

Solidarity

Issue No. 155 / January 2022

\$3/\$5

Jobs, refugees, RATs, hospitals

DRIVE OUT THIS COVID CRIMINAL



OMICRON

Testing, hospitals and the health system failure

INDIGENOUS

Fifty years since the Aboriginal Tent Embassy

CLIMATE

Independents not the answer on climate

Solidarity **WHAT WE STAND FOR**

Capitalism is a system of crisis and war

Capitalism is a system of competition, crisis, and war based on exploitation of workers, producing for profit not human needs. Although workers create society's wealth, they have no control over production or distribution. Through environmental degradation and climate change capitalism has become a threat to humanity's future and life on earth.

Workers power and socialism

The working class has the power to challenge the existing system and create a better world. We stand for socialism, a society based on democratically elected workers councils which would control and plan the economy to produce for human need. The authoritarian states like Russia and China are not socialist but forms of state capitalism where workers have no power.

What about elections and parliament?

Parliament, the army, the police and the courts are institutions of the capitalist state that maintain the dominance of the ruling class over the rest of society. The capitalist state cannot be taken over and used by the working class, it must be smashed. Workers need to create their own state based on workers councils.

While parliament can be a platform for socialists, real change doesn't come through parliament. It is won by mass action in strikes, protests and demonstrations.

We are internationalists

The struggle for socialism has no national boundaries. We oppose everything that turns workers from one country against those from another; we campaign for solidarity with workers in other countries.

We oppose borders and immigration controls, and welcome migrants and refugees.

We oppose imperialism and support all

genuine national liberation struggles. We oppose Australian nationalism.

Australia is an imperialist power established through genocide on stolen Indigenous land. We support the continuing struggles of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people for land, justice and self-determination.

Oppression and liberation

We oppose sexism, racism, homophobia and transphobia. We fight against all forms of discrimination and the oppression of women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, migrants, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people. We oppose discrimination against Muslims and people from the Middle East.

Linking up the struggles

We are active building movements for environmental and social change and economic equality. We are active in our unions and work to build the organisation and self-confidence of the rank and file. We work to bring activists together to strengthen each movement and build a common struggle against capitalism.

Educate, agitate, organise

Socialism cannot be introduced from above, by parliament or parties. The emancipation of the working class is the act of the working class itself.

Solidarity is an organisation of activists, anti-capitalists and revolutionary socialists committed to socialism from below. We are part of the International Socialist Tendency.

A democratic revolutionary party is necessary to deepen resistance to capitalism and to build a movement to overthrow the system. Solidarity members are beginning to build such a party out of today's struggles against the system.

SOLIDARITY MEETINGS AND BRANCHES

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Online meetings via Zoom
6.30pm every Thursday
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Things they say

In terms of the supplies in the private market, in pharmacies and shops, supermarkets and places like that, what is important is they have the certainty that they know that governments aren't all of a sudden going to go round and start providing these free to anybody and everybody.

Scott Morrison putting profits before public health

Without providing free RATs to households, only privileged & wealthy will be able to protect themselves & reduce wider risk of spread.

UNSW Professor of epidemiology Mary-Louise McLaws

This is Australia living with the virus, look at out there and Australians taking wickets in the virus

Scott Morrison in the SCG commentary box, relieved that the cricket can still go on despite Omicron

Strong borders are fundamental to the Australian way of life as is the rule of law.

Scott Morrison justifying his decision to deport Novak Djokovic

I'm more worried about being in a room by myself to be honest.

Deputy PM Barnaby Joyce about testing positive for COVID-19 in the US.

I mean, it's not clear that to my information that someone in that case is actually a refugee.

Morrison, lying again, this time on 2GB claiming that those detained in the Park Hotel haven't been found to be refugees

Coal and coal workers continue to be an important part of your economy and community.

Anthony Albanese in the Hunter Valley on New Year's Day.

CONTENTS

ISSUE 155 JANUARY 2022



Morrison's failures create COVID chaos

5 Editorial

6 Morrison trashes workers' safety

6 Health funding not restrictions key



Fighting ongoing Indigenous injustice

14 The Aboriginal Tent Embassy 50 years on

20 'Voice to parliament' farce won't bring change

Australia

7 Sydney Festival boycott 'biggest BDS action here'

8 Djokovic deportation exposes Morrison's immigration crimes

9 Labor's climate plan aims to please the bosses

10 Australia's 'grotesque' arms exports

11 Inquiry shows sexist system inside parliament



International

12 Australian troops won't help Solomons

13 Spirit of revolt rocks Kazakhstan



Features

16 Backing independents no answer on climate

18 The 1891 shearers' war: when unions took on the state

Court rules Assange can be extradited

JULIAN ASSANGE is one step closer to extradition to the US, after a British High Court ruling in December. The court said it was satisfied by flimsy assurances from the US that Assange would not be kept in restrictive prison conditions during this trial. Such treatment would be dangerous, due to the state of his mental health.

Assange faces charges over the leak of thousands of military documents and diplomatic cables exposing the reality of US war crimes in Afghanistan and Iraq. They include the shocking “Collateral Murder” video showing a series of killings targeting innocent people from a US helicopter in Iraq.

None of those responsible for the wars in Washington, London or Canberra have ever been held to account. Yet Assange is facing 175 years in prison under the Espionage Act for helping expose their crimes. He has lodged a further appeal with the Supreme Court. In January, he passed 1000 days held in prison in the UK after he emerged from the Ecuadorian Embassy.

Billionaires double wealth since COVID hit

THE WORLD’S ten richest men have doubled their wealth during the pandemic, according to Oxfam, with their fortunes now standing at \$1.9 trillion, increasing at a rate of \$1.3 billion a day. Meanwhile another 163 million people have been pushed into poverty.

Australia’s 47 billionaires have also doubled their wealth, to a combined total of \$255 billion between them. The super-rich have been the main beneficiaries of government stimulus during the pandemic. Elon Musk is now the world’s richest person, with his wealth increasing ten-fold during the pandemic to \$294 billion, as the stockmarket surged.

The incomes of the other 99 per cent of the world’s population, on the other hand, shrank between March 2020 and October 2021.

Even taxing the gains the super-rich have made in the last two years could transform global access to healthcare and COVID vaccines, reduce inequality and tackle climate change.

Private companies profit from testing fiasco



PRIVATE PATHOLOGY companies have been raking in millions from COVID testing, with big profits set to continue.

The government is paying them \$85 for every PCR test, increased from \$28.65 before the pandemic. More than 55 million tests have been charged so far.

Yet Morrison has refused to provide rapid tests free, which only cost around \$10 each for bulk orders.

Sonic Healthcare’s annual profit has soared from \$550 million before the pandemic to \$1.3 billion last year, with profit jumping another 16 per cent to almost \$1 billion in just four months to the end of October.

Healius also tripled its profits in the three months to September to \$201.9 million.

Instead of boosting the public health system’s capacity, Scott Morrison has relied on private operators to scale up testing. The companies are relying on casual, underpaid staff. One result was that 17 clinics in Queensland closed over the New Year, just as demand was surging—and the government could do nothing about it.

US sanctions condemn Afghans to starvation

TENS OF millions of Afghans are facing starvation due to international sanctions imposed by the US.

When the Taliban took power, the US froze government funds held abroad and cut the country off from the global financial system. This was designed to strike the Taliban and demonstrate that the US still has the capacity to punish those who stand in its way, after the humiliation of the collapse of the US occupation and puppet government.

Previously the country was reliant on foreign aid, accounting for 45 per cent of its GDP. Now many aid organisations cannot even get money into the country. Afghanistan is also facing its worst drought in 30 years.

The United Nations World Food Programme says that almost 24 million people are facing acute hunger. Humanitarian agencies are warning that a million children could die.

The Taliban are a reactionary regime. But the US sanctions are having their main impact on ordinary people—causing immense suffering so the US can show it still has some global clout.

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

Heat records tumbled in 2021

LAST YEAR was Earth’s sixth hottest on record, according to the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. The last eight years have been the eight hottest ever recorded. In the Arctic, the town of Verkhoyansk hit a record temperature of 38C in June during what the World Meteorological Organisation called “an exceptional and prolonged Siberian heatwave”.

Europe experienced its hottest summer and North America was ravaged by bushfires. In Colorado, a bushfire in the middle of winter in December destroyed 1100 homes, making it the most destructive in the state’s history, reaching the suburbs of cities like Denver. The damage was a result of a record dry year and drought, with fires fanned by hurricane force winds.

The impact of climate change is becoming more and more obvious.

Record heat has continued into 2022, with Australia’s equal highest temperature was recorded in WA as the remote town of Onslow in the Pilbara hit 50.7C on 13 January. Around 200 prisoners in nearby Roebourne, which reached 50.5 C, were forced to cope in cells without air-conditioning, in conditions the Aboriginal Legal Service described as “a form of torture”. Most of the town’s population is Indigenous.

Private health profits from pandemic

PRIVATE HEALTH insurance companies saw their shareprices shoot up, in response to the surge of hospital admissions due to COVID. The cancellation of elective surgery in Victoria and NSW means they will pay out less money to their members.

Already they have seen a big jump in profits due to the pandemic, up \$1.8 billion last year. The funds promised to pay back money to members in response. But the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission warned in December they were using “conservative” calculations to avoid paying enough back.

EDITORIAL

Morrison's failures bring COVID chaos—kick him out

YET AGAIN, Scott Morrison's failure to prepare the health system has created a complete disaster over Omicron.

Morrison's failures have seen hospitals and the testing system completely overwhelmed and unable to cope in the face of the surge in cases. His move to kick Novak Djokovic out of the country was a desperate attempt to play to the politics of "strong borders" and distract attention from the growing discontent with the Liberals.

He has tried to duck responsibility by claiming "Omicron changed everything". But an increase in COVID cases was always predicted as lockdowns and other restrictions were lifted once we reached high rates of vaccination.

Morrison did nothing to prepare for any rise in cases—no funding for nurses and public hospitals, no free RAT tests, no speed up to booster shots for aged care.

The failure in aged care is particularly criminal when 80 per cent of those dying in this wave are over 70. The aged care booster rollout slowed in December as the cases rose.

Health crisis

Testing has all but collapsed, and people queue for hours for PCR tests. Some have waited almost a week for results. Others never received them, with one pathology company in Melbourne messaging people after seven days, saying their samples had become too old to process.

Morrison was warned months ago by the peak doctors' body, the AMA, and others that a spike in cases could see PCR testing overwhelmed. Yet nothing was done to place bulk orders for rapid tests until the system was on the verge of collapse.

Instead Morrison was more concerned with chemist and supermarket profits, dismissing calls for free rapid tests, saying, "We can't just go round and make everything free."

Yet Britain alone has already provided hundreds of millions of free test kits, as have Singapore, Portugal, Germany and some states in Canada and the US. Rapid tests have been widely used overseas for months.

Unions have been calling for wider use of them here since last July.

Hospital staff in NSW and Victoria are fatigued and overwhelmed after repeated COVID surges over the past two years. They were understaffed even before Omicron hit. Figures presented



Above: ICU nurses protest outside Westmead hospital in Sydney

to National Cabinet in October showed there were actually 200 less ICU beds across the country than at before the pandemic. Now, with thousands of health workers isolating, hospitals face crippling staff shortages.

Fifty intensive care nurses at Sydney's Westmead hospital staged a protest with placards saying "stop playing with people's lives" calling for governments to act urgently to increase staffing levels.

In Queensland in early December, while the state still had zero COVID cases, the AMA's Kim Hansen said that hospitals were already "stretched to breaking point", with "not enough beds and not enough staff".

Nurses' unions in every state should call stopwork protests for the extra staff and funding needed—to deal with this crisis and future COVID waves. Other unions should join them.

Abandoned

When the pandemic began, the government introduced JobKeeper for those affected by workplace closures, funded free PCR testing and praised "essential workers", saying we were "all in it together". That was always a lie—businesses rorted JobKeeper to boost profits, while casual and migrant workers were not even included in the scheme.

But now, instead of fixing the health system, Morrison is throwing the vast majority of the population to the wolves, saying it's a "personal responsibility" to avoid infection and manage if we get sick.

Morrison's changed definitions

mean that close contacts are now being forced to work in many industries.

In mid-January the ACTU finally called a meeting of unions to respond to Morrison and the COVID crisis, calling for free RAT tests and measures to allow workers to safely isolate. But it backed away from its initial promising calls for stopwork action to demand safe workplaces.

McManus was reported saying, "the vast majority of business were doing the right thing", and "We're not wanting strikes." But we can't afford "business as usual".

Our union leaders need to start a campaign for guaranteed testing and sick pay, free rapid tests and improved ventilation in workplaces, including schools.

Such a fight would be enormously popular. Strike action could force Morrison to fund the hospitals and provide RAT tests, and give workers the confidence to fight on the job for the safety measures they need.

Nurses, teachers, warehouse workers, truck drivers—the front line workers who were hailed as the heroes of the pandemic—are now paying for the COVID crisis with their wages, jobs and safety at work.

NSW nurses have made a start. Teachers in NSW are planning more strikes for the start of the year in their fight to break the wage cap.

Morrison is on the slide. We need to fan the flames of resistance and escalate the struggle to fight to end the Morrison government and the sick capitalist system.

.....
Morrison was warned months ago that a spike in cases could see PCR testing overwhelmed

Morrison trashes COVID safety for essential workers

By James Supple

SCOTT MORRISON is forcing workers into unsafe conditions and fuelling the spread of COVID through new rules designed to protect business profits.

The Omicron surge is putting enormous strain on the workforce, with staff shortages such as in supermarkets, deliveries, hospitals, and aged care. Business has been demanding watered down COVID rules so it can force close contacts and even COVID positive workers into work.

The Australian Industry Group's Innes Willox declared that staff isolating or off work sick were "a hand-brake on the economy" and demanded new "rules that allow businesses to maintain as strong a workforce as possible".

Morrison revised close contact rules in late December, narrowing them to household contacts with four hours' exposure. This meant those exposed at work were no longer automatically deemed close contacts.

Now Morrison and the state premiers have allowed workers in basic industries including health care, agriculture, deliveries, energy, resources, media, education and childcare to work even if they are close contacts. Workers are required to have a rapid test the day after their exposure in order to work—but with the tests impossible to find some employers are simply ignoring this.

ACTU Secretary Sally McManus has reported that they are already demanding staff who can't access a test turn up to work, even if they feel sick. And employers are pushing for more and more exemptions.

Teys Australia, a supplier of meat to Woolworths, made COVID positive workers in South Australia turn up for shifts, until union pressure forced this to stop.

Staff shortages are again showing that workers are essential to keeping society running. But Morrison and the bosses' contempt for workers and their health is on full display.

Two years into the pandemic, none of the problems exposed as a result of casualisation and lack of government funding have been fixed. Hospitals are at breaking point.

Aged care centres are in complete crisis, short of staff even before COVID, due to years of underfunding. Aged and Community Services



Above: Scott Morrison's changes will speed up the spread of the virus through workplaces

Australia CEO Paul Sadler told the *Sydney Morning Herald*, "right now we have staff isolated, leaving the sector and homes that have severely depleted rapid test supplies and PPE shortages".

Casuals still have no access to paid sick leave, forcing many to head into work even if they're sick. With COVID payments wound back, workers are again losing pay when isolating or when reduced staff force businesses to close.

Schools can be made safe through widespread use of rapid testing, contact tracing and HEPA filters for ventilation. But Morrison wants them running at any cost, more concerned that if students stay home other businesses will lose their workers.

Every worker has the right to a safe workplace. Morrison's changes will mean some will be forced to risk taking

the virus home to vulnerable family members who are at higher risk.

Workers have the right to stop work if they are put in unsafe conditions. Throughout the pandemic bosses have looked to cut corners on safety. Cleaners at Westmead hospital, bus drivers in Sydney and supermarket distribution centre workers, among others, have all taken stopwork action and won increased safety measures at work over the past year.

The ACTU has dithered over safety stoppages, endorsing them but also saying they don't want strikes. But companies running short staffed are particularly vulnerable to stopwork action that threatens to shut them down completely.

We need union action to keep workplaces safe—and to make sure workers get the pay and proper health services that we need.

Health funding not more restrictions needed

MANY HAVE blamed the easing of restrictions in mid-December, especially in NSW, for the surge in Omicron cases. This likely did speed up transmission.

After a week, Perrottet was forced to reverse his scrapping of the requirements to wear masks indoors, impose density limits in hospital-ity and QR check-in codes at low risk venues. Singing and dancing at nightclubs and other venues is now also banned.

But the spread of the new variant at breathtaking speed worldwide and in every state shows that, short of a severe lockdown, further restrictions will not dramatically slow cases.

Lockdowns and border restrictions could not keep the virus out forever. Australia's rate of vaccination now means the risk of serious illness is far less, and a well funded health system could have managed the surge.

But Perrottet, Morrison and the other state premiers have steadfastly refused to increase resources in the hospitals or the testing system where it could make a serious difference.

Calls for a return to more severe restrictions and border rules aimed at keeping unvaccinated people out are distractions from the fight to win more funding for the public health system.

Morrison and the bosses' contempt for workers and their health is on full display

Sydney Festival boycott 'biggest BDS action ever here'

More than 40 per cent of performances at this year's Sydney Festival have now been disrupted with over 100 artists and companies withdrawing in opposition to the festival's "artwashing" of Israeli apartheid. *Solidarity* spoke to Fahad Ali, one of the organisers of the boycott and a member of the Palestine Justice Movement Sydney, about how it developed.

IN NOVEMBER, the Sydney Festival program launched publicly. A number of Arab artists who were taking part noticed a logo for the state of Israel on the program.

That was brought to the attention of Arab Theatre Studio, a Western Sydney-based collective, and Michael Mohammed Ahmed, director of Sweatshop, a literacy movement in Western Sydney for people of colour.

The sponsorship was ostensibly being used to support a production choreographed by an Israeli dance company. The Israeli Embassy was hosting a reception at the Sydney Opera house.

Mohammed was in the process of being appointed to the Sydney Festival board. He brought this back to a group of community based artists and activists. We put together an open letter and met with the board to ask them to cancel this partnership.

What they were doing is allowing the festival to be used to give respectability and a positive image to the Israeli regime, an apartheid state.

It actually emerged that the Sydney Festival had approached the Israeli Embassy for support in May 2021, when the evictions of Palestinian families from Sheikh Jarrah in occupied Jerusalem, and Israeli bombardment of the Gaza Strip including hospitals, schools, even a tower [housing] the international press [was happening].

They said that Sydney Festival is a non-political organisation and could not divest from the sponsorship. But accepting money from one of the most politically contentious states on the planet is necessarily political.

Mike Mohammed Ahmed immediately ended his appointment to the Board. Arab Theatre Studio as well as Bankstown Poetry Slam withdraw from the festival.

We told them we would call on other artists to boycott.

They probably didn't think that the withdrawal of two groups was going to have a big impact, but now



Above: Action against the Sydney Festival artwashing Israeli apartheid at protest on its opening night

they've seen about a quarter of their original program pull out.

We were clear from the beginning that this was not about a particular dance event or an Israeli choreographer. This was about the Israeli state sponsorship.

There are many artists for whom this is not a hard question. They refused to be complicit with apartheid and an organisation that takes blood money. Given COVID and the position that artists have been in over the past two years this is not an easy ask.

The first artists to pull out were all Indigenous, people who are directly affected by settler colonialism and understand this call.

This is the biggest BDS action that's ever occurred on this continent. I'm blown away by the reaction that we've received from artists.

The BDS movement is a response from Palestinian civil society modelled on the boycott movement targeted towards apartheid-era South Africa.

Protests and theatre staff back boycott campaign

OVER 50 people joined a protest on the opening night of Sydney Festival at the Opera House in early January, including a street theatre performance condemning "Artwashing for apartheid".

Union members who work at Carriageworks, one of the festival venues, have been protesting by wearing "Free Palestine" badges during their shifts. Six staff have also given up shifts and turned down work for the duration of the festival in support of the boycott. Most of these workers are employed as casuals and rely on their jobs for income.

Carriageworks management told workers they were welcome to turn

It aims to bring pressure to bear on Israel from every angle—economic, social, political, academic, cultural.

What BDS does most effectively I think is open space to get people thinking about Israeli apartheid, how people in Gaza live under a continual state of siege, and the West Bank is under military occupation and has been for 70 years. We're gaining attention on this in a way that we haven't before.

In the last year Human Rights Watch and Israeli NGO B'Tselem have declared that Israel is an apartheid state. As the BDS movement grows, you're now seeing people in the press saying it. It normalises discussion about Palestine.

A lot of people have told me that they didn't really think about Palestine seriously until the events of May 2021. We need a continual campaign of grassroots activism to draw focus to these questions. And that's what the BDS campaign here has done really well.



Fahad Ali, Sydney Festival boycott organiser

down shifts. But workers wearing badges have faced intimidation and were told not to share their "personal" beliefs at work as it went against the code of conduct. This is incredibly hypocritical given the anti-colonial image arts venues such as Carriageworks like to pride themselves on.

In response, the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA), released a statement supporting "the right of our members to express their personal views in this way in the course of their employment", saying this was, "part of the rich mix of expression and exchange in a vibrant creative community."

Tooba Anwar

Djokovic deportation reveals more of Morrison's immigration crimes



By Ian Rintoul

THE CANCELLATION of Novak Djokovic's visa was a calculated political stunt.

It provided a great distraction from the growing criticisms of the government's Omicron failures and its refusal to provide free rapid antigen tests (RAT).

Morrison also seized the opportunity to try to make border control the central political question, hoping to have his own John Howard moment to decide "who comes to this country and the circumstances in which they come".

But in the process the government inadvertently drew attention to the plight of the around 60 refugees who are indefinitely detained in the Park hotel and other detention centres around the country. The fiasco has also exposed the scope of the "god-like powers" it has given Immigration ministers to cancel visas.

Even when the court found that the initial cancellation of Djokovic's visa for not being vaccinated was unreasonable, five days later the Immigration Minister, Alex Hawke, used his discretionary power to cancel Djokovic visa on completely different grounds; that Djokovic may be a threat to, "the health, safety or good order of the Australian community."

Although the decision was blatantly political, the court found that it was "open" to the Minister to make such a finding, stating, "Another person in the position of the Minister may have

Above: There are still 32 refugees detained in the Park Hotel in Melbourne

not cancelled Mr Djokovic's visa. The Minister did." That was enough for it to be lawful.

The court noted, but was silent on, the implication that lawful protests could be regarded as being against the good order of the Australian community.

The visa cancellation power of the Minister is deliberately broadly worded to make it almost impossible to challenge. Hundreds of people are in immigration detention because of such powers. Official figures from September 2021 show that 87 per cent of people are in immigration detention because their visas have been cancelled either similarly to Djokovic, on character grounds under s116, or under s501 (enforced when non-citizens have been sentenced to a cumulative total of imprisonment for 12 months or longer).

Regardless of what anyone thinks of Djokovic personally, the fiasco surrounding his visa cancellation and subsequent deportation has thrown a light on the arbitrary abyss that is the Australian immigration system.

Visa cancellation is a little-known, intrinsically racist, but increasingly-used, immigration power that is far more devastating when it is wielded at the border against people seeking asylum. It is well-known, for example, that Border Force has cancelled the visas of Saudi women fleeing violence, and put them on planes back to Saudi Arabia.

When visa cancellation is used against refugees or non-citizens already in Australia, detention can be

indefinite; literally a life sentence.

Ministerial power to release

Detaining Djokovic in the Park Hotel in Melbourne meant that almost every TV report and international article about him, also highlighted the plight of the 60 Medevac refugees who are still in that hotel-prison (and other detention centres) more than two years after the government brought them to Australia, after more than six years' detention in PNG and Nauru—almost nine years altogether.

The Minister also has wide discretionary powers to grant visas. Since December 2020, more than half of the 221 refugees and asylum seekers brought from PNG and Nauru have been released from closes detention. Most of them have been released on bridging visas; some are released but are still in community detention (free to come and go, but their residence is determined to be a "place of detention").

They are hostages to the government's offshore detention policy, arbitrarily detained at the political whim of the Minister.

Double standards

Morrison says "rules are rules" but Morrison is the master of double standards—first Djokovic was granted a visa and then it was cancelled. Then Border Force retrospectively cancelled the visas of two others, a tennis player and an official, to make it look like the government applied the rules consistently.

There is one rule for non-citizens who can have their visas cancelled and face indefinite detention, and another for citizens, who don't.

Some Medevac refugees have been freed to live in the Australian community but others remain in hotel-prison and detention centres.

With COVID, there is one rule for those who can afford RAT tests and another for those who can't.

Morrison champions "can-do capitalism" but capitalism relies on there being one rule for the rich and another for the poor.

Djokovic has been deported, but he has a home to go to. The refugees don't. We will need to step up the struggle to fight Morrison, and his system, to free every refugee and asylum seeker still left in detention.

The fiasco has thrown a light on the arbitrary abyss that is the Australian immigration system

Labor's climate plan aims to please business

By James Supple

LABOR'S NEW climate policy, released in early December, is nowhere near what's needed to stop dangerous climate change. Although it promises tens of thousands of jobs, it does nothing to guarantee they will be well paid, or where they are needed. And Labor is still backing the Liberals' plan to massively expand gas and fossil fuel extraction.

Labor's new target is lower than what it took to the last election, and lower than even what the Business Council of Australia (BCA) wants. It has opted for a 43 per cent reduction target by 2030, when the BCA backs 50 per cent.

Only rapid and dramatic changes can avoid dangerous levels of heating. But Labor's target would not even put us on track for net zero emissions by 2050, the aim of the global agreements on climate.

Rich nations like Australia need to get to zero far more quickly if the world has any hope of meeting this target. The Climate Council says Australia needs to cut emissions by 75 per cent by 2030. Labor is not even going to get close to that.

Labor leader Anthony Albanese was falling over himself to say his policy was "what business wants". And business agreed, with the BCA calling the policy "sensible and workable" and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry lauding it as "encouraging to see" and "a sensible approach".

But it is Australian companies' desire to keep profiting out of fossil fuels that has put us on track for climate disaster.

Climate jobs

Labor's plan does show the potential for jobs from serious climate action. It estimates there would be 130,000 new jobs in constructing transmission infrastructure and solar and wind farms, and all up an additional 604,000 jobs by 2030. Power prices would actually drop by 26 per cent.

Predictably, Scott Morrison tried to spread fear that Labor's policy would mean "forcing people out of jobs". This echoes the devastating campaign the Liberals and Nationals ran at the last election in coal mining areas like central Queensland and NSW's Hunter region.

The problem is, Labor's plan does



Above: Anthony Albanese's climate target is lower than the one Labor took to the last election

not do enough to guarantee high wage jobs with good conditions. It is leaving it to private companies to build all the new renewable energy generation.

This risks a race to the bottom on wages and conditions. Many of the existing solar farms across Australia have an appalling record on wages and safety standards.

The jobs in Labor's plan look good on paper. But this is not enough to convince workers in coal and gas industries, who have seen how workers get left behind when big companies close down.

Guaranteeing good jobs to replace those in coal and gas, requires new public sector projects. It was government that built the existing coal power stations, and government could build renewable energy to replace them.

Poles and wires

The only significant public investment Labor is planning is in electricity poles and wires, through upgrades to the electricity grid. These will be necessary to handle the shift to renewable sources of power.

They also propose a National Reconstruction Fund, but it would spend only \$3 billion over eight years, or less than \$400 million a year.

Labor's key measures are around power generation, electric cars and industry emissions. There will be a

small increase in renewable energy, which is set to get to 68 per cent of our power needs by 2030 anyway, with Labor boosting this to 82 per cent.

Polluting industries will have to reduce their emissions, through an extension of the Liberals' existing Safeguards Mechanism. This, too, has been welcomed by the BCA. That's no surprise, because Labor would allow companies to buy offsets instead of actually reducing their emissions.

There are also measures to boost uptake of electric vehicles, with the hope that they will make up 15 per cent of all cars on the road by 2030.

But even while Labor is proposing measures to reduce emissions, it is backing the Liberals' plans to expand gas drilling and export. On 29 November, it voted through another \$50 million to speed up gas mining in the Beetaloo Basin in the NT. There are estimates this one basin alone could push Australia's emissions up by 20 per cent a year.

And there are also plans for more gas fracking in NSW's Narrabri, WA's Kimberley region, Queensland's Bowen and Galilee Basins and others.

Kicking out Scott Morrison will be a step forward for climate action. But it's also clear Labor is not willing to take the action that's needed—the climate movement needs to stay on the streets until we get it.

Labor is backing the Liberals' plans to expand gas drilling and export

Australia's 'grotesque' arms exports fuel barbarity and bloodshed

By Tom Fiebig

AUSTRALIAN MANUFACTURERS are profiting from selling military technology and deadly weapons to brutal regimes around the world, including Saudi Arabia, the UAE and up to 18 African countries.

Buyers include Sudan, where the military has been using its firepower to try to quell a revolutionary upheaval; Burkina Faso, where the military is accused of executing hundreds of prisoners; Zimbabwe, where the government is suspected of abducting and torturing political opponents; and Eritrea, a country run for decades by a dictatorship. It also includes countries accused of using child soldiers.

SBS *Dateline* used a Freedom of Information request covering 2015-2020 to reveal the scale of the trade, reporting that: "Worldwide, defence officials approved the sale of an estimated \$5 billion worth of military equipment in 2019-20—more than the typical yearly export value of Australian wine, wool or wheat."

Melissa Parke, a former lawyer for the United Nations and ex-Labor MP, told *Dateline*: "Australia has increased arms exports, including to countries accused of war crimes, while decreasing transparency about those exports."

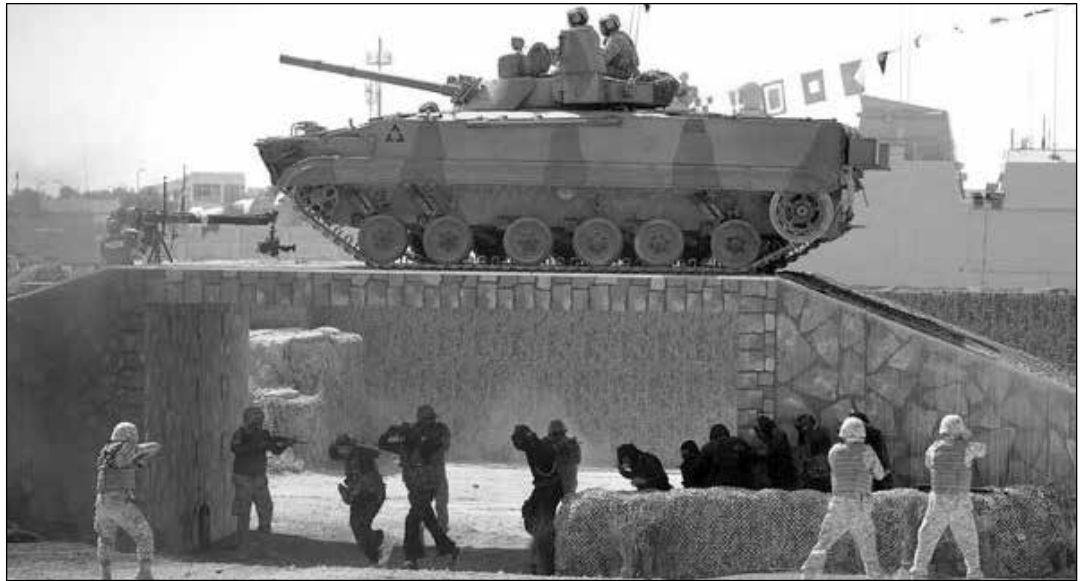
Dateline reports that Australia markets itself to international customers using the Australian Defence Sales Catalogue, "which reads like a giant K-Mart pamphlet of military capability".

Featured in the 2021 catalogue are armoured vehicles, mortar systems, automatic assault rifles and drones equipped to carry "lethal" payloads.

The Australian government's Defence Export Strategy outlines how military sales will be scaled up. It lists the Middle East as a "priority market", *Dateline* reports.

The weapons sales are part of Australia's push to become a major weapons exporter. In January 2018, then Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull announced that Australia was gearing up to become one of the world's largest arms dealers, with plans to expand defence industry exports from \$1.5 billion to \$2.5 billion a year over the following decade, a target that's already been exceeded.

Defence Minister at the time Christopher Pyne proclaimed that Australia aspired to be among the top-ten weapons exporters, a vision which Parke called "grotesque".



Above: Military display by the United Arab Emirates, source of repeated Australian arms exports

Most Australian military exports consist, according to the government's own definition, of "Category 1" equipment designed specifically for military use or equipment that is "inherently lethal". That includes ammunition, missiles, guns and tanks.

Australia is also one of a group of countries that's home to overseas weapon companies.

The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute reports that: "The United Kingdom, Australia, the USA, Canada and Germany host the largest numbers of these foreign entities. Outside the arms industry hubs of North America and Western Europe, the largest numbers of entities of foreign companies are hosted by Australia (38), Saudi Arabia (24), India (13), Singapore (11), the UAE (11) and Brazil (10)."

Arming Australia

Australia is also among the top ten arms importers worldwide. In recent weeks the government announced it would spend a further \$3.5 billion on tanks, on top of the \$100 billion or more to be spent on nuclear-powered submarines.

All of this is meant to bolster Australia's arsenal in the context of rising imperialist tensions with China.

Australia's wealth and geo-political power depends on maintaining its place within the world system of imperialism. While Morrison talks about "values", economic and geopolitical imperatives shape Australia's foreign policy and the arms trade plays a role in this.

Australia has had a history of making money from supporting despotic regimes.

For example, Australia provided military training and hardware to Indonesia between 1975 and 1999 when the country was engaged in a brutal occupation of Timor Leste which killed hundreds of thousands.

When in 2017 Defence Minister Pyne was accused of being an arms dealer for selling military technology to well-known human rights abuser Saudi Arabia, his office insisted (without providing evidence) that the exported equipment was not being used in the Yemen conflict.

But SBS *Dateline* reports that the Australian government has since 2015 approved 31 Category 1 permits to sell weapons and military equipment to Saudi Arabia and 92 Category 2 permits (technology that meets civilian needs but can be adapted for military uses) to the UAE.

Saudi Arabia and its coalition of Gulf States have engaged in a brutal war on Yemen resulting in what the UN has called the world's largest humanitarian crisis. There is little doubt that Australian weapons have fuelled the gross murder and starvation in Yemen. Arms-dealing inevitably trades in blood and death.

While Australian bosses profit from the death and misery, socialists stand in solidarity with working class and liberation movements in such countries. The best way to do that is by opposing our own country's imperialist and economic interests.

This means opposing its arms imports and growing arms exports and building a working-class internationalist movement that challenges the war-torn system.

.....
There is little doubt that Australian weapons have fuelled the gross murder and starvation in Yemen

Parliament sexism report exposes a foul system

By Ruby Wawn

A FEDERAL government review into workplace culture in Federal Parliament has found that an astonishing one in three staffers there have experienced sexual harassment.

The report, written by Sex Discrimination Commissioner Kate Jenkins and released in December, was commissioned in March last year following public outrage at the attempt by the government to cover up the alleged rape of former Liberal staffer Brittany Higgins inside Parliament House in 2019.

Just days before Morrison commissioned the inquiry, the then Liberal Defence Minister Linda Reynolds called Brittany Higgins a “lying cow”.

Little has changed with the government announcing a consultation period of just two weeks in the middle of January for its ten year plan to end violence against women and children.

Since Brittany Higgins’ accusations, the Liberals have been rocked by a series of sexual abuse scandals revealing their contempt for women. Most recently, Federal Education Minister Alan Tudge was forced to stand aside after former staffer, Rachele Miller, alleged her 2017 affair with Tudge was “at times abusive”.

The report also found that 51 per cent of workers in federal parliamentary offices have experienced at least one incident of bullying, sexual harassment, or actual or attempted sexual assault, with the harassment and bullying disproportionately reported by female staff and MPs.

“From the get-go there’s no incentive to actually report because it’s not going to change it and it’s probably actually going to make it worse,” one staffer told the inquiry.

The report concluded that the harassment and assault were, “largely driven by power imbalances, gender inequality and exclusion and a lack of accountability”. It also made 28 recommendations including implementing gender and diversity targets, rules around alcohol consumption, codes of conduct, reviewing rules of the parliamentary chambers and improving support services.

Disturbing

Prime Minister Scott Morrison called the findings “appalling” and “disturbing”, and said “the recommendations cover all the right territory”.



Above: Brittany Higgins’ accusation about her rape in Parliament House triggered the report

But Morrison has not committed to any action, just as the government did nothing about the 55 recommendations of the Respect@Work report that Jenkins delivered in March 2020.

Women should feel safe at work, but addressing the “boys’ club” in parliament will do little to fix the sexism embedded in the system that parliament is responsible for.

While the Liberal Party has signed off on a 10-year plan to increase the number of Liberal women in parliament, this will do nothing to improve the lives of ordinary women.

It was Liberal women Linda Reynolds and Michaela Cash who covered up Higgins’ alleged rape. And in July this year, the Liberal National Party’s Women’s Conference voted to support George Christensen’s anti-abortion bill and to oppose gender quotas claiming they would “basically punish men”.

In the last nine years in federal government, the Liberals have overseen some of the worst attacks on women. They have forced women on JobSeeker to live in poverty, introduced the punitive ParentsNext program, left domestic violence and other women’s services chronically underfunded and worked with Pauline Hanson to abolish the specialist Family Court, to name just a few.

Poverty

The government’s economic response to the pandemic shows that if they truly cared about fighting women’s oppression, they could find the money to fund the services that could radically transform women’s lives.

It is women who have borne the brunt of the pandemic. A Grattan Institute report found that women were more likely to lose their job, did even more unpaid work and were less likely to get government support.

But while the government found \$130 billion to fund JobKeeper, only 13 per cent of single mothers received the wage subsidy. And while the government briefly doubled the JobSeeker payment, 700,000 unemployed women are now again living below the poverty line.

Workplace sexual harassment is horrifyingly widespread, with a 2018 Australian Human Rights Commission report finding that 85 per cent of women over the age of 15 have experienced sexual harassment in the workplace.

To fight for a world in which women are safe at work, we need to fight the structures that leave women vulnerable to violence, abuse and harassment. We need to fight the gender pay gap, for abortion rights, for funding for women’s services, for higher welfare payments, for free childcare and against casualisation.

These are the things that can empower women and give them greater security and confidence to speak up about harassment, and provide the financial independence and support needed to leave abusive relationships.

Parliament House should be a safe workplace. But the harassment that women suffer inside Parliament reflects the oppression and discrimination that it inflicts on women in wider society. It will be struggle outside parliament that can bring real change.

Morrison has not committed to any action, just as he did nothing about the Respect@Work report

Australian troops no solution in the Solomons

By Tom Orsag

THE MAINSTREAM media has dutifully reported that “order” has been restored in the Solomon Islands (SI), following the arrival of Australian troops and police after protests and riots in late November.

But an additional offer from China of six police officers and riot gear, accepted by Solomon Islands Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare in late December, was enough to spark alarm in Australian government circles.

China’s offer pales in comparison to the 200 troops and police sent from Australia, New Zealand and PNG.

However, Australia’s efforts, far from humanitarian, are specifically aimed at preventing rival powers from establishing a presence, in order to ensure long term strategic control and advance Australian imperialist interests.

In the 19th century Australia plundered the Solomons, kidnapping islanders to work as slaves through the “blackbirding” trade. Today it is not a source of significant profits for Australian companies.

But Australian capitalism still needs to ensure control of trade routes and the free passage of exports to Asia and the US, as well as access to military supplies. This is why the “stability” of the Solomons, Fiji, Vanuatu and other island groups in the region remains important to Australian governments—and why they oppose China’s involvement.

An earlier Australian military and police occupation, the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI), began in July 2003 and ended in August 2017.

Originally RAMSI was seen as a ten-year project to rebuild and strengthen the Solomon Islands’ state machine. Various Australian officials were placed in charge of the public service, courts and police.

This too was driven by strategic interests. In 2003, SI government officials told SBS TV that Indonesia had offered to send troops there, in two meetings in Bali and Canberra that year. This prompted then Prime Minister John Howard to act.

Ethnic divide

The RAMSI intervention was a response to the fracturing of the Solomons along regional lines, as it spiralled into armed conflict between rival militias after the Asian economic



Above: Australian soldiers in Honiara, Solomon Islands

crisis of 1997.

Ethnic tensions erupted in 1998 on the main island of Guadalcanal, between locals and people from the island of Malaita, who have moved there in search of work over decades.

But the roots of the problems were economic. Capitalist development and export industries in timber, palm oil and fishing benefited only a small layer of the population, with many others living in poverty.

The recent riots are a product of the same Guale and Malaitan rivalry. Regional leaders on both sides are happy to fan divisions to advance their own positions.

For 36 years the Solomons recognised Taiwan instead of the mainland Chinese government in exchange for aid funding. But in 2019 Prime Minister Sogavare switched support to China in the hopes of a better deal.

This has become a focus for the regional divisions, with Malaita’s Provincial Premier Daniel Suidani condemning the shift. He is alleged to have fomented recent protests.

Defence think-tank the Australian Strategic Policy Institute has admitted, “The billions spent on RAMSI bought peace and stability for a time but did not solve the underlying problems that have festered in Solomon Islands since 1999.”

In fact Australia has made the problems worse, imposing neo-liberal policies focused on encouraging foreign investment. These plans have meant attacks on workers’ wages and conditions, as in June 2002, when the IMF and Australia pressured the government to implement public service cuts.

Tony Kagovai, President of the Solomon Islands’ National Union of Workers, said successive governments had been told, “You have to cut back the public service—teachers, nurses—in order that we give you money.”

In January 2004, public servants went on strike for a pay rise. RAMSI took “exception to” this and intervened to halt it. RAMSI said the country “could not afford” the pay rise and that “it threatened the country’s partnership with aid donors”—one of the biggest being Australia.

The recent riots saw anger diverted into ethnic divisions, as well as the looting and burning of Chinese-owned businesses. But working class action could provide an alternative focus and turn the anger against the Solomons’ corrupt political elite.

Workers have unionised on the waterfront, transport, the hospitals, schools and the public service.

Two public servants’ strikes planned in August and November 2009 were shut down by the government. In 2013, around 9000 teachers held three major strikes over pay. Nurses went on strike over COVID-19 allowance payments in October 2020, and Sogavare deregistered the nurses’ union in retaliation.

Much of the Solomons’ population is still based in an agricultural subsistence economy. But the organised working class has a social weight far larger than its numbers imply.

Australia military and police action operates to prop up the corrupt local elite.

It is workers and ordinary people in the Solomons whose struggles are the hope for change.

Australia’s efforts are specifically aimed at preventing rival powers from establishing a presence

Spirit of revolt rocks through Kazakhstan

By David Glanz

KAZAKHSTAN'S DICTATORIAL leader, President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, has re-asserted his control over the country with the aid of Russian troops at the cost of 227 lives.

Many more were injured and an estimated 10,000 people have been arrested.

A woman who had been shot in the violence and was being treated in hospital in Kazakhstan's biggest city Almaty, told the BBC how armed men in uniform burst into the ward and shouted: "If you go out to protest again, we will kill you."

But the mass protests that flared on 2 January and continued for nine days showed that anger runs deep among ordinary Kazakhs.

And it is a reminder that growing inequality and poverty continues to trigger revolts around the world—from Sudan to Myanmar, from Belarus to Chile, and now in Kazakhstan.

Kazakhstan, which borders both China and Russia, is rich in fossil fuels and other minerals. It has 12 per cent of global uranium resources and is the world's largest producer. It is a significant source of oil, coal and natural gas.

The country also has the world's biggest reserves of chrome ores and is second largest in terms of silver, third in manganese ores, fourth in zinc and fifth in iron ore.

But the wealth has not been shared. The immediate trigger for the protests was the government's decision to more than double the cost of gas used by car drivers. But for many it was just the last straw.

As the US magazine *Foreign Affairs* put it: "The anger on the streets reflected genuine and deep political and social problems in the country, which has experienced enormous change since independence in 1991.

"The protests were ... a reflection of the frustration Kazakhs feel with widening inequality, the entrenched corruption of elites, and a calcified political system."

When Kazakhstan gained independence following the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, its government adopted free market "shock therapy", guided by advisers from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.



The welfare state was dismantled and swathes of the economy were privatised.

The result was that some, especially then President Nursultan Nazarbayev and his family, became extremely rich. Central Almaty developed as a glitzy pocket of wealth while ordinary Kazakhs did not benefit.

Nazarbayev bolstered his increasingly corrupt regime by surrounding himself with oligarchs and cronies.

Political demands

Protests began in the gas and oil-bearing western region, where people suffer from high rates of poverty and unemployment and are often treated as second-class citizens by the centre.

There is a history of struggle. In the city of Zhanaozen, workers in the mining industry went on strike in 2011. The authorities responded then with state terror. Some 14 workers were shot dead.

This time, the government retreated, dropping the gas price increase. But it was too late, with protests spreading to almost the entire country, strikes breaking out among mining workers, and protesters making new demands.

According to the Russian group Socialist Tendency, Solidarity's sister organisation, protesters raised not just economic matters such as wage and pension rises, and a lower retirement age and lower fuel prices, but were making political demands.

Protesters called for the removal

Above: Thousands take to the streets in Kazakhstan

of Nazarbayev, who ruled the country from 1991 to 2019 and who was continuing to exert influence behind the scenes, as well as the current president Tokayev.

They also wanted elections for mayors and governors (currently appointed by the central government) and a guarantee that no civil and political activists would be prosecuted.

Repression and the presence of troops from Russia, along with small contingents from Armenia, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Belarus, have quelled protests for now.

Tokayev has moved to marginalise Nazarbayev, who at the height of the protests attempted to stage a coup.

But Kazakhstan will continue to be under pressure from Russia and China.

In the short term, Russia has gained most. As *Al Jazeera* put it: "The Kremlin declared victory, having managed to strengthen its influence in the post-Soviet space and securing the loyalty of Kazakhstan's leadership and its respect for Russian geopolitical interests and the interests of the large Russian community in the country."

But China will continue to use its economic investments to influence the Tokayev government, not least because it views Kazakh rulers as too sympathetic to the oppressed Uyghurs across the border in Xinjiang.

The workers and poor of Kazakhstan can expect nothing from the local elites or neighbouring powers. Instead they have shown the potential for people to look to themselves to change things.

Protests began in the gas and oil-bearing western region, where people suffer from high rates of poverty

ABORIGINAL TENT EMBASSY 50 YEARS ON 'WE WILL FIGHT FOR WHAT IS OURS'

The Aboriginal Tent Embassy's establishment in 1972 was one of the high points of the Aboriginal rights movement, showing how protest could win real changes.

IN 1971 a Supreme Court challenge by the Yirrkala people against the Nabalco mining company ended with a ruling that Aboriginal people had no rights to their land under the law.

Then, on the eve of Invasion Day in 1972, Liberal Prime Minister Billy McMahon refused to recognise land rights through legislation.

The next day four Aboriginal activists, Michael Anderson, Billy Craigie, Bertie Williams and Tony Coorey, travelled from Sydney to Canberra in a car driven by Communist Party photographer Noel Hazard. They planted a beach umbrella on the lawns of parliament house and held placards that read "Land rights now or else", and "Legally this land is our land. We shall take it if need be".

Originally this was intended as a protest stunt. But when they arrived they discovered that a legal loophole allowed camping on the Parliamentary lawns, and began erecting tents. The Tent Embassy became a central rallying point for the Aboriginal rights movement.

After the 1967 referendum extending citizenship to Aboriginal people, campaigners had hoped conditions in Aboriginal communities would improve.

But little changed. The government continued to revoke Aboriginal reserve land, forcing families into the cities. Aboriginal people lived in squalid housing and segregated communities, encountering daily police violence.

The failure of the Yirrkala court action and McMahon's subsequent rejection of land rights showed many people that neither parliament nor the legal system would end the discrimination they faced.

The Tent Embassy drew inspiration from the student and working class radicalism of the 1960s and 1970s, including widespread strike action, the movement against the Vietnam War, anti-colonial struggles across the world and the US civil



Above: The march in support of the Tent Embassy in Canberra on 30 July 1972

rights movement.

Demands for land rights had become central. In 1966 over 200 Gurindji on a cattle station in the NT began a three-year strike against virtual slave conditions. White unionists toured Gurindji people around workplaces nationwide to speak about their struggle and raise funds.

The Gurindji not only won equal wages, but eventually, ownership of their land. Their strike put land rights on the political agenda.

The movements of the 1970s brought real gains for Aboriginal people. The Tent Embassy's demands included: an Aboriginal controlled state in the NT; legal title and mining rights to all reserve lands, as well as the land around capital cities; the preservation of sacred sites and compensation for lands lost including a \$6 billion down payment. Underlying them was a desire for an end to the policy of assimilation and a demand for self-determination and Aboriginal control over their land, communities and lives.

The Whitlam Labor government rode to power at the end of 1972 on the back of this period of ferment. Whitlam abolished assimilation

as official policy, creating the first Department of Aboriginal Affairs. His government also drew up the NT Land Rights Act (eventually passed under the subsequent Liberal government), finally giving the Gurindji and many other Aboriginal communities in the NT back their land.

These steps showed the power of political protest to win gains. But the government never fully delivered self-determination or the compensation for dispossession that the movement demanded. In the decades since, many of the gains around self-determination and Aboriginal control have been wound back, seen most starkly in the takeover of Indigenous communities through the NT Intervention.

Rates of Indigenous imprisonment are the highest in the world, record numbers of Indigenous children are being removed from their families, very few Indigenous people have meaningful rights over land and constantly see their country destroyed by development.

We need a return to the protest politics of the Tent Embassy today if there is going to be any serious progress for Aboriginal rights.

Voices from the 1972 Aboriginal Tent Embassy

THE TENT Embassy stood on the lawns outside Old Parliament House in Canberra until July when the Liberal government passed a new law making camping there illegal. Without warning 100 police descended on the Embassy on 20 July and violently removed the tents, arresting eight people.

Three days later, demonstrators tried to re-establish the embassy without success.

Then on 30 July the movement organised a 2000-strong march including students, unionists and workers from across Canberra—led by at least 250 Aboriginal people who travelled from as far as Brisbane. It was the largest land rights demonstration in Canberra's history.

Below are excerpts from three speeches delivered to the crowd on the day.

Chicka Dixon, wharfie, unionist and Aboriginal activist

In 1968, if my memory serves me correct, we marched for land rights here, from the university—three Blacks and about 200 university students. Why are there only three Blacks? Because they were too frightened. They were frightened of the establishment. They were frightened to stand up and be counted.

Now, because of what occurred here on Thursday and last Sunday, when the Gestapo [the police] came in and used boots and everything to suppress our people, we've got Aboriginal people here from every state—these are Black people that care that our people were being hammered over the principle of land rights.

For six months we've had a tent [embassy] here in [an act of] passive resistance. Then all of a sudden in come the powers that be and rip down the tent.

The reason why the tent [embassy] was put up was because on so-called Australia Day, the Prime Minister brought down a decision on land rights as far as the Liberal Party were concerned.

Every other Indigenous race of dispossessed people in the world have been given land rights. Land is our major concern.

.....
**'Aboriginal people were proving to the world that they were prepared to fight for what was theirs'—
Ken Brindle**

And if the people allow the government to move in heavily on passive Aboriginal people [to disperse the Tent Embassy] that is an indictment on the Australian people. The most vital thing as I see it is that if you're not going to become part of the solution, then we'll have to consider you part of the problem.

Bob Pringle, NSW President, Builders Labourers Federation

As far as I'm concerned, the police force that I saw here last weekend were just a mob of racist, fascist pigs. I disagree that it's just their job. Because the Builders Labourers in New South Wales have been asked to do a lot of jobs, like pulling down buildings that have historical value, like building on kids' playgrounds, like tearing down the last bit of scrub land left on the Parramatta River—and we refused. So, if these thugs have got any real guts, they ought to refuse [to disperse the Embassy].

And as far as saying that a change of government is going to assist the Aborigines, I think that it will be because of the action of you people here today, that's put pressure on this government and any other government that's going to be [formed].

We are a racist nation and unless we face up to that fact then we're having ourselves on. If it wasn't for actions like this, the Labor Party wouldn't take any more action than the present government. We've got to fight.

Today we have struck a blow.

In the past we've stood by and let our governments enact a policy of genocide against the Aborigines.

And I believe that Aboriginal people in Australia are worse off than Blacks in South Africa, because in South Africa the Blacks are the labour force—so at least the government's got to keep them healthy. But because the Aboriginal people in this country are only 2 per cent of the population, they're not a big section of the labour force.

So the policy that this government is enacting [is designed to see them] wiped out slowly. I believe that it's worse than apartheid [in South Africa] and unless we stand up and are prepared to fight it's going to

go on.

There's eight union officials here today. I got up on the Labor Council floor in New South Wales last Thursday night, and put forward a motion that the Labour council should support this Embassy going up here today. I got 20 votes out of 106.

It's only pressure from the people that's going to change things. It's the power of the people that we've got to be looking for.

Ken Brindle, Aboriginal activist

I was up in Kempsey on the far north coast [of NSW] when I saw [the Tent Embassy] on television. There were about 15 or 16 young Kooris watching television with us.

They were a bit shocked by what they saw, but also elated and very, very proud that Aboriginal people were proving to the world that they were prepared to fight for what was theirs.

And they weren't just going to watch their white mates go and fight for them, but were going to fight for themselves. This is what this is all about today.

This will be world news, but it's not so important for the people around the world to see this as it is for Aboriginal people that are living in huts and shacks and shanties in places like Menindee, Bourke, Collarenebri, Toomelah, places right out of sight of the government...

The government's policy towards Aborigines particularly in isolated places where they're living in poor conditions is that they [will do nothing for them, claiming they] can't build houses for them because there's no work there for them there.

This embassy doesn't only stand for Aboriginal land rights; it stands for Aboriginal equality.

Aborigines need more than land rights, they need the opportunity to be given a decent education and to be able to stand up and take their place in society.

I got a terrific kick out of coming down and marching with my own people, and from all the support. But Aboriginal people are such a minority in this country that we cannot succeed without the sympathetic support of the European Australians.

CLIMATE ACTION AND THE ELECTION BACKING LIBERAL-LITE INDEPENDENTS NO SOLUTION

Independents are campaigning in a series of Liberal heartland seats targeting Morrison’s failure on climate change. **Caitlin Doyle** explains why they’re not the answer we need

ANYONE WHO wants to see action on climate change will be celebrating if the Morrison government is kicked out in this year’s federal election. The Coalition’s pitiful emissions reduction targets in the face of unprecedented climate disasters around the world have left millions of people furious.

Morrison’s net zero by 2050 target, which lacks a real plan for emissions reduction and relies on dubious technology, is woefully inadequate. The Australia Institute’s 2021 Climate of the Nation survey found that a record 75 per cent of voters are concerned about climate change, meaning it will be a key issue in the upcoming election.

Unfortunately, the ALP has offered little in the way of an alternative on climate. Anthony Albanese has talked up Labor’s commitment to climate job creation, but has little to say about what kind of jobs these will be. Labor also continues to support new gas developments.

Morrison’s intransigence on climate, combined with the ALP’s lack of ambition—and a more general decline in trust for the major parties across Australia—has led some sections of the climate movement to back a series of “climate independents” in the election.

Climate 200

In the last election, independent candidate Zali Steggall unseated Tony Abbott, largely around climate change, and MP Kerry Phelp narrowly lost to Dave Sharma. Both were supported by Climate 200, a group founded by Simon Holmes à Court, clean energy analyst, investor and son of Australia’s first billionaire, to support climate independents.

This year, the organisation has so far amassed a \$3.6 million election campaign “war chest” to back independents running in seats across the country.

A number of School Strike for Climate activists campaigned for Steggall in 2019. But there are serious problems with looking to independents to confront climate change.

Most of the climate independents are running in blue ribbon Liberal seats that are among the wealthiest in the country, including Wentworth, North Sydney, Goldstein and Kooyong, and want to appeal to disillusioned Liberal and conservative voters who are concerned about climate.

Many of them describe themselves as business figures and see business as the solution to the climate crisis—a message tailor-made for the wealthy residents they are appealing to, who are generally pro-business, anti-union and against taxing the rich.

Kylea Tink, running in North Sydney, describes herself as “a mum and a businesswoman and a CEO”. Tink was a Liberal supporter right up until her decision to run against Liberal MP Trent Zimmerman, who she voted for in 2019.

Wentworth candidate Allegra Spender’s father and grandfather were both Liberal MPs. She presents herself as a Liberal at heart, saying, “Today’s Liberal Party is not the same party of my father and my grandfather.”

Her campaign body, Wentworth Independents, is headed by Lyndell and Daniel Droga, who boast a \$20 million Woollahra home funded through short-selling and stock trading. Spender has stressed the benefits of climate action for “the economic opportunity it presents to business”.

Climate 200, whose board includes a number of former Liberal MPs including one-time leader John Hewson, insist they are non-partisan and driven only by science-based climate action. But their donors include billionaires like Nick Fairfax, Simon Hackett and Mike Cannon-Brookes,

.....
Many describe themselves as business figures and see business as the solution to the climate crisis

who are unlikely to back candidates who pose any serious threat to the political status quo.

Climate 200 talk up the potential for making profits through decarbonising the economy and are explicitly pro-business.

But business will not deliver changes at the speed needed. The Climate Council says Australia needs to reduce emissions by 75 per cent by 2030. This kind of radical action will only come through a government plan involving massive investment not just in renewable energy but retrofitting household appliances, zero emissions transport, manufacturing and agriculture.

Worse, the existing reliance on businesses to deliver renewable energy projects has seen a race to the bottom on wages and conditions on solar and wind farms. This has been a disaster for workers in the industry, who earn far less than the highly unionised mining sector.

The climate movement in Australia has been set back by climate action being counterposed to jobs and workers’ rights. This was exemplified by the 2011 carbon tax, which pushed the cost of polluting onto consumers.

Understandably, some workers have come to believe that decarbonising the economy will mean job losses and higher costs of living. Recent workplace closures, like the Holden and Bonds factories and the Hazelwood coal-fired power station, have left workers on the scrap heap. The absence of any indication from Labor that climate action would guarantee jobs for workers in fossil fuels industries led to the Coalition being reelected in 2019.

It is only in recent years that this has started to be addressed, with demands for climate jobs and a just transition for fossil fuel communities becoming more common on protests.

Backing candidates who pro-

mote profit-making opportunities for “green” businesses will make it difficult for climate activists to appeal to workers worried about job security and cost of living.

Another problem is that candidates who support climate action are not necessarily progressive on other issues. In fact, many of the climate independents have Liberal party backgrounds or support neo-liberal policies that attack unions, workers and public services.

Zali Steggall, for example, was prepared to support the government’s Ensuring Integrity Bill, which could have seen the CFMEU deregistered. If climate activists were to back Steggall again, this could send a message to CFMEU members that the movement doesn’t care about workers and their conditions. At the 2019 election she described herself as “an economic conservative who believes in small but effective government” and opposed Labor’s plans to increase taxes on wealthy investors through changes to negative gearing and dividend imputation.

The climate bill that Steggall eventually put forward was hardly any better than Morrison’s 2050 commitment.

A movement outside parliament

Some argue that more independents in parliament could force change. Simon Holmes à Court himself has argued that, “If we can just win two or three seats it’s highly likely there will be a minority government” where independents call the shots. But there is no reason to believe that this will work.

After Julia Gillard’s reelection in 2010, independent MPs held the balance of power and supported a minority Labor government. But this did not produce any overall shift to the left. In fact, Labor cut uni spending, cut welfare for single parents, reintroduced offshore detention for refugees and failed to raise taxes on the rich.

It also resulted in the carbon tax. This was a political disaster because Labor wanted a policy acceptable to business. The carbon tax allowed them to pass the cost onto consumers, meaning Tony Abbott was able to capitalise on fears it would push up the cost of living.

None of this is to say that climate activists should be indifferent to who wins the election. Getting rid of Morrison would buoy progressives everywhere.

But simply backing independents, minor parties or Labor in the election is no answer.



Above: Allegra Spender’s campaign launch in Wentworth

Campaigning for independent candidates sends the wrong message, implying that electing a minority government is the key to getting change.

Even in a minority government Labor is not going to accept dramatically improved policies. Labor in government will always defend the interests of business to keep making profits and expand gas and coal mines.

Climate activists will need to fight whoever holds power after the election to demand a transition away from fossil fuels.

This means building mass street mobilisations and building power in our schools, universities and workplaces. We need more actions like the Climate Strike in September 2019, with 350,000 nationwide and 120,000 in Sydney’s Domain.

When independents have voted against cuts and neo-liberal policies in the past, it has often been pressure outside of parliament that has pushed them to do so. In 2014, the Senators elected by Clive Palmer only opposed the deregulation of university fees after enormous public opposition and rallies.

The same goes for major parties. Mobilisations in the streets and workplaces have halted coal seam gas projects and led to the scrapping of offshore detention the first time around in 2008. Protests and campaigning forced Morrison to get children off Nauru and pushed Labor to back the Medevac legislation in 2019.

Union and working class mobilisation to join protests and ultimately

use their industrial strength to strike can bring enormous power to social movements.

The Green Bans movement of the 1970s saw the Builders Labourers’ Federation refuse to work on projects that were destructive to the environment or local communities. There was strike action against the Vietnam War and against uranium mining in Australia in the 1970s.

This kind of power could be used to halt new fossil fuel projects and demand real climate action. The ETU’s announcement in 2021 that it will not work on the Narrabri gas project is a step in the right direction.

The climate movement has to stick to demands for the kind of climate transition we need—for 100 per cent renewable energy and zero emissions by 2030, not 2050. And the movement also needs to articulate a vision for the climate transition that is not left up to the market, but 100 per cent publicly-owned and run renewable energy, thousands of new well paid climate jobs and Indigenous justice.

Climate activists should be campaigning to get rid of the Morrison government once and for all. But time spent campaigning for independent candidates is time squandered. Climate independents cannot be relied upon to deliver the transition we need.

To win real action on climate, we need to build a bigger, more confident movement on the streets, at schools, on campus and at work—starting with the School Strike for Climate strike on 25 March.

WOOL WARS WHEN SHEARERS' UNIONS TOOK ON STATE BRUTALITY

The 1891 Great Shearers' Strike in Queensland was one of the defining industrial battles in Australian history. **Adam Adelpour** draws the lessons

IT WAS naked class war. The Queensland government deployed thousands of troops to break the strike. They used conspiracy legislation and dished out 100 cumulative years of prison time to strikers.

Thousands of unionists set up strike camps, amassed guns and ammunition, tried to derail trains—and many even talked about the need for revolution, civil war and socialism.

An excited editor of one republican newspaper said it would be better to “butcher every last squatter and member of this government” than concede defeat.

Looking back 130 years on, there are two lessons we can learn from this incredible strike.

First, it exposes the role of the state as an instrument of the ruling class and vindicates the argument that Marx had made 20 years earlier when he said: “The working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery and wield it for its own purposes.”

He argued that the state—the military, the police, the courts, prisons—was an instrument of capitalist class rule and must be destroyed to achieve working class democracy and liberation.

At the same time, the defeat of the strike played a significant role in the formation of the Australian Labor Party.

Union officials drew exactly the wrong lessons from the strike. Even today, union officials present 1891 as part of the origin story of the ALP: unions lost the battle but gained a clear understanding that parliament was the key to advancing working class interests.

With the growing prospect of an ALP federal government it is important to understand that the roots of the ALP's reformism lie in despair at the prospect of workers winning through

direct struggle.

Harsh conditions

The story of the strike starts with the harsh working conditions in the booming pastoral industry. Wool was big business. In the 1860s Marx had described Australia as “a colony for growing wool”. By the 1890s, Queensland was exporting up to 45 million kilograms to Britain each year and pastoralists and bankers were making huge profits.

The industry was very concentrated and had immense political influence. About half was controlled by a dozen financial institutions. More than half the executive of the bosses' United Pastoralist Association were members of the Queensland parliament. Every magistrate in western Queensland was a pastoralist.

Immense profits were built on the backs of thousands of pastoral workers, who toiled dawn till dusk and suffered diseases like trachoma and Barcoo rot. They slept in dirt-floored sheds on remote stations and could be fined for whistling or singing.

The 1891 strike took place following a period of growing union organising in the pastoral industry. Strikes were used as a direct weapon to force employers to improve conditions.

In 1887, the Queensland Shearers Union was formed in response to attempts to cut shearing rates. It fended off the cuts and forced pastoralists to employ shearers under union rules which included a closed shop (compulsory union membership for all workers). In 1890 the Australian Labour Federation (ALF) was formed and was involved in a dispute where Jondaryan shearers won a closed shop with the help of maritime workers who banned non-union wool.

In response, the pastoralists formed their own organisation. They were keen to pick a fight, as was the

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There were strike camps often of hundreds with a section of each camp armed

ruling class more broadly, because even though wool exports were growing there was an economic depression.

Their battering ram was a new shearing agreement that rejected the closed shop, cut pay between 15 and 33 per cent and rejected the eight-hour day. It also gave the employer the right to withhold wages until the end of the season and to refuse to pay if the labourer breached the agreement.

The union rejected the agreement and the strike was declared on 5 January. The pastoralists tried to get men to sign the agreement individually but station after station rejected it and formed strike camps. Employers began organising scabs (or “free labourers” as they called them). With the scabs came police and the army. Before February was over there were military forces deployed across western Queensland.

As the struggle escalated, the ALF desperately tried to get employers to agree to a meeting to arrange a compromise. But the employers were set on smashing the unions and refused to meet unless unions conceded “freedom of contract” (an end to the closed shop) first.

The central district shearers' strike committee ignored the ALF's calls for restraint and issued a statement in February saying if employers wanted a fight, they'd get it.

Major escalation

The day after the Barcardine strike committee issued a general call-out of shearers, all its members were arrested. This signalled a major escalation. Because the pastoralists hadn't pushed through the agreement everywhere all at once, the general call-out meant a massive increase in the number of striking sheds.

The ruling class was worried. There were strike camps often of hundreds with a section of each camp

armed, huge street marches, public meetings and a high level of organisation among the strikers, who had public sympathy despite the hostility of the press.

At the Charleville camp, tents were arranged around streets with names like freedom, liberty and republic. The men took turns to cook. There was a daily meeting at 10am, signalled by a gun shot.

In Barcaldine, unions organised a vigilance committee which patrolled the town and arrested any drunk unionists running wild at night. One of the first May Day marches in the world took place on 1 May in Barcaldine. The Sydney Morning Herald reported that 1340 men took part, of whom 618 were on horse.

From the very start the government and pastoralists wanted to disperse the camps to break the strike. On 23 February, when military forces arrived in Clermont, the Governor-in-Council ordered strikers to lay down their arms and disperse. But strikers ignored the order and the government wasn't game to enforce it.

Despite the press and some strikers talking about civil war, the overall union strategy was peaceful, mostly aiming to exercise the legal right to try to convince scabs to join the strike—what officials called “moral suasion”.

The government and employers used their huge military and police mobilisation primarily to keep scabs away from strikers so they couldn't convince them to join. About 2000 soldiers and police, plus 1099 special constables, were deployed during the five months of the dispute.

In February, Major Landon Dealtry Jackson was sent to Clermont with three officers, 58 men, a nine-pounder field gun and a Nordenfelt machine gun. On 15 April, a cannon and a dozen artillerymen were sent to Charleville by government minister Horace Tozer. Pastoralists also tried to build private armies by recruiting vigilantes.

There were mass arrests—hundreds of strikers got a combined 100 years of jail time. Fourteen strike leaders were arrested, with 13 receiving three-year sentences. The Riot Act was used—once it was read anyone still in the area an hour later could legally be shot.

Throughout the strike the government, state officials and pastoralists colluded. This wasn't hard as they were often the same people.

In February, Robert Ranking, the police magistrate in Rockhampton, contacted Tozer, telling him ammuni-



Above: The 13 strike leaders who were received three year jail sentences for their role in the strike

tion had arrived for both the union and a squatter. Tozer said to seize the unionists' ammunition but to let the squatter's cartridges through.

During the trial of the 14 union leaders on 9 May, Judge Harding said he would have shot the unionists if he was a police officer on the scene of the riot they had supposedly started. Railway Commissioners told railway workers they could be sacked if they attended pro-strike meetings or donated to strike funds.

The wave of vicious repression showed that, for the ruling class, their domination was far more important than the letter of the law.

Political conclusion

The scale of the repression, the lack of action outside the pastoral areas and insufficient funds all gradually wore down the strikers. They returned to work on 10 June but refused to formally concede “freedom of contract”.

Despite the role of the capitalist state, the political conclusion drawn by union officials and many strike leaders was that industrial action had to be replaced by political action and arbitration. If you couldn't beat the state, you had to take it over.

The final manifesto of the strike

committee concluded with a plea to register to vote so as to “reorganise society”. Three of the 14 conspiracy prisoners were later elected to parliament and one became a minister.

The Labor Party ran properly in Queensland for the first time at the 1893 election with a moderate program of reforms and an emphasis on opposing coloured labour. The first Queensland Labor Government took office in 1899.

The track record of the reformist and parliamentary strategy speaks for itself. In 1927, the Queensland Labor government smashed a railway strike. In 1948, during another railway strike, Labor ministers unleashed police on a march and beat Communist state MP Fred Paterson within an inch of his life. Federally, the ALP used the army to break the 1949 miners' strike, the RAAF to break the 1989 pilots' strike and the police to smash the NSW Builders Labourers Federation.

Parliament has turned out to be a road to nowhere. The dramatic gains in wages and conditions leading up to 1891 were won by militancy. Given it took the army and the police of an entire state to stop the shearers alone, it is clear the working class fighting as a whole would be unstoppable.

‘VOICE TO PARLIAMENT’ FARCE WON’T FIGHT ONGOING INDIGENOUS INJUSTICE

By Paddy Gibson

IN THE week before Christmas, the Morrison government committed to the creation of an Indigenous Voice to parliament and government.

This proposal would see 35 regional “Voice” bodies set up, along with a national body, with a mandate to advise all levels of government on policy and legislation concerning Indigenous peoples.

Tom Calma and Marcia Langton, the Indigenous co-chairs who led the design process, continue to insist on the need to implement the Uluru Statement from the Heart, which calls for a “Voice to Parliament” to be enshrined in the Australian constitution.

While the Liberals have flat-out rejected a referendum, many Uluru Statement supporters hope that this legislated Voice might be a stepping stone to constitutional enshrinement. Morrison’s support is so late, however, that there is no expectation he will deliver legislation before the federal election.

Labor has attacked the proposal, promising a constitutional referendum on the Uluru Statement. In reality, the legislated “Voice to Parliament” Morrison now supports and the Uluru Statement model are practically the same. Both propose advisory bodies with no control over resources, no power to set policy direction and that could be dissolved by government.

This is a weak shadow of the historic demands for self-determination and sovereignty advanced by the Aboriginal rights movement over generations.

Intensifying oppression

The current policy framework for Indigenous affairs was largely established by the Howard government, which waged war on Aboriginal self-determination from 1996-2007.

Howard slashed funding for community-controlled services, abolished the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, attacked native title and land rights and launched the NT Intervention, creating a level of racist control over Aboriginal lands and lives not seen since the Protection era.

Labor, in government from 2007, continued the Intervention, rolled the punitive income management system



Above: Mass movements like the Black Lives Matter rallies are needed to force justice for Indigenous people

into many more Indigenous (and some non-Indigenous) communities, dismantled funding for essential services in remote areas and axed the community-based employment program (CDEP).

Disempowerment and poverty has been accompanied by a large expansion of police, child-protection and other punitive programs. The number of Aboriginal children taken from their families is higher than ever, with almost one in ten children spending time in a foster placement in 2020.

The rate of Indigenous incarceration is also higher than ever, with more than 500 deaths in custody since the Royal Commission in 1991.

Government proposals for constitutional recognition and now a “Voice to Parliament” have provided a useful cover for Labor and Liberal governments alike, while daily oppression grinds on.

Labor points to opinion polls indicating strong support for a referendum among Indigenous people. But there has also been consistent opposition to a referendum on a “Voice to Parliament” from more radical Indigenous leaders.

This is no surprise, given that the proposal came from conservative Indigenous commentator Noel Pearson and was designed to bring business and the right-wing of the Liberal Party on side.

The Business Council of Australia, Qantas, even Rio Tinto which recently blew up Juukun Gorge, all support a constitutionally enshrined

Voice precisely because it poses no threat whatsoever to them.

A group of more than 20 elected representatives walked out of the Uluru conference in 2017, denouncing the proposal as tokenistic and pre-terminated. Wiradjuri delegate Jenny Munro said constitutional recognition was “about validating their sovereignty [the Crown] on our land, not ours”.

Significantly, opposition to a referendum is concentrated among Indigenous activists who organise street demonstrations, such as Warriors of the Aboriginal Resistance. Greens Senator Lidia Thorpe is also opposed.

Labor claims that an enshrined Voice would be a step towards treaties across Australia. Its record shows that this, too, would largely avoid serious change.

In the NT, Labor is overseeing a treaty-making process while increasing police powers against Aboriginal youth. In Queensland, Labor has also started a treaty process while pushing ahead with the Adani coal mine against strident opposition from Wangan and Jagalingou traditional owners.

This year marks 50 years since young Black activists established the Aboriginal Tent Embassy in Canberra.

This radical movement was a historic high-water mark, winning reforms that Howard was still working to wind back 30 years later. The co-ordinated mass politics, direct action and solidarity with other struggles of working and oppressed people seen in this era is needed to win real change today.

Almost one in ten Indigenous children spent time in a foster placement in 2020

Solidarity