

# Writings from the **FRONTLINE**



**Vol. 2: Selected articles from  
*Green Left Weekly* 2009-14**

**Jim McIlroy**

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*Cover photo:* General strike for Medibank, July 12, 1976, Sydney (see article page 41).

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# Introduction

"Workers of the world, unite! You have nothing to lose but your chains!" — Karl Marx & Frederick Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (1848)

This collection of articles from *Green Left Weekly* (now *Green Left*) follow on from a previous pamphlet, entitled *Writings from the Frontline: Selected articles 1991-2008*, published in 2022. The articles in this new pamphlet, *Writings from the Frontline 2*, cover a wide range of topics concerning the struggle against the capitalist system and for radical social change, during the period 2009-14.

The articles range from interviews and reports on key Australian political events; interviews and reviews of struggles by Aboriginal leaders for Indigenous liberation in this country; first-hand coverage of the Bolivarian revolution in Venezuela, headed by inspirational leader then-President Hugo Chavez; reports on environmental campaigns, including the struggle against coal seam gas and the disastrous WestConnex tollway in Sydney; and a particular focus on the ongoing battles against privatisation of public assets, including Medicare, public housing and the power industry in NSW.

Important features include interviews with Queensland Aboriginal socialist leader Sam Watson, including coverage of his election campaigns as a candidate for the Socialist Alliance; various reports of struggles to oppose moves by Coalition governments, federally under then PM Tony Abbott, and by the NSW Liberal-National state government, to sell off public services and property to their mates in the private sector; and reviews of major international and local historical events,



*Jim McIlroy (1972).*

including the Arab Spring in Egypt, the involvement of the Communist Party in the Australian union movement, and the legacy of former Labor PM Gough Whitlam.

The collection covers a wide range of topics, highlighting the vital role of *Green Left* as the premier socialist publication in Australia, and as an organising voice for the building of a broad eco-socialist movement in this country. The role of the mainstream media in helping to defend the capitalist status quo in this country underlines the essential role of radical journalism, such as provided by *Green Left*, in fighting for a new egalitarian and environmentally sustainable society.

Once again, thanks to Dave Holmes for his tireless work in the preparation of this publication. ■

## Hugo Chavez speaks to GLW bureau: 'Socialism will save the world'



Barinas / May 16, 2009 / Issue 795

"Socialism will save Venezuela; socialism will save the world", Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez said on May 10 during his weekly TV program *Alo Presidente*.

Chavez was answering a question put to him live on air by Coral Wynter, a member of the Australian Socialist Alliance and the Australia-Venezuela Solidarity Network (AVSN).

Wynter, along with myself and two other Australians, had, with the assistance of the Venezuelan embassy in Australia, been invited onto the program, held that week in rural Barinas state.

Wynter and myself have been Venezuela correspondents for *Green Left Weekly* over the past six months.

Wynter asked Chavez: "Could you explain why 'socialism of the 21st century' is important and relevant to people of the developed countries, like Australia?"

Chavez answered: "The Bolivarian revolution is an important support for the salvation of humanity, and also the salvation of nature.

"Both entities are closely related, human and nature, because humans are part of nature and nature is part of humanity.

"Therefore, for the developed world, as

you may call it, this current level of development of the countries of the North, of Australia, of Europe, must be made sustainable. Therefore, socialism is [necessary for] the salvation of the entire world."

Wynter had explained that she and myself had lived in Caracas for a year during 2006, and had later written a book, entitled *Voices from Venezuela: Behind the Bolivarian Revolution*, based on hundreds of interviews with grassroots Venezuelans.

She said it aimed to "reveal the truth about Venezuela, in English, for the English-speaking world, to help break through the curtain of lies and distortions" in the mainstream media in Australia and elsewhere.

She also explained that we had helped organise two solidarity brigades over the past six months, sponsored by AVSN, to "bring Australian people here to see with their own eyes the truth about the Bolivarian revolution".

Wynter presented Chavez with a copy of the book.

Chavez replied: "Thank you for your presence in Venezuela, for your feelings, for your work in spreading the truth about the revolution.

"A thousand thanks for coming here, living in this country, speaking to people, and explaining the reality of Venezuela." ■

## Oodgeroo: 'A keeper of the law, a teller of stories'

By Jim McIlroy & Coral Wynter

July 26, 2009 / Issue 804

*Oodgeroo: Bloodline to Country*. Written by Sam Watson. Directed by Sean Mee. With Jonathan Brand, Darren Brady, Simon Hapea, Roxanne McDonald, Rhonda Purcell and Emma Pursey. La Boite Theatre Company

Black people "are getting stronger all across the world," declares Kath Walker, the renowned Aboriginal poet, who later in life

adopted the Indigenous name of Oodgeroo Noonuccal (of the Noonuccal tribe of Stradbroke Island, off the coast near Brisbane).

"It's my country. I'm never going to leave it." It is early on in the marvellous new play *Oodgeroo: Bloodline to Country*, by well-known playwright, author, filmmaker, lecturer and political activist Sam Watson. Watson is national Indigenous affairs spokesperson for the Socialist Alliance.

This moving portrayal of scenes in the life of Australia's most famous Aboriginal poet consists of a dreamtime-style series of flashbacks to events in her past, centring on a dramatic incident in which Walker was a passenger on a British aeroplane seized by Palestinian hijackers in 1974.

In the play, Walker befriends a German fellow passenger. As was her lifelong way, Walker tries, this time unsuccessfully, to intercede between the Palestinian militants and the German banker.

"I am an Aboriginal woman from Australia. I am used to all this", Walker said.

The incident appears as a vehicle to highlight the difference between Walker's (Noonuccal's) pacifist approach and the

militant views of her older son Denis Walker, who was a founding member (along with Sam Watson) of the Australian Black Panther Party in 1971.

The Brisbane-based Panthers were established on the inspiration of the US Black Panther Party, who galvanised the North American Black power movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Denis and Watson went on to be involved in the establishment of the Canberra Aboriginal Tent Embassy in 1972 and the development of a strong Aboriginal rights movement in Queensland in later years.

“All political power grows out of the barrel of a gun”, Denis insists at one point, debating with his mother.

All the while, Oodgeroo’s younger son Vivian, a talented dancer, appears as a spiritual presence, showing her the way toward reconciliation with her home country and her culture.

Early on in the play, we see Kath Walker as a young domestic servant for a wealthy family in Brisbane, standing up for herself against the racism of both the mistress and the master of the household.

We then see her meeting up with her husband Bruce Walker, a waterside worker, and Denis’s father. For a time, Kath joined the Communist Party of Australia, the only party of the period that rejected the White Australia Policy.



Oodgeroo Noonuccal.

Writer Mary Gilmore also appears, stressing to Kath that, “Your words have power. Your stories belong to us all.” Gilmore encouraged the initial publication of Walker’s poetry in the mid 1960s.

Another presence in the story is Jessie Street, radical lawyer, feminist and Aboriginal rights supporter. Street and Walker became leaders of the movement which culminated in the successful 1967 referendum that gave the Federal government the right to make specific laws for Indigenous people.

Another character is Pearl, a young Aboriginal woman of the Stolen Generation. Pearl was raped by a group of policemen,

and told Kath, “That’s why I don’t want to be Black.”

Kath befriends her and assists in her later education as a lawyer. Pearl is later able to explain to Oodgeroo that the old forms of organisation for Aboriginal rights must change: “We have to make our own way now. It’s our time.”

Oodgeroo, in her later life, concentrated on her Aboriginal cultural centre on Stradbroke Island, educating thousands of young people, Black and white, in traditional Indigenous ways. She died in 1993.

In a voice-over to finish the play, Sam Watson says, “Oodgeroo was a keeper of the law, a teller of stories. The moment she left us, a light went out in our lives. Her wisdom will always carry us forward.”

In a discussion between the cast and audience after the play, Watson added: “Her life was a wonderful journey. We wanted to present a story that played a vital part in the history of Queensland and Australia.

“The power of her writing and her political work for Aboriginal rights, especially in the earlier period of the 1960s, made an enormous impact. Today, there is a clear link between Auntie Kath and young Blacks, learning about our history and culture,” Watson said.

He confirmed that there are plans to stage the play in other cities. ■

SA member Jim McIlroy stressed that the struggle over the mining tax was an escalation in the class struggle in Australia. “It represented an exercise of raw class power by the mining companies and their allies in the mainstream media. The two major parties are plunging even further to the right, which opens up a big space to the left of politics.

“The Greens will be the major beneficiary of this vacuum to the left, but we need to work hard in the Socialist Alliance to put forward our distinctive view that capitalism is the source of the crisis, and that socialism is the only realistic solution.

“The Socialist Alliance needs to campaign hard to present the socialist project as a genuine alternative to the Australian people in the coming election.” ■

## Forum: mining companies’ rip-off continues

*Brisbane / July 9, 2010 / Issue 844*

“The recent campaign by the big mining companies, which brought down PM Kevin Rudd, shows the enormous power of these giant monopolies in our capitalist society”, Socialist Alliance activist Marg Gleeson told a public forum, sponsored by the SA on July 6.

“This two-month campaign of lies and distortions by the mining barons was victorious. It underlines exactly who holds the levers of power in our ‘democratic’ country.”

Gleeson outlined the background to the battle over the mining super-profits tax, with the release of the Henry tax review in early May, and the ensuing campaign by the

mining giants, particularly Rio Tinto, BHP-Billiton and Xstrata, to prevent a tax increase on their resources rip-off.

Rudd’s resulting fall, and his replacement by Julia Gillard, was a pre-emptive strike by the right-wing powerbrokers in the ALP to head off possible defeat in the upcoming federal elections.

Gleeson noted the comments by mainstream media analysts on the severity of Labor’s back-down, and their conclusions that the ALP was moving even further to the right under pressure from the ruling class. She welcomed the Greens’ positive response on the mining tax and asylum seekers.

## Indigenous activist launches campaign

Brisbane / August 6, 2010 / Issue 848

“The major parties, Labor and Liberal, have failed to highlight Indigenous issues, and have largely ignored problems important to my community in this election”, Sam Watson, Aboriginal activist and Socialist Alliance Senate candidate for Queensland, said at a rally to launch his campaign for the Queensland Senate on July 31.

The Support Sam! action took place on the streets of the inner-suburban West End. The Murri activist is a leader of the campaign for justice for Palm Island Aboriginal man Mulrunji Doomadgee, who died in police custody in 2004. He is running on the SA ticket with Townsville-based union activist David Lowe.

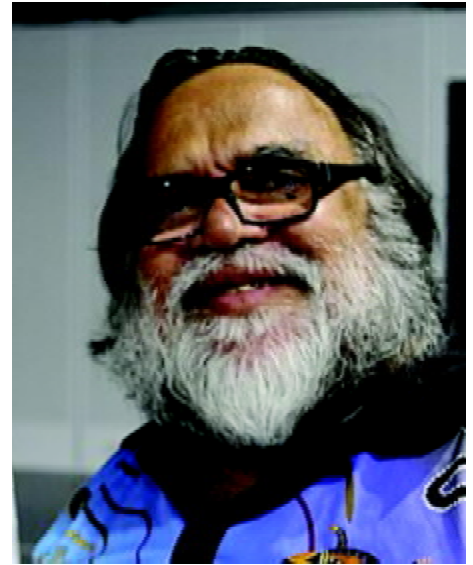
“Socialist Alliance calls on the electors to vote for parties like Socialist Alliance, which have a vision for the future”, Watson told

the gathering.

“The major parties serve the interests of the multinational corporations. Use the elections as a day to demand empowerment of the ordinary working people in this country.”

Also speaking at the rally were Ewan Saunders, SA candidate for the seat of Brisbane, and Hamish Chitts, Revolutionary Socialist Party candidate for the seat of Griffith.

Watson’s campaign has been endorsed by the Brisbane Aboriginal Rights Coalition. ARC was responding to a call from the Defending Indigenous Rights convergence, held in Alice Springs over July 6-9, for campaign groups to endorse Aboriginal candidates who support the convergence’s aims. These include ending the racist intervention into Indigenous communities



Sam Watson.

in the Northern Territory, which has made conditions for Aboriginal people worse. ■

## Farmers resist coal seam gas

November 5, 2010 / Issue 860

“The coal seam gas industry is facing a rural revolt with farmers yesterday threatening to risk arrest and lock their gates to drilling companies”, the November 2 Brisbane *Courier Mail* said.

“A massive expansion of the industry was ignited on the weekend when BG Group-owned Queensland Gas gave the go-ahead for a \$15 billion liquefied natural gas plant at Gladstone that will be fuelled by coal seam gas from the Surat Basin. Santos, Origin and Shell are all trying to firm up their own massive LNG projects.”

But farmers from south-western

Queensland reject the plan to drill thousands of wells on farmland over the next 20 years. Dulacca farmer Lee McNicol said the region would be turned into a pin cushion of gas wells, the *Courier Mail* said.

“There will be a long-term environmental effect and short-term farming effect”, McNicol said. He was prepared to risk arrest by refusing the companies entry to his property.

McNicol is concerned about the effects of coal seam gas on groundwater. “I’m concerned about sustainable agriculture”, he said. ■

US, the Halliburton-led drilling technology of hydraulic fracturing (or “fracking”) has unlocked a “Saudi Arabia of natural gas”.

So Josh picked up his camcorder, and set out on a journey across America’s heartland. His personal concerns quickly uncovered global ones, as the citizens of *GasLand* testify to what’s been happening around them.

It becomes evident that the multi-million dollar business of fracking has contaminated the water supply, the corporate giants are in cover-up mode, and the PR-spun government has not only turned a blind eye, it has regulated itself out of the picture.

Part verite travelogue, part expose, part mystery, part showdown, *GasLand* is a compelling and emotional first-person story of discovery and, ultimately, empowerment. Rough-hewn yet poetic, the film is a desperate plea for scrutiny of a powerful industry that has now turned its eyes on a new, massive and largely unexplored territory: Australia.”

*GasLand* was awarded the Special Jury Prize for Documentary at the 2010 Sundance Festival, and a number of other prestigious awards.

Director *Josh Fox* is being toured around rural South-Western Queensland by Friends of the Earth, to show his film and discuss the growing problem of the natural

## GasLand: coming to Australia

November 12, 2010 / Issue 861

*GasLand*. A film by director Josh Fox.

In September 2006, theatre director and part-time banjo player Josh Fox received an unexpected letter in the mail: a natural gas company offering him \$100,000 for permission to explore his family’s upstate New York property, in the lush Delaware

River Basin area.

Rather than join many of his neighbours in signing on the dotted line, [director] Josh [Fox’s] curiosity saw him asking questions. He soon discovered that in the race for “cleaner”, greener and more efficient energy sources, the largest natural gas drilling boom in history is sweeping the globe, and in the

gas industry in this country.

He spoke to *Green Left Weekly* about the impact of his film, and the people's movement that is growing in the US to challenge the corporate energy giants.

\* \* \*

[The film has had] a galvanising effect on the movement.

There were already grassroots organisations springing up around the country, but touring with the film was helpful. It inspired new groups to be formed right there at screenings of the movie.

There has been a big polarising effect, with the energy industry attacking the film and the people in it. But this has been largely a mistake, as it has drawn attention to the film.

We now have people in Wyoming (US) talking to guys in Oklahoma [about mutual problems with natural gas drilling and the poisoning of their water supplies].

It is very hard to debate an industry willing to blatantly lie: it openly denies the natural gas drilling industry has been exempted from the Safe Drinking Water Act and other

regulatory controls.

This is all a problem of living in this system where powerful economic interests transcend other issues.

[In *GasLand*] you see a profile of America beyond the usual stereotypes, with people from Texas talking about the same things as people in New York.

This is the force of the future. For me, there is no difference between an environmental issue and a public health issue. We need a clean environment if we are to survive.

As a society, we have been living for the past century with enormous benefits because of fossil fuels. But if the next 100 years is also dependent on such fuels, we will be brought right down.

The world has to change or disaster will ensue.

We just toxified the Gulf of Mexico. This whole approach is not going to work any more.

This system is based on competition. The turn to gas as an energy source is designed to destroy the other alternatives.

The energy industry often argues that gas

is better than coal. The truth is that, dealing with "hydraulic fracturing", this is not so.

When you look at the point of consumption, gas produces 40% less greenhouse gases than coal. But fracking releases huge amounts of methane, which is a much worse greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide.

Looking forward, we have immense potential for renewable energy production from geothermal, biomass, solar and wind power.

The reality is that the system we are living in right now is not a truly "free market". By exempting the natural gas industry from regulations, and applying massive subsidies, it is not a level playing field.

Renewable energy would be quite competitive if the system was not tilted against it.

The problem is that our present system is "corporate socialism": "socialism" for the corporations, and capitalism for the rest of us.

As far as I can see, the US is quite similar to Australia in this regard. ■

## Sam Watson: Continue the struggle for justice on Palm Island

November 27, 2010 / Issue 863

Mulrunji Doomadgee died in police custody on Palm Island in November 2004. Despite reviewing findings highly critical of police by coroner Brian Hine at the third Coronial Inquest in May, on November 23 the Queensland Criminal Justice Commission (CMC) found there was insufficient evidence to prosecute the officers involved.

The office of the Director of Public Prosecutions is still considering allegations that the policeman directly responsible for the death of Mulrunji, Senior Sergeant Chris Hurley, dishonestly claimed compensation after the community upheaval that took place on Palm Island after Mulrunji's death.

Palm Island Councillor Alf Lacey told ABC News on November 24: "At the end of the day, one thing that everyone has to understand is that someone died in a cell on Palm Island.

"I think it's so important that something went wrong and someone needs to provide

Palm Island and the rest of Queensland some very indicative answers in terms of what happened and who was responsible.

"Certainly, it's so disappointing that after so long, a long drawn-out process, that this saga continues to deliver no results."

*Green Left Weekly's* Jim McIlroy spoke to Aboriginal community leader Sam Watson.

\* \* \*

The CMC has displayed judicial cowardice and lack of integrity ... The CMC has again failed the people of Queensland. It has collapsed before the blatant pressure of the Queensland Police Union.

Our Aboriginal people are hurt and angry. They feel overwhelmed by this latest act of betrayal.

We must remain focussed and committed to struggle to gain justice for Doomadgee's family on Palm Island. In 2004, we made the commitment to ensure that police officers involved in the callous murder of Mulrunji

would be held criminally accountable for the death of another innocent Aboriginal man.

We will continue the struggle. We will ensure that those police with blood on their hands are brought to justice.

The next step is to petition Prime Minister Julia Gillard to use the federal government's reserve powers to convene a broad-ranging Royal Commission into Aboriginal deaths in custody. It will soon be 20 years since the handing down of the findings of the original royal commission in 1991, and nothing has basically changed.

The new royal commission should conduct a complete and searching audit of the rate of arrests, incarceration and deaths in custody of Aboriginal people. This would include special reference to the Doomadgee case from 2004, the TJ Hickey case in Redfern and the death of Mr Ward in 2008 in Western Australia.

This struggle is not just about racist discrimination, but about the fundamental value of life, and the criminal accountability of our law agencies. ■

## Insurers skimp on flood recovery

January 22, 2011 / Issue 865

The flood disaster that struck three-quarters of Queensland over the past month and then spread to Victoria and Tasmania is the worst overall flood catastrophe in recorded Australian history. It has also inspired a massive outpouring of public sympathy and solidarity.

The disaster has shown in practice the huge potential for ordinary people to mobilise in support of fellow human beings in need of help.

Tens of thousands of Brisbane residents volunteered to help people whose homes had been flooded by the raging Brisbane River, especially over the weekend of January 15-16.

These actions undercut the argument that humanity will always be dominated by the selfish values encouraged in our normally class-ridden and money-centred capitalist society.

For a short time, we have seen that a cooperative, egalitarian socialist society is possible — if only the rule of corporate greed could be overcome by a new system based on social cohesion rather than conflict.

Unfortunately, that window into a possible future is now being closed with a return to the realities of neoliberal capitalism.

This is underlined by the big question of who will bear the main costs of recovery and reconstruction.

“Many homeowners — maybe half of them — do not have flood insurance, and many of those who do are underinsured,” said David Humphries in the January 15 *Sydney Morning Herald*.

“Governments will have a tough time persuading an insurance industry to cut the uninsured and underinsured some slack. ‘If people do not purchase flood cover insurance, they will not be covered,’ said a spokesman for the Insurance Council of Australia.”

Queensland Premier Anna Bligh told ABC Radio on January 14: “I call on insurance companies to act with compassion in the face of this event. It is not in the interests of anyone in our community, including those companies, to stall or delay recovery, but to show flexibility and

compassion.”

However, the word “compassion” is seldom used by insurance company executives or the owners of big corporations. The word they know best is *profit*.

On January 17, Bligh announced a \$15 million government inquiry to monitor how insurance companies meet claims by flood victims.

The January 18 *Australian* said: “Insurers are on notice they will be held to public account over their handling of Queensland flood claims after the state government announced an inquiry into the disaster and the commonwealth flagged reforms to insurance policy definitions.”

“The increased scrutiny comes amid concern over the multi million-dollar salary packages earned by top executives in the industry, including at prominent insurers QBE, Suncorp and IAG.

“Ingrid Just, spokeswoman for consumer group Choice, pointed to the disparity between high executive pay in the industry and the plight of policy holders: ‘It’s not going to sit well in the eyes of flood-affected families.’”

One point of contention will be the lack of clarity in many insurance policies about the difference between river flooding and storm-related flash flooding.

Insurance companies will undoubtedly use the distinction to deny payments to some householders on the grounds their policy did not cover river flooding.

## Floods show public insurance system needed

January 29, 2011 / Issue 866

The recent Queensland and Victorian floods make it clear — Australia needs a comprehensive, national, public insurance scheme, to cover floods, bushfires and other major natural disasters.

The federal and state governments should combine to establish a national insurance scheme to protect the interests of working people and small businesses.

The January 21 *Sydney Morning*

*Herald* reported on the abject failure of most private insurance companies to provide proper coverage to ordinary, working householders.

Wary of the attitude of big business to this disaster, Socialist Alliance Queensland co-convenor Ewan Saunders told *Green Left Weekly*: “Federal and state governments, together with local councils, need to urgently coordinate national emergency action by creating a National Disaster Response Council.

“This national body could combine firefighters, SES, medical, police and military forces, under the control of expert officials elected by workers and volunteers in the various fields.

“The economic and social burden of disasters should be borne by big business and governments, not by working people.”

Saunders said workers stood by mining and other companies due to the floods should continue to be employed on full pay.

“Workers who lose their job because of the disaster should have access to retraining and alternative employment: especially on immediate relief and reconstruction work.

“The burden of recovery from disasters for residents of cities, towns and rural areas should be taken by society as a whole, not by individual home-owners and tenants.”

Because the private insurers cannot be trusted to fairly compensate people for losses due to such disasters, Saunders called for the nationalisation of the insurance sector under the control of workers and policyholders.

This would include “the creation of a unified, publicly owned, no-fault national insurance scheme, to cover all forms of natural disasters, as well as other areas such as car accidents”. ■

“Insurers have determined to take a hard line on stricken policyholders in Brisbane, leaving tens of thousands of flood victims uncovered and facing financial ruin,” the *SMH* said.

It said insurance claims for flooding in Toowoomba and the Lockyer Valley would



likely be accepted. But many flood-affected Brisbane residents would be abandoned.

The *SMH* said: "This is the view of insurers understood to have been reached at a board meeting of the Insurance Council of Australia this week and revealed during a briefing attended by the *Herald* between Suncorp-backed Vero Insurance and hundreds of brokers who write insurance policies on behalf of business customers..."

"Industry estimates suggest that more than 60% of houses and business damaged in the floods of last week had no insurance or flood coverage, leaving them facing financial ruin."

Government leaders have admitted the serious problems with the private insurance industry's response to the Queensland flood crisis.

Queensland Premier Anna Bligh questioned the behaviour of private insurers on January 16 on *Weekend Sunrise*.

"It's hard to believe that Australia can't do better than this," she said. "When you see the scale of this and understand the havoc and heartache this has brought, it is hard to believe we can't find a better system."

Bligh and Prime Minister Julia Gillard have weakly urged insurance companies to be more "flexible" and "show compassion",

while Queensland Treasurer Andrew Fraser suggested if the private insurers don't lift their act, then a government-sponsored scheme to provide funding for flood victims may be needed.

Unsurprisingly, the Insurance Council of Australia said on January 19 that "calls for a government-sponsored scheme ... have not been welcomed".

Well, of course they would say that. And that's why we must campaign to demand that private insurance companies provide fair flood compensation to their policyholders.

But pressure must also be put on the federal and state governments to abandon a fruitless "private sector solution" and begin to set up a truly national, comprehensive, public disaster relief insurance scheme.

The flood crisis should also begin a discussion over insurance in general. The giant insurance corporations are making a fortune out of household, car and other forms of insurance.

Most people pay exorbitant insurance premiums, but never, or rarely, need to claim.

We should now take the opportunity to discuss the formation of a comprehensive national, public, no-fault insurance system

to cover all forms of insurance liability.

The creation of a truly comprehensive insurance scheme would need to spread the risk of claims over the whole of society through a special levy steeply graded toward the big end of town. Private industry and wealthy households would need to bear the biggest cost.

A certain analogy can be made here with Medicare, which is a (supposedly) universal, national health insurance system.

Of course, only a minority of people suffer directly from the impacts of big disasters such as floods and bushfires. But almost everyone will make some kind of insurance claim during their lifetime.

Similarly, while some people suffer serious medical crises during their lives, everyone requires medical attention at some point.

Just as we need to defend and extend Medicare and the overall public health system, and stop taxpayers' funds being used to subsidise the private health insurance industry, we should urgently move to set up a public insurance scheme to take over the role of the greedy private insurers. ■

## Egypt: A sleeping giant awakens

February 5, 2011 / Issue 867

The popular uprising which has swept Egypt over the past two weeks, inspired by the revolt which drove the Tunisian dictator from power in mid-January, is the expression of a people's power movement in the Arab world which has been 40 years in the making.

I have been waiting for this for a long time. I lived in Cairo for six months in the first half of 1967, until the so-called Six Day War forced my family to leave Egypt for Britain.

My father was a meteorological scientist working through the United Nations with the Egyptian agriculture department for a time.

I studied at the American University in Cairo for a semester, and was well aware of a strong progressive, including socialist, current among Egyptian students and youth generally in the mid-1960s. This youth sentiment was part of the world-wide

radicalisation of young people, in opposition to the US war against Vietnam and Israel's oppression of the Palestinians.

This period was also the high point of the Arab nationalist movement. A key leader was Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser, who sought to bring together the entire Arab world under the banner of an anti-imperialist Arab national unity.

Nasser had won huge popularity among the Arab masses for his nationalisation of the Suez Canal in 1956 and successful defence of that landmark measure against an attack by Britain, France and Israel that same year.

Nasser led a group of young military officers who took power in a coup that overthrew the reactionary King Farouk and his aristocratic gang in July 1952, and launched a progressive, national-democratic revolution.

Nasser nationalised the bulk of the Egyptian economy. As a result, some 75%

of the country's economy was either in the hands of the state, or of small peasants and property-owners.

This process was presented as "Arab socialism", but it was carried out bureaucratically and from the top down. It weakened the hold of imperialism over Egypt and enabled economic development in a context where Egyptian capitalists were too weak to fulfill that role.

But it was not based on self-activity of ordinary people and independent political activity faced the threat of repression.

Nonetheless, this process enabled significant social gains for the Egyptian working people. The poor majority won better living standards and social benefits.

After the military disaster of the Israeli victory in the Six Day War, the Arab nationalist project went into prolonged crisis.

Millions of Egyptian people rallied in the streets to demand that Nasser withdraw his resignation from power after Egypt lost the war, but his prestige was mortally wounded.

After Nasser's death in September 1970,

a process of counter-revolution in Egypt began under the leadership of new president Anwar Sadat. This was consolidated under the regime of Hosni Mubarak, who came to power after Sadat was assassinated in October 1981.

Large-scale privatisation and other neoliberal economic policies were imposed on the Egyptian masses by these right-wing governments. The policies were pushed by the International Monetary Fund and World Bank.

Egypt also became one of the staunchest allies of the US in the Middle East. Mubarak became a key collaborator with Israel in helping to suppress the Palestinian people — in particular, maintaining the illegal blockade of Gaza since 2007.

All this is now threatened by the people's power upsurge in Egypt. Mubarak's days are surely numbered, and the US and Israel are terrified of a new rise in progressive Arab mass struggle, sweeping right across the Middle East.

The popular upsurge we are now seeing on our TV screens every night did not come from nowhere. An underground radical current continued to organise right through the hard years of dictatorship and police repression.

And, contrary to the fear-mongering of many Western politicians and the media, the movement is overwhelmingly secular and progressive in character — with the decades-old Muslim Brotherhood apparently playing a limited role in the leadership of the upsurge.

The democratic movement in Egypt (as in Tunisia and elsewhere in the Arab world) is strongly based on the youth, who are demanding their rights to freedom and economic justice.

This revival of the democratic youth struggle in Egypt today builds on the achievements of the radical Arab movement of the 1960s and afterwards.

It generates hope that genuine progressive change can now come to Egypt and the whole Arab world after decades of dictatorship and repression. ■

## Forum discusses Venezuela's struggle for sovereignty



*Brisbane / April 28, 2011 / Issue 878*

"I have recently had the opportunity to witness important developments in the Bolivarian Revolution," Nelson Davila, Venezuelan ambassador to Australia, just returned from a three-week visit to his homeland, told a forum sponsored by the Australia-Venezuela Solidarity Network (AVSN) in Brisbane on April 20.

"There have been big developments in agriculture, mainly aimed at maintaining and improving the ecosystem, through expansion of eco-socialist co-operatives," Davila told the forum.

"This all falls within the revolutionary government's plan, which is for food sovereignty for Venezuela. We don't want to be dependent on other countries for our food, and the government is therefore increasing investment in agriculture and livestock."

Another priority is housing, Davila explained. "We have recently had a similar problem to Queensland, with massive floods leaving many people without homes.

"Slowly, the government has been moving to resolve this housing shortage," with the construction of public housing estates and co-operatives, he said.

Pensions and social welfare have been improved, and communications have been developed through an increase in the provision of community radio stations.

"Assistance has been increased to the Indigenous communities; and the popular sectors have been given greater support regarding medical services and transport.

"The rail network has been expanded,

with greater connections being made between the various states. The rail system had been virtually eliminated under previous conservative governments," he noted.

"The Venezuelan government has also organised a joint venture with Cuba to expand the fishing industry, including fish farming, in order to increase the supply of food to the population."

"The education system has been improved considerably at all levels over recent years. But, while public university education is free, the main traditional universities are controlled by the right-wing opposition.

"The government provides the funding for all universities, but because of the legal autonomy of these institutions, it cannot determine the use of these funds," Davila said.

He noted that the anti-Chavez opposition is strong, with the support of around 4 million voters, including large sections of the middle class and parts of the government bureaucracy. "They try to block the government's political initiatives, but this is all part of the political struggle facing the revolution," he said.

"We are determined to defend our sovereignty against the threats of the US Empire," Davila stressed.

"April 19 is a historic day for Venezuela. On that day in 1810, the Venezuelan people declared their independence from Spain. We are resolute that we will never be a colony again."

"The empire has invaded Libya in order to gain full control of its oil. Venezuela has the largest oil reserves in the world, and much fresh water and gas.

"We will defend ourselves against any attacks. We are developing the popular militias as part of our armed forces to allow the people to be involved in this effort," he said.

"The US is financing the political opposition in Venezuela. We need all the international solidarity that can be mobilised, especially next year in the lead-up to the presidential elections at the end of 2012," Davila added. ■

## Forum discusses media monopoly, WikiLeaks & freedom

*Brisbane / August 12, 2011 Issue 891*

The dilemma facing journalists in Australia today was addressed by Philip Castle, a veteran journalist for more than 30 years and Griffith University academic, at a public forum sponsored by *Green Left Weekly* at the Brisbane Activist Centre on August 9.

The forum, titled “Murdoch vs Assange: Media corruption versus the truth”, also heard from Jim McIlroy, a long-time correspondent for *GLW*.

In the face of the dominance of the Murdoch empire in this country, Castle said journalists face a battle to maintain the union code of ethics advanced by the Australian

Journalists Association, as part of the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance. “There is no guarantee that hacking practices like in Britain have not occurred in Australia,” he said.

On the other hand, “What Julian Assange has done has tipped the balance internationally in favor of free speech in the media,” he said.

He concluded we should welcome the advent of the “Fifth Estate”, the new media, which had played such a major role in the people’s movements in the Middle East and Europe.

McIlroy summarised the issues raised by

the Murdoch empire’s hacking scandal in Britain, and contrasted the part played by WikiLeaks in exposing the secrets governments want to keep out of the public gaze.

He put forward ideas about democratising media access for alternative political parties and social movements, including expanded publicly-funded advertising before and during election campaigns.

A lively discussion from the audience ensued, taking up issues such as “commentary versus news” in the mainstream media, the myth of “balance”, and sensationalism replacing serious reportage in the big business press.

The forum also discussed ideas for building up alternative and community media sources as a counterweight to media empires such as News Ltd. n

## Sam Watson: We need a new royal commission into black deaths in custody

*Brisbane / November 17, 2011 / Issue 904*

November 19 marks the seventh anniversary of “the police murder of Mulrunji Doomadgee on Palm Island”, says Sam Watson, a prominent Queensland Murri leader and Socialist Alliance member.

In Brisbane, supporters of Aboriginal rights will rally that day to demand governments implement all 339 recommendations of the 1991 Royal Commission into Black deaths in custody.

Watson told *Green Left Weekly*: “It is important that Aboriginal people and their supporters mark this solemn day with a rally and march to continue our urgent call for justice for all Aboriginal deaths in custody.

“To this day, the police officer who admitted his actions had directly caused the death of Mulrunji on November 19, 2004 — Senior Sergeant Chris Hurley — is still a free man. Our commemoration is also intended to condemn the many Aboriginal deaths since the Royal Commission into Black Deaths in Custody handed down its report in 1991.

“State and federal governments endorsed most of those 339 recommendations of the Royal Commission, and applied for Commonwealth funds to implement them.

As a result, large amounts of public money were handed out to state police and prison services, while Aboriginal community support organisations had to line up for the crumbs.

“Hundreds of millions of dollars was dished out, but Aboriginal legal services and deaths in custody watch groups received only the loose change. Even now, 20 years on, we still have national networks of community-based programs still fighting for survival.

“Recently, in deaths in custody cases in Queensland, New South Wales, Western Australia and Victoria, police unions can channel millions of dollars into legal defence funds for police, in order to frustrate the processes of the law. Meanwhile, families of Aboriginal victims have to access public defenders for their legal representation.”

Watson said the rally would also call “for a new Royal Commission into Black deaths in custody, and a full, public audit of all the deaths which have occurred in the past 20 years.

“We also want a complete investigation into particular cases, such as the death in Brisbane of Daniel Yock in 1993, the Mulrunji case in 2004, the death of Mr Ward

in WA, and TJ Hickey in Sydney.

“In all these cases, arresting police and prison officers routinely ignored and breached key recommendations of the 1991 Royal Commission. Until the Australian legal system can hold police and prison staff criminally accountable, there will be no justice for Black people in custody.

“The arrest rates of Aborigines will continue to climb; the incarceration rates will continue to climb; and the deaths in custody rates will also climb. Until police and prison officers responsible for deaths in custody are arrested, charged and jailed for long terms, the tragedy of Black deaths in custody will never be properly addressed. And justice will continue to be denied to Aboriginal people.”

*GLW* asked Watson about his view of the new stage of the Northern Territory intervention into Indigenous communities. He replied: “With Prime Minister Julia Gillard now calling for uranium exports to India, the hidden agenda of the Northern Territory Intervention is fully exposed.

“The real agenda of the Howard, Rudd and now Gillard governments’ NT intervention was to force Aboriginal landowners to step aside and allow uranium

mining on their land.

"The traditional owners have always been very worried about the dangers of uranium. The sites where uranium lies have been known for generations as 'sickness places'. This has been expressed over the years through songs, sacred ceremonies and rituals.

"The move to export uranium to India, which refuses to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, will increase the danger of the spread of weapons of mass destruction. In general, further expansion of the uranium industry is an immense environmental disaster, which could expose Australia to the dangers of nuclear waste dumps.

"Julia Gillard and the current crop of Labor politicians have no principles. They are committed merely to the short-term political and economic cycle."

Watson said the intervention has done nothing about the key issues NT Aboriginal communities face, such as health, housing and education. He said: "All the statistics show that since the 2007 intervention, there has been no significant improvement in the health and living conditions of Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory. There has been a further drift of the out-station population into the urban hubs.

"They want to destroy the communities

and allow the miners in. This is genocide by another name. The result is just as sure as in the old days of poison and guns."

He told *GLW* he thought the future of the Aboriginal rights movement depended upon the movement "becoming far more political. There are currently pockets of Black resistance, where families and communities have mobilised against deaths in custody, against increased police powers, and in support of improved health, housing and land rights.

"But we need to build an effective, national political network that can draw Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people together to create a Black bloc that can challenge the whole white, ruling power structure.

"We must realise we either hang separately, or hang together. So soon after the 11th day of the 11th month, we can see that the ruling class has no vision for the future, apart from war and economic crisis. We urgently need to construct an alternative political vision that looks beyond the short term, and far into the future."

He also said he was heartened by the global Occupy movement. "The ruling class hopes that Occupy has reached its peak and will decline from here," he said. "But Occupy has meant that masses of people are now demanding a new goal for society.

"People are seeking to cast aside the

shackles of exploitation and oppression. The 99% are now in the parks and streets of almost every major city in the world.

"The 99% are demanding a genuine new world order. The Occupy movement will get stronger, not weaker, from here," Watson said.

Regarding the future of the socialist movement, Watson said: "All the great, progressive political movements of the last 150 years had great thinkers and leaders driven by a vision of a new equitably-based society.

"Capitalism merely counts its coins, which should be redistributed at the street level to the workers and poor, whose sweat, blood and sacrifice has created all their wealth."

Watson also said he was not happy with the recent announcement that 2,500 US Marines would be stationed in Darwin.

"President Obama is intent on driving the US further into the Asia-Pacific region, strengthening its military base in northern Australia as a new 'Brisbane Line', aimed in the final instance against China.

"We should all be alarmed at the growing alliance between the US and Australian governments in consolidating US military power in our region. This represents a disturbing threat to peace in this area of the world." ■

## Aboriginal activists speak on Tent Embassy 40-year milestone

January 13, 2012 | Issue 907

Few Australian political protests can claim to have made an impact as great or as lasting as the Aboriginal Tent Embassy in Canberra. First set up on the lawns of Old Parliament House in January 1972, the embassy has been a focal point for the struggle for Aboriginal rights.

Four Aboriginal men, Michael Anderson, Billie Craigie, Tony Koorie and Bertie Williams, launched the embassy in response to then-prime minister Billy McMahon's refusal to grant Aboriginal land rights. Instead, McMahon had offered to lease stolen land back to Aboriginal people.

The protest swelled, capturing the imagination of Aboriginal activists and their supporters around the country. The

Aboriginal Tent Embassy received wide media coverage in Australia and internationally. It threw the spotlight on the appalling conditions Aboriginal people faced and the refusal of the Australian government to respond to Aboriginal demands for justice.

The activists decided to make the tent embassy a permanent protest, while the government pursued legal avenues to evict the protesters.

In the March 1972 edition of *Direct Action* (the precursor to *Green Left Weekly*), Aboriginal rights activist and author Bobbi Sykes wrote from the embassy: "As a solid affront to the government, and a matter of great national embarrassment, the Embassy could not be more strategically placed —

opposite Parliament House, where each day politicians and the public are forced to display either sympathy, ignorance or apathy in the face of those whom they continue to oppress, and who now fight back to win their rights to an independent and dignified existence."

In late July 1972, having exhausted its legal attempts to move on the embassy, the McMahon government sent in the federal police to evict the protest by force.

A report in the August 1972 *Direct Action* captured the police brutality: "Over 300 police emerged from beside Parliament House [on July 23] and punched and kicked demonstrators defending the tent. An 18-year-old girl had her head kicked, glasses broken and her stomach stood on and she was taken to hospital.

"Paul Coe, an Aboriginal law student, was beaten unconscious and taken to hospital. In all, eight people were taken to hospital and numerous others sustained cuts and bruises.



Aboriginal Tent Embassy, outside Parliament House, Canberra, first day, January 26, 1972. (Photo: *Tribune*)

“Five police went to hospital — two for knuckle lacerations, assaulted by a demonstrator’s teeth, one for a sprained shoulder, assaulted by a demonstrator’s head. Altogether 18 people were arrested. A number were bashed by police in the cells.”

Since then, the embassy has continued in various forms. In 1992, the Aboriginal Tent Embassy was re-established as a permanent occupation. It has remained there ever since. In 1995, the Aboriginal Tent Embassy was entered in the Register of the National Estate, Australia’s official listing of natural and cultural heritage places.

Hundreds of Aboriginal people and their supporters will converge on the tent embassy for three days beginning January 26 to mark the embassy’s 40th anniversary.

*Green Left Weekly’s* Jim McIlroy spoke to Aboriginal leaders Michael Anderson, Sam Watson and Lara Pullin about the significance of the tent embassy’s 40th anniversary and the struggle for Aboriginal sovereignty.

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**Lara Pullin: ‘Embassy must continue until our people achieve self-determination’**

The 40th anniversary of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy represents a coming together of several generations of Aboriginal activists. The event has excited a lot of people around the country.

There is a feeling from the elders that now is the time for younger people to become more involved, in the face of the widespread health and mental health problems affecting our communities.

There is a sense of despair, worsened by having a Labor government that promised to repeal many of the worst aspects of the Howard era. Despite the Sorry statement by [former PM Kevin] Rudd, there is immense distress at the lack of improvement in the conditions of the people over the past few years.

There is now a process of passing the baton to a new layer of the Aboriginal people under way.

In the days following the January 26 commemoration, there will be a national consultation on changing the Australian

Constitution to recognise Aboriginal sovereignty. But this process should not be counterpoised to the struggle for land rights and other key issues.

The important message of this anniversary is that we are doing it for ourselves, that we have the creativity and the solutions emerging from the communities themselves. We need to listen to and empower these communities.

It is very important that this Aboriginal Tent Embassy continues until all our people are out of poverty and have achieved self-determination.

Moreover, it is exciting to see essentially three generations of struggle taking part: the veterans of 1972; my generation, involved from 1988 until now; and our children, the teenagers, who are coming into action at present.

The program of the anniversary will include excellent cultural content, and workshops on many key topics. There will also be a focus on deaths in custody, including a national day of action, and presentations on the tragedy of Aboriginal youth suicide.

We have actually tried hard to be really inclusive, drawing in people from across the country. It is inspiring to see the results of a history of 40 years of our people sitting down at the embassy and identifying with it.

The anniversary is connecting people in a way not seen since 1988. We can also see the impact of the Canberra convergence of February 2008 [for the government apology to the Stolen Generations].

The more recent struggle to resist the NT intervention, and the connection to the current global Occupy movement, are both being felt.

There is a real feeling that Aboriginal people have no genuine political voice at present; that the National Congress of Australia's First People's is not a real voice, not representative of our people.

We encourage the growing movement of non-Aboriginal solidarity with the Aboriginal struggle, including the support of trade unions and community organisations.

Preparations for the big event are stepping up, notably with the involvement of a great women's collective. I'm sure that the 40th anniversary will be a tremendous landmark for the Aboriginal rights movement in Australia.

### **Sam Watson: 'We've defended the embassy through thick and thin'**

The Aboriginal Tent Embassy has always been acknowledged as the most successful and significant protest in the entire history of our Aboriginal struggle. We have defended it through thick and thin.

After the embassy was established on January 26, 1972, the Liberal government tried to destroy it. When squads of police removed the tents in July that year, the people mobilised to put them back.

On the 40th anniversary this year, it is time for us to come together as a network of Aboriginal nations, to stand together with our supporters and salute the achievements of the magnificent men and women who have since passed on.

It will be an emotional time, to acknowledge the bonds formed on the Old Parliament lawns over the years of revolutionary struggle. I was invited to join the embassy in the first week of February 1972, as a co-founder of the Black Panther Party of Australia.

The Aboriginal struggle at that time was against the then McMahon government of the day, to demand uniform land rights across the nation. We needed to ramp up the campaign for justice and higher living standards for Aboriginal people.

The tent embassy became a national focus, with hundreds of tourists visiting every day. We handed out thousands of leaflets, raising international awareness of the plight of Aboriginal people in Australia.

The attempt to forcibly close down the embassy in July 1972 merely reignited the campaign to defend it. I was there from February to July that year, and remember and honour the brothers and sisters who fought to keep the embassy going.

We have to come together again as a national movement, and put into place a genuine national Aboriginal leadership team. We also need to welcome a new generation of young Aboriginal activists and encourage them to move forward with the next level of struggle.

Michael Anderson is preparing to launch a legal campaign to overturn the lie of peaceful British colonial settlement of Australia. This legal action will establish beyond dispute that Aboriginal people never ceded our sovereign rights over this land.

This legal challenge will be taken to the international community. We need to seek a binding treaty to fully recognise our rights.

This will recognise our demands for comprehensive land rights and an end to mining on our land.

We also stand in solidarity with all the families who have suffered over the years from deaths in custody arising from state violence. Police and prison officers who commit these crimes must be identified, charged and sentenced.

We need a Truth and Reconciliation Commission to reveal the facts behind these criminal actions.

In addition, the Northern Territory intervention must cease, and local communities be given the rights and the funding to properly manage their own affairs.

These are among the key aims of our movement as we mark this historic 40th anniversary of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy this month.



### **Michael Anderson: 'It will be a great day of Aboriginal unity'**

The significance of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy is that it has a history over 40 years, continuously for the past 20 years. This means it can be regarded as the longest running political demonstration in the world.

When I was in London last year, I addressed Occupy London, and the Aboriginal Tent Embassy was described as one of the first Occupations in the world. Now, with the Occupy movement, there are tent gatherings everywhere.

The 40th anniversary will have great significance, as elders will be attending from all over Australia. From the Northern Territory, there will be delegations from Arnhem Land to Katherine.

The Central and Western Deserts will be sending representatives. Law men and women will be coming from all over the country, one of the first times this will have occurred.

We will begin to form a sovereign union of Aboriginal nations.

Young people are coming down from Queensland. It will be a great day of Aboriginal unity.

No law has ever been passed to abolish Aboriginal sovereignty. These issues are now being considered in the Australian Senate.

This is the beginning of a new movement, a new way. We will pursue all avenues, national and international, to ensure our rights are properly recognised.

We welcome support from the general community, from the multicultural community, from the unions and elsewhere. We want a united community, which fully recognises Aboriginal rights. ■

## Candidate: Coal industry wrecking Queensland's future

March 9, 2012 / Issue 914

Mike Crook, the Socialist Alliance candidate for Sandgate in the March 24 Queensland state elections, is a former ALP member, who radicalised when working on construction and mining projects over many years. Mike is active in community and environmental campaigns in the Sandgate area, including the Transition Towns movement.

He has strong family connections to the Gladstone area and has been a close observer of the process of industrialisation and environmental degradation suffered by that town and its harbour over the past few years. He spoke to *Green Left Weekly's* Jim McIlroy about the coal and coal seam gas mining industries in central and northern Queensland.

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The recent excision of Queensland's ports from the operation of the Environmental Protection Act should be sounding warning bells for all who are concerned about the environmental health of our harbours and the Great Barrier Reef.

Degradation of our waterways is not a new thing. For years we have had nutrient run-off from agriculture creating major problems for our rivers, estuaries and reef, especially from sugar cane growing areas.

But now Queensland is faced with, if possible, a far greater menace — the deliberate poisoning of our waterways by uncontrolled and unregulated mining and marine activity.

It is time to ask, just who is in control here? Why has the Queensland Labor government not only refused to protect our waterways but, by their spineless submission to the coal and gas barons, sent a message that it is open slather.

Companies such as Queensland Gas Corporation, a subsidiary of the British Gas Group, have been given the green light to rape and pillage our resources to their hearts' content.

Clive Palmer, the obscenely rich coalmine owner, expects approval from the ALP state government to mine an 8000 hectare nature reserve, Bimblebox, in the Galilee Basin. This is despite Palmer being the Liberal National Party's (LNP) biggest funder in its battle to take over the state from Labor.

Mining and gas employs very few workers in the production phase. It is largely an automated industry, so they can't even justify using the excuse of employment for allowing these destructive industries to perpetuate and grow.

It has been estimated that for every mining job created, we lose two or three in tourism and primary industry. Add to this

the job losses caused in manufacturing due to the artificially high Australian dollar, which has climbed as a direct result of the mining boom.

On top of this are the drastic climate change implications of the increased burning of coal. The projected exports of coal from Queensland fields will increase from 280 million tonnes a year to close to 1000 million tonnes a year in 10 years.

The burning of this coal alone would end any chance of keeping the world's temperature increase to less than 2°C and would lead to runaway climate change.

The Queensland government has apparently not yet worked out the connection between burning coal and the extreme weather events we have experienced over the past few years. The rest of the world has.

Socialist Alliance calls on the Queensland government to issue no new exploration or mining licences, and to revoke those where work has not yet commenced. This is preparatory to a complete nationalisation program for all resource industries so that these resources, which rightfully belong to us all, may be managed for the benefit of the community and for the health of the world environment.

Unlike the ALP and LNP, the Socialist Alliance has a clear commitment to build for the future. We have to make the world a safer, healthier place for our children and grandchildren. Capitalism, as a system, has shown that it cannot, and will not, do this. Only socialism can achieve this essential goal. ■

## Qld Labor wipeout means left must unite, organise

March 29, 2012 / Issue 917

The Australian Labor Party (ALP) in Queensland is in its deepest crisis in its 120-year history following the disastrous defeat in the state elections on March 24. A swing of more than 15% to the Liberal-National Party (LNP) has resulted in the Queensland ALP's record lowest primary vote of 26.5%.

Labor is likely to win seven, or at most eight, seats in Queensland's parliament of 89. The LNP will take 77 or 78. This is a worse position for the ALP than the Joh

Bjelke-Petersen regime's high point in 1974, when Queensland Labor was reduced to 11 seats.

There is no doubt that the "Time for Change" theme of the LNP was a factor in the ALP's defeat. Queensland Labor had been in office for 20 of the past 22 years, interrupted only by a 1996-98 National-Liberal government.

Some Labor figures have said Premier Anna Bligh's narrow election win in 2009, when the ALP came from behind in the last

couple of weeks of the campaign to snatch victory, probably produced a term too far for Labor.

That win was largely based on leadership disunity among the conservatives. The LNP dealt with this problem with the unprecedented step of choosing former Brisbane Lord Mayor Campbell Newman to run as LNP leader even though he was not a sitting member of parliament.

But the crucial factor in Labor's collapse was the betrayal of the party's union and working-class base. Immediately after the 2009 election, the Bligh government moved to sell off a huge section of the state's public assets: Queensland Rail freight, major ports, motorways and forest plantations.

This move, a neoliberal declaration of war

on the Queensland people, led to major divisions in the union movement and plummeting support for the Bligh government.

Despite a strong campaign against the privatisations led by the Electrical Trades Union and other unions, the popular resistance was defeated and Bligh rammed the sell-offs through.

Now, privatised rail freight company QR National is making a substantial profit for private investors and the public are losing out on precious revenue that could be used to fund state education, health, housing, social services and renewable energy programs.

Despite a temporary revival in the polls during Queensland's flood and cyclone emergencies early last year, Bligh's support never recovered. By December, Labor's support was at 28%.

The ALP's weak election campaign also played a role in the size of the swing against it. Having no positive record to stand on, its campaign focused mostly on Newman's personal and family finances.

Labor could not even effectively attack the real political scandals of the former Brisbane mayor, such as the bankruptcy of the Clem 7 river tunnel, the mass layoffs of council staff, huge rates hikes and cuts to council environmental programs.

New Queensland ALP leader Anastacia Palasczuk admitted on March 28 that the

asset sales represented "a fundamental breach of trust" between Labor and the people of Queensland.

Palasczuk apologised for the sell-offs but still could not admit that the decision was fundamentally wrong. Instead, she said: "We should have communicated our message much sooner, much earlier."

Even though voters punished it for its anti-people policies, the rump of the ALP is still a capitalist party committed to governing in the interests of big business.

Labor's Queensland debacle reflects the collapse in popular support for the party around the country. In last year's NSW election, Labor won only 25.55% of the vote. Newspoll said on March 27 that federal Labor's support had dropped to 28%.

Most of all, the ALP's unpopularity is due to the anti-people policies it has carried out in government on behalf of the giant corporations and the richest 1%.

But the problem in Queensland is that the people may be stuck with a conservative LNP regime for a decade, with all the ensuing disastrous consequences.

The trade union movement must now regroup to fight back. But it must also take a deep look at its relationship with the Labor Party. This turning point is a crisis, but also could be an opportunity for a strategic rethink.

At one stage of the struggle against the asset sales, the Electrical Trades Union

seriously considered breaking away from the ALP and helping to form an Independent Labor Party or similar organisation.

Now is the time to raise this project again and investigate possible moves to disaffiliate from the ALP and form a new progressive workers' party, which will really represent the interests of unions and working people instead of the demands of the mining companies and big business.

For the environment and other social movements, it is time to marshal resources and prepare to step up the struggle to defend our democratic rights, social gains and the environment in the face of the escalating attacks sure to come from a reactionary Campbell Newman LNP government.

And for the left, the election outcome is a chance to take the initiative. Now is a crucial time to push forward the project of left and socialist unity. Socialist Alliance supports all further steps toward united action and organisational unity between groups and individuals in the socialist movement.

The crisis of the ALP in Queensland demands united action by all popular organisations to defend the rights and interests of the people. This must include building a genuine, alternative organisation to represent the working people in their hour of need. ■

## Palestinian speaks of Israel's crimes at Sydney meetings

*Sydney / August 15, 2012 / Issue 934*

"The Palestinian people will never surrender. We will win in the end," Shamikh Badra, youth and students coordinator for the Palestinian People's Party in the Gaza Strip, told a public forum in the Resistance Centre on August 14. The forum was sponsored by Socialist Alliance and Resistance.

He passed around graphic photos of Israeli military attacks on Gaza to the audience. The photos showed "the war crimes of Israel; how the Palestinian people suffer from the Israeli occupation". He asked: "Where is the rule of international humanitarian law in this."

Badra said: "Gaza is more than an open jail; it is an example of genocide against a people. The Israeli government is destroying the homes and farms of the Palestinians, and leaving children without fathers, without families.

"In the West Bank, the Apartheid Wall separates families, farms, homes — even divides single houses in two. The peace process cannot succeed unless it recognises genuine Palestinian rights — an independent state based on realistic borders.

"But, with your support, the Israeli occupation will be defeated. We have many friends around the world. What we need from our friends is to build and expand the

BDS [boycott, divestment and sanctions] campaign.

"We need solidarity visits to Palestine to see the truth about the occupation and our reality. I hope to see you in Palestine. I invite you all to meet us in Gaza and the West Bank, to see for yourselves the truth about Israeli war crimes and oppression."

A lively discussion followed Badra's talk, covering many aspects of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the divisions within the Palestinian movement and the rise of democratic struggles throughout the Arab world.

"We in Palestine are in the forefront of the worldwide confrontation between imperialism and the people, not just between Israel and Palestine," Badra concluded. "We in the progressive movement need to co-ordinate our

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## Venezuela: Chavez campaign points to gains of revolution, youth mobilise for socialism



By Jim McIlroy & Coral Wynter  
Caracas | September 23, 2012 | Issue 939

As the final weeks of the Venezuelan presidential election campaign unfold, an intense battle of ideas is under way. The poll on October 7 is looming as one of the

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*Continued from previous page*

struggles, and develop mutual solidarity on an international scale.”

On August 15, Badra spoke at a University of Sydney forum sponsored by Students for Justice in Palestine and Resistance. About 20 people heard Badra and Michael Coleman — a member of the Gaza Flotilla 2011 and an organiser of the Gaza’s Ark Project, — discuss Israel’s blockade of Gaza and the struggle to lift the siege.

Badra told the meeting: “Boycott Israeli products, isolate the Israeli regime. We need an independent Palestinian state, with full international recognition. Our situation is very difficult, but with your help and solidarity, we can win. The example of South Africa shows that an international campaign against Israel can be successful.” ■

most important elections in the country’s history.

On one hand, the right-wing opposition candidate Henrique Capriles Radonski, and his Roundtable for Democratic Unity (MUD) coalition, has produced a program aimed to privatise great sections of Venezuelan industry, particularly the state oil company PDVSA. This would destroy the economic basis for the Bolivarian revolution led by the government of President Hugo Chavez, whose gains rely on funds from PDVSA.

The MUD program would gut the social missions, slashing public expenditure and reversing the widespread gains made by the Venezuelan people since Chavez was first elected in 1998.

On the other hand, Chavez has launched an all-out political offensive to demolish right-wing opposition, with huge rallies and caravans of cars and buses all around the country daily.

The Chavez campaign fiercely criticises Capriles’ neoliberal economic package. It highlights the tremendous social gains of the revolution, while pushing a program aimed

at a radical transition towards “socialism of the 21st century”.

“In a few weeks, we will see what the people of Venezuela are capable of,” Chavez told the media before starting a huge caravan truck tour of the poor barrio of Catia in the west of Caracas.

“Once more they are going to repudiate the capitalist media campaign, above all the lies and the corruption of the capitalist class, who are attempting to hide the reality of the opposition’s neoliberal policy package.”

Chavez reminded journalists that in the 2006 presidential elections, his campaign won 73% of the vote in Catia. Ahead of the October 7 poll, Chavez leads right-wing opposition candidate Henrique Capriles Radonski in the opinion polls by 18-24 points.

“Be sure that we will not fall down from there,” Chavez said. “Catia is a bastion of the Bolivarian revolution.”

Chavez said Venezuela is the epicentre of an international battle: “It is a battle for truth, of the people against the capitalist class. We will win with socialism and with an awakened people.”

The Capriles campaign has suffered serious blows recently. Some conservative parties and political figures have withdrawn support, with disagreements over the neoliberal policies of the Roundtable for Democratic Unity MUD coalition backing Capriles a big factor.

These policies involve widespread privatisation of public assets, cuts to public spending and sacking public servants.

The latest scandal to hit the opposition campaign has been the release of a video showing Capriles campaign official Juan Carlos Caldera receiving money from a Colombian businessperson, alleged to be a drug baron. The National Assembly has responded by calling on the National Electoral Council to launch an investigation into the financing of Capriles' campaign.

The Chavez campaign, on the other hand, has been notable for the high involvement of youth. At stalls organised by the pro-Chavista Campaign Carabobo around the country, the activism of young people has been very noticeable.

At a Chavista caravan of hundreds of cars, trucks and buses in Merida on September 14, we saw thousands of youth wearing red T-shirts, waving pro-Chavez flags, banners and posters, and chanting support for the socialist president.

The caravan took around two hours to pass through the city centre, accompanied by honking horns and loud music.

Young people constantly stand at the entrances to Metro stations in Caracas handing out pro-Chavez leaflets. We even saw graduating students marching alongside the highway from Maracay to the capital, holding placards and banners supporting the socialist campaign.

At a huge rally of youths in the Poliedro Stadium on September 19, Chavez told the crowd: "This is an impressive force that springs from the heart of Venezuelan youth.

"You, who were born in the middle of a hurricane with the Caracazo [popular uprising in 1989] and the February 1992 [an attempted coup by progressive soldiers led by Chavez], are the children of the revolution ... You are going to construct with your own hands the socialist Venezuela of the 21st century.

"We cannot afford to lose this battle," Chavez said. "We are obliged to win."

He called on the "patriotic youth, with all your energy, to spread out in all the streets

of the country", and to "develop the best campaign in order to ensure the best possible victory".

Below is the text, translated from Spanish, of a widely distributed leaflet published by the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV), the main popular organisation supporting Chavez's election campaign:

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Achievements of the Bolivarian Revolution:

1. Development of participatory democracy, acting together toward popular power.

2. Gains of petroleum industry funding: With an investment of 62% of the total income of the nation.

3. The lowest indices of inequality in Latin America, over the past 12 years: The indices of extreme poverty are well down, along with poverty in general, with the Gini Coefficient (the measure of inequality in the distribution of income) being the lowest in the history of Venezuela. The Index of Human Development (IDH) has risen.

4. Education: With the achievements of [free education program] Mission Robinson, UNESCO has declared Venezuela a country free of illiteracy. Now, 95 out every 100 children are students. Access to primary education has risen from 43% to 70%. Venezuela occupies the the second place in Latin America and fifth in the world in university graduation.

5. Health: Venezuela maintains an investment of 7.8% of GNP in the area of health. About 470 million consultations have been conducted by [free healthcare program] Mission Barrio Adentro, saving 301,000 lives. The level of infant mortality has been reduced by 32%.

6. Combating unemployment: The jobless rate has been reduced from 16.1% (1998) to 6.5%. The minimum wage is among the highest in Latin America. Also, workers receive a bonus of food, and the payment of pensions has been made equivalent to the minimum wage.

7. Food: With Mission Alimentation, food is offered at lower prices. The nutritional deficit went down from 5.3% in 1999 to 2.9% now. "Houses of Alimentation" [providing free food to the poor] have been created in the popular communities.

8. Economic sovereignty: The Gross Domestic Product rose 4% in 2011, resulting in an rise in the non-petroleum sector.

9. Technological sovereignty. The Network of Infocentres, the Bolivarian Centres of Information, the National Plan for Technological Literacy, and the nationalisation of [telecommunications company] CANTV have all been implemented. The Simon Bolivar satellite has been put into orbit and the government is preparing to launch another satellite.

10. Sovereignty in foreign relations: Venezuela has pushed for spaces of integration and unity for the peoples of the world, such as in Bolivarian Alliance of the Peoples of Our America (ALBA), the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), PETROCARIBE [which provides cheap oil to Caribbean nations], and more recently, Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) and the Common Market of the South (MERCOSUR).

11. The PSUV throughout Venezuela: The party [with millions of members] is using its strength to attempt to dismantle the vestiges of capitalist exclusion by building bases for the construction of socialism, through expanding social inclusion, as part of the revolution, and struggling against economic speculation.

12. Grand Mission AgroVenezuela: Deepening the security and sovereignty of agricultural food production.

13. Grand Mission Vivienda Venezuela: With the aim of building more than 2 million homes in seven years.

14. Grand Mission Amor Mayor, Love of the Older Generation: Dedicated to recognising the work of those older people who work all their lives, but were not previously counted for Social Security.

15. Grand Mission Children of Venezuela: Providing economic assistance to adolescent mothers and pregnant women, to families with children less than 17 years old and to families of disabled children.

16. Grand Mission Knowledge and Work: Aimed to establish the basis for the development of a system of productive and liberating work for all. ■

## Put Australia's key industries in public hands

May 24, 2013 / Issue 967

As part of its federal election campaign this year, the Socialist Alliance is calling for the mining industry, the big banks and the energy companies to be put back into public hands, so that they can be run in a way that respects the environment and social justice.

But several other important industries should also be in line for nationalisation under workers' and community control in future.

- **Telecommunications:** The privatisation of Telstra by the former Coalition government was a disaster for the country. Telstra as a private corporation, and a host of other telcos, have raised the prices of telephone and internet services, and offered a generally poorer deal for consumers.

We should re-nationalise Telstra to offer a planned national telecommunications service, at lower cost, for the whole country.

- **National Broadband Network (NBN):** The NBN is currently being rolled out as a fibre-to-the-household network by the federal Labor government. The Coalition is offering an outmoded fibre-to-the-node and copper-wire-to-the-door alternative, which is cheaper but will be obsolete before it is built.

In either case, the NBN is currently a publicly funded and owned utility. We should totally reject plans to privatise the NBN in future, and retain this crucial

national communications infrastructure in public hands, but place it under a board of community and worker control to safeguard the interests of the people.

- \* **Insurance:** Recent fire, flood and storm disasters have highlighted the reality of climate change in Australia. Yet the private insurance industry refused to cover many householders suffering destruction from floods and other events, and has now increased premiums to an impossible level, leaving many homeowners facing likely ruin in future.

Nationalising — re-nationalising in some cases like Suncorp — the insurance industry could provide low-cost, universal coverage for disasters and accidents of all kinds, in the public interest.

- **Retail:** Australia's retail duopoly, Coles and Woolworths, control about 80% of the supermarket trade in this country. They blackmail small suppliers, including farmers and food manufacturers, to minimise purchase prices and maximise profits.

This system of extortion should be ended by putting these retail giants in public hands, under community and workers' control, to provide a better service to ordinary customers at lower prices, and improved dealings with small business suppliers and farmers.

- **Car industry:** General Motors-Holden (GMH) has recently announced the

retrenchment of 500 jobs from its car plants in South Australia and Victoria, less than a year after the Gillard government announced a further \$275 million hand-out to the corporate multinational. Successive federal and state governments have poured billions of dollars into GMH, Ford and the other vehicle companies over the years.

GMH management refuses to guarantee the future of the company in this country. Ford has now announced it will close its factories in Australia for good, destroying 1500 jobs in Geelong and Broadmeadows in Victoria.

Instead of throwing good money after bad to GMH and Ford, they should be nationalised under community and workers' control, to ensure a vehicle manufacturing industry is maintained for the future. Jobs can be saved by restructuring the industry to produce buses and light rail, instead of relying on production of petrol-guzzling private cars.

- **Airlines:** Qantas has sacked hundreds of workers in recent years, refused to bargain reasonably with unions, and faces the real threat of bankruptcy or takeover in the medium term. It was a disaster that the Bob Hawke Labor government privatised Qantas in the first place.

A nationalised, co-ordinated, reasonably priced network could be rationalised in future to meet real public transport needs, in tandem with the construction of a publicly owned Very Fast Train system along the east coast of the country, and further afield in future. ■

Territorians".

The Wilderness Society and the Australian Marine Conservation Society are sponsoring the visit to Sydney by the Maningrida traditional owners.

The visit follows a growing campaign by NT traditional owners against oil and gas exploration in Arnhem Land. On December 10 last year, a meeting of 250 gathered in Maningrida to protest moves by Paltar Petroleum to gain exploration permits for offshore and onshore exploration in the region.

On February 19 this year, a large public meeting in Darwin, addressed by a broad

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## Traditional owners bringing gas protest to Sydney

July 12, 2013 / Issue 973

Aboriginal traditional owners and the Protect Arnhem Land community campaign, based in the town of Maningrida, Northern Territory, are seeking the assistance of environment groups and Indigenous networks in Sydney to help raise awareness of the threat to Arnhem Land from oil and gas exploration.

Five traditional owners are travelling from Maningrida to Sydney in mid-July and

are holding a public protest in Martin Place outside the offices of exploration company Paltar Petroleum.

The Environment Centre NT said: "Arnhem Land is under threat from fossil fuel companies and need your help. Ninety per cent of the land and all the nearshore waters are being targeted for exploration. These are some of the most ecologically intact areas left in Australia, and the ancestral lands of thousands of Indigenous

## Experience a revolutionary election this year

*September 13, 2013 / Issue 981*

Are you sick of elections that primarily involve a choice between two pro-capitalist parties?

Well, here's your chance to experience an election involving a mass mobilisation of revolutionary-minded people determined to bring about socialism of the 21st century in their country.

The Australia-Venezuela Solidarity Network (AVSN) will host its 14th solidarity brigade to Venezuela over December 4-13. The registration closing date has now been extended to October 1.

A highlight of this year's brigade will be to observe the mayoral and municipal election campaign in Venezuela, leading up to polling day on December 8. Candidates for the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV), founded by the late former president Hugo Chavez, and other progressive parties, will be running against candidates of the right-wing parties of the Venezuelan oligarchy.

The AVSN brigade will join rallies and marches supporting the revolution, as part of a 10-day program of activities, including visits to social missions, communal councils and communes, as well as production cooperatives, public health and education services, sustainable development projects, community-controlled media, and women's and indigenous organisations.

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range of speakers from concerned organisations, including Eddie Mason from the Maningrida community, and Drew Hutton from the Lock the Gate Alliance, condemned the plans for oil and gas exploration in the NT.

On March 14, a large meeting of traditional owners in Maningrida strongly opposed all oil and gas mining on land or sea in the Arnhem Land region. Since then, another company, Empire Gas, has claimed to have signed a Native Title Agreement with the NT Land Council and some Native Title claimants in the Urapunga region of eastern Arnhem Land. ■

This year's brigade is also special because it will be the first since the tragic death of Chavez in March this year, and the election of new socialist President Nicolas Maduro in April.

It will be a unique opportunity to assess the progress of the Bolivarian revolution, initiated by Chavez after he came to power in 1998, under the new leadership of Maduro and his government.

It will give brigade participants the chance to see how the revolution is faring in the



## Arnhem Land people 'don't want fracking'

*July 19, 2013 / Issue 974*

"We don't want oil or gas mining in our country," Aboriginal traditional owner Eddie Mason, based in Maningrida, a community in eastern Arnhem Land, told a rally in Sydney on July 19. "We are protecting our land and sea rights."

About 100 people rallied with visiting Arnhem Land residents outside the offices of US-based oil exploration company Paltar Petroleum.

"We are saying no to Paltar," Mason said. "We don't want exploration destroying our land and waters. You are welcome to visit our country, but don't destroy it.

face of ongoing attacks by the right-wing opposition and its US backers.

Despite many economic and social challenges, there are positive signs that the people-power Chavista revolution is making significant progress tackling the problems of Venezuela, and making steady inroads into the control of the oligarchy and its US masters.

The December solidarity brigade will be a priceless opportunity to observe firsthand, learn about and be inspired by a grassroots mass movement that is transforming not only Venezuela, but all of Latin America, and challenging the greed and destructiveness of global capitalism by showing that a better world is possible.

Brigade participants will meet with a wide range of grassroots organisations, community activists, trade unions and government representatives to learn more about the participatory democracy and 21st-century socialism being created by the Venezuelan people.

This year's brigade will be led by experienced Latin American solidarity activist and author Fred Fuentes. The itinerary is being planned in consultation with AVSN's partners in Venezuela, but interested people can read accounts of previous brigades.

Accommodation and transport in Venezuela, and English-Spanish translation throughout the brigade, will be organised for all participants by the AVSN. ■

"Paltar stay away: Leave us alone to practice our culture, as we have for the last 40,000 years."

Alice Eather Williams, a young traditional owner from Maningrida, said: "We are spiritually connected to the land and water in our country. The Aboriginal elders were shocked and angry to find out about Paltar's plans for drilling in our area.

"We don't want fracking of our soil for gas mining; we don't want pollution of the land and sea by these big companies.

"We're going to keep standing up: No to oil and gas exploration in our country!" ■

## Sydney residents oppose WestConnex toll road plan

*Sydney / October 18, 2013 / Issue 985*

More than 100 residents of Sydney's inner western suburbs attended a public meeting at Leichhardt Town Hall on October 10 to oppose the NSW Liberal government's plan to build the WestConnex toll road.

The road would link the M4 motorway to Sydney Airport. The \$10-15 billion project would involve a 33-kilometre toll road to extend the M4 from Strathfield to Mascot Airport and Port Botany, and duplicate the M5 East and M6 tollways.

Gavin Gatenby, from Ecotransit Sydney, told the audience the plan meant "the

collisions of two versions of reality: that big business and developers will take precedence over residents and small business, involving the forced resumption of homes to build roads, and no problem with global warming, in contrast to our version: that global warming is a major problem, and that public transport and rail should be prioritised over vehicle transport and new roads."

The NoWESTConnex campaign says: "Private car travel is actually decreasing. The state government needs to urgently invest limited public funds to meet the expected

30% rise in demand for public transport.

"WestConnex would mean: More than 10 years of massive disruption and traffic chaos; Compulsory land and house acquisitions, and 'rat-runs' in suburbs; Destruction of regionally significant Wollri Valley bushland; Increased reliance on cars (toll road operators encourage cars); Health impacts from smoke stacks, diesel and truck traffic; A car-dominated city when the rest of the world is moving to light rail and other vehicle public transport; and, Major state debt, asset sell-offs and overdevelopment.

"Alternatives: Integrated light rail network from inner west and Maroubra into and through the city; Build second Harbour rail crossing to maintain entire rail network; Equalise all fares on Airport rail line and add two stops; and, Reduce truck traffic, move more containers by rail, not roads." ■

## Firefighters slam cuts, demand climate action

*October 24, 2013 / Issue 986*

The NSW Fire Brigade Employees Union (FBEU) is campaigning to reverse cuts to the state fire services budget by the Liberal state government.

Under the theme, "Stop Fire Station Cuts and Closures," the FBEU is circulating an open letter to NSW Liberal Premier Barry O'Farrell stating: "As NSW faces devastating bushfires — the worst since 1968 — your closures and cuts to fire stations puts lives at risk when we most need protection.

"Before your government's election and \$70 million in cuts, permanently staffed stations had never been closed. Yet over the last 10 months professionally crewed fire stations have been closed hundreds of times.

"As concerned citizens, we ask you to put our safety and communities first. Firefighters bravely protected us every day under dangerous conditions — don't make their job harder and threaten the state's safety with fire station cuts and closures."

FBEU state secretary Jim Casey spoke to *Green Left Weekly* on October 25 about the current bushfire crisis in NSW and key issues for the future.

"There are two major observations relating to the current fire crisis," he said. "One, it is still October, and while in Australia

we always face bushfires, we have never seen fires like this so early in the season in this region. The question of climate change is clearly significant.

"Meanwhile, the O'Farrell government is cutting the budget of both Fire and Rescue NSW (FRNSW) [the professional fire service] and the Rural Fire Service (RFS) [volunteer fire brigade]. We see the gross hypocrisy of Premier O'Farrell and [Emergency Services Minister] Mike Gallagher draping themselves in the flag of helping the firefighters, while simultaneously undercutting them.

"Both the FRNSW and the RFS were affected by the state government's enforced cuts of 1.2% to the public sector. However, only one-third of the RFS budget is made up of wages, compared to 85% of the FRNSW budget.

"This has meant an 8% reduction in the wages bill for both organisations, which means either hack into jobs or cut conditions. For FRNSW, this has meant temporary closures of fire stations.

"For the RFS, there is effectively no such option. They have been shedding jobs.

"The FBEU campaign against the cuts has gained a positive response from the public in NSW. But passive public support, while a

nice thing to have, isn't going to cut it. We need to really take this battle back to the government.

"The FBEU is a proudly militant union, and our strength has always been based upon our capacity to deliver industrial action. That will not be changing any time soon. But we are mixing things up a little, and trying some new things, like our intervention into the Miranda by-election [which resulted in a big win for the Labor opposition candidate with a swing of 26% against the Liberals].

"Firefighters mobilised in force, campaigning at almost every polling booth, exposing the cuts in fire services. The material we distributed talked about station closures in the area, and urged punters to 'Put the Liberals last'. Making the politics of it so directly linked to the industrial problems we are facing made it much easier to get members to participate. All in all we had 80 members in structural firefighting gear handing out our leaflets on the day.

"We believe this had a significant impact on the vote. Comparing the handful of booths we did not cover with the overall result it appears that the FBEU intervention was worth as much as 2%. This is enormously significant.

"Regarding the current bushfire crisis, at the height of the fires, some 2000 firefighters were involved. Around 1000, or half of these, were professionals from the FRNSW.

"And this is only the start of the fire

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## Key Communist role in post-war unions detailed

December 2, 2013 / Issue 992

*Conflict In The Unions: The Communist Party of Australia, Politics & the Trade Union Movement, 1945-60* By Douglas Jordan | Resistance books, 2013 | 312 page, \$30

*Conflict In The Unions* is an important new book examining the union activity of the Communist Party of Australia during a very turbulent time in Australian and world politics. The book looks at the period of 1945-'60, when the Cold War reached its height.

Author and former Victorian tramways union militant Douglas Jordan has done a great service to the study of Australian labour movement history with this detailed analysis of the achievements and challenges that faced Communist unionists. It captures the extreme pressure they worked under in the face of escalating right-wing attacks.

Today, when the Australian union movement has been generally weakened

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season. Depending on the vagaries of the weather, we could well see further serious fires driven by more extreme summer weather.

"In general, we are clearly facing an increasingly unstable environmental situation. There is a strong argument for more serious action against climate change. At present, we are treating the symptoms, not the causes.

"Our union's message to the NSW government is: Now's not the time to be cutting budgets and fire services. These cuts will come at a severe price.

"Our message to the broader community is that we need urgent action on climate change. Climate change is affecting all human and other life on our planet.

"Finally, climate change is a critical workplace issue for us as firefighters and emergency service workers. These changes create a less safe work environment for our workers.

"For all these reasons, we need to unite to defend our firefighting and emergency services, to stop the cuts and expand our capacity." ■

and on the defensive, it is crucial to closely study the experiences of Communists and socialists in the unions. Jordan's account looks at a time when Communist Party influence in the unions was at its height, but starting to wane.

Trade union membership has, today, slipped from well over 50% of the workforce to less than 20%. Socialist and left-wing influence in the unions is significantly lower than the '40s and '50s. So we need to analyse the lessons from a period when the CPA had thousands of members in unions, including many elected delegates and officials.

"In 1945, after more than two decades of intense activity, the CPA was a leading force in the Australian trade union movement," Jordan notes. "A significant part of its membership was experienced cadres who were confident that they could continue to build the party's influence in the trade unions.

"During this period the party put considerable effort into educating both old and new members into the postwar struggles armed with a belief that a new social order was about to emerge.

"It was an era of intense political activity and communist union activists were prominent in all of the postwar struggles.

"The CPA was an active and enthusiastic supporter of the [post-war] strike wave and

of the right of workers to restore their living standards. One measure of this was that from August 1945 until the end of 1947, nine communist-led unions representing only 26 per cent of the workforce were responsible for 84 per cent of strikes."

Nevertheless, tensions existed between CPA union leaders and sections of the rank and file, as well as between leaders of the Communist Party and the party's union officials. As the Cold War intensified over coming years, these tensions grew as the anti-Communist offensive in Australia and internationally deepened.

Sharp shifts in the policy of the Stalinist leaders of the Soviet Union caused particular problems for the CPA. For several years from 1948 on, the international Communist movement was instructed, as it was for part of the 1930s, to see the main enemy as social democratic parties such as the Labor Party.

This worsened tactical difficulties over industrial conflicts with the Chifley Labor government. This led to the 1949 coal strike, which was infamously broken when the Labor government sent soldiers into the mines.

A combination of conflict and collaboration with different sections of the ALP was a major part of the CPA's approach throughout its existence. However, as Jordan explains, in the immediate post-war period, "The CPA



Strike committee of Aboriginal workers, Darwin, 1946.



Hungarian immigrants leaving Melbourne for Bonegilla camp, 1947.

policy of political trade unionism was not limited to the ALP's mild reform goals. It envisioned a more active role, where trade unions would use their industrial strength to pursue their political ideals."

For many Communist activists, "in order to maintain their roles as union officials they had to repeatedly demonstrate that their roles as orthodox trade union officials surpassed their opponents. At the same time, the party leadership was constantly demanding that the trade unions increase their involvement in political campaigns and that communist union officials prioritise this activity.

"The dilemma between the two approaches was never fully resolved by many communist union officials."

Jordan uses party newspapers and journals, other CPA primary resources and considerable research into writings on the period, to show that, with all the limitations and distortions of policy imposed by national and international pressures, Communist union activists played a crucial part in changing the face of Australian industrial and general politics.

In doing so, they advanced the class struggle in this country over decades.

The author analyses three key areas of struggle: the peace movement; post-war immigration; and Aboriginal rights.

Anti-war activities by Communist unionists in the '40s and '50s mainly involved

petitioning, distributing literature and passing resolutions against nuclear weapons.

However, a move by CP-led unions to ban the building of the Woomera Rocket Range in 1947 failed after the Chifley government outlawed industrial action at defence establishments. Moves by several CP-led unions to ban the transport of war materials for the United States-led invasion of Korea in 1950 were rejected by the unions' members.

Nevertheless, the CP leaders of these unions — the Miners Federation, the Seamen's Union and the Waterside Workers' Federation — were all re-elected in subsequent union elections. This showed that rank-and-file unionists supported Communist officials, even if they did not always agree with all of their politics.

In regard to immigration policy, Jordan writes: "From its inception, the CPA adopted an internationalist perspective. It broke decisively with the dominant working class racism prevalent within the Australian labour movement.

"From the 1920s onwards, it condemned the White Australia Policy as antagonistic to working class interests."

However, "Between 1948 and 1952 the CPA reversed its previous consistent internationalist outlook on migration. It condemned East European and German refugees who arrived as part of the mass immigration program.

"These refugees were strongly anti-communist and had refused to return to their countries now ruled by Soviet imposed regimes. This provided the only basis for the CPA's opposition to their arrival.

"In order the buttress its campaign the CPA utilised many of the traditional labour movement arguments against migration."

In contrast, however, "the CPA welcomed the arrival of migrants from other countries. It honoured its commitment that once in Australia they should have the same rights as other workers. The CPA remained a multi-ethnic party and many of the new arrivals joined because of its internationalist outlook."

On the crucial issue of Aboriginal rights, Jordan states: "Almost from its inception, the CPA was the most consistent working class supporter of Aboriginal human rights

...

"For most of the 1950s the CPA was the only organisation in the labour movement that consistently supported the struggles by Aborigines for an end to the oppressive regulations that governed every aspect of their lives."

Almost alone, the CPA campaigned in support of the Pilbara strike by Aboriginal station workers in 1946. And Communist-led unionists backed strikes by Aboriginal workers in Darwin in 1950-'51.

The CPA often had difficult winning Australian workers to a more developed program of political unionism. But there is no doubt such activity in the post-war period laid the groundwork for later advanced political struggles, such as the Seamen's Union bans on military supply ships during the Vietnam War and the Green Bans of the NSW Builders Labourers Federation in the '70s.

From the late '50s onwards, the CPA gradually accommodated to the Labor Party and class-collaborationism. This deepened with its gradual decline and eventual dissolution in 1990. But the impact of the CPA's union activities remains as a key part of the best traditions of the Australian labour movement.

The challenge of rebuilding a renewed militant and revolutionary working class movement is now more urgent than ever. Jordan's book on this critical period of CPA initiative during the early Cold War years provides important information and analysis that can assist in such a task. ■

# Union calls for Aus Post to become public bank

January 30, 2014 / Issue 995

The Communications Workers Union (CWU) has called for Australia Post to expand its services to include banking and insurance. The postal workers' union said this would help strengthen Australia Post as a public enterprise, while challenging the power of the big four banks and improving services in regional and rural areas.

The CWU made the proposals in its submission to the federal government's Commission of Audit. The commission was set up late last year to make plans to implement Prime Minister Tony Abbott's neoliberal agenda of privatisation and budget cuts. The CWU's proposal is a positive step in the opposite direction — to defend and expand the public sector, and begin to take back the wealth of big business.

The CWU submission "aims to provide strategies for: The financial viability of Australia Post into the future; maintaining the standing of the Australia Post brand which is a trusted Australian icon; ensuring that existing postal services are maintained; the protection and maximisation of meaningful employment; and the continuance of Australia Post as a public

asset which has public service as a priority."

Introducing its proposal for expanded services, the CWU submission says: "Australia Post's retail network should be given more freedom to leverage off of the trusted icon status, especially in rural and regional areas, and move into new services such as banking and financial services, insurance services and communication services.

"This would enable 'one stop shopping' for communities and help fill the vacuums that have been created by the banks and other service withdrawals from regional and rural Australia. Additionally, both individuals and businesses in metropolitan areas would benefit from an added competitor to the big four banks and the obvious reduced cost of banking that would ensue.

"We include examples from around the world to support our submission and suggest that the provision of extra services by Australia Post would yield results that would surpass those experienced by international counterparts, given Australia's unique geography. Australia lends itself to being a natural monopoly given its large

landmass and sparse population."

The CWU submission uses the examples of Kiwibank, established in 2001 as a wholly owned subsidiary of New Zealand Post Limited, which now services more than 850,000 customers; La Banque Postale, France, which was established in 2006 as a subsidiary of the national postal service, La Poste, provides banking services to 10.6 million customers, and is now the second largest employer in France, after the government; and Banco Posta, Italy, which was set up in 1999 following the restructure of the Italian Post Office, is wholly owned by the Ministry of Economy and Finance, and made a €343 million profit in 2012.

CWU assistant national secretary Martin O'Shea said: "The federal government doesn't seem to be completely pro-competition. The big four banks with their market share, and billions of dollars in profits, there's an opportunity for Australia Post to compete against them, but there's a reluctance on behalf of some in the government who probably see that as government competing against the banks," the *Sydney Morning Herald* reported on January 22.

University of Queensland economist John Quiggan told the *SMH* on January 25 he supports the CWU plan. He said: "Australian banks are highly profitable and have been protected on a 'too big to fail' basis. Australian banking consumers would benefit from an expansion of competition and from the option of a basic bank with a range of low-cost standard services."

In the same article, Terry Ashcroft from the LPO Group, which represents the interests of licensed post offices, said extending banking to Australia Post would be a "win-win" situation for the federal government. "It would become a fifth pillar, and the big banks wouldn't like it.

"But it would generate probably between \$1.5 and \$2 billion net revenue for Australia Post, allowing it to subsidise a lot of its community service obligations ... while giving a huge return to the Australian people. The only loser would be the major banks."

Australia Post is already "the country's biggest retail network, and has 4429 retail

## Message to congratulate Green Left's 1000th issue

February 18, 2014 / Issue 994

### Jim McIlroy, socialist activist & former CPSU delegate

Best wishes and congratulations to *Green Left Weekly* for its 1000th issue coming up. This event represents a milestone in the history of left publications in Australia.

Having been closely involved with the socialist press, going back to the old *Direct Action* from the early 1970s, I regard *GLW* as a culmination of decades of struggle to create a quality socialist alternative voice, as well as an essential vehicle for helping to build the Socialist Alliance as a key organisation for working people and the oppressed in this country.

In particular, I would like to congratulate

the hard-working editorial and production staff of *GLW*, as well as those who sell the paper in the streets and communities every week. Without their professionalism and dedication, *GLW* could not come out and could not be distributed.

*GLW* plays a crucial role in getting out the real news about people's revolutions that are happening right now, such as in Venezuela today under the leadership of the Bolivarian socialist movement, as well as the truth about political struggles in many parts of the world. It also informs the Australian people about the reality of the class struggle in this country, as well as helping to build the people's movements here.

Once again, congratulations on the 1000th, with many more to come. ■



outlets, nearly 60% of which are in rural and regional Australia. The majority of its outlets act as agents for the big four banks and about 70 other financial institutions, providing banking and insurance services, among other things,” the *SMH* reported.

Australia Post is strategically well placed already to operate a national banking licence — and move into the vital public banking space lost when the Hawke-Keating Labor government privatised the Commonwealth Bank in the early 1990s.

This intervention by the postal workers’ union is very timely when big business spokespeople are stepping up calls for privatisation of Australia Post, Medibank Private and other government-owned entities.

Rod Simms, chair of the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC), told the *Australian Financial Review* on January 6 that selling publicly owned assets such as Australia Post, energy providers and Medibank Private “will be the most important driver of how Australia improves its productivity.”

These comments were slammed by the Communications, Electrical and Plumbing Union.

CEPU Postal and Telecommunications NSW branch secretary Jim Metcher said the benefits Australia Post provided to the wider community were far reaching, especially the job opportunities and diversity of services it provided to rural and regional Australians.

“Privatisation would result in thousands of job losses and the closure of hundreds of post offices around the country. This would have a significant negative impact on both the regional workforce and the full range of postal services provided to people who live in country regions,” Metcher said, according to the January 6 online edition of *The Land*.

Joan Doyle, CWU Victorian secretary, said the sale of Australia Post would be “a disaster for the community and our members.”

“Australia is a really big continent and it’s sparsely populated, and the whole postal service works on a cross-subsidisation process,” she told the *SMH* on January 7.

Australia Post currently makes a loss on letter delivery, but a huge profit on its expanding parcel delivery system, driven by online shopping. Adding in a substantial income from a public bank, Australia Post could be a highly profitable arm of

government — providing a huge boost to the public coffers, available for spending on health, education, social welfare and the environment and cutting into the massive super-profits of the big banks.

To ensure that the operations and public income from Australia Post are in the people’s interests, workers would need to fight for the national postal-banking service to be placed under workers’ and community control. The example of Telstra, when it was corporatised before full privatisation, shows that government ownership is not sufficient in itself to ensure public enterprises function in the interests of the community.

Australia Post could also expand further into a network of government shops, challenging not only the big banks but the private supermarkets, especially Coles and Woolworths, by taking on a wider range of

consumer products than it already handles.

An international example of such a government initiative is the Mercal program in Venezuela, where a network of public shops set up by the socialist government in Caracas initially to sell cheap food to the people in competition with the private sector, has now been expanded to distribute white goods and computers.

It will require a major campaign by unions and community groups to save Australia Post from being privatised by the Abbott government and its greedy corporate masters. Working people need to mobilise to defend our public postal service — and to extend it into the banking and an expanded retail area, as a step toward a stronger public sector committed to the interests of workers and the wider community. ■

## Electricity privatisation ‘a dismal failure’: union report

March 7, 2014 / Issue 1000

A report commissioned by the Victorian branch of the Electrical Trades Union (ETU) shows that energy sector privatisation in Australia has been “a dismal failure”, which has produced “no benefits” for consumers, but has resulted in “large fiscal losses” for taxpayers.

Economist John Quiggin, from the University of Queensland, reviewed energy sector privatisation and the related process of electricity market reform between the early 1990s and now, and found no long-term benefits for either governments or consumers.

The report found electricity prices were highest in privatised states, and had “risen sharply” since the introduction of the National Electricity Market. Quiggin said his review also found customer dissatisfaction has risen “markedly” in privatised states (primarily Victoria and South Australia) and “efficient” investment and operation had not occurred; money was instead diverted to areas such as management and marketing, the February 25 *Brisbane Times* reported.

Quiggin said that while state-owned enterprises were presented as being a burden on the public purse during privatisation campaigns, they tended to be

“consistently profitable” and “in all cases, the option of continued public ownership yielded long-term returns as good as, or better than, the option of selling assets and using the proceeds to repay debt.”

He said: “My general conclusion is that privatisation in general hasn’t improved the financial situation of state governments, as is one of the primary motives for selling.”

Quiggin said he looked at how governments fared holding on to electricity assets and retaining their earnings, compared to selling assets and using the proceeds to pay down debt. He concluded governments which held onto the assets “did better,” the *Brisbane Times* reported.

He concluded his report by saying: “Privatising the [Queensland electricity] industry in 1996, as recommended at the time [by the Borbidge Liberal-National Party government commission of audit], would have resulted in the loss of dividends, as well as foregoing capital gains. The total loss to the public would have been around \$15 billion.”

Quiggin said the market system put in place had also “failed badly” to cope with the arrival of renewable energy options, despite looming climate change. “The market has failed to cope properly with

renewable [energy] so we have seen a continuation of failure of policy there to make proper use of renewables and integrate them properly into the system.”

The ETU-sponsored report directly contradicts a push by the federal and various state Coalition governments to escalate the neo-liberal drive to privatise public assets, and place them in the hands of corporate business giants. It also refutes the disastrous decisions by past Labor governments, including the Bligh Labor government in Queensland in recent years, to sell off government enterprises to big business in a fruitless quest to balance the government budget.

One of the first acts by Prime Minister Tony Abbott was to create a commission of audit. This will be used to launch a big attack on the public sector and the trade union movement. The May federal budget is shaping up to be the most vicious, pro-business and anti-worker budget in decades.

A key part of this pro-business offensive is a plan for wholesale sell-offs of remaining public assets. This offensive was clearly signalled by federal Treasurer Joe Hockey in a speech to the Lowy Institute on February 6.

Hockey spoke of a new era of privatisation, and called on big business to “ready their cheque books” and prepare to “shoulder the burden” by buying public assets. “The private sector is cashed up around the world. Governments are not. We need to facilitate that private sector investment,” Hockey said.

According to a comment piece in the February 15 *SMH*, there are “government-owned assets worth \$130 billion waiting to be privatised”. Hockey did not list the targets for sell-off, but business representatives have indicated most are currently owned by state governments.

“One drawn up by ANZ’s economics department, for example, includes the ports of Melbourne (\$5 billion), Newcastle (\$1 billion) and Gladstone (\$3.1 billion), electricity distribution and transmission companies in NSW and Queensland that ANZ thinks are worth almost \$69 billion, and water distribution companies in NSW, Victoria, Queensland, Western Australia and South Australia that ANZ says could fetch about \$41 billion,” the *SMH* said.

The first target for the federal government is likely to be Medibank Private.



A corporate public relations firm has already been contracted by the Abbott government, at a cost to the taxpayers of \$211,000, to draw up plans for the privatisation of the publicly owned health insurance company.

The privatisation is expected to yield more than \$4 billion. However, Medibank Private returned a profit to the federal government of \$315 million last year. In the long term, the sell-off will represent a serious loss to the public purse.

The Australian Medical Association (AMA) warned that the sale of Medibank Private could result in higher health insurance premiums. The AMA said premiums could rise if Medibank is “gobbled up” by a rival firm in a trade sale.

Another target is Australia Post. Hockey did not rule out its privatisation when asked by the media on February 12. “I’m not going to offer a sale list today,” he said.

The Queensland branch of the ETU has been running a strong campaign against the further sell-off of state power industry assets, promoted by the website [not4sale.org.au](http://not4sale.org.au).

ETU state secretary Peter Simpson said the Quiggin report’s findings were “pretty much what we have been saying for some time. Our publicly owned power entities are profitable and efficient when managed properly and the dividends generated by them can and should be used to reduce the cost of power for Queensland households.”

The Socialist Alliance has been campaigning over the past year on the

theme, “Take back the wealth: Nationalise the mines, banks and energy companies under workers’ and community control”. The defence of publicly owned assets is a crucial part of the struggle to combat the neoliberal offensive now escalating in Australia and around the world.

While state ownership under capitalism is by itself a limited gain for working people, it represents a step away from the total domination by the “free market” over all wealth in our society. Any part of the economy that is government owned makes profits for the public purse.

This profit can be used for the public good, including health, education, social welfare and the environment. Only political struggle by the majority of people can ensure that government funds are in fact used for the public good, and not for corporate welfare, military missions and ecologically unsustainable infrastructure.

That’s why we need to campaign for public ownership under workers’ and community control. In the end, only a genuine people’s government will guarantee this goal is fully implemented.

In the meantime, the unions and people’s movement must fight to defend public ownership of government assets against the voracious attacks of the super-rich, seeking to steal what little public sector we have left after several decades of neo-liberal pillage. The struggle to make public enterprise not for sale is a vital priority in this period. ■

## Residents protest Millers Point public housing sell-off

March 21, 2014 / Issue 1002

The Tenants' Union of New South Wales, the state's peak organisation for tenants, has condemned the proposed sell-off of 293 public housing properties at Millers Point and The Rocks, announced by the Barry O'Farrell government on March 19.

The area is the historic heartland of the city of Sydney, and was previously saved from the developers' bulldozers by residents' action and Green Bans imposed by the NSW Builders Labourers Federation in the 1970s.

Dr Chris Martin, senior policy officer for the Tenants Union said: "This sell-off amounts to the destruction of a community. It will cause hardship and grief to the people of Millers Point, and make all of us poorer.

"We are concerned for the wellbeing of Millers Point tenants, especially those who are elderly and those who have lived all their lives at Millers Point," he said.

"Millers Point is irreplaceable, both as inner-city social housing and as part of our state heritage," Martin said. "The heritage value of Millers Point is not just in its buildings, but in its historic use as public housing, and in the long family and community ties of many of the people living there."

Public housing residents in Millers Point have launched a campaign against the NSW government's sell-off plans, the March

20 *Guardian* reported. Three separate community organisations have combined to form the Millers Point Community Defence Group, which is holding its first public meeting on March 22.

An organiser of the campaign, John McInerney, said the sell-off would result in "the destruction of an existing community."

"The government says their core business is not housing. But surely their core business must be communities. If they're not about building and sustaining communities, then what are they about?"

Writing in the *Guardian*, Sydney Lord Mayor Clover Moore described the decision to move out residents, some of whom have lived in the area for decades, as "tantamount to social cleansing."

"The Millers Point community survived the plague, the Depression and war. It is shameful that it is government that will destroy this proud and strong neighbourhood," she wrote.

Moore also slammed the sale as "Barangaroo-driven" — referring to the massive Barangaroo housing and casino development under way nearby. "All public housing tenants in inner-city properties are now put on notice that if the value of your home goes up, the government is going to put you out of your home," she said.

Angry residents are refusing to leave their homes after the announcement of the sell-

off. They gathered in the shadow of the Harbour Bridge on March 19 to protest the threatened evictions.

"We are not moving one iota," said Colin Tooher, whose family have lived at the same Millers Point address for six generations. "Think about it, [NSW Premier] Barry [O'Farrell], and think about it bloody hard."

Patricia Haub, 77, insisted she isn't moving either. "They can take me out in a box," she said. "Why should I move?"

Barney Gardner, who was born and raised in the area, told the March 20 *Sydney Morning Herald*: "It's the only place I've ever known; this is where I grew up, this is my life."

He said he and his neighbours would fight to stay, locking arms and legs if necessary to defy whoever is sent to evict them. "It will be a fight because we will have many, many supporters; we don't want violence, but we are prepared to go to jail."

Community Services Minister Pru Goward on March 19 tried to justify the sell-off because of the cost of maintenance of the Millers Point homes, and the "high potential sales values." Some public housing in the area was sold off under the previous Labor government five years ago at an average price of \$1.3 million each.

The O'Farrell government expects to raise hundreds of millions of dollars, which the government says it will re-invest into the "social-housing system."

There are significant problems with social housing, compared with public housing. Social housing is operated by NGOs, but at higher rents and lower security of tenure to public housing — which is owned and operated outright by the Housing Department.

In any case, the sale of Millers Point public housing is completely unjustified. The state's 57,000-long waiting list for public housing cannot be used as an excuse to sell off existing, historic public housing assets.

It is all a question of social priorities. The government should re-direct massive, wasteful funding for environmentally unsustainable road infrastructure like WestConnex, and invest the money into positive, socially progressive projects like more public housing and expansion of public transport. ■



Formerly public housing at Millers Point, Sydney.

## The case to renationalise Qantas

March 21, 2014 / Issue 1002

“The solution to Qantas’s problems is being framed as a choice between lifting the level of permissible foreign ownership or a public debt guarantee,” Chad Satterlee wrote in article in the *Guardian* on March 3. “There is another option: renationalisation”.

The alternative of renationalisation of Qantas, under workers’ and community control, is the course that would advance the interests of the public and the environment over the future of Australia’s major airline in the medium term.

Satterlee said: “Neoliberals assume that private ownership is more efficient than other forms of ownership. By the test of the market, this assumption does not hold in view of Qantas: its board and management have performed poorly compared to other airlines, many of which are publicly owned and operated. The chickens are now coming home to roost.”

Satterlee rejects both the Tony Abbott government’s push for relaxation of the foreign ownership provisions of the *Qantas Sale Act*, and the Labor Party’s policy of giving Qantas a public debt guarantee. “The optimal solution, therefore, is to renationalise Qantas and keep it in public hands.

“At the same time, direct democratic control over major decisions in a nationalised Qantas, including the composition of the board, must be implemented. Modern communications technology makes this easy to coordinate. A core reason behind Qantas’s underperformance is that the people directly affected by its operations — passengers, employees, citizens — are excluded from participating in the major decisions of the enterprise. These decisions are made by a private shareholder-appointed board, who have in recent times locked out employees, stranded passengers and sent jobs offshore.”

In a world dominated by the neoliberal capitalist offensive of the past three decades, the notion of public ownership of major industries and facilities is now totally dismissed by mainstream politicians and media. Australians have seen the wholesale sell-off of government-owned enterprises

in a frenzy of attempts to supposedly pay off public debt by “selling the family silver”.

The Liberals are now leading the charge on privatisation. But the Labor Party must take considerable responsibility for its role in the sell-off of the Commonwealth Bank and Qantas under the Bob Hawke and Paul Keating government of the 1980s and early 1990s.

Since then, Liberal and ALP federal and state governments have competed to be the worst offenders in virtually handing over public assets to greedy private corporations.

The worst recent example of this folly must surely be the Anna Bligh Labor state government’s sell-off of Queensland’s freight rail, ports, roads and forests to private investors in the 2010-11 period. This turned out to be a fatal move for the ALP, which was decimated in the 2012 state elections.

Now, a plan to privatise Australia’s remaining public assets is at the top of the agenda for the Abbott government and its Coalition counterparts around the country, as part of their neoliberal “free market” war on working people. An estimated \$130 billion of government-owned assets, mainly under state jurisdiction, is in the firing line to be sold off in coming years, says an ANZ Bank report.

Top of the list for privatisation by the federal government are Medibank Private and Australia Post. Strong opposition to the sell-off of these institutions, which are profit-making for the public purse, is developing in the community.

The ideological war in support of this privatisation mania is being stepped up by the big business media and their allies in the corporate media. In an article *Sydney Morning Herald* on March 10 economics columnist Ross Gittins wrote: “So how can states do a lot more infrastructure investment without increasing their debt levels? By privatising existing businesses and reinvesting the proceeds in new infrastructure. That’s what [federal Treasurer Joe] Hockey hopes to encourage.”

But that option is just like selling off the priceless family silver to buy a new, plastic dinner set. It will not benefit the public, but only a handful of private capitalists.

The revenue from public enterprises, once sold, is lost from government coffers forever. The bulk of any profits, less a minimal and reducing amount of tax, are then stolen by the wealthy 1%.

Privatisation is grand larceny from the public purse on a massive scale.

Working people must now go on the counter-attack and say enough is enough. We need a broad campaign by trade unions and social movements to keep public assets in public hands.

In the case of Qantas, renationalisation under workers’ and community control is the obvious way to go. Qantas CEO Alan Joyce has been calling for yet another public hand-out, after trashing the airline, locking out its workers, moving to sack 5000 of them, closing down maintenance facilities and attacking the unions. This is the real legacy of privatisation.

If we compare some other government-owned airlines, we see a superior record.

For example, Air New Zealand, which was privatised in 1989, then renationalised in 2001, has just posted a 40% increase in its half-year profit, to NZ\$140 million — which is a boost to the public coffers, not a potential drain on it as is Qantas now.

Another interesting comparison is with Aerolineas Argentinas. The Argentine national airline was privatised in 1990 under the neoliberal government of the day. Its fortunes declined until it was almost bankrupt, with debts of over US\$1 billion in 2008.

In July that year, the government of President Christina Kirchner moved to renationalise it. Despite many problems, Aerolineas Argentinas is now functioning relatively efficiently, and making a profit for the country’s treasury.

Of course, having key airlines in public hands is only part of the solution. Many airlines in Asia and the Middle East, for example, are under some kind of government ownership.

The related part of the struggle for working people is to make sure these crucial transport facilities are operated in the public interest, and that profits are used for the common good — not to subsidise other capitalist ventures, for instance.

The renationalisation of Qantas could be the first step in the development of an

*Continued over page*

## MUA, residents oppose Millers Point public housing sell-off

Sydney / March 28, 2014 / Issue 1003

"We'll win this, because we'll stick together", Barney Gardner, a long-time resident of the Millers Point public housing area in inner-city Sydney, told a rally of several hundred at Argyle Place on March 25.

The rally heard a variety of speakers condemn the Barry O'Farrell NSW government for its decision to sell-off 293 public properties in the historic heartland of Sydney, following a march organised by the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) from the Kent Street Fire Station.

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*Continued from previous page*

integrated public transport system, linked to a huge expansion of the national railway network, with special priority given to the construction of a very fast train system. A nationalised airline would have to be under workers' and community control, as part of a national public transport plan implemented by a genuine people's government.

Only such a democratic socialist plan could effectively work to rationalise highly polluting air transport within a framework of fully unionised, green jobs with fair wages and conditions, in an environmentally sustainable, national public transport system.

A publicly owned and community controlled national transport system is essential to drastically reduce carbon pollution in a world threatened by climate change.

Now is the time for working people and their organisations to mobilise to defend the public sector. ■

Gardner said. "You deserve as much right to live here as these rich people they want to put in our homes. We will win, because we are the heart and soul of this place."

The rally was chaired by Paul McAlear, Sydney secretary of the MUA, who stressed the strong historic links of the waterfront unions with the area, and pledged the full support of the MUA, and other unions, for the residents of Millers Point. Other speakers included Irene Doutney, Greens city councillor, and Alex Greenwich, independent MP for the area.

The rally and march followed a public meeting of 500 people at the Abraham Mott Hall on March 21, who slammed the proposed forced eviction of several hundred public housing residents from Millers Point. Alex Greenwich described the government decision as "cruel and heartless."

Sydney Mayor Clover Moore told the meeting that the state government "has no housing policy, and thinks the inner city is just for the rich". A representative from the

housing organisation Shelter NSW described Millers Point as "probably the most important community in the whole of Australia".

She added that there was no guarantee that the housing stock planned to be lost at Millers Point would be replaced elsewhere in the city. "It is a land grab, which massively accelerates the process of dividing Sydney into rich and poor areas."

Speakers at the meeting warned residents not to speak to housing department officials about being relocated, without legal and community advice. Some speakers from the floor declared they would not move, and would totally refuse to allow housing representatives into their homes.

The campaign to stop the sell-offs is being coordinated by the Millers Point Community Defence Group, a coalition of three local residents' groups. Further actions are being planned for coming weeks. ■

## Government moves to sell Medibank Private

April 4, 2014 / Issue 1004

The first cab off the rank in the federal Coalition government's great privatisation push has now been confirmed: Medibank Private. Finance minister Mathias Cormann announced on March 26 that the government-owned health insurance company would be sold off through an initial public offering in the next financial year.

The announcement came just before a meeting of federal and state treasurers on March 28, which resulted in Commonwealth Treasurer Joe Hockey boasting of a "historic agreement" for the state governments to sell off billions of dollars of public assets.

In return the Abbott government would provide an "asset recycling pool" of funds, which would be used to give states a further 15% of the sale value of the assets, to reinvest

in new infrastructure projects, such as roads, ports and railways.

This use of the "asset recycling" cover for privatisation is a gigantic confidence trick on the community, designed to camouflage the fact that the sale of public assets is theft from the public purse on a grand scale. It will merely hand over public enterprises, which often make a substantial profit for the government treasury, to big business and the 1%, at bargain prices.

The neoliberal crusade to sell off and outsource public sector facilities began in Australia in the 1990s under the Hawke-Keating Labor government, with the sale of Qantas and the Commonwealth Bank. It escalated in the past 15 years with the John Howard government's privatisation of Telstra and the sale of other public assets.

At the state level, Liberal and Labor



governments have outbid each other to flog off the people's property to the private sector over the past 25 years.

Cormann said the government would not speculate on a sale price of Medibank Private, but previous estimates have ranged up to \$4 billion. He said that no one investor would be able to buy more than a 15% share in the company, as stipulated in the *Medibank Sale Act* which the Howard government pushed through in 2006.

Howard was stopped from selling Medibank Private by public opposition at the time. He pledged to implement the sale if his government was re-elected in 2007 — but lost, so the sell-off plan has sat on the table since.

Medibank Private made a pre-tax profit of \$315 million last year. It is a profit-making operation, the gains of which will be lost to the public purse once the asset is sold. In the past four years, Medibank Private has paid \$1.1 billion in dividends to the treasury.

In response to the government announcement, Labor's health spokesperson Catherine King said the federal opposition had concerns about the impact of the sale on the insurer's 4000 staff and its 3.8 million policy holders. Medibank Private now holds about 30% of the private health insurance market.

"It's really up to the government to guarantee that this won't lead to an increase in private health insurance premiums," King said, the ABC News reported on March 26. The opposition said the sale would increase

the budget deficit, because the government would lose Medibank's annual dividend payment of up to \$500,000. It also would not, under budget rules, be able to mark the eventual sale price as a budget gain.

The ALP opposition assistant spokesperson on health, Stephen Jones, condemned the government's decision on March 27. "It will impact on the premiums of people paying private health insurance.

"Expect another big whack. As the biggest insurer in the market, what Medibank does, others will follow."

Remarkably, former Liberal prime minister Malcolm Fraser wrote a letter to Jones, then convener of the Save Medibank Alliance, a coalition of organisations and individuals opposing the proposed sale of Medibank Private in 2006.

It said in part: "When Medibank Private was introduced in 1976, we believed that if the government were actively involved in the business, we would have a better handle on costs and outcomes than if it were done by private enterprise. I believe it would be a great pity if Medibank Private was sold and that it would lead to escalating fees."

It should be noted that the Fraser government had moved to abolish the Whitlam Labor government's original publicly owned Medibank universal health scheme that year — provoking the biggest, nationwide general strike called by the Australian Council of Trade Unions in Australian history. Medibank Private was, in part, a concession to the strong union

and community opposition to the removal of Medibank at the time.

Private health insurance funds co-exist with the public Medicare system, introduced by the Bob Hawke Labor government in 1984. Private health insurance, in principle, is contradictory to the operation of Medicare as a universal, public healthcare system.

Nevertheless, the privatisation of Medibank Private should be opposed by all labour movement and community organisations as yet another blow against the public sector in the interests of big business. Medibank Private should be kept in public hands until a future people's government can implement a genuine, universal healthcare system by the extension and radical reform of Medicare.

The entire Australian healthcare system, including Medicare, is under attack from creeping privatisation, outsourcing and higher charges and fees. This includes the proposal by the federal government's Audit Commission to introduce a co-payment for GP visits (possibly \$6), which could be considered for the upcoming federal budget in May.

Speaking at the Save Medicare rally at Sydney Town Hall on February 15, Brett Holmes, general secretary of the NSW Nurses and Midwives Association, said: "Privatising public health and moving towards an expensive and inefficient US-style managed care system is clearly on this government's agenda.

## Abbott moves to stifle public service free speech

“That is a system where insurance companies decide what care is provided to patients based on their level of insurance cover. And most acute care is provided by profitable corporations.

“Make no mistake, co-pays or any other initiative in the guise of helping to fund Medicare marks its death knell ... There is no evidence that a co-payment for GPs or emergency departments will control costs effectively or that it will improve health outcomes.”

Ian McCauley, writing in *New Matilda* in April last year, said: “Two-thirds of our \$60 billion [federal budget] revenue gap is due to health-care spending. But the push to privatise health and move it ‘off budget’ must be fought — or hospital stays will soon become unaffordable.

“PHI [private health insurance] is essentially a ‘privatised tax,’ collected by NIB, HCF or Medibank Private, rather than by the Australian Taxation Office, to fund our shared health care needs ... Worse, because of its demonstrated incapacity to control service providers’ costs, combined with a tendency to consumers to over-spend on health insurance, PHI results in high over-use and over-charging, a situation most clearly manifest in the USA where health care costs are now 18 per cent of GDP, compared with our 9 per cent.

“We should be wary of the PHI industry ... We need to see the PHI for what it is — an industry with a high bureaucratic overhead and with every incentive to see its market expand — rather than as part of our health care system.”

If Medibank Private is sold to big business, this profit before human needs character of the PHI will then know no bounds. Health care in this country will take another major step in the direction of being a market commodity, rather than a social right for all.

Both British and Australian conservative governments are moving in the direction of a privatised US-style model of health care. It is crucial that the labour movement and the community in this country mobilise to oppose the privatisation of Medibank Private, which is a further step along the road to a fully market-based system — based on private profit, not human needs. ■

*April 11, 2014/Issue 1005*

The Tony Abbott government has moved to crush the right of free speech for federal public servants. In new guidelines issued by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C) on social media policy, employees are threatened with harsh discipline if they are “critical or highly critical of the department, the minister or the prime minister” on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Pinterest, Flickr, blogs or elsewhere.

The policy applies to statements made either at work or in a personal capacity, even if made anonymously. Fellow public servants are being pressured to do in any workmates they may suspect of making critical comments in any forum.

The guidelines say: “If an employee becomes aware of another employee who is engaging in conduct that may breach this policy, there is an expectation that the employee will report the conduct to the department.”

If public servants have been found to have breached the Australian Public Service Code of Conduct, they could be sacked. Furthermore, the PM&C department has now declared its guidelines are secret, and will not discuss the matter with the media.

These guidelines are an outrageous attack on the civil rights of public servants. What right does the government have to control the expression of opinion of public employees in their private life, for example?

Don’t public servants have an equal right with other citizens to engage in political activity, including written or verbal protests against intolerable government policies, such as the current Coalition government’s actions on the environment, refugees or welfare cutbacks?

These guidelines are a direct attack on union rights in the workplace. As a former delegate in the Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU), I am alarmed that these new restrictions could severely limit the ability of unionists to organise freely inside government departments.

How will this new policy affect the right of union delegates to communicate with their members, especially in matters which

inevitably involve conflict with the government of the day? How would we have been able to organise for the Your Rights at Work campaign in the mid-2000s, for example?

How will this new policy affect the right of government employees to be publicly active in political campaigns outside work, or even to merely express support for them? This new policy further tightens restrictions on public servants’ democratic rights, which have already been narrowed in recent years.

“PM&C’s policy also cites the case of former Immigration Department worker Michaela Banerji, who was sacked last year after she used a pseudonymous Twitter account to criticise refugee detention policies,” the *Age* reported on April 8. “Late last month, the Federal Court’s Justice Steven Rares dismissed her appeal against her sacking.

“Ms Banerji wrote to Attorney-General George Brandis on Tuesday, saying the bureaucracy’s policies on using Facebook and Twitter were ‘a “trip-wire” for public servants in that, while on the one hand the guidelines state that public servants are encouraged to enter into robust discussion, they are in fact, not permitted to criticise government as private citizens.’

“She asked him to declare ‘that all public servants, as a class of persons, enjoy the constitutionally implied freedom of political communication in their capacity as private citizens, whatever the platform of expression.’”

The hypocrisy of the government and its right-wing backers on this question of free speech is breathtaking. Newly appointed Human Rights Commissioner, and former head of the neoliberal think tank Institute of Public Affairs, Tim Wilson, supported the new guidelines, saying: “Ultimately, public servants voluntarily and knowingly choose to accept these limits on their conduct when they accept employment.”

Compare this stand to the howls of outrage over the supposed denial of right-wing NewsCorp columnist Andrew Bolt’s

*Continued over page*

## Coalition push to dismantle health system

April 25, 2014 | Issue 1006

The Tony Abbott government, in line with its ruthless drive to privatise all remaining public sector assets, last month announced a plan to sell off Medibank Private during the 2014-15 financial year. Following the secret recommendations of the government's big-business-controlled Commission of Audit, the federal budget in May is likely to include further attacks on Medicare — undermining its character as a national, universal health-care system.

In addition to the growing privatisation of the federal health-care system, state government-run health services, including the public hospitals, are gradually being eroded by private hospitals and clinics. The ideological pressure to expand the coverage of private hospitals over public is increasing, but is also being strongly challenged.

Alison Verhoeven, chief executive of the Australian Healthcare and Hospitals Association (AHHA), said on October 14 last year: “Privatising the governance of public health-care, as proposed in a report released today by the Centre for Independent Studies (CIS), [a right-wing think tank], is not an optimal solution to address rising health expenditure.

“The CIS report ... is based on a number of assumptions which the AHHA challenges. Firstly, the report suggests a direct relationship between increased public health expenditure and inefficient delivery of services in the public health-care sector ... Most emergency services, intensive care and

*Continued from previous page*

“freedom of speech” after his conviction for racial discrimination under Section 18C of the *Racial Discrimination Act*, and Brandis's attempts to repeal that section of the law.

Unions and the community need to take a firm stand against these new restrictions on the free speech of public servants. This attack is part of the preparations by the government to launch huge assaults on workers and the Australian public, and to try to limit the ability of workers to be involved in defending the community and themselves. ■



Save Medicare rally, Sydney, 2014.

non-elective surgery (by their nature, largely more costly and resource-intensive) are provided by public hospitals. There is no robust evidence to suggest that private hospitals would deliver these services any more efficiently or cost-effectively than public hospitals, despite this being the basis of the CIS report's proposals.”

Neoliberal lobbyists like the CIS are supporting the current trend for federal and state Coalition governments to outsource hospital and specialist health care to the private sector — despite the evidence and public opinion favouring a universal, public health-care system at primary care and hospital levels.

The *Australian Financial Review* said on April 13 last year the Coalition would press “for an increase in the number of public hospitals run by private operators if elected, expanding on models developed in the Liberal-led states of Queensland and Western Australia. The move would be a boon to private health providers in the country, including listed private hospital operator Ramsay Health Care.”

The NSW Coalition government announced last May that a private or not-for-profit operator would run a new hospital

for Sydney's northern beaches. Labor state opposition health spokesperson Dr Andrew McDonald told ABC News: “This happened 20 years ago at Port Macquarie and that was a game that ended in tears. I've got major concerns about the ability of the private sector to deliver health care to everyone who needs it, irrespective of needs or ability to pay, for the next 20 years.”

In March, NSW Nurses and Midwives Association (NSWNMA) secretary Brett Holmes called on the NSW government to “come clean about its plans for the new Maitland hospital at Metford ... We have a right to know if the government intends to continue shirking its responsibility to provide public health services, favouring profits over patients and a universal health system.

“History shows a alarming rate of failed public-private hospital partnerships across the country, including Port Macquarie Base Hospital, Victoria's La Trobe Regional Hospital, Modbury Hospital in South Australia and Queensland's Robina Hospital.

“Last December, the Queensland government reversed a decision to privatise the new Sunshine Coast Public University



Hospital, citing 'the private sector can't match the public service on cost.'

"Meanwhile in Western Australia, the newly privatised Fiona Stanley Hospital is already suffering from a postponed opening date and staff shortages across a number of specialities."

In addition, the creeping privatisation of specialist health services, including under the previous Gillard Labor government's National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), continues. In New South Wales, the O'Farrell Coalition government "rushed through with obscene haste laws that codify privatisation as the only option," the NMWA said in December last year.

"Buried deep in the [NDIS] agreement is a clause which states: 'following the commencement of the full NDIS, the NSW government will not provide any residual specialist disability services or basic community services'."

Holmes said: "The NDIS is a worthy reform that is long overdue and strongly supported by nurses and midwives. But it has never been put before the community that it is to be a fully privatised system."

More recently, the NMWA has campaigned against plans by the NSW government to shut down the public disability care Stockton Centre in Newcastle and to privatise all disability services in the state. Holmes said on March 11: "Thousands of vital nursing jobs across NSW are at risk as a result of the O'Farrell government's privatisation plans, with no assurances current public sector pay and conditions would be offered by private agencies."

The Coalition push to privatise health care at all levels echoes the Conservative Party's drive to destroy Britain's iconic National Health Service (NHS) in recent years.

The NHS is being dismantled from within, by piecemeal privatisation of key elements of the public system, while retaining the NHS label.

In addition to the attacks on Medicare, and the plan to sell off Medibank Private, Coalition governments around the country are stepping up the outsourcing and creeping privatisation of hospital and other specialist health services.

The labour movement and the community urgently needs to declare an end to the further privatisation of the health-care system. ■

## Audit Commission declares open class war

May 2, 2014 / Issue 1007

The Commission of Audit report is a declaration of open class war by the corporate ruling class against Australia's working people and the poor.

Released symbolically on May 1, the international workers' day, it is a clear challenge to the labour movement and social organisations.

If its 86 recommendations are implemented, it would be a wholesale destruction of the welfare state, hard fought for over a century or more by working people, and a huge victory for big business in shifting wealth from the poor to the rich.

It would also result in the almost total sell-off of remaining public assets to the multinational corporations, and a drastic change in the relationship of class forces in Australia.

Although federal treasurer Joe Hockey has been quick to say the recommendations are from "a report, not the budget", there is no doubt the commission report is intended to soften up the public for the worst horror budget in decades, due on May 13.

It also represents a medium-term log of claims by big business and its Coalition political agents for the economic future of the country.

The brutality of the report is no surprise. The Commission of Audit was headed by the former president of the Business Council of Australia, Tony Shepherd, and other conservative figures. It essentially entails an outsourcing to the corporate sector of the Abbott government's future planning strategy.

Despite attempts in the mainstream media to downplay the likelihood of some of the worst elements of the report being included in the upcoming budget, we should be in no doubt that this plan represents the true ambitions of the Coalition regime.

Economics commentator Ross Gittins said in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on May 2: "Not surprisingly, the commission found ways to solve our budget problem at the expense of almost everyone bar the top '1 per cent' whose interests the council represents."

The severity of many of the recommendations is intended to provide cover for Tony Abbott's government to bring in less obviously draconian, but nevertheless extremely harsh, measures in the upcoming budget.

For example, the commission's proposed \$15 Medicare co-payment for GP consultations "is unlikely to go ahead, but it provides political cover for the almost certain \$6 co-payment," the *SMH* said.

The commission's recommendation for a \$5 co-payment for Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme medicines is also likely to be in the budget mix.

Proposals to force university students to pay more for their studies — and to begin paying back earlier and at a lower threshold — while cutting federal funding to higher education, are likely to be adopted by Hockey in the budget. These policies would go hand-in-hand with a huge privatisation of higher education over the medium term.

"A requirement for unemployed 22-30 year olds (who do not have dependants or an exemption) to move to high employment areas after one year on the dole could also get the nod," the *Herald* reported. This policy would disrupt the lives of thousands of young people and is a form of forced labour.

The commission's proposed changes to the age pension system are extremely politically dangerous for the Coalition. The suggested increase in the pension age to 70, confirmed by Hockey, and the even more radical plan to include the family home under the pension asset test, would effectively demolish the current age pension scheme — and destroy the whole idea of a secure, universal retirement payment for older people.

The commission proposes an all-out assault on the federal public service, with a further 15,000 jobs to be cut. The report recommends the virtual abolition of federal education and health departments, with all responsibilities in these areas to be devolved to the states — returning to a pre-1970s model, resulting in greater disparities and inequities in different regions of the country.

## Huge public asset sell-off to fund roads

As Community and Public Sector Union national secretary Nadine Flood told ABC *Radio National* on May 2: “The public service has already shrunk overall ... Who will do these jobs? People are scared for their livelihoods, especially in regional areas, where there are not many other jobs in town.”

The report confirms plans for the privatisation of most remaining federal public assets, including Australia Post, Snowy Hydro, Defence Housing, the Australian Rail Track Corporation, NBN Co and Australian Hearing Services. Some are proposed for sale in the next few years and others over the longer term.

These recommendations are for a blatant robbery of public property by the thieves who stand to gain most: big business. They reveal just how fundamentally corrupt this Commission of Audit process really is — the vampires taking over management of the blood bank.

This whole charade is being sold on the basis of a so-called “budget emergency”. This is nothing but a lie by the Abbott government and its backers to justify these disastrous cuts to the wider community.

Australia’s debt to GDP ratio is about 14% and is predicted to rise to 17% by 2024. This compares with an average OECD debt to GDP ratio of 73%.

Socialist Alliance national co-convenor Susan Price said on May 2: “This Commission of Audit report has thrown down the gauntlet to the labour movement and the broader social organisations in Australia. It is a declaration of open class war on the working class and the disadvantaged sections of our society.

“It is a threat to destroy the foundations of the welfare state and the social gains made through decades of struggle by trade unions and social movements. We must now increase our organisation to fight back against this escalating ruling-class offensive.

“March in May rallies are a step in the right direction, but we urgently need more action by the unions and social organisations to confront this challenge. Planning needs to begin immediately to build the broadest possible movement to fight back against this neoliberal attack.” ■

May 9, 2014 / Issue 1008

The Coalition government plans to speed up the push to privatise remaining federal and state public assets in a massive program to help fund new infrastructure projects — mainly road developments — media sources reveal.

ABC radio’s *AM* reported on May 8 that “an infrastructure package worth about \$10 billion will be at the centre of the Abbott government’s first budget.

“*AM* understands a large portion of the money will go towards an asset recycling program, which encourages the states and territories to privatise their assets in exchange for a [15 per cent] bonus payment from the Commonwealth.

“Today, the government will announce it is giving a \$2 billion concessional loan to New South Wales to fast-track the WestConnex road project in Sydney in the hope the extra money will allow construction to begin sooner. The federal government hopes that will mean the \$11 billion road link ... will be completed by 2019.”

Other big road projects to receive billions of dollars are expected to include the controversial East West Link in Melbourne; the South Road project in South Australia; the second range crossing in Toowoomba, Queensland; and roads and other infrastructure associated with the proposed second Sydney airport at Badgerys Creek.

In short, the Abbott government’s idea of vital new national infrastructure is almost entirely limited to roads for private cars and trucks — not essential new infrastructure such as public railways, including the east coast high-speed rail proposal, which would provide a sustainable alternative to air transport and reduce greenhouse gases instead of hugely increasing them.

The national Commission of Audit report released on May 1 recommended the privatisation of a series of Commonwealth-owned public assets. The list includes: Australia Post, Snowy Hydro, Moorebank Intermodal Company, and the Australian Rail Track Corporation.

Added to the list are: Commonwealth car service Comcar, NBN Co, and the Royal

Australian Mint. The Australian Submarine Corporation and Defence Housing Australia would also be sold over time.

The *SMH* said: “The privatisation list covers almost every government business enterprise and is sorted into three categories: Immediate; 2014-16; and beyond 2016.”

Any government enterprises that operate in “contestable markets” should be privatised, the commission report said.

In other words, all the people’s property, no matter how big or small, should be sold off to big business. The private equity sharks and merchant banks are no doubt licking their lips in expectation of a huge profit windfall.

Estimated major sale prices include: \$3-4 billion for Australia Post; \$2.2 billion for Snowy Hydro; more than \$1 billion for Defence Housing; and more than \$500 million for Australian Rail Track Corporation. But all these sell-offs would mean job and service cuts, and the loss of billions of dollars in payments to the public purse.

In addition to outright privatisations, the Commission of Audit recommends large-scale outsourcing of government services to business. This would include linking the privatisation of Australia Post to its taking over social security and other welfare payments.

The *SMH* said: “Payments of about \$400 million a day to Australians from the government should be considered for outsourcing, it says. Australia Post — a privatised or soon to be privatised one, possibly — could potentially absorb payments made through 334 Centrelink centres, 126 rehabilitation centres and 139 stand-alone Medicare offices into its network of 4400 retail outlets, it adds.”

The potential disaster this poses for the community includes big job cuts in the public sector, serious individual privacy and service concerns for social welfare clients, and the danger of system failures, for a start. It would mean the destruction of a public system of social security built up over a century of struggle.

These recommendations from the Commission of Audit are a recipe for highway robbery of the public sector by big

corporations.

This is an outright conflict of interest, as the commission is chaired by Tony Shepherd, former head of the Business Council of Australia, and former chairman of Transfield Services, which profits directly from government contracts, including the \$1.2 billion contract to run asylum seeker detention centres on Nauru and Manus Island.

Among the many highly unpopular measures looming in the upcoming federal budget, these proposed sell-offs of public assets will be extremely controversial. Already, there is a strong union and community campaign against the privatisation of Australia Post.

The recommendation to privatise Snowy Hydro has run into a storm of criticism, including from within the Coalition itself.

Liberal MP Sharman Stone publicly criticised the proposal, telling the *Guardian*: “Why sell this? This is an iconic piece of infrastructure.”

The Howard government tried to sell the Snowy in 2006, but failed due to intense public opposition and a backbench revolt within the Coalition.

The Snowy Hydro scheme is jointly owned, with the federal government holding a 13% stake, the NSW state government a 58% stake, and the Victorian government 29%. Now, with Coalition governments in both states and Canberra, the push to privatise the Snowy is on again.

But such a move will undoubtedly face fierce community opposition again, including from within the Coalition parties. With all the problems facing Australia's river systems under threat of runaway climate change, privatisation of the Snowy system would certainly further contribute to uncontrolled corporate exploitation of scarce river water supplies.

These proposed all-out privatisations of remaining government-owned assets and services are an escalation of the neoliberal offensive against Australian working people and the poor. They represent blatant theft of public property, which provide community services and generate substantial income for the public purse.

All opinion polls have emphasised most people are adamantly opposed to selling public assets. The labour movement and community organisations urgently need to mobilise to fight this grand theft of public property. ■

## Community opposes NSW public asset sell-off



Port of Newcastle.

*Sydney* / May 23, 2014 / Issue 1010

Recent opinion polls show there is widespread opposition in NSW to the Coalition government's plans to privatise remaining public assets.

Polling by UMR Research, reported by the *Australian Financial Review* on May 1, shows a majority of people are against proposed sell-offs announced recently by Premier Mike Baird.

It found 61% of respondents opposed the privatisation of the state's electricity poles and wires, while only 23% supported the idea. An even bigger 73% are against any sell-off of NSW public hospitals, with just 18% in support.

Baird, who became premier last month after the resignation of Barry O'Farrell, led a push which resulted in a national deal signed with federal Treasurer Joe Hockey in late March. Under this deal, state governments can sell public assets to the corporate sector and will be given a 15% “bonus” by the federal government if they invest the money in new infrastructure projects.

This supposed “recycling of infrastructure” is overwhelmingly based on privatisation of key assets to build new motorways, in private public partnerships with big business.

The *AFR* said: “NSW Premier Mike Baird will push to privatise the state's \$25 billion electricity grid after reaping a hefty \$1.75 billion from the sale of the Port of Newcastle, most of which will be invested back into infrastructure.”

Newcastle is the world's largest coal port, handling 40% of Australia's coal exports.

The Newcastle port has been leased for 98 years by a consortium comprising Hastings Funds Management and a Chinese state-owned corporation, China Merchants. This follows the \$5.1 billion gained from the sales of Port Kembla and Port Botany last year.

The Port of Newcastle sale brings the total amount of funds in the state government's infrastructure fund, Restart NSW, to more than \$6 billion. Much of this has already been allocated, mostly to road projects.

These include \$1.8 billion towards the WestConnex motorway, \$403 million for the Pacific Highway, \$170 million for the Princes Highway, and \$135 million for Bridges for the Bush, the May 1 *Sydney Morning Herald* reported.

For the Coalition, “essential new infrastructure” is virtually equivalent to roads for private cars and trucks — not public railways, hospitals and schools.

In addition, Baird has also indicated a plan

to privatise NSW public hospitals. He recently highlighted proposals to further extend the current role of the private sector in running the state's hospitals.

"These [services] extend everywhere, from cleaning, to the public-private partnership to design, build, operate and maintain the new Northern Beaches Hospital," Baird told AAP on April 20. He promised to push forward privatisation in the hospital sector to "transform" the system.

The sale of government-owned assets is basically grand theft from the public purse. Even John Daley, CEO of the Grattan Institute thinktank, pointed out in the May 5 *AFR*: "The idea behind the latest Commonwealth-state agreement is 'asset recycling': selling assets and using the proceeds to fund new infrastructure. Superficially it's attractive. The problem is that when states sell infrastructure, they save on interest payments, but they also give up future revenues from those assets. Although NSW is seen to have negotiated good prices for recent long-term leases of three ports, the interest saved will be about the same as the revenue given up."

In other words, public revenue gains no benefit from privatisation: it merely represents a huge hand-out to the corporate ruling class, permanently moving crucial state property into the hands of the wealthiest corporations.

Already, it is clear that public opinion in this country is strongly opposed to further privatisation of public assets. What is needed urgently now is a vigorous campaign by the unions and community organisations to mobilise this sentiment into a massive movement to stop the sell-offs, at state and national levels.

Already the Not4Sale campaign against Liberal and Labor state governments' privatisation in Queensland has shown the direction we need. The Hands Off Aussie Post campaign against the proposed sell-off of Australia Post has also made ground in recent times.

If the huge cuts to state finances announced in the Abbott government's recent budget are to be successfully fought, the public will need to link their struggle with opposition to the sell-off of state-owned public assets. ■

## Profits should never come before patients

*Sydney / May 30, 2014 / Issue 1011*

"This country can afford a universal healthcare system that provides access to quality health care for everyone," Judith Kiejda, assistant general secretary of the NSW Nurses and Midwives Association (NSW NMWA), told a forum at the University of Technology Sydney on May 27.

The forum, organised by the Save Medicare Campaign, heard Kiejda and Professor Bill Mitchell, director of the Centre of Full Employment and Equity (CofFEE) at Newcastle University, addressed the topic, "No to Abbott-Care. Hands Off Medicare."

Kiejda said: "On every measure, Australia is either just below, just above or on par with OECD averages for health outcomes, and the US was nowhere near our outcomes. Nobody wants a US-style health system ... and yet this is where our federal government with its ideology, backed by its vicious federal budget handed down two weeks ago, is surely taking us.

"It's not just about the extra co-payments announced for medical services and prescriptions. And don't think for a minute these amounts are the end of it. Whatever amount the GP co-payment ends up being — \$5, \$7, \$15 — in two or three years, those providers will come back and say it's not enough, and then you and I will have to dig deeper, and a few years later we'll have to do it again. And before you know it we'll be paying \$30, \$40 or \$50 co-payments, and bingo, we'll have the US system.

"This country has seen the slow but steady introduction of the privatisation of public hospitals over recent years. Western Australia, Queensland and now NSW are all playing this field. And make no mistake, this is all about dismantling our universal healthcare system.

"In NSW, we have seen a steady march towards privatisation of our public health services. We have seen palliative care services privatised — imagine profiteering from the dying. We have seen the wholesale privatisation of our disability services by 2018 — imagine how the most vulnerable in

our society will be cared for if profit is the driver. And don't think for one minute that moving to the not for profit sector will save those people currently in the disability sector.

"Just look at the age care sector and you'll be fully able to appreciate what it means to hand over disability services to private and not for profit entities. There are services that should never be privatised and health fits into that category. Profits should never come before patients.

"This move to privatisation is not at all about the care of patients. It's purely about removing a huge burden from the state budget bottom line. The fact that there will be public beds in [a privatised] facility means nothing: because private operators only move into this space if they see an opportunity to generate revenue for their shareholders."

In discussion, the importance of the campaign to defend Medicare was emphasised by several speakers. Its role at the centre of the campaign against the Abbott government's neoliberal budget was noted.

Kiejda stressed how the campaign for Your Rights At Work against the Howard government's Work Choices anti-union legislation built up over time during the mid-2000s. "The Nurses and Midwives Association will be there in numbers to support the struggle to defend Medicare," she said.

Mitchell said: "People power is everything in this campaign. We have to educate ourselves about these issues. Small steps now will lead to big changes in the future." ■

# NSW budget proposes sale of power assets

June 20, 2014 / Issue 1013

To summarise the NSW Coalition state budget announced on June 17: Sell off public electricity assets; build more private roads.

This first budget from new Premier Mike Baird is in line with the drive led by the federal government to privatise all remaining public enterprises in the interests of their big business masters.

NSW Treasurer Andrew Constance told state parliament: "We are now in control of the budget. It's no longer in control of us."

This is code for: We plan to sell off the remains of the people's property in this state, whether you like it or not.

Constance said the budget would be "built on the repair work of the last three years". This refers to drastic cutbacks that have resulted in the loss of 15,000 public service jobs, a cap on public sector wage rises, and across-the-board cuts to departmental spending, including in education and health.

Labor opposition leader John Robertson accused the Baird government of delivering a "budget built on savage cuts." He said the NSW government was passing on the health and education cuts made by the federal government in its May budget.

Greens MP Mehreen Faruqi said the government was "pouring billions of dollars into wasteful and ill-conceived projects". These include the WestConnex motorway and the north-west rail link.

The only really new promises in the budget are for about \$1 billion to be spent on protecting at-risk children, and bolstering disability support and homelessness services. In reality, the core of the budget is the sale of the state's remaining government-owned electricity assets. The government proposed selling the "poles and wires" infrastructure for up to \$20 billion. This would fund mostly road and private rail infrastructure in the northern and western suburbs of Sydney.

But the *Sydney Morning Herald* said on June 17 the pledge of new projects "largely remains a promise. The [budget] documents are littered with a raft of 'feasibility studies' worth a few million each to explore the potential for roads and hospital building — all of which would take place after next year's election [due in

March].

"A stand out example is Constance's declaration that a 'centrepiece' of the budget is 'the rebuilding of Westmead hospital.' While this is stated as a \$1 billion commitment, there is only \$5 million in the budget papers for planning."

Robertson said the budget contained 69 planning and feasibility studies "in lieu of actual construction".

He said: "The Liberals are spending over \$700 million on drawing boards and glossy brochures, when they should be getting on with the job of delivering real infrastructure."

Economics columnist Ross Gittins said in the June 18 *SMH*: "The election next March is shaping up as a referendum on electricity privatisation."

The bid to privatise caused "bitter division within the previous Labor government. It led to the demise of a premier and a treasurer, and was ultimately the greatest single contributor to Labor's ignominious defeat in 2011".

Public opposition to the sale of state-owned power infrastructure remains overwhelming. A poll of voters in four regional NSW electorates in early June, conducted on behalf of the Electrical Trades Union and three other key public sector unions under the umbrella of the Stop the Sell Off campaign, showed 70.3% of respondents were opposed to the privatisation of the state's poles and wires.

Only 14% were in favour of the planned sell-off. "I can't think of any other political policy or proposal where the community sentiment has been so consistently opposed," Adam Kerslake, director of the Stop the Sell Off campaign, said.

Unrest within National Party ranks is such that Monaro MP John Barilaro urged the Coalition state government to put the question of power privatisation to a popular referendum before implementing the policy.

This suggestion was obviously pushed aside, as National Party MPs eventually agreed to accept Baird's plan for a 99-year private lease of 49% of most of the state's power infrastructure.

In a minor sop to the Nationals, the government would "retail its 51 per cent control of the sector's assets but it will retain

full control over the distributor, Essential. Controlling equity of the other distributors, Ausgrid, Endeavour and TransGrid, would pass to the private sector," the *SMH* said in June 11.

This scheme simply provides a fig-leaf for plans for the eventual full privatisation of the energy sector in NSW. A 99-year lease is, in effect, permanent. A 49% sell-off is no more than a slippery slope to the full privatisation of the power industry sometime in the future — when yet another manufactured "debt crisis" looms.

The Stop the Sell Off campaign has exposed the scam behind the Baird government's electricity sales pitch. Adam Kerslake said on June 2 that huge debts carried by the power companies mean the likely final price received for the public purse from any sale would be much less than stated.

Stop the Sell Off said: "The situation was even more stark when an examination was made of the ongoing state income that would be lost once the poles and wires were privatised."

Kerslake said: "Many people in the community mistakenly believe the electricity network is a financial burden to the state, but it is actually hugely profitable and provides billions of dollars a year to fund schools, hospitals, roads and other infrastructure.

"According to the NSW Auditor General, these businesses paid almost a billion dollars in dividends to the state government last financial year, with the addition of tax equivalents and interest payments taking the total figure to more than \$2.5 billion.

"Not only are the electricity businesses profitable, the revenue they are delivering to the NSW government has been steadily growing, but once sold that revenue would dry up."

The Stop the Sell Off campaign said experiences of other Australian states that have privatised electricity networks have left consumers "paying more for their power".

"South Australia now has the highest electricity prices in the country, while customer complaints in Victoria have gone

*Continued over page*

## 'Work half an hour more, but no fair pay rise'

July 18, 2014 / Issue 1017

The Community and Public Services Union (CPSU) has slammed a move by the federal government's biggest department, the Department of Human Services, which incorporates Centrelink, Medicare and the Child Support Agency, to force staff to work extra time for no additional pay. The department wants its 35,000 staff to work an additional half hour a week in negotiations for a new industrial agreement.

This attack on working hours is part of the Coalition government's assault on the jobs and conditions of public servants, launched in the recent federal budget. In initial bargaining, which started on July 1, the department reduced its previous enterprise bargaining agreement (EBA) from 116 pages to 42, making a huge cut to employee rights and entitlements.

In addition to longer work hours, staff are being pressured to accept a loss of overtime payments, reduced leave entitlements, an end to the right of consultation on work rosters, and a stricter "performance management" regime.

CPSU deputy national president Lisa

Newman said the plan was a "shocker", and warned CPSU members to brace for a fresh attack on their wages when the department managers release their pay offer. She told CPSU members that the bosses' plan to add six minutes to the department's working day of 7.5 hours would add up to big gains for the federal government.

"This means working an extra six minutes a day will deliver the government \$104 million in additional working hours, but will not deliver you a fair and reasonable pay rise," Newman said, the July 8 *Sydney Morning Herald* reported.

She also accused the department of delaying making a pay offer, saying public servants were, in effect, on a pay freeze while negotiations continued, after the government banned back-pay in new workplace agreements.

A July 3 CPSU statement said: "The

government has a radical agenda to cut job security, rights, real wages and conditions.

"Job cuts as an industrial weapon: The government announced 16,500 job losses in the budget, and more cuts are expected before the end of the year. Government and agencies are using genuine staff concerns over job cuts to lower bargaining expectations and 'soften' people up for substandard agreements. This is an attempt to fool [Australian Public Service] workers into accepting agreements which strip critical rights at the same time as 16,500 jobs are being cut.

"Building support: At the same time as our bargaining campaign is gathering momentum, we are also campaigning strongly about budget cuts ahead. We are taking every opportunity to argue against such deep cuts and speak up for the important work public sector workers do. We are also lobbying hard to stop legislative change that impact your rights, your jobs and services, and working closely with community groups and the Australian Council of Trade Unions." ■

## Fight Abbott's welfare cuts: a direct attack on the poor

*Continued from previous page*

from around 5000 per year before privatisation to more than 56,000 last year," Kerslake said.

"Mike Baird is preparing to say or do anything in order to do a deal with his mates in the banking industry.

"The electricity network will not be sold to a charity; it will be sold to big business looking to collect the largest possible profits, which means higher prices, poorer service, and NSW families and small businesses worse off."

This reality behind the budget plans of the NSW Coalition government — integral to the wider privatisation offensive of the Abbott federal government — means that the union movement and community organisations urgently need to mobilise to build a huge popular movement to stop the sell off of the people's energy and other assets. ■

August 8, 2014 / Issue 1020

The social welfare cuts proposed in the federal government's May budget are a direct attack on working people and the poor. If implemented, they would represent a huge shift in income from the poor to the rich. This harsh reality is backed up by partial figures released by Treasury to Fairfax Media under Freedom of Information.

The *Sydney Morning Herald* reported on August 4: "The Treasury analysis reveals the spending cuts cost an average of \$842 a year for lower-income households, while the average high-income family lost just \$71. Middle-income families were down \$477. Partly offsetting the skewing of spending cuts towards low earners was the temporary deficit repair levy for those earning above \$180,000 a year.

"The Treasury modelling says the average high-income family would pay an extra \$446 a year in tax; middle-income families an extra \$15; and low-income families only \$2

a year more.

"The combined effect is that an average low-income family loses \$844 a year in disposable income (earnings after tax and government payments) due to the budget. Middle-income earners forgo \$492; while a high-income family is down by \$517.

"The Treasury analysis is simplistic. It does not account for changes such as the proposed \$7 Medicare co-payment and is for one year only — 2016-17 — of the budget estimates. As such, it understates the disproportionately negative impact of the budget measures on poor families compared to wealthy ones.

"For example, in 2017-18 the deficit repair levy will be abolished and high earners will be much better off. Also in 2017-18, the full effects of the cuts to family benefits will be felt."

This plan will push many more into poverty. And there are many real alternatives.



Tony Abbott, Joe Hockey and Matthias Cormann plotting attack on welfare.

Ending the large tax breaks for mining and fossil fuel corporations would free up billions of dollars, as well as drastically reversing the steady decline in the rate of company tax.

Federal and state government plans for wholesale privatisation of public assets, which generate substantial profits for the public purse, will lead to a further fall in government income in the medium term. These sales should be stopped at all costs.

Treasurer Joe Hockey's so-called "budget emergency" has been shown to be a sham. Australia has one of the lowest debt to GDP ratios in the OECD.

Instead, the federal budget, described by Hockey as "tough but fair," is the complete opposite of "fair." It is an open declaration of class war by the rich against the poor, the ruling class against the workers and their families.

Inequality of wealth and income have already risen massively in Australia over recent decades. From having one of the more equal wealth disparities in the Western capitalist world in the 20th century, Australia now has one of the more unequal.

This budget is intended to further shift wealth from the poor to the rich. And Hockey is on record as thinking the budget was "not tough enough".

Sean Brocklehurst, Socialist Alliance

candidate for the seat of Pascoe Vale in the Victorian state elections in November, condemned the federal budget as "an all-out attack on our social welfare system, fought for over a century by working people and the community".

He told *Green Left Weekly*: "All the existing gains of the welfare system, including unemployment benefits, aged and disability pensions, and single parents' payments, were won as a result of long struggles by the people against big-business rule.

"The attacks in the budget on youth access to the dole, expanding Work for the Dole and income management, as well as cuts affecting family payments and pensions, affect every section of society — except the ruling 1%," he said.

"And the proposed \$7 GP co-payment will hit the whole community, but most of all those most vulnerable sections.

"The federal government and the Victorian government are working hand in glove to attack the welfare and rights of the community. Federal government threats to cut \$80 billion from funding for hospitals and schools nationally will savagely affect communities in this state and elsewhere.

"The Socialist Alliance pledges to campaign strongly against the welfare cuts and other measures such as privatisation and outsourcing in the upcoming state

election," Brocklehurst said.

Sarah Hathway, a tertiary student and the Socialist Alliance candidate for Geelong in the Victorian elections, slammed the federal budget moves to deregulate higher education fees, and to increase interest rates on HECs (the Higher Education Contribution Scheme), as well as other moves to effectively increase privatisation of the university and technical education system.

"These proposed changes to higher education will hit the poor by far the hardest. For example, students from wealthy families will pay far less if fees are paid up front, than those who have to pay their fees through tax after graduation.

"This is just another example that this budget is a declaration of class war on the poor. These changes to education will impact TAFE and the school system massively over time.

"The Socialist Alliance, and especially Resistance-Young Socialist Alliance, will seek to highlight these issues in the upcoming election campaign. Meanwhile we will be going all out to build student protests against these attacks — in particular the National Day of Action against education cuts on August 20." ■

# Government takes first steps to sell Medicare

August 14, 2014 / Issue 1021

The federal government took the first steps towards privatising the Medicare payment system on August 8, asking businesses for expressions of interest in taking over the handling of claims and Medicare and Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme payments.

This \$29 billion annual operation is currently carried out by the federal Department of Human Services (DHS), the government's largest department.

Medicare is second only to Centrelink as the biggest section of DHS. Selling off Medicare payments would begin the break-up of the department, and represents an attack on the Australian public service as a whole.

Up to 20,000 public service jobs could be lost or outsourced to the private sector if the Medicare sell-off goes ahead.

This head-on attack against the public service by the Coalition government is part of its neoliberal war against the public sector. The Australian ruling class is intent on slashing the public service and privatising the overwhelming bulk of public enterprise, in order to seize direct ownership of state assets in the interests of the big multinational corporations.

"The sell-off [of Medicare was] a recommendation of the federal government's National Commission of Audit, one of many that did not make it into May's federal budget. Departments and agencies are now braced for announcements of more of the commission's ideas," the *Sydney Morning Herald* reported on August 8.

"These include the sell-off of Centrelink [social security] payments, big cuts to Defence Department staffing in Canberra, the abolition of the Australian Public Service Commission and the establishment of a shared services department.

"Commission head Tony Shepherd also wanted parts of the Commonwealth workplace insurer Comcare sold off ... Jobs in the Department of Veterans Affairs will also be in the gun as the Health Department looks to outsource nearly \$2.5 billion in veterans' benefits, currently administered by DVA," the *SMH* said.

The *Australian Financial Review* said on

August 8: "The decision [to sell off Medicare] ... could allow Australia Post or any of the big four banks to step in to calculate and process health payments and absorb Medicare retail outlets.

"Early discussions have indicated a very strong level of commercial interest in fulfilling the contract. It could boost the valuation of Australia Post if the government decided to privatise the government business enterprise later.

"The struggling mail carrier has already made a pitch through the Commission of Audit process to take over the entirety of the Department of Human Services' payment delivery responsibilities, including welfare payments."

"The development of a new payment system could facilitate the collection of the \$7 payments for doctor visits, pathology and imaging the government wants to implement."

This last point underlines the link between the plan to sell off Medicare payments and the attack on Medicare as a universal public health system contained in the \$7 co-payment plan. It shows the urgent need to combine a campaign against both the privatisation push and the Medicare co-payment.

The Community and Public sector Union (CPSU), which covers DHS employees, has slammed the government's move to privatise Medicare payments.

CPSU national secretary Nadine Flood said on August 8: "Medicare staff are stunned and appalled at news the government is planning to sell off their jobs and outsource Medicare payments to big business. This outrageous move could cut up tens of thousands of public service jobs, most in regional and suburban Australia where jobs have already been hit hard.

"This is another part of [Prime Minister Tony] Abbott's plan to murder Medicare. Medicare is a highly effective key part of Australia's great public health system, yet this government is determined to dismantle it and sell the profitable bits to its big business mates. It is absolutely shocking.

"It's even worse they're doing it without a word to the community or thousands of Medicare workers whose jobs are in the

firing line. The first we hear of this is a tender to sell off Medicare. This is a nasty, sneaky move by the Abbott government.

"Australians are wary about privatisation because so often they pay more and get less. The last place we want that to happen is with something as important as Medicare."

The recommendations of the National Commission of Audit, headed by former Business Council of Australia chair Tony Shepherd, are essentially a wishlist for big business in Australia from the federal government.

The Abbott government — the most pro-corporate regime in recent Australian history, which is taking up issues even the Howard government backed away from — is seeking to implement this business agenda as fast as it can.

In light of the public opposition to the government budget in general, and the Medicare co-payment proposal in particular, the time is now right to launch a broad community and union campaign to fight both the co-payment and the Medicare sell-off plans.

This means working to unite the existing Save Medicare campaign aimed against the co-payment with a drive by the CPSU and other unions, under the umbrella of the Australian Council of Trade Unions, to stop the privatisation of the Medicare payment system.

The Australian public has a strong interest in the defence and extension of Medicare as a universal, freely available public health system. Medical care should be free and equally shared as a community right.

The campaign to save Medicare — both to stop any form of co-payment for doctors' visits and to prevent the sell-off of its administration and payment system — is now an urgent priority for the union movement and the community generally. ■



## History shows us how to defend Medicare



March to defend Medibank, July 1976, Sydney.

*September 12, 2014 / Issue 1025*

The bust the budget campaign stands at a crossroads right now. Although the federal government has succeeded in ramming some of its harsh austerity measures through parliament, there are large parts of the budget which are still held up in the Senate — largely due to the public hostility to these cutbacks.

There is widespread opposition to the deregulation of university fees, the attack on young jobseekers, the scrapping of the Renewable Energy Target and other climate change legislation, the public asset “recycling” bill and the Medicare co-payment proposal. None of these changes have managed pass, which is a win for the people’s movement in opposition to the government’s neoliberal offensive.

However, there can be no guarantee that the government will not be able to make deals with the cross-bench senators to force these unpopular measures into law. We need to increase the public pressure against

these vicious cutbacks by stepping up the mass campaign against the budget, through united action of the trade union and social movements.

The campaign to defend Medicare against the GP co-payment and other attacks on the national healthcare system has been strong this year. Medicare is an iconic issue for the great majority of ordinary people.

The question is whether the unions and community movement are able to mobilise with enough militant force to seriously challenge Prime Minister Tony Abbott’s attacks on Medicare and the welfare system. Industrial action is one essential weapon in any strategy to take on the government.

We can learn from history about the capacity of the labour movement to act decisively, using industrial action to defend the political interests of working people.

### **General strike**

Almost 40 years ago, the union movement organised a national general strike to defend

Medibank — the precursor to Medicare — that was under attack by the then Coalition federal government of Malcolm Fraser.

Medibank had been introduced by the Gough Whitlam Labor government in 1974, largely dismantled under Fraser, and finally reintroduced as Medicare in 1984 under the Bob Hawke Labor government.

The following is an account of the lead-up to, and unfolding of, the Medibank general strike, in an article I wrote in July, 1976, published in *Direct Action*.

“In what was described by a number of union leaders as a historic decision, the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) has called its first ever 24-hour nationwide general strike for Monday July 12.

“The national strike call, which has never happened before in the 49-year history of the ACTU, came in a resolution from the ACTU executive which was endorsed by more than 200 delegates at the special national unions conference held in Sydney on July 5 and 6. The strike has been called in

opposition to the Liberal government's threat to dismantle Medibank.

"The strike decision has extremely far-reaching significance. It is a direct result of the powerful groundswell of opposition among working people to the Fraser government's economic policies, and especially to the threat to destroy Medibank.

"The build-up to July 12 has proceeded over a period of months, with a series of stoppages, rallies, marches and meetings all over the country. Chief among these were stoppages in Sydney, Brisbane, Newcastle and the NSW South Coast, and a number of shop stewards' and delegates' meetings in Victoria leading up to a state-wide four-hour stoppage on June 16 and the day-long strike called by the Victorian Trades Hall Council last June 30.

"All these, together with countless job meetings in many states, have set the scene for the biggest national strike in the history of the Australian labour movement.

"The strike is a reflection of a deepening polarisation of class forces as the government steps up its drive against welfare, jobs and wages. The intransigence of the Liberals in the face of intense criticism of its Medibank-wrecking proposals, (including some muted criticism even from usually conservative press sources), has shown their determination to throw back the major social gains made by workers during the period of the Labor government."

An article in the next issue of *Direct Action* described how the strike brought industry to a halt.

"Australia's first, nation-wide 24-hour strike around Medibank was a resounding success. This is the essential message of July 12.

"Around the country basic industry was brought to an almost total standstill. Transport, both in the public commuter sector and in the industrial and commercial area, was almost non-existent in most major cities. In the two biggest cities, Sydney and Melbourne, there was hardly a bus or truck on the road. No trains ran anywhere in the country.

"Warehouses were largely shut down, the waterfront was silent, and all scheduled flights from airports were cancelled. A considerable number of pubs were closed, as well as all other bars relying on members of the Liquor and Allied Trades Union, which called its members out.

"The strike seems to have been most effective in NSW and Victoria. The July 12 *Sydney Sun* reported: 'Of Victoria's workforce of about 500,000, about three-quarters were on strike, had been laid off or could not get to work, union sources estimated.'

"Victorian powerworkers severely restricted output, resulting in heavy power cuts to industry. According to the July 13 *Australian*, the deputy national director of the Metal Trades Industry Association, Ian Little, said there was a 'substantial shutdown' of Victorian plants.

"Keith Martin reported in the July 13 *Sydney Morning Herald*: 'Heavy industry in Sydney, Newcastle and Port Kembla was particularly hard hit. The steelworks at Newcastle and Port Kembla were closed, except for continuous process plants.

"In a 100-kilometre survey of key industrial centres in the Sydney suburbs, I found most major metal, engineering, building materials, chemical and other manufacturing industries closed.'

### Strike 'effective plus'

"In the view of Frank Bollins, an official of the NSW branch of the Amalgamated Metal Workers Union, the strike was 'effective plus'. He said that despite a massive effort by the employers to cut down the strength of the stoppage, they could not point to 'one major factory that was working', in Sydney.

"Max Taylor, the general secretary of the NSW Teachers Federation which backed the strike, described it as 'very successful', and as 'an important first step, so long as the ACTU continues with the Medibank campaign'. A considerable number of NSW schools were closed or had reduced attendance of staff and students on July 12.

"The July 13 *Australian* also reported: 'The steelworks and most of the shops were closed in Wollongong, and a spokesman said, "The city is paralysed."

"And: 'In South Australia, about 150,000 workers struck at a cost of \$100 million to industry. The state's three largest manufacturers, BHP, GM-H and Chrysler, were paralysed when 25,000 workers walked off. Work on all major building sites stopped as 12,000 building workers supported the strike.'

"The paper also reported that: 'More than 250,000 Queensland unionists took part in the strike.' The strike appears to have been

effective throughout most of Western Australia.

"The whole experience of July 12 has been invaluable for Australian workers, and quite unprecedented in this country. Not even the [anti-penal powers] upsurge around [the jailing of tramways union official] Clarrie O'Shea in 1969 involved so many unionists in action at once."

"Victory on the Medibank issue, especially if the government can be forced to drop all plans to introduce a Medibank levy, will be a vital first step in the defence of living standards overall. It would open the way to a new confidence in the face of Fraser's horror budget and the Liberals' wage-cutting schemes."

In the end, the great Medibank general strike of July 12, 1976 was not enough to force Fraser to drop his plans to undermine it as a universal national health scheme. The ACTU leadership under then-president Bob Hawke refused to follow up the 24-hour strike with further industrial action to defend Medibank.

However, the strike was a large show of force by the labour movement, which began the process of weakening the Fraser government, eventually leading to its defeat in the March 1983 federal election. The legacy of July 1976 was the campaign which led to the Hawke Labor government reintroducing a new, universal national health scheme in the form of Medicare in 1984.

Today, despite the changed conditions, we can learn much from the experience of 1976. If the union movement, together with the community campaigns against the Abbott government's attack on Medicare and the public sector in general, can gather momentum with a combination of industrial and political action, the government's offensive can be defeated. ■

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## Thousands turn out to support Millers Point

*Sydney / September 19, 2014 / Issue 1026*

The Save Millers Point spring picnic, held at Argyle Place in the heart of the historic inner suburb on September 14, drew thousands of people to support the campaign to stop the sale of public housing by the NSW Coalition government. Live music, market stalls, a free BBQ and information about the campaign were features of the day.

An art exhibition and film screening was held. In addition, a history walk took attendees on a tour of the unique architectural sites of the area.

A public forum heard speakers, including Sydney Mayor Clover Moore, independent state MP Alex Greenwich, Labor candidate for Sydney Eddie Lloyd, Greens councillor Irene Doutney, Maritime Union of Australia NSW secretary Paul McAleer, and

Save Millers Point campaign spokesperson Barney Gardner.

Doutney told the audience of several hundred in the Abraham Mott Hall: "Miller Point residents have tried everything to stop this sell-off. The bureaucrats of Housing NSW are working overtime to divide and conquer the community.

"This attack is a wake-up call for public housing tenants all over the state. We deserve to be treated with respect.

"There is absolutely no guarantee that money from the sale of Millers Point properties will go into funding public housing. Casinos are more important to the NSW government.

"Say no to the forced evictions. Stand with Millers Point residents."

Paul McAleer talked about the maritime

history of the area, including its involvement in major industrial disputes over the years. "Millers Point is losing its working class character to a gentrification process," he said.

"The Liberal government are thieves who are robbing our heritage. These corrupt politicians are the same people who robbed the Aboriginal people of their land.

"Long live Millers Point as a community, not as a rich enclave of thieves."

In discussion, calls were made to boycott any real estate agents involved in the sale of Millers Point public housing properties. Protests outside auctions of Millers Point houses will continue.

Barney Gardner reported that the Construction Forestry Mining Energy Union committee of management has decided to place a green ban on renovation work on sold-off Millers Point houses.

"Other unions are also getting on board the campaign," Gardner said. "The government won't succeed in getting us out." ■

## Behind Gough Whitlam's legacy

*October 31, 2014 / Issue 1031*

The passing of former Labor Prime Minister Gough Whitlam at the age of 98 on October 21 provoked a wave of emotion from the community, both young and old. At a time when the federal government is trying to smash the remnants of the progressive reforms initiated during the Whitlam government — in office from December 1972 to November 1975 — the Whitlam era seems like a period from another political universe.

A letter to the *Sydney Morning Herald* on October 23 summed up the mood: "The death of Gough Whitlam not only provided an opportunity for political midgets such as Bill Shorten and Tony Abbott to become authorities on giants ... It also showed how these two agree on almost everything else. The contrast with the Whitlam era is complete."

The election of Whitlam was greeted with widespread hope. An editorial in *Direct Action* newspaper of December 7, 1972, following the landslide victory of Labor in the December 2 election that year proclaimed: "Labor's return to power and

its crushing defeat of the L-CP [Liberal-Country Party] government is a landmark in postwar political life. It will be a great boost to the morale and confidence of the labour movement and its allies as they press forward in their struggles against the employers and for an end to their particular oppression."

Some big reforms were introduced immediately. *Direct Action* reported: "Australian workers got some immediate benefits from dumping the Liberals. The call-up [conscription] was ended after 30 minutes of Labor government; the Labor government intervened [to support] the equal pay [for women] case; the sales tax on contraceptives was dropped and they were placed on the pharmaceutical benefits list; South African sporting teams were banned from the country; [left-wing journalist] Wilfred Burchett's passport was returned; and steps were taken to preserve Aboriginal land rights and culture."

During the three years of the Whitlam government, some of the big gains included: bringing the troops home from the Vietnam War, and ending conscription; recognising

the People's Republic of China; abolishing the racist "White Australia" policy; ending tertiary education fees; introducing the universal national healthcare system Medibank (predecessor to Medicare); granting the first Aboriginal land rights; supporting equal pay for women, and funding women health centres and refuges; introducing law reform, including no-fault divorce; funding urban and regional development, including public housing and large-scale sewerage works; and expansion of financial assistance to the arts and cultural programs.

What prompted the government to make so many far-reaching reforms in a short period of time? The Whitlam Labor government came to power after 23 long years of Liberal-Country Party rule, ending an era of right-wing governments stretching back to the first Menzies win in 1949. The popular thirst for change was effectively captured in the ALP slogan, "It's Time!"

However, it is important to emphasise that the Whitlam victory occurred on the crest of a wave of popular mass struggles — most centrally the anti-Vietnam War moratoriums — and the rise of a new youth radicalisation that began on the university

*Continued over page*



November 11, 1975: Gough Whitlam on steps of Parliament after sacking.

campuses and spread to broad layers of society from the 1960s to the early 1970s.

This upsurge also involved the new wave of women's liberation, the growing Aboriginal rights movement, the start of gay liberation, and the modern environment movement. The youth revolt also challenged traditional authority roles in the family, education, morality, culture and politics.

The Australian movement was part of an international political explosion, fuelled by the growing anti-Vietnam War campaign, but including the civil rights and Black Power upsurge in the US, the new rise of international feminism, and anti-colonial and anti-racist struggles around the globe.

Highlights of this period included: the May-June 1968 student revolution in France, the anti-bureaucratic revolt expressed in the Prague Spring, and the wave of student dissent in universities and high schools in most countries of the developed capitalist world.

In Australia, the anti-war movement grew from a small minority to a mass movement expressed in the Moratoriums of 1970 and 1971. General anti-war sentiment gradually increased to become a large majority by the time of the 1972 election.

It was in this tumultuous social context that the Whitlam Labor government came

to power, carried on a huge wave of popular demand for real change. It was this mass pressure that forced the Whitlam government to initiate the reforms it brought forward.

However, Whitlam was not a left-winger in Labor. He established his authority in the party eventually, as part of the preparation for government, by intervening against the Socialist Left-controlled Victorian branch of the Labor Party.

As an article in *Green Left Weekly* from 1992, marking the 20th anniversary of the election of Whitlam, said: "Labor rode the anti-Vietnam War movement to power — though not before Whitlam had attempted to overturn former ALP leader Arthur Calwell's opposition to the war. In 1968, Whitlam almost lost the party leadership to anti-war campaigner Jim Cairns.

"Labor was elected also with considerable support from sections of the business elite — led by Rupert Murdoch's Australian — that considered Labor's foreign policy much more in tune with the reality of detente than was the Liberals' Cold War posture. Their hope was Labor would defuse the late 1960s mass movement and impose some form of wage freeze...

"With the recession of 1974-75 approaching, Labor gave grants to failing manufacturers, like the Leyland car-maker,

but did little to save threatened jobs. It unsuccessfully proposed a wage-price freeze referendum in the face of soaring prices, and then introduced a rigged indexation scheme to cut real wages. It retracted pledges on child care and abortion rights.

"With unemployment around 300,000, the highest in decades, Treasurer Bill Hayden's 1975 budget cut public spending and raised taxes, initiating the austerity program later taken up by the Fraser Coalition government. And when Labor turned a blind eye to Indonesia's invasion of East Timor in 1975 — and the murder there of Australian journalists reporting the invasion — many former sympathisers knew time was up for the Whitlam dream.

"Even so, public anger at the November 11, 1975, Fraser-Kerr coup was palpable. But in the face of mass demonstrations and strikes around the country, ALP president Bob Hawke called for 'restraint' and for 'law and order'. 'We must not substitute anarchy in the streets for the processes of democracy,' he pleaded. And he accurately claimed: 'We [the ALP] came to power to save the system.' Is it therefore surprising that Labor lost the December 1975 election in such dramatic style?

"Labor's post-Whitlam leadership studied the whole 1972-75 experience with

## Socialists make mark in Newcastle byelection

great intensity. Their conclusion: maintaining government means unflinchingly meeting the economic needs of capitalist big business, while at the same time holding down working-class pressures from below. The result; 10 years of Labor government under Hawke-Keating; 11 per cent unemployment; and real wages 20 per cent lower than a decade ago.”

More recently, Whitlam and Fraser are reported to have reconciled. And Fraser recalls that they both regretted the move even further to the right by the Liberal and Labor parties.

Today, the Abbott Coalition government represents the most far-right government in decades in this country. It is seeking to substantially roll back the social gains, not only of the Whitlam era, but of the whole post-Menzies period.

This occurs in a period of growing crisis for the capitalist system in Australia and internationally. The bipartisan, neoliberal offensive of the past 30 years is seeking to turn back basic gains made by working people over generations.

Meanwhile, the labour movement is at a turning point. The trade unions are in a weakened state and under escalating attack.

The ALP, which remains the second party of capital, turned to by the ruling elite when the class struggle threatens to spiral out of control, has moved even further right under the leadership of Bill Shorten.

The Labor left is a shadow of its former self. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Victorian Socialist Left was a strong force, holding mass meetings in Collingwood Town Hall to discuss the Vietnam War and key domestic issues. Today, the Labor left is a hostage to the ALP right-wing and has shrunk to being a minor player.

The real legacy of the Whitlam era is mixed: Many of the key social gains we are defending today against the Abbott barbarians are an essential part of that legacy.

But the other side of the Whitlam legacy is the confirmation that the ALP is not an instrument for fundamental political and social change in Australia. We now need to accelerate the vital task of building an alternative political movement to eventually challenge the status quo of big business rule, and to struggle for a socialist society. ■

*October 31, 2014 / Issue 1031*

“We talked about the real issues that the ALP couldn’t face up to and received a good hearing from local people,” Steve O’Brien, Socialist Alliance candidate for the Newcastle byelection on October 25, told *Green Left Weekly*.

The byelection followed the forced resignation of Liberal MPs for the state seats of Newcastle and Charlestown, who were implicated in corruption scandals.

In Newcastle, ALP candidate Tim Crakanthorp won with 37% of the first preference vote; Liberal-leaning independent Karen Howard received 26%; and Greens candidate Michael Osborne had 20%. Newcastle used to be a safe ALP seat.

O’Brien gained 2.6% or 1086 votes. In five booths he received more than 4%, and in five others he received more than 3%, to come sixth out of eight candidates.

About 80 people supported O’Brien’s campaign during the month-long build up to the election and on polling day.

“Our three main issues in the campaign were: a future beyond coal, anti-privatisation and saving the Newcastle rail line,” O’Brien said. “The Socialist Alliance campaign helped to force these issues to the forefront at candidates’ forums and in the local media.

“These are all issues we are involved in on a daily basis and by linking them we were able to make a case for socialism. The feedback we received was that our ideas made a lot of sense.

“We tied the question of jobs, for example, to the need to plan for a future beyond coal and the fight against privatisation.

“We met with activists campaigning against the closure of Stockton Hospital. This closure is mooted as part of the privatisation agenda being implemented as part of the National Disability Insurance Scheme.

“Our support for maintaining the inner city rail line, which is to be ripped up on Boxing Day, was linked to the community call for honest and democratic planning and disgust with corruption.”

In a feature article in the *Newcastle*

*Herald* on October 12, under the heading, “What a socialist member could do”, O’Brien wrote: “It was a Labor government that privatised the state dockyards, started to privatise electricity, began the talk about closing the Newcastle rail line, increased TAFE fees, ran down our public transport and sold off the state lotteries.

“The conservatives — whether ‘independent’ or Liberal — are no better. There is no mandate to close the rail line, privatise the port, run down TAFE, sack public servants or reduce public services.

“Life after coal — the source of much of the recent corruption — will come sooner, rather than later. I believe we need to start the shift towards renewable technologies now. New sustainable industries and green jobs are urgently needed in order to prepare for the post-coal economy.

“The Hunter could become a manufacturing hub for wind turbines and solar power technologies, rail carriages and ferries. A rebirth of local manufacturing would also create a need, leading to expansion of the region’s vocational training and higher education sector.

“An example of a practical measure I would take as the member for Newcastle would be to support the work of the Earthworker Cooperative, a community-led initiative that aims to create green jobs that empower local communities through the manufacture of solar hot water systems.

“Experience shows that socialists elected to public office can and do deliver. In Fremantle, Western Australia, thanks to an initiative of Sam Wainwright, a twice-elected Socialist Alliance city councillor, housing development in that city now includes a mandated provision for affordable housing. In Moreland, Victoria, thanks to an amendment by Sue Bolton, another elected Socialist Alliance city councillor, this city will be the first to move towards divestment from fossil fuel projects.

“I have lived in Latin America and been inspired by the ways in which progressive governments promote development

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# Stop the sell-off of NSW power assets

December 5, 2014 / Issue 1036

Almost 70% of NSW voters oppose the partial sale of state-owned electricity “poles and wires” assets, according to a Fairfax/Ipsos opinion poll reported in the November 24 *Sydney Morning Herald*. Only 29% say they support the NSW Coalition government’s plan to lease 49% of the power facilities to private corporations.

The same 69% of people also believe that electricity prices would rise if the sale goes through; while only 7% think prices would fall. About 20% consider prices would remain the same.

Underlining the tricky nature of opinion polls, the same survey showed that support for the sale, if the proceeds are used for infrastructure projects, rose to 55%, with 40% opposed.

Of course, if the pollsters had framed the question to include the fact that the government would simultaneously lose \$1.7 billion in annual dividends from the power industry, which is used to fund public health,

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through community and cooperative based structures. These measures show that there are real, workable and just alternatives to privatisation and corruption.

“The people of Newcastle want elected leaders they can trust, who are accountable, who reject bribes and put people and the planet before profits”.

One issue that was much discussed during the campaign was the fact that the Socialist Alliance was the only party to allocate preferences on its how to vote card.

It numbered all the squares, giving second preference to the Greens, third to the ALP and putting the Christian Democrats/Fred Nile group last.

Many people supported the Socialist Alliance’s decision to defend Australia’s unique preferential voting system, which is under increasing threat from the optional preferential system used in Newcastle by all other candidates, including the Greens.

Optional preferential, or Just Vote 1, in practice means a return to the undemocratic first-past-the-post system operating in Britain and the US. ■



Newcastle power station.

education and transport, the result would no doubt have been quite different again.

Under the headline, “The Baird ultimatum,” the November 26 *SMH* reported that Premier Mike Baird has effectively launched his campaign for the March state election with the pledge to spend the expected \$20 billion from the partial sale of electricity assets on road, rail and other infrastructure projects over the next decade.

But the infrastructure plan is contingent on the Coalition winning the election, Baird warned. “Because if we don’t win, not a cent will be spent.”

Susan Price, Socialist Alliance candidate for the NSW seat of Summer Hill said: “This is nothing more than ‘Baird blackmail’ on the NSW people.

“The Baird government is threatening to sell off the most valuable remaining public asset the state owns, in order to build tollways and privatised railways.

“It is nothing less than theft on a truly massive scale. The list of projects Baird says the government will fund from the sale of the power industry shows the overwhelming predominance of hand-outs to big corporations through so-called Public Private Partnerships (PPPs).

“The largest single allocation is \$7 billion for a second Sydney Harbour rail tunnel

crossing project, designed to link up the already planned private north-west rail link with the Bankstown rail line. Details are still sketchy, but it is clear the whole enterprise will be based on big business, rather than an extension of the public rail system.

“In fact, the danger is that this and other PPP rail projects could be the thin end of the wedge toward a fully privatised rail system in future. The disaster of the Kennett government’s sell-off of the public rail system in Melbourne should be a serious warning against this alarming prospect,” Price said.

“Moreover, there is a gigantic black hole in the costings presented by Premier Baird on November 25. While \$1.1 billion is supposedly allocated for extensions to the WestConnex privatised tollway project, where is the funding, estimated at up to \$10 billion in all, coming from for the main WestConnex road tunnel itself?

“This has never been spelt out in the projections for West Connex. This huge white elephant of a road should be stopped right now.

“Sydney needs more genuine public transport, not more polluting and traffic generating roads, which only create more demand for private cars and trucks. The people want more public transport, and the planet needs it,” Price said.

Meanwhile, the NSW Labor opposition and Shooters and Fishers Party (SFP) have warned that the Baird government's proposed 49% sale of the state-owned "poles and wires" companies is only the first stage of a full sell-off of the power industry to big business.

SFP leader Robert Borsak said if Baird is allowed to sell 49%, he will move to sell the remaining assets after the election, including Essential Energy, a regional provider that has been excluded from the transaction to secure the support of the Nationals.

Susan Price challenged all parties running in the March NSW state election to pledge not only to oppose the sale of all power assets, but to "renationalise the retail sector of the electricity industry which was privatised some years ago.

"The sell-off of retail electricity companies has led to a massive rise in power bills for the NSW community over recent years. This huge rip-off exposes the lie that privatisation leads to lower prices for power or any other service.

"This neo-liberal crusade to sell off all the remaining people's property, led by the Abbott government in Canberra and matched by Coalition (and previous Labor) governments in the states, including NSW, must stop right now.

"The Socialist Alliance calls for the nationalisation of the energy, mining and banking industries under workers' and community control, to be run in the interests of the people, the environment and Aboriginal rights." ■

## Other titles by Jim Mcllroy

- **The Red North** *Queensland's history of struggle.* Resistance Books, 2001, 32pp.
- **Australia's First Socialists.** Resistance Books, 2003, 56pp.
- **The Origins of the ALP** *A Marxist analysis.* Resistance Books, 2004, 60pp.
- **Voices from Venezuela** *Behind the Bolivarian Revolution.* With Coral Wynter. Resistance Books, 2008, 316pp.
- **Privatisation Is Theft** *The looting of NSW public assets.* Self-published, 2018, 28pp (A4).
- **Nationalise the Banks** *Public control need to end rip-offs.* Resistance Books, 2018, 20pp (A4).
- **A Radical Life** *A memoir by Jim Mcllroy.* Self-published, 2021, 344pp.
- **Writings from the Frontline** *Selected articles 1991-2008.* Self-published, 2022, 36pp (A4).

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## From the Frontline, Vol. 2

This is the second collection of articles, as part of a series, from *Green Left Weekly* (now *Green Left*) by veteran Australian socialist Jim McIlroy. They deal with the ongoing fight against capitalism and for radical social change, and span the period 2009-2014.

The articles range from interviews and reports on key Australian political events; interviews and reviews of struggles by Aboriginal leaders for Indigenous liberation in this country; first-hand coverage of the Bolivarian revolution in Venezuela, headed by inspirational leader then-President Hugo Chavez; reports on environmental campaigns, including the struggle against coal seam gas and the disastrous WestConnex tollway in Sydney; and a particular focus on the ongoing battles against privatisation of public assets, including Medicare, public housing and the power industry in NSW.

The collection covers a wide range of topics, highlighting the vital role of *Green Left* as the premier socialist publication in Australia, and as an organising voice for the building of a broad, radical eco-socialist movement in this country.



