The military, whose actions in determining the course of the coup attempt will be key, are close to Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro

position doesn't exist throughout Venezuelan society. The urban poor may be joining anti-government demonstrations over economic demands or abstaining from voting, but this doesn't mean they support the return of the traditional right, who don't have anything to offer them and who if in power would unleash a wave of repression against them.

Chavistas' failure

But socialists also should be clear that US sanctions and economic and political sabotage by the right are deepening, not causing, the crisis devastating Venezuelan society. The roots of it have to be located in Venezuela's economic and political model defended by Maduro and the PSUV.

Shortly before his death in 2013, Chávez laid out the Plan for the Nation 2013-2019, a restatement of his Socialism in the 21st century:

"This is a programme for the transition to socialism and the radicalisation of participatory democracy. We should not delude ourselves—the socio-economic form that prevails in Venezuela remains capitalist... This programme is aimed at the radical suppression of the logic of capital and a continuing transition to socialism. For new forms of planning and production for the benefit of the people to emerge requires pulverising the bourgeois form of the state."

Instead, what we see is the failure of the economy to diversify and

reduce its dependence on oil, which Chávez identified as the precondition to breaking the grip of neo-liberal global institutions on Venezuela.

The country is heavily dependent on imports. Production has ground to a halt and investment doesn't take place. Hence the images of empty shelves in supermarkets and long queues to obtain basic food and medicine. For six years Venezuela has also had the highest inflation rate in the world, hitting nearly a million percent last year.

The unaccountable and undemocratic structures of the PSUV, which has fused with the state, have elevated layers of wealthy Chavistas into a new ruling class and given rise to huge levels of corruption, causing a further drain on the state funds and resources.

This is why those in the Venezuelan left that have distanced themselves from the PSUV are right to insist on the development of a new left organisation, independent of the state, that can fight for a working class strategy.

But this has to be combined with a defence of the reforms of the Chávez years and a firm opposition to imperialism.

This won't be achieved by uncritically supporting the authoritarian means of Maduro or his attempts to conciliate sections of the old and the new bourgeoisie, but only by rediscovering the long lost radical mood of the Bolivarian revolution.

Socialist Review UK

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The PSUV has elevated wealthy Chavistas into a new ruling class and given rise to huge levels of corruption

Los Angeles teachers' strike shows how to fight and win

By Clare Lemlich

TEACHERS IN Los Angeles became the latest to join the strike wave in education across the US in January, winning historic gains after their first strike in 30 years.

A year ago, teachers in West Virginia staged an explosive strike that inspired similar action to spread through Oklahoma, Kentucky, Arizona, North Carolina and Colorado.

Educating over 600,000 students, Los Angeles is the second largest school district in the country, so all eyes were on our fight.

It's also the first solidly "blue" state to join the strike wave, raising political questions about why the Democrats have led the charge on privatisation and the defunding of public schools across California for decades.

California is the wealthiest state in the country (its economy is bigger than that of most countries), but it is 46 out of 50 US states for per-pupil spending.

Teachers won back-dated and future pay rises, more librarians and nurses in every school, an enforceable cap on class sizes, and a commitment from the district to fight the statewide expansion of publicly funded but privately operated charter schools.

Social justice unionism

The district is almost 90 per cent students of colour, with almost 75 per cent from Latino backgrounds and large African-American and Asian populations. The vast majority of the workforce are women of colour too.

Thanks to the concerted effort of left activists in the teachers' union, the strike was widely understood by both teachers and the community as a fight to defend the last public space that kids of colour can access in the US.

The district tried to say that social justice demands didn't count as union issues and to confine teachers to their claims for pay, staffing, and class sizes. But the union also won a reduction in the daily security searches for weapons in schools and legal assistance for undocumented students and their families.

"We won a reduction in the 'random' searches", high school teacher, union activist and socialist Gillian Russom explains, "although obviously they should be eliminated. The district's admitting they're racist or



Above: Teachers in Los Angeles during their five day strike

don't work, and the answer to that is eliminating them, not reducing them. But it's something they moved on that we technically had no bargaining rights over.

"Then there's the immigrant defense fund. Our original demand—again completely outside the box of what a union can usually get—was a \$1 million fund. What we got was the district hiring a dedicated attorney for immigrant families to receive support. That's a big expense. I think it's tremendous that we won on that."

I helped organise a community solidarity campaign called Tacos for Teachers, along with other activists in the International Socialist Organization, Democratic Socialists of America, and California Educators Rising.

Not only did we raise over \$40,000 to deliver tacos to thousands of striking teachers across the district, we raised the profile of immigrant rights in the city and opposition to Trump's racist border wall.

I spoke to a teacher at one picket who explained that she was marking students as present even though they were respecting the picket-line, to ensure Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) couldn't use non-attendance to deport them later.

She also explained why getting more counsellors in schools was important to her. "When these kids that Trump has stolen from their families get to us, they are going to have serious trauma," she said. "We need to

give them the support they need."

What's next

The strike was a stunning victory with mass community support. One survey from Loyola Marymount University found that more than 80 per cent of the county supported the teachers.

But there is much left to win. The city's superintendent is a former investment banker who plans to break the district into several smaller areas in what's called the "portfolio model"—in which schools are treated like stocks in an investment portfolio.

Wherever this plan has been implemented in the US, it has brought privatisation, school closures, and increased racial segregation. Teachers got a taste of their own power in Los Angeles and they are in an excellent position to rise up against these plans for the district.

This strike wave has already put class politics back on the agenda across the country in a profound way. And it's far from over. Teachers in Denver, Colorado began striking in February and teachers in Oakland, California are next.

At the same time that Los Angeles struck, aviation and other federal workers started to show their class power in the face of Trump's government shutdown, threatening to close down major airports. This working class confidence and self-activity show the power that could bring down the Trump administration.

Almost 75 per cent of students are from Latino backgrounds alongside large African-American and Asian populations

French socialist: Yellow vest revolt is a cry of rage against austerity

Jad Bouharoun is a socialist based in Paris who has been part of the wave of yellow vests protests in France. He will visit Australia in April to speak at Solidarity's Keep Left conference.

Below is part of a speech he gave to explain where the movement came from, who are the yellow vests and how left-wing activists should respond.

'THE FUEL tax hike announced by French President Emmanuel Macron that started the movement was only the straw that broke the camel's back.

This movement emerged after a decade of global economic crisis and austerity policies adopted by all the European governments. Macron is trying to apply further violent neo-liberal measures—the classic recipe of tax cuts for the very rich, cuts to public services, privatisation of public services and pensions as well as indirect taxation like the fuel tax, which mostly hit people who have less money.

Even before the yellow vests emerged Macron was perceived as the president of the rich. After a year in power Macron was announced as the saviour of the European neo-liberal centre. He is today the most unpopular president in the history of France. For the past ten years we've had three presidents each with a new record low in approval ratings.

We've had a very sharp polarisation which is what is happening throughout Europe. The past few years have seen large sectors of the working class going on strike and students occupying their schools and universities. At the same time there is a polarisation to the right: in the last election in 2017 the far right candidate got ten million votes.

The yellow vests movement emerged in this context. The vast majority of the people taking part are working class: in work, unemployed, retired or juggling two jobs to make ends meet. They all say they don't have enough money to make ends meet and they hate Macron and want him to resign.

This movement is really outside of the organised working class. One in two working people in France have never been part of a union. These are people who usually live in smaller towns and work in small workplaces. Very often they have to travel 30 or 50 kilometres to get to work, so fuel is a major expense—which is why the tax is so hated.



Above: Jad Bouharoun

Top: Yellow vests demonstration in France

'They all say they don't have enough money to make ends meet and they hate Macron and want him to resign.'

A minority of the movement are small business owners who want less taxes but are opposed to raising wages because this means they will have to pay their workers more.

Although the most visible and spectacular demonstrations are in Paris, most participants in the yellow vest movements are in smaller gatherings of hundreds of people all over the country blocking roads. All of this means the movement is very uneven.

Political ideas

The far right have tried to hijack the movement on social media and appear as its representatives. Many participants have explicitly rejected these attempts. Some fascist groups have been kicked out of demonstrations.

People are moving into struggle using symbols that are unusual for the left, like the French flag and singing the national anthem, including in a minority of cases homophobic or racist ideas. This is not surprising given the mainstream political parties and the media have resorted to racism and Islamophobia.

As the movement goes on the anti-racist and working class movement are realising that we need to stand shoulder to shoulder with the yellow vests but to bring our ideas and our arguments.

The fact that they're involved in struggle is actually starting to change their ideas.

The violence comes mainly from the police—on one Saturday the

police fired 10,000 grenades in Paris alone, one grenade every four or five seconds on average. Many people are starting to realise that the police are on the side of the rich.

Another idea that some in the yellow vests had was that trade unions were useless.

But we've had local convergences between trade unions and the yellow vests and both are realising that they need each other to win.

Finally sections of the anti-racist movement have decided to join the demonstrations bringing their own anti-racist demands. This is important because if we can learn one thing from France in the last few years it's that traditional class struggle—strikes, demonstrations, occupations—create a favourable environment for anti-racists but do not make racism disappear automatically.

The French ruling class will use racism and Islamophobia whenever they are in trouble.

The images of riots and barricades in Paris are a reminder of what happened in 1968 but the economic impact of the yellow vests at the moment is not so big.

In May 1968 the economic impact was huge because there was also the largest general strike in the history of the country. Macron is already in big trouble politically, what we need now is more strike action to really finish him off. This will not come from above, it needs to be built from below in every workplace.'

RACISM, CRISIS, CLIMATE CHAOS: WHY CAPITALISM FAILS AND THE ALTERNATIVE

Adam Adelpour explains how tackling the rise of racism and the far right, the threat of climate change and growing inequality requires a fight against the system itself

POLITICAL CHAOS and instability are spreading across the globe.

Racism and the far right are on the rise almost everywhere. Donald Trump, the racist bigot that sits in the White House, is determined to spread racist poison and encourage this worldwide.

Following the longest government shut-down in US history he has now declared a national emergency to seize funding for his border wall with Mexico.

Last year Hungary's government won the election after blaming Jewish financiers for the country's problems. Italy's new Interior Minister Matteo Salvini, head of the far right League, has declared, "The good times for illegals are over. Get ready to pack your bags".

And in Brazil, Jair Bolsonaro, a far-right bigot and supporter of the country's former dictatorship, is now president. He has referred to black activists as "animals" that should "go back to the zoo".

In Australia, Scott Morrison and the Liberals are desperately channeling Trump's racism as they slump further and further in the polls. This gives further confidence to the likes of Senator Fraser Anning, who channelled Hitler in one of his parliamentary speeches, calling for a "final solution" for Muslim immigration, and attended a rally against African immigration organised by fascists in St Kilda in January.

Australia's racist border policies have provided a shocking source of inspiration. In 2018 Denmark announced they would use Lindholm Island as a dumping ground for refugees.

A system of crisis

The horrifying rise of the far right has been part of the fall-out from

the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) in 2008. It was the worst economic crisis since 1929 and brought the world financial system to the brink of collapse.

In order to prevent a complete economic meltdown governments around the world spent hundreds of billions bailing out the banks that caused the crisis. Goldman Sachs, which had taken bailout money, was still paying record bonuses to criminal bankers the year after the crash.

Meanwhile ordinary people around the world were hit hard. There was skyrocketing unemployment and savage cuts to schools, hospitals and social services as governments sought to claw back the money they spent on bank bailouts. This was especially the case in Europe.

The misery this created has accelerated disillusionment with mainstream political parties. The onslaught came off the back of decades of pro-business attacks on living standards.

Both mainstream conservative and Labor-type parties have resorted to racism to try and sell their attacks on workers.

In country after country, governments have pedalled lies about migrants and refugees stealing jobs and resources to deflect blame away from themselves. This has given far right ideas legitimacy.

For decades scientists have been warning about the danger of climate change, yet governments around the world have failed to take serious action. The impact of climate change is becoming dramatically clear, with record breaking heat and extreme weather events worldwide.

Late last year the IPCC climate science report warned there were only 12 years left to avoid worst case scenarios. It said that "rapid, far-reaching and unprecedented changes

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Capitalism is a system run in the interests of a tiny minority at the expense of the overwhelming majority of people
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in all aspects of society" were needed to avert disaster. Australian Defence Force strategy papers warn of rising temperatures, sea-level rises, food shortages, instability and the permanent large scale displacement of populations from Island states like Kiribati and Tuvalu.

Capitalism isn't working

The roots of these problems lie in the capitalist system itself.

This is a system run in the interests of a tiny minority of capitalists at the expense of the overwhelming majority of people. This year Oxfam reported that the 26 richest people in the world own the same amount of wealth as the world's poorest 3.8 billion people.

This inequality is getting worse. In Australia, the share of total income going to the top 1 per cent has nearly doubled since the early 1980s.

This super-rich minority depend for their wealth on control of the massive multinational corporations and the land, factories, mines and offices they run. Capitalism is a system where the sole motive for production and investment is profit.

As a result it is incapable of meeting the basic needs of ordinary people and the planet. Around 800 million people, or 10 per cent of the world's population, is chronically undernourished, according to the UN Food and Aid organisation. Yet the world produces more than enough food for everyone.

Governments around the world have failed to act on climate change because the oil companies and mining giants make billions of dollars from digging up fossil fuels.

Capitalism is also a self-destructive system that goes into periodic economic crises that devastate millions of people's lives.

There have been major economic crises throughout its history, from the 1890s, to the 1930s to the mid-1970s. The world economy has still not recovered from the 2008 crisis, and there are fears that another crisis is not far away.

Another world is possible

But the system also generates resistance that has the potential to get rid of capitalism altogether.

Over the last 150 years there has been wave after wave of revolt—from the student uprising in Paris in 1968 that detonated a general strike and weeks of factory occupations, to the Arab revolutions that toppled dictatorships in 2011.

More recently, in France we have seen hundreds of thousands of people demonstrate as part of the weeks of Yellow Vest demonstrations against neo-liberal policies of the Macron government.

In October last year, 250,000 people marched in Berlin against racism and the neo-Nazi Alternative for Germany party.

In January, up to 150 million Indian workers held the biggest strike in history for an end to casualisation and privatisation and an increase to the minimum wage.

The system forces the overwhelming majority of people to sell their labour in order to get the money they need to survive. Workers are constantly forced to defend their living standards against the drive for profit, against sackings, wage cuts and speed ups.

The system concentrates workers in huge numbers in giant workplaces—with their hands on society's most powerful levers—controlling electricity, ports, public transport and the operation of the banks.

This means workers have the power to paralyse capitalism through stopping production and bringing a halt to the flow of profits.

It is this power that Karl Marx saw as essential to destroying capitalism and replacing it with socialism. Capitalism, he said, “creates above all its own gravediggers”.

Marx and Engels were revolutionaries committed to deeds, not just words. Their argument was simple. It is only by putting production under democratic control that the incredible technology humanity has produced can be used for human need rather than profit.

Socialism requires revolution because—as Marx explains in the *Communist Manifesto*, “the working



Above: The outbreaks of resistance against racism and inequality, like the protests against Trump in the US, are where the hope for change lies

class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery and wield it for its own purposes”.

The military, police, prisons, courts and capitalist parliaments are tied to the ruling class through a thousand golden threads. The elite who run these institutions are thoroughly committed to the system and have nothing in common with those that suffer under capitalist rule.

In recent years, alongside the growth of the far right, there has been a wave of support for new left-wing leaders and parties in a number of countries—like Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn in the UK, Syriza in Greece, Podemos in Spain and Bernie Sanders and Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez in the US.

A number of them even call themselves socialists. But left-wing governments that come to power through parliament are at the mercy of capitalists, because they don't control the wider economy or the state machine.

Most real power lies outside of parliament, with the corporations and the super-rich top 1 per cent. Their control of the bulk of the economy means their decisions can see whole companies shut down and thousands of workers sacked—as well as radical government destroyed.

In Greece, Syriza was a left-wing party elected in 2015 to oppose vicious government cuts. But it capitulated in the face of threats from bankers and the European Union to cripple its economy—accepting even

more savage austerity measures.

The only road to socialism is struggle from below—through strikes, mass demonstrations and workers' control in the factories and offices.

In the 1917 Russian Revolution, workers' councils, made up of delegates directly elected from workplaces, overthrew capitalism for the only time in history so far. Workers threw out their bosses and began running factories themselves. Peasants got rid of their landlords and seized control of the land. The revolution granted freedom to Russian colonies and introduced rights for women and LGBTI people in advance of anywhere else in the world at the time.

It survived just a few short years before it was crushed by Stalin's dictatorship under the pressure of isolation and foreign invasion.

But it showed how in periods of mass strikes and social movements the working class can create new forms of mass participatory democracy with the potential to run society—something seen again and again, including in Spain in 1936, Hungary in 1956, Chile in 1973 and Poland in 1980.

The revolution could not have succeeded without the socialists organised together in the Bolshevik party.

We need a socialist organisation today to build the struggles from below into a movement capable of taking on the capitalist system. If you want to end the racism, inequality, and threat to the planet itself that capitalism poses—we urge you to join us.

MAKING STUDENTS PAY—

THIRTY YEARS SINCE THE END OF FREE EDUCATION

Student debts levels have exploded since HECS fees were introduced 30 years ago, explains **Tom Fiebig**, as governments have moved to slash spending on universities

TODAY, A university student will end up on average \$20,303 in debt. The size of student debts is rapidly increasing—around 150,000 students now have over \$50,000 in debt.

This year marks 30 years since HECS, the Higher Education Contribution Scheme, was introduced, effectively bringing to an end to the short-lived period of free education that began under Labor Prime Minister Gough Whitlam.

In 1974, Whitlam abolished tuition fees and established free tertiary education. He had come into office on the back of the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s, in which university students played a prominent part.

After Whitlam was deposed in the 1975 “Constitutional Crisis” Liberal Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser made several concerted attacks on free education.

The first came in 1976, when Fraser tried to re-introduce tuition fees for second and postgraduate degrees. However, despite having control of both houses of parliament, he was forced to back down after an unprecedented national student strike. Banks also refused to implement a commercial loans scheme to underwrite students’ ability to pay. The second attack came in 1982. This time, Fraser was able to introduce fees for international students.

Yet it was a Labor government entering office in 1983 that really ended free education. In the August 1986 Budget, Labor Prime Minister Bob Hawke introduced a \$250 “administration fee” charged to students on enrolment.

The government claimed this was a small fee that students could easily afford to pay. But it proved to be the thin end of the wedge, as fees

multiplied and continually increased in size.

Universities were next allowed to charge international students full fees, covering the whole cost of their courses.

In 1989, Labor introduced HECS, which was designed to make domestic students pay a proportion of the cost of their degrees. The next year, it gave universities the go-ahead to charge up-front fees for some post-graduate courses, and in 1994 it deregulated postgraduate fees to allow universities to charge fees for any course, according “to what the market would bear”.

Labor’s “user pays” model of education was designed to push the costs of university funding more and more onto students in order to cut government spending.

This was part of Labor’s embrace in the 1980s of neo-liberalism and free market policies that saw it hold down government spending in order to cut corporate taxes and boost the profits of big business.

During their time in office the Hawke-Keating Labor governments reduced corporate tax rates from 49 to 33 per cent and cut the highest personal tax rate from 60 cents to 47 cents in the dollar.

This is a model that Labor today continues to support, with the last Labor government under Julia Gillard slashing university funding by \$2.3 billion in 2013.

HECS was introduced in 1989 at a flat rate of \$1800 per student. It acts as a loan scheme that allows students to defer university tuition fees, and pay them back once they earn an income over a set threshold. The Howard government significantly increased HECS fees in 1997, introducing three separate HECS bands with

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It was a Labor government entering office in 1983 that really ended free education

higher rates for courses like science, law and medicine. Then in 2005 it allowed universities to increase HECS fees another 30 per cent, renaming the system HECS-HELP.

One year of study now costs up to \$10,958, so that a standard three year course can easily cost students over \$30,000.

Recent changes mean that students starting university in 2019 will have to start paying back HECS sooner, at an income of \$45,000, not far above the full-time minimum wage. This is at a time when most students have no hope of retiring or ever owning a home—since house prices have sky-rocketed and wages have stagnated.

International students are also being extorted; the deregulation of fees is seeing them pay up to 400 per cent more than domestic students for the exact same course.

What’s wrong with HECS?

Despite the massive debt burden that HECS places on students, it is common to hear the argument that HECS is a fair system because of the benefit that students receive from their education. Students who complete a degree will generally get a higher paying job, it’s said, so it’s unfair for the government and taxpayers in general to meet all the costs.

Viewing education in individual terms as an investment to the future, they thus conclude: it is only fair that students fork out the cost themselves. But the main benefit of university spending goes to business.

The system of university education was established to fit the needs of Australian capitalism, creating a labour force that has the skills that business needs.

The majority of students end up working as exploited labour gener-

ating corporate profits. Businesses require hundreds of thousands of specialists and technicians to operate, and cutting edge research to boost their profits and outcompete their rivals.

Universities historically emerged as bastions of the elite, a space where a privileged minority could rub shoulders and prepare for a life as part of the ruling class or in a small number of elite professions. This is no longer as clearly the case. Nowadays there is a 90 per cent chance that a person in Australia will enroll in a TAFE or university course at some stage during their life.

In the period after the Second World War, universities moved away from being playgrounds for the rich, and began to gradually open up to admit entry to individuals of more working class backgrounds, expanding in two major phases.

This reflected the new needs of Australian capitalism following the war.

In 25 years Australian university enrolments increased from 30,000 in 1950 to just below 300,000 in 1975—a rate six times the rate of population growth.

The second phase of expansion began in the early 1990s. By 2003 more than 920,000, including many overseas students paying full fees up-front, were enrolled in Universities across Australia.

However, the more recent expansion of the University sector was not, in the most part, funded by government. Rather, the funding gap was covered by students and their families, through HECS and full cost-recovery fees.

As student contributions to education costs have increased, the government has been able to cut its own expenditure on education from just over 1 per cent of GDP (national income) in 1983-84 to 0.8 per cent in 2015, well below the average of the OECD group of rich nations. Today, government spending makes up only 40 per cent of total university funding, down from near 100 per cent in the early 1980s.

While many jobs nowadays require applicants with graduate qualifications, in 2015, the median salary for bachelor degree graduates aged less than 25 in their first full-time job was below the median wage—at \$54,000—hardly permitting a life of luxury.

Whilst some graduates do certainly enter high-paying professions such



Above: Students protesting the attempt to increase fees in 2014

as medicine or law, the solution to this isn't to make the majority of students pay higher fees, but rather to increase income-tax on this minority.

The enormous, and growing, size of today's average HECS debts is a serious deterrent to students from poorer backgrounds entering university, particularly when a university degree is no longer a guarantee of a job.

Figures from 2017 showed 15 per cent of graduates were still out of work four years after finishing a degree. Added to this is the prospect of at least three years of poverty while studying, given the hopeless level of student income support.

Fight back

Protests of thousands of students opposed the increases in university fees and funding cuts all the way through. While the student movement has been unable to prevent the introduction of higher fees, activists have succeeded in blunting the neo-liberal agenda.

In 1997 John Howard's Coalition government introduced full upfront fees for domestic students. University administration buildings were occupied across the country in protest at university managements who decided to implement the fees. The opposition to full fees eventually saw Labor repeal them when it came back into government.

Attempts by the Coalition under Tony Abbott to deregulate fees in 2014 was met by a similar defiance and anger.

Education Minister at the time, Christopher Pyne, planned to deregulate university fees, as well as slash funding by 20 per cent, giving

university managements the ability to increase fees as high as they liked. Widespread public opposition, including student protests across all major cities saw the Liberals back down on deregulation, after the proposed changes were defeated in the Senate.

But the corporatisation of universities and their shift away from government funding means that they have become run like businesses in their own right.

For example, the University of Melbourne's ordinary activities in 2017 alone were enough to generate an income of over \$2.2 billion.

The corporate education model gives rise to constant cuts to courses and jobs on campus, and reducing the quality of education through slashing face-to-face contact hours and replacing them with labour-saving online content.

Universities' income-streams have also diversified to include income derived through private investments (including in companies linked to arms manufacturing, and the fossil fuels industry).

School kids are taking up the cause of protest, planning to leave school early on 15 March for a "climate strike" to demand action on Climate Change.

University Students can take inspiration from this, and previous struggles around education on campus. We need to channel the inspiration into a renewed fightback for more government funding and better conditions on campus, and ultimately for the free and accessible education that we deserve.

ROSA LUXEMBURG

A FIGHTER FOR REVOLUTION

Rosa Luxemburg defended the need for revolution to end the horrors of capitalism, and her ideas were tragically confirmed by the outbreak of world war, argues **Sadie Robinson**

ONE HUNDRED years ago in January right-wing paramilitaries killed the revolutionary Rosa Luxemburg—on the orders of a reformist, social democratic party.

Her murder, along with that of her comrade Karl Liebknecht, was part of a drive to stop a workers' revolution in Germany.

Luxemburg was an uncompromising revolutionary whose writings developed Marxist ideas.

She saw that the self-activity of the working class was the key to transforming society. She fought against those who argued that socialism could come about through reforms in parliament.

And as left reformist parties across Europe backed up their rulers in the First World War, she continued to fight for international socialism.

Luxemburg was born in 1871 to Jewish parents in Poland. She became politically active while still at school and joined her first political party, the Proletariat, aged 16.

Luxemburg later split from Proletariat, opposing its support for Polish independence from Russia, and formed a new group.

Avoid

She moved to Zurich, Switzerland, in 1889 to avoid prison and then to Berlin, Germany, in 1898.

She was jailed for “insulting the Kaiser” in 1904 and for “inciting violence” in 1906. She later spent three and a half years in prison for opposing the First World War.

Even as a young woman in a new country, Luxemburg didn't back away from challenging more established socialists.

She was one of the first to grasp the threat of reformist ideas after joining the Socialist Democratic Party (SPD). It was the largest socialist

party in the world, with up to a million members, and many of its leaders had worked directly with Karl Marx and his collaborator Friedrich Engels.

The party was formally revolutionary and claimed still to adhere to Marx's ideas but in practice it was reformist and focused on parliamentary change.

An open row burst out when SPD member Eduard Bernstein argued that capitalism had moved away from crises and would progress towards a fairer society. Luxemburg opposed this argument.

She said the growth of capitalism wouldn't end competition between bosses. Instead these battles would be waged on a more destructive scale.

Luxemburg argued that those who choose reform over revolution weren't looking for a “calmer, more tranquil path to the same goal, but a different goal altogether”.

For her, socialism was a “necessity”. This didn't mean Luxemburg dismissed fights for reforms.

She saw mass struggles for reforms, including strikes and demonstrations, as key to preparing workers for revolution as they developed their ideas, experience and confidence.

Luxemburg was shaped by the 1905 revolution in Russia, where striking workers set up their own councils.

These workers' councils were alternative organs of political power, far more democratic than a parliament.

Previous revolutions weren't based on economic struggles, but capitalism had brought state and economic power closer together.

Some saw economic and political battles as separate. In *The Mass Strike* Luxemburg argued that they are part of the same class struggle.

“Every fresh victory of political struggle is transformed into a powerful impetus for the economic struggle,”

Luxemburg refused to cave into nationalist warmongering

she wrote.

She described mass strikes as “the living heartbeat of revolution, and its most powerful driving force”.

And the political impact on workers who take part was “the most precious thing, because it is the most enduring”.

Just as Luxemburg refused to compromise on her commitment to revolution, she also refused to cave into nationalist warmongering.

All the major left parties across Europe, except the Bolshevik party in Russia and the Bulgarian and Serbian social democrats, backed the First World War in 1914.

Luxemburg said the war exposed capitalism as “wading in blood and dripping with filth”. She denounced social democracy as “one of the best supporters of imperialism”.

Attitudes to the war reflected theoretical differences about the nature of capitalism, and were linked to the argument about reform or revolution.

SPD reformists such as Karl Kautsky argued that capitalism would become more peaceful. He said some capitalists would oppose war due to the waste of spending on arms.

Luxemburg argued that imperialism, competition between states for power and new markets, was key to capitalism. That meant there could be no capitalism without war.

Many of Luxemburg's ideas have been distorted over the years.

Shunned

For instance, some argue that she saw socialism as inevitable and shunned organisation in favour of workers' “spontaneity”.

But her celebration of workers' self-activity didn't mean she thought revolutionaries should passively wait for them to take action. Luxemburg repeatedly urged revolutionaries to

intervene in struggles.

She argued that capitalism “gives us the preconditions” of socialism. But she said it will not come about “without our conscious interference, without the political struggle of the working class”.

Others focus on Luxemburg’s criticisms of the Bolsheviks. She celebrated the October 1917 revolution in Russia as “the salvation of the honour of international socialism”.

But she criticised the Bolsheviks for disbanding the Constituent Assembly, which was supported by liberals and bourgeois forces, to instead back workers’ councils.

However, her experience of the German Revolution led her to see that calls to protect bourgeois institutions were an attempt to stop workers’ rule.

Reformists in Germany argued for a National Assembly to oversee the running of society. Luxemburg said the assembly was a “counter-revolutionary fortress erected against the revolutionary proletariat”.

She wasn’t without flaws. Her hostility to nationalism meant she didn’t support fights for national liberation by oppressed groups that could weaken the imperialist powers.

Luxemburg rightly saw that workers built up experience and revolutionary consciousness through their own actions. But she also saw revolutionary organisation as a “process” that could be built during revolutionary periods.

In contrast, the Bolsheviks argued that a socialist organisation had to be established and rooted in the working class in order for revolution to be successful. They were proved right.

Revolution broke out in Germany in October 1918, but Luxemburg and others didn’t set up the Communist Party (CP) until January 1919. She became one of its key leaders.

The newly-formed CP was very small with barely any members in major workplaces.

Its programme argued that the CP could not take power without the support of the majority of the working class.

But the party was inexperienced.

Overthrow

The same month, right-wing Social Democrats went on the offensive. A group of influential workers in Berlin were provoked into calling for the overthrow of the government.

Luxemburg had previously opposed this, arguing that the vast majority of workers across Germany would not yet support it. But other CP



Above: Rosa Luxemburg, the revolutionary leader socialist murdered in Berlin in 1919

members went behind her back and supported the call, and once events were in motion Luxemburg eventually did too.

In Russia, the Bolsheviks had been strong enough to successfully argue against a premature rising in July 1917.

The Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky later wrote that, in Germany, “absent was a centralised revolutionary party with a combat leadership whose authority is universally accepted by the working masses”.

Luxemburg paid for this with her life. The workers’ councils set up in November 1918 in Germany hadn’t seized state power. They’d handed it back to the SPD government.

The SPD, while being reformist in practice, could sound very left wing and used radical rhetoric. There needed to be an organised pole of attraction of revolutionaries to win more workers away from it and to revolutionary politics.

The SPD worked with the old generals to organise a new paramilitary force, the Freikorps, to smash the revolution. SPD leader Friedrich Ebert

ordered the Freikorps to destroy the CP.

Luxemburg was captured on 15 January 1919. She was tortured, shot in the head, and her body thrown into a Berlin canal. Many Freikorps soldiers later joined the Nazis.

The horrors of fascism and war bore out Luxemburg’s argument that capitalism faces a dilemma—“socialism or barbarism”. And she was right to argue that only revolution could bring about a socialist world.

Luxemburg warned, “It is an insane illusion to imagine that the capitalists will submit good naturedly to a decision by a socialist parliament to give up their property, profit, privileges, and their right to exploit.

“The imperialist bourgeoisie would rather turn the country into a smoking heap of rubble than voluntarily give up the system of wage slavery.

“All this resistance must be broken. The violence of the bourgeois counter-revolution must be met by the revolutionary violence of the proletariat.”

Socialist Worker UK



By Ian Rintoul

THE VOTE for the Medivac amendments on 12 February won't end offshore detention, but it is an historic vote. It was a fantastic blow against the Morrison government. And it is one of the very few occasions in the history of offshore detention that Labor has voted against a Coalition government on refugee policy.

A number of things came together to make the result possible. Firstly, the vote was a victory for the years of rallies and protests calling for refugee rights and the closure of Manus and Nauru. Secondly, the #KidsOffNauru campaign focussed attention on offshore detention and helped shift public opinion even further. The "Kids Off, All Off" rallies, held as courts started to order children and their families off Nauru, helped carry the momentum of the #KidsOffNauru campaign into support for getting everyone off.

Then in November, Kerry Phelp's election in the Wentworth by-election (coming hard on the heels of Labor's sweeping win in Victoria) showed how much the Liberals were on the nose and that a pro-refugee Federal candidate could be elected. And Morrison kept going down in the polls.

In December, teachers in Brisbane and Melbourne walked off the job calling for an end to offshore detention and to bring the asylum seekers and refugees to Australia. The first vote on the Medivac transfer amendments came in the Senate in December.

As the vote in the House of Rep-

resentatives approached in February, Morrison began loudly declaring that the Medivac amendments would mean, "the end of offshore processing as we know it". Around 5000 doctors responded by signing a petition supporting the bill.

Labor's concessions

Not surprisingly, given Labor's history of support for offshore detention, a lot of people thought Labor would fall at the last hurdle. Their willingness to make concessions has resulted in changes that give the Immigration Minister greater discretionary powers to refuse medical transfers on serious criminal or security grounds.

The government now says it will do security checks, while slandering refugees as murderers and child abusers. In another telling concession, the bill now also only applies to those currently on Nauru and Manus.

But the bill's substance, that on the recommendation of two doctors an asylum seeker or refugee must be brought to Australia for needed treatment or assessment, is still in place.

Its defeat made the Coalition the first government in 90 years to lose a vote on legislation in the lower house of parliament—and over refugee policy, of all things, an issue that Morrison was so sure was an electoral winner. *The Australian* thinks this has given Morrison his Tampa moment.

It hasn't. The vote shows that protest works, and is a vindication of the long-term strategy of the refugee movement to break Labor's bi-partisan support for offshore detention.

Above: Calling on Labor to back the bill

The vote was a victory for the years of rallies and protests calling for the closure of Manus and Nauru

That strategy meant systematically addressing Labor members and supporters, and in particular the union movement, to win them away from the politics of scapegoating refugees to become part of the fight for refugee rights, recognising that workers and refugees have a common enemy.

That strategy does not mean that the movement's focus has been on how Labor votes in parliament; most of all, it has on building protests and rallies, winning resolutions, publicly challenging the myths and lies.

In the aftermath of the vote, the government has embarked on a rabid anti-refugee campaign, along with a piece of political theatre—grandly announcing the re-opening of the Christmas Island detention centre because, it says, either new asylum boats will begin arriving from Indonesia or because hundreds of people will start to be transferred from Nauru and Manus. Between now and the election, Morrison will continue to ramp up his border protection scaremongering.

Morrison and cruelty to refugees has suffered a serious blow; yet, offshore detention hasn't been ended. Labor is still committed to offshore detention, and says that anyone brought to Australia for medical treatment will not be allowed to stay.

But we know how to fight. The 14 April Palm Sunday refugee rallies will both sound Morrison's death-knell and show the movement's determination to fight to finally close Manus and Nauru, and bring all refugees and asylum seekers to stay in Australia—permanently.

Solidarity