

REDFLAG

**NO U.S. ATTACK
ON SYRIA**

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Newspaper of Socialist Alternative

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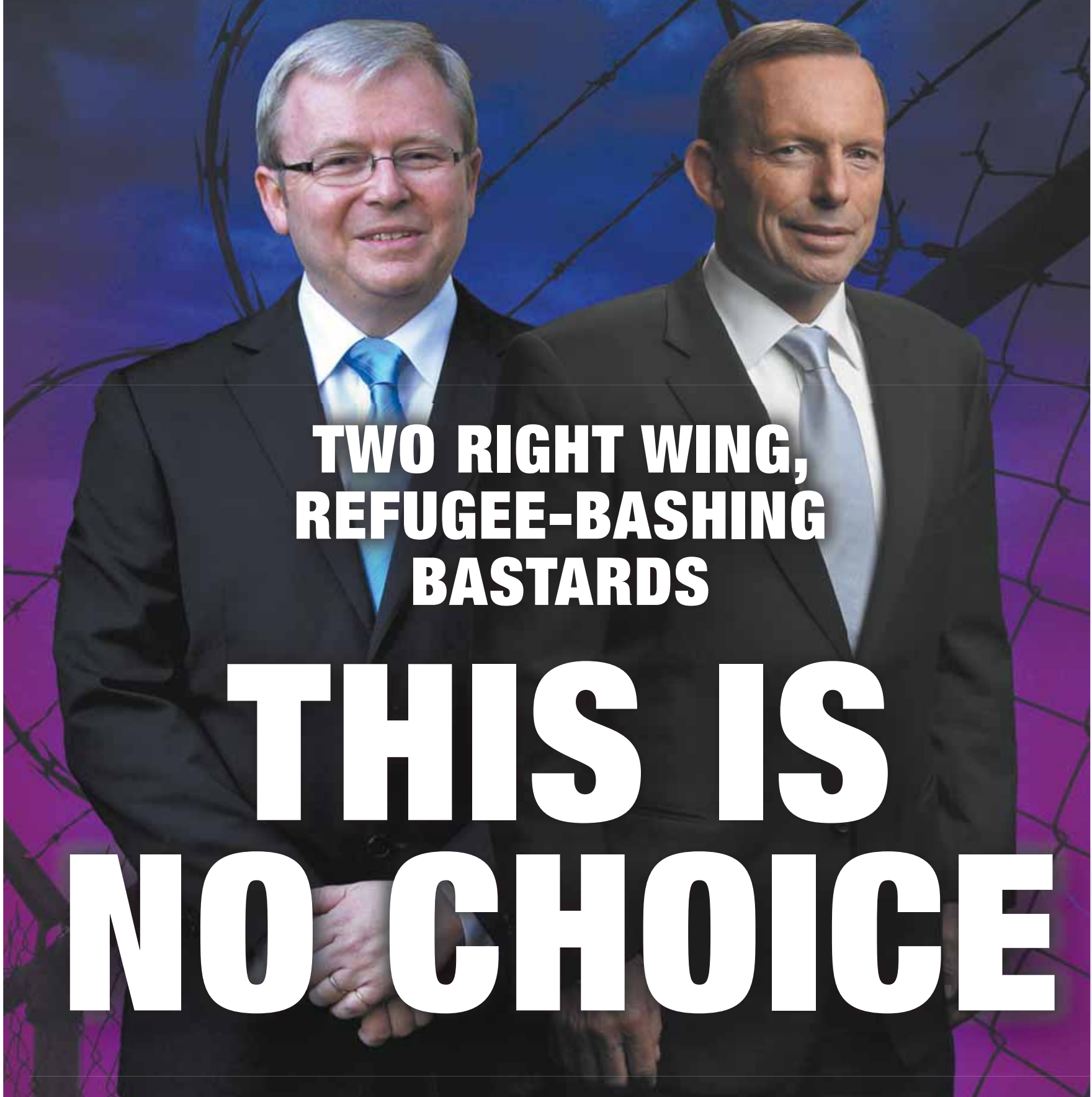
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EDITORIAL

A choice beyond the no-choice election

Tony Abbott has been reassuring everyone that his will be a "no surprises" government. In a sense he's right: if the Coalition wins the federal election, it won't be surprising at all when he and his filth-pot conservative mates start kicking workers and the poor in the teeth.

In May, shadow treasurer Joe Hockey declared in a speech to the Institute of Public Affairs that a Liberal government will usher in "the end of the era of universal entitlement ... and the reinvigoration of the culture of self-reliance".

He wasn't talking about ending the billions of dollars in government subsidies to mining and energy companies, or stopping the banks reaping billions from dubious fees. He was foreshadowing, as the *Financial Review's* Philip Coorey wrote, "drastic welfare and spending cuts".

In the lead-up to the election, Abbott and Hockey are now saying it isn't so; we've got nothing to fear. But this is the party of the born to rule – the caviar-munching, Gucci Brera two buttoned suit-wearing, silver spoons up their arses la-di-darlings who would have the rest of us on rations of stale bread and warm milk if they thought they could get away with it. Their word means nothing.

That they look on track to win convincingly is a tragedy – and one that was avoidable.

For so long our side has hesitated and wavered. Union leaders have insisted on "boxing clever" – a euphemism for not actually throwing any punches.

By "boxing clever" we have more and more learned to put up with a beating. It's become so natural that nobody seems to know how to fight any more: the Labor left has

disappeared in everything but name, and unions are in their weakest state in generations.

Left and union quiescence has allowed the ALP to shift unopposed to the right. The more it has shifted, and the more passive the union movement has become, the more the conservatives have been able to get a hearing.

Just look at western Sydney. That these North Shore slime suckers might actually pick up seats here is the greatest indictment of Labor – the party that made neoliberal economic policy "common sense".

The Australian ruling class has made no secret that it wants governments to increase the attacks on workers. The voices calling to ditch penalty rates, to make it easier to sack people, to stop unions getting into workplaces, have been getting louder. The Liberals will be more receptive to those calls than Labor has been. They should be put below the ALP at the ballot box.

But voting is not the most important thing. The choice for election 2013 is about whether we want to be stabbed in the back again by the ALP or punched in the face by the Liberals.

More important than the election outcome will be the extent to which people can mobilise to resist any and every cutback in the coming years. No matter who wins, we can't just sit and wait for the next attack.

We have to organise now on campuses, among the rank and file in workplaces and in the few campaigns that exist.

If our side continues to avoid the fight, we will continue to lose. There is nothing clever about that.

REDFLAG

We live in a world where "political struggle" is a sullied phrase. The term evokes dishonesty and the kind of vacuous, self-serving antics that are on display whenever we look at the major parties of Australia politics. If the parliament is all there is to "politics", then it is wholly understandable that most people want nothing at all to do with it.

But there is another kind of politics: the politics of resistance and struggle. Over the past few years – from the Arab revolutions to Occupy in Europe – people have time and again taken to the streets, organised in their communities and their workplaces, and set themselves the task of fighting for a better world.

This politics of resistance is what *Red Flag* is about.

We took the name *Red Flag* because it represents solidarity, struggle and internationalism, but also because it stands for socialism – a world organised to meet human need, not the interests of the rich minority that currently in control.

Out of the struggles against the injustices of our current system, we want to be part of building a new socialist movement that can mount a challenge to the whole structure of capitalist rule. This is an enormous task. But the courage of the thousands of people resisting oppression and injustice from one side of the planet to another, gives us confidence that the future belongs to all of us.

WHAT IS REDFLAG ABOUT?

Telling the truth. The capitalist press is full of lies, distortions and right wing bias. We need an alternative press, free from corporate interests and government spin, to provide news and analysis of major developments in our world.

Supporting resistance. Those that own and control the corporate media are hostile to people fighting for their rights. They make money out of the exploitation and oppression of workers and the poor. Red Flag is a paper on the side of the oppressed, telling the story from our side and giving solidarity to those in struggle.

Fighting for socialism. Red Flag is about more than just highlighting problems with the system, or supporting individual struggles. It campaigns to win people to socialism, to convince them that the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism is the solution to the problems of society.

Intervening in struggles. Red Flag's socialist politics doesn't just mean general arguments for socialism. Red Flag is an interventionist paper, bringing socialist arguments to the debates of today about how we can best mount a fightback, what tactics and strategies are needed to take on the right. And while Red Flag will fight for the views of Socialist Alternative, the paper is also a forum in which crucial questions on the left can be debated.



What this election should have been about, but wasn't

Mick Armstrong

Election day is meant to be *the* day when we get to have our say over the vital decisions that impact our lives – the day we determine the future of the country for the next three years.

The lead-up to election day surely should be a time of great excitement, animated discussions, vibrant debate, of close examination of alternative plans for the future and of mass mobilisation of popular sentiment behind one or another candidate.

Yet for this election, most people are disinterested, bored and cynical. Rather than millions of workers feeling this is a time when they have some say over their lives, they feel disempowered.

They rightly recognise that there is no real choice on offer. Labor and Liberal are but pale imitations of each other. Neither party seriously addresses the key issues impacting our lives, let alone offers genuine solutions to our problems.

Let's start with the issue that the opinion polls indicate people are most concerned about: jobs. With the winding down of the mining boom and the pitiful level of the dole – just \$497 a fortnight for a single person – they are right to be worried.

Other than meaningless rhetoric about the budget deficit and posturing about who is the best economic manager, neither Rudd nor Abbott offers anything on jobs. Both of them accept that an official unemployment rate of 5-6 percent (which significant-

ly understates the real level of joblessness and underemployment) is necessary to ensure that workers don't become too uppity and demand decent wages.

Yet there is no shortage of work to be done. For starters, the health sys-

Neither party seriously addresses the key issues impacting our lives, let alone offers genuine solutions to our problems.

tem is chronically understaffed. There is a desperate need for more staff in emergency wards and more paramedics.

Training and employing more nurses and doctors would dramatically cut the waiting lists for elective surgery. As well, the public health system should be expanded to cover dental care and support services.

Aged care in particular is chronically understaffed and poorly paid. Construction workers losing their jobs on mining projects could build hospitals, health care centres, aged care facilities and many other vital projects.

One glaringly obvious project would be a massive expansion of high quality, low cost public housing. This would both tackle homelessness and put a downward pressure on rents and thus raise living standards across the board.

There are myriad other jobs that construction workers could be employed on – childcare centres, a massive expansion of the rail network, renewable energy projects and new

schools. These projects in turn would generate a wave of other jobs – teachers to train the extra nurses and construction workers, factory workers to produce the materials.

None of the parties want to talk about these sorts of initiatives. There

is a consensus among the media and the politicians that there is no money for such projects. Yet governments never have any trouble finding billions of dollars to lock up refugees in concentration camps.

In any case, the big banks and the mining tycoons are flush with cash. For decades, Labor and Liberal governments competed to slash taxes on the rich and big business. Australia now has one of the smallest shares of tax paid by companies and the rich of any advanced industrial country. This is another issue that none of the politicians want to talk about.

Why? Because all the major parties – Labor, Liberal and Greens – are committed to maintaining the capitalist system. All of them are committed to boosting profits at our expense.

Vital projects that cut into profits, such as public housing, free health care, free child care and a decent pension, are axiomatically ruled out.

Or take another issue that impacts the great majority of us – the quality of our working lives. For decades, the advocates of the free market and

small government like the Institute of Public Affairs have campaigned for government deregulation of big business and greater workplace “flexibility”. This approach has been embraced by both the Liberals and Labor. The core of Howard's anti-worker WorkChoices legislation remains intact despite six years of Labor government.

And for all the talk by the free marketers of greater individual freedom and ending the “nanny state”, the reality is that there are much greater legal restrictions on what workers can do at work than at any time in the last 100 years.

Under Labor's WorkChoices-lite, the bosses have been granted “flexibility” to undermine our wages and working conditions and to ensure that basic safety provisions are not enforced.

But if workers object to being bullied or pushed around by some bastard of a boss or are worried about unsafe conditions, they are legally denied the basic right to withdraw their labour.

Even holding a meeting at work is illegal. As for a strike, the labyrinthine rules and regulations that you have to comply with make the idea that we have a legal right to strike utterly meaningless.

Whether Labor or the Liberals win on 7 September, none of this is about to change for the better. We need to change totally the framework of politics in this country so that the rights of workers and the oppressed are put front and centre.

The media are as bad as the politicians

Diane Fieldes

Is the US *Daily Show's* comedy coverage of the Australian election – which focussed on a idiot candidate who couldn't remember his own party's policies, a sexting scandal involving red wine and a racist who thought Islam was a country – really that different from that of the serious Australian media (or the *Australian*)?

When it's not pratfalls and gaffes, we are served a diet of opinion polls that tell us whether more of us rate Rudd or Abbott as trustworthy. Article after article questions politicians' style and performance.

The "quality" press, such as the *Sydney Morning Herald* or the *Age*, are just as much content-free zones as the Murdoch papers.

For example, the *Sydney Morning Herald's* 24 August editorial began like this: "With two weeks left, we know that trust will determine who prevails on election day."

It concluded with that other important policy, "stability", and who was more likely to deliver it, and a final sentence as anodyne as the beginning: "Abbott must prove that he deserves to be trusted enough to become prime minister."

Nothing about the fact that the only thing we can trust in is that, whoever wins, their policies will be right wing, anti-working class and

racist.

A cursory glance at any news website will yield a tonne of this dross: "Australia is getting used to the idea of Tony Abbott, prime minister", apparently because of his "deliberate effort to throw the switch from negative to positive, from angry opposition leader to measured potential prime minister".

Over and over there's the same crap about confidence and other intangibles. While we are told Abbott has "polished and direct delivery and ... facility for distilling messages into digestible 'grabs'", Rudd's problem appears to be that he's "often verbose". Why don't we just read the entrails of some dead animal and be done with it?

Labor's contempt for its supporters doesn't figure much in explaining why it looks like losing the election. Cutting welfare benefits for single mothers and refusing to increase the poverty-level dole, while raising almost nothing from the mining tax on the super-rich doesn't help its cause.

Yet none of this finds anywhere near the analysis of "commonsense reasonableness", "extraordinary stamina and growing confidence" and similar tripe.

The media virtually never call the parties to account over real issues. The question is only whether or not the latest development is a

Article after article questions politicians' style and performance. But seldom is anyone seriously challenged on policy.

good move in terms of wedging the opponent, rather than whether it will be good for workers and the poor. If you want to find sharp questioning that attempts to hold a politician to account, you need to lower yourself to the depths of watching billionaire buffoon Clive Palmer being grilled by *Lateline's* Emma Albarici.

And then the calling to account is really just a calling back to planet Earth: is the Palmer United Party really going to win 15 seats? Is your policy what's on your website or what pops into your head during this interview? And so on.

There is one place where the real issues of which class benefits and which class is being screwed gets some airing (apart from the pages of *Red Flag*, of course).

The business pages and the more in-house journals of the capitalist class like the *Australian Financial Review* are more revealing.

The *Sydney Morning Herald* economics editor, Ross Gittins, did write an article titled "Rich win big with class warfare in session", which correctly identifies the class war being waged by the rich with the help of the major parties:

"If you think the class war is over, you're not paying enough attention. The reason the well-off come down so hard on those who use class rhetoric is that they don't want anyone drawing attention to how the war's going. All of them except Warren Buffett, the mega-rich American investor. 'There's class warfare, all right,' he once said, 'but it's my class, the rich class, that's making war, and we're winning.'"

But he then went on to blame it on us: "The workers are too busy watching telly to notice the ways they're being got at. It requires attention to boring things like superannuation when you could be up the club playing the pokies."

There's a much better explanation of why, for example, a quarter of voters under 25 have failed to enrol. An Australia Institute survey of under-25s indicated that 40 percent felt that none of the political parties represented the interests of young people.

Professor Ian McAllister of the Australian National University says of his election surveys, "Young people are not any less interested in politics. They are just not interested in what is being offered." And so say all of us.

Pre-election rallies against education cuts

PHOTO: DANIEL TAYLOR.



Sarah Garnham

The latest round of demonstrations against cuts to university funding, on 20 August, brought out students and staff across the country. The biggest turnout was in Melbourne, where 1,000 people marched through the streets and delivered our message directly to the office of newly appointed education minister Kim Carr.

The cuts, which were introduced earlier this year by the Labor government, will cut off thousands of students' much needed Centrelink payments and will cut some university budgets by more than \$50 million. This will inevitably give universities an excuse to continue with their national agenda of cancelling courses, increasing class sizes and casualising and sacking staff.

For these reasons, the staff union, the NTEU, has been opposed to the government's cuts since they were announced. But for the first time in the campaign, the NTEU called strike

action on some campuses to coincide with the demonstrations, and in Melbourne it mobilised at least 400 staff to attend.

The demonstrations were an important intervention into the federal election, in which both major parties are committed to the cuts and to increasing privatisation of our education system.

Both Labor and Liberal are also for diverting money from things like education in order to fund their cruel and barbaric policies towards refugees. Importantly, pro-refugee chants and speeches featured on the demonstrations.

It is now important to start to plan the next steps for the campaign against the cuts. Students cannot afford to allow the incoming government a honeymoon.

We need to organise another round of demonstrations and we need to continue to rebuild an activist culture within the student body and the student unions so that we can fight future attacks.



Australian bosses prepare for war

Jerome Small

As the Liberals prepare for government, some major employers are preparing for war. Australia needs "a dose of Margaret Thatcher" according to Mark Adamson, the boss of Fletcher Building Ltd, one of the largest construction companies in Australia.

His sentiments are echoed throughout sections of corporate Australia.

It's not all huffing and puffing, either. A major dispute is brewing in the offshore oil and gas sector. Chevron, a global giant with over \$26 billion in annual profit, is gearing up for a fight with the Maritime Union of Australia's West Australian branch – one of the few unions in the country to win significant gains for its members out of the mining boom.

The Liberals and big business seem to want to take us on one union at a time – just like Thatcher

Other companies have launched vicious attacks against their workforces and their unions. After a massive propaganda barrage, Brisbane abattoir Teys Brothers is trying to force through a non-union collective agreement that eradicates key conditions.

Also in Queensland, global mining giant Glencore-Xstrata has shut down its mine in Collinsville, where coal has been mined for a hundred years. Re-opening it, says the company, will depend on workers abandoning long-established conditions won by generations of militant Collinsville miners.

In the meantime, the company is shutting the mine, leaving workers to rot. According to ABC Radio reports, the company is hiring large numbers of security guards and potential scabs, in anticipation of a major dispute.

The Liberals have been careful to keep industrial relations policy low profile in this election campaign. They have learned some lessons from their defeat in 2007, following their across-the-board WorkChoices offensive on working conditions. WorkChoices inspired a number of massive set piece strikes and a significant electoral backlash.

This time the Liberals are picking their targets more carefully. They don't have to repeat the broad assault, as much of WorkChoices remains in place through Labor's "Fair Work" regime. The Liberals also calculate that a combination of complex but very significant changes to the law can assist employers in smashing union power.

The *Australian Financial Review* recently explained: "The Coalition's policy largely leaves workers' entitlements alone but the same cannot be said for unions. They will be squarely in the Coalition's sights." Of course, if unions are dramatically weakened, employers will find it straightforward to trash conditions.

The strategy of the union movement for a generation has been to avoid all-out confrontation, under Liberal or Labor. That's been a dismal failure, as the past 30 years of retreat and defeat show. Keeping quiet under Labor has only paved the way for more significant attacks.

The Liberals and big business seem to want to take us on one union at a time – just like Thatcher. Our best strategy is the exact opposite – to stick together and fight like hell.

IN PLAIN ENGLISH

What's the difference between Liberal and Labor on workplace rights?



Our short, easy to understand guide to the different aspects of workplace policy of the major parties.

Allowable matters

Under Howard's WorkChoices laws, it was illegal for unions to bargain over issues including contracting out, casualisation or labour hire. Eliminating these rules on "allowable matters" was one of the few genuine reforms under Labor. Under Liberal policy, the Fair Work Commission will have to be satisfied that all union claims are "fair and reasonable" and that they "won't adversely affect productivity". Almost anything that gets in the way of making a profit can be ruled out under this description.

Industrial action

Already, under Labor, it is illegal for workers simply to meet together and decide to go on strike. Even when an enterprise agreement has expired, there has to be a series of negotiations, a secret ballot and three days' notice so the boss can minimise the impact of the strike.

The Coalition will keep all this, and also has a policy that "protected industrial action can only happen after there have been genuine and meaningful talks between workers and business". The Coalition criticises the result of the legal case involving JJ Richards, a transport company that simply refused to negotiate with the Transport Workers Union. When the union applied to take industrial action, the company argued that this should not be allowed – because there had been no negotiations! The company lost this case, but it seems that this approach will be legal under the Liberals.

'Greenfields' sites

A huge amount of damage was done under the "greenfields" clauses of WorkChoices. Companies could shut down a factory or warehouse, restart the business at a new location and dictate terms. Decent wages and conditions disappeared. Many unions signed terrible, concessionary "greenfields" deals just to get in the door, with the aim of improving the standard afterward. There are still difficulties under Fair Work, but unions can negotiate and, if there is no outcome, unions can start pursuing bargaining as soon as the "greenfields" site opens.

Under the Liberals, unless the unions agree to the bosses' terms, they would be forced into arbitration, which overwhelmingly favours employers. Bosses would have to negotiate only with the "main" un-

ion, which makes it even easier for bosses to make sweetheart deals with grubby right wing unions like the AWU.

Right of entry

Under WorkChoices, union organisers had to give 24 hours' notice before they could access a work site to investigate a breach of employment standards. They had to specify what breach had occurred, which made it hard to maintain the confidentiality of the worker. And the boss could dictate where organisers were allowed to go in a workplace, and how they were allowed to get there – down to which route they could walk!

All of these restrictions were maintained under Labor's "Fair Work" laws. Not all unions abide by these provisions, and not all bosses enforce them. But they can be a serious obstacle to unions trying to establish a presence in a workplace. It's common for management to restrict union meetings to an area just outside the boss's office. (Labor has just made it legal to use lunch rooms for union meetings.)

The Liberals want to keep all the restrictions, tighten administrative requirements and end right of entry at workplaces where unions are not already party to an enterprise bargain – that is, where unions are relatively weak.

Anti-union bodies

The Liberals will establish a Registered Organisations Commission to police the internal affairs of unions.

The Liberals will re-establish the Australian Building and Construction Commission. The introduction of the ABCC in 2005 caused a sharp spike in workplace deaths and injuries, as it sued unions that stopped work in protest at poor safety. Labor has made things easy for the Liberals by keeping the ABCC going, with reduced penalties, as part of the Fair Work Commission. The new ABCC will police "onshore and offshore" construction, targeting the Maritime Union as well as traditional construction unions.

The Liberals have also indicated support for attacks on weekend penalty rates, extending "individual flexibility agreements", scrapping the "safe rates" road transport tribunal; and turning exploitative 457 visas into a "mainstay" of immigration policy.



Who's who in the minor party mayhem?

When you're handed a Senate ballot the size of a small bed sheet, you'd be forgiven for thinking there might be someone or something on it worth voting for. Surely among the dozens of intriguingly named political groupings, the ma and pa stores of the voting world, someone will stand for something decent.

Unfortunately, this is by and large not the case. Navigating your Senate ballot is above all else an exercise in avoiding inadvertently casting a vote for a far right religious lunatic or worse, one of several disgruntled ex-One Nation candidates fed up with the bleeding heart liberalism of the refugee debate.

A casually misplaced digit could easily have you unwittingly fuel some nut-job's campaign to have Chiko rolls recognised as the official national food or compulsory forced labour for migrants. So be careful, and consult this guide by **Louise O'Shea** before numbering anything.

General rule of thumb

Anything with the word "Australia" in it – Rise Up Australia, Australia First, Australian Independents, Australian Voice – is likely to be a borderline fascist grouping, if not outright fascist. It will generally involve some version of a return to White Australia and a policy platform featuring compulsory Southern Cross tattoos for primary schoolchildren. You will probably recognise the candidates from the Cronulla riots. There are many of these, so be careful.

Sex Party

If you're the kind of person who needs an entire room to store your porn collection and resents the fact that moral prudery and government interference prevent you from acquiring more, this is the group for you. Established as the political arm of the sex industry (the party's leader, Fiona Patton, is also the CEO of the industry's peak body, the Eros Association) the party is accordingly committed to the interests of its small business constituency. Opposing censorship and other government restrictions relevant to the sex industry gives it a libertarian gloss, but this is solely in order to make more money from the exploitation of sex and those who work in the sex industry. It takes no stand in support of social justice where it does not assist in generating greater profits for sex industry bosses. This is reflected in Sex Party preferencing, which has

placed One Nation in NSW and other far right parties elsewhere ahead of left wing groups and the Greens.

Animal Justice Party

You'll be surprised how many animals have political grievances when you read the Animal Justice Party's policies. Whether it's day release for lab rats, better working conditions for circus animals or breaking down the false dichotomy between introduced and native species, if an animal somewhere is suffering, the AJP is on to it. While they are one of the few minor parties that is not merely a means to channel votes to the Liberals, the fact that they are more inclined to speak out against the mistreatment of cows on boats than that of human beings does not win them any points in my book. They may also represent a serious threat to steak nights, if not steak in general.

Motoring Enthusiasts

How these lunatics got 500 people to sign a party registration form for them is a mystery. Really enjoying car driving is what unites them, and the non-uniformity of vehicle modification standards across state lines is what angers them. Basically their dream is to be able to drive across state lines in a modified car without worrying. They'd also like to be able to take their big cars onto Aboriginal land more often, with a bit of extra hunting and fishing thrown in. Needless to say, their preferences

go to the Liberal Party in most states.

Wikileaks Party

Possibly the most short-lived experiment in electoral history, the Wikileaks Party crashed pretty early on the rocks of preference deals. Suggesting that transparency in government is perhaps not a sufficient basis for a coherent political party, the competing interests of ex-Liberals, ex-Greens and some maverick personalities have rendered what might have been a serious challenge to the Australian electoral scene fairly impotent. Democratic structures that bring together people with a shared political world view are essential for a political party to function, and it seems the Wikileaks ethos may have been a little too broad and heterogeneous. The preferencing of far right groups like Australia First as well as the National Party ahead of left wing tickets and the Greens in some states has not only caused bitter internal division and resignations from the party, but has also discredited it in the eyes of many who admired Assange and Wikileaks' courage in speaking truth to power.

Outdoor Recreation/Smokers Rights/Liberal Democratic Party

All somehow nefariously connected to the Liberal Democratic Party – a pro-free market, Ron Paul-loving right wing libertarian outfit.

Don't get sucked in, smokers: there won't be any state funded cancer wards if these characters get their way (although there will be more legal camping areas).

Bullet Train for Australia

More or less self explanatory. Pro-business and preferencing the Greens, who are keen on trains in an environmental rather than spotting kind of way.

Pirate Party

Their main concerns are surveillance, data retention and copyright reform, although they also have policies in a range of other areas that are broadly socially progressive. Their candidates are younger than most of the other parties and are generally fed up with being governed by "a class of self-confessed technological illiterates". They are part of an international movement, their counterparts in Germany and Sweden attracting a significant, if still small, vote in elections there. They are preferencing the Greens.

Stop CSG

Although attempting to tap into the anti-coal seam gas feeling and campaigning that has been done around the issue in NSW and Queensland, the preference allocators have alienated whatever left wing base they had by placing the sexist Non-Custodial Parents Party and various other far right groups ahead of the Socialist Alliance and Greens.

Socialist Alliance

The only principled left wing party running for the Senate. They stand for workers' rights, against the PNG deal, offshore processing and mandatory detention of refugees, in support of public education and for marriage equality. Their members are actively involved in various campaigns for social justice and workers' rights. They have preferenced other left wing candidates and the Greens in a principled fashion. The only drawback is that you can vote for them in the Senate only in NSW, although they are also running in six lower house seats.



Katter's Australian Party

A populist outfit able to pick up votes from the left and right. Katter champions the "little guy" and boiling billies at campfires and talks about men fishing together a lot, but his stand against the carbon tax and privatisation marks him as someone who also seems to care about the economic interests of working class people. His social values are conservative by 1950s standards, attacking the right wing Qld Premier Campbell Newman, of all things, for his perceived (although non-existent) support for marriage equality.

Palmer United Party

The only minor party to have nominated a candidate in every lower house seat and a Senate team in each state, which just goes to show that money really can buy just about anything. Run by the billionaire mining magnate and Liberal Party defector Clive Palmer, the party stands for pretty much what you would expect: stopping the class war (aka smashing unions), cutting income tax, building a stronger Australia (aka further enriching Australian bosses), as well as some things you wouldn't, such as more government spending on social services and subsidised flights to Australia for asylum seekers. While Palmer's criticisms of Kevin Rudd's hair are fairly unobjectionable, the rest of the PUP agenda hinges on the interests of the mining industry and must be opposed.

The above groups are just a selection of what is on offer in this election. Sadly, more options in this case do not correlate with more choice. The plethora of small, mostly right wing tickets that have somehow managed to complete the necessary paperwork and assemble the requisite supporters does nothing to make our society more democratic. It simply aids the electoral interests of the larger right wing parties and gives conservative cranks a platform they don't deserve. What's sorely missing is any sort of serious electoral grouping based in the labour movement that is committed to standing up for workers' rights and making their top priority the day to day economic and political pressures on working class people and the oppressed.

Better than Labor, but Greens are not the answer

The ALP has become so appalling that it is understandable that left wing people want alternatives at the ballot box.

The Greens continue to be a pole of attraction in that regard. They have consciously positioned themselves more to the left in this election campaign.

Against the inhuman asylum seeker policies of the big parties, they have attempted to provide a much needed counter-narrative about human rights. They also advocate a range of policies that are more traditionally social democratic, such as lifting the paltry level of the dole and taxing big business to fund social spending.

Yet despite these policies, the Greens are not a genuine left alternative to the ALP. The party does have radical roots in some places. But the years of orienting to parliament, of running local councils and of sitting in committees at a state and federal level have left their mark.

The most damning event in their recent history was signing the deal with Labor in 2010. It was clearly not about advancing a progressive agenda, but simply about getting more power for Greens

MPs. Since that time they have done little in office but go along with Labor and tried not to rock the boat.

The great exception was the anti-worker carbon tax. But on that front the Greens were actually the champion of this neo-liberal piece of legislation.

Outside of professional politics the party has become increasingly invisible, opting to mobilise members mainly for electoral purposes like letter boxing and door knocking at election time, rather than in progressive campaigns.

And it is most telling that since their arrival as a third force more than a decade ago, as an organisation they have remained aloof from the workers' movement.

Things would be different if they had a base in the unions and were trying to organise a fight-back or having a go at rebuilding a rank and file. But they don't and they're not.

So while the Greens should be put above Labor and the Liberals on 7 September, we need to look elsewhere to build a fighting left alternative to the ALP.

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Equal pay decision means nothing without a fight

Cecilia Judge, Chair of ASU Metropolitan Delegates Committee, Melbourne

Whoever said that battles are won in the street, not the courtroom, had sage advice for community sector workers. More than a year after a significant legal victory, we're still fighting for equal pay.

Last year, Fair Work Australia (now the Fair Work Commission) recognised that workers in the community sector are paid considerably less for doing the same work as workers in other sectors like government and health. It was a historic decision. The commission accepted that the wage disparity was due to the fact that most community sector workers are women.

The win came on the back of a five year campaign that drew in thousands of workers. We rallied, we argued, we recruited to the union (Australian Services Union) and we made equal pay an issue that wouldn't go away. Our campaign undid the idea that community workers are in the job for an emotional reward and should be grateful for whatever we get. The ASU grew at a rate that defied the trend in union membership. It became relevant to many workers for the first time because it became a union that fought.

However, our fight is far from over. The legal decision, significant as it was, left a loophole, a way out for community sector bosses. The wording means that community sector agencies can try to absorb extra funding that is supposed to pay for our wage increases.

Furthermore, workers in the sector are currently being transitioned to a "modern" award as part of the award "modernisation" process started by the Labor government in 2008. A number of agencies are using this as a chance to reclassify workers at lower levels. Lower classifications will mean workers lose thousands over



Equal pay for community workers suddenly matters less than padding the bottom line of the organisations they work for.

the phase-in period set down by the commission's equal pay decision.

All of this will chip away at the pay and conditions of workers who are currently paid above award rates and setting the standard for the sector. This, in turn, will lower pay and conditions for everyone.

What makes these attacks particularly loathsome is that they are coming from the very agencies that once claimed to be partners in the fight for equal pay. In the lead-up to the court case, most community sector bosses signed on as supporters of equal pay.

They wrote letters to politicians, and some even let workers attend the street rallies in paid time.

But that was when an equal pay campaign meant a fight with government for more funding for the sector. That's a fight that community workers and our union have largely won. Now the bosses have changed their tune. Equal pay for community workers suddenly matters less than padding the bottom line of the organisations they work for with the extra funding meant for wages.

However, it's not all bad news; the

struggle for equal pay is continuing in the workplace. ASU members at the Tenants Union of Victoria took strike action and set an important precedent for an enterprise bargaining clause to protect equal pay and prevent the absorption of extra funding. Workers at Mind Australia have also taken industrial action. They are right now in the middle of a battle for an enterprise agreement that preserves the benefits of the equal pay decision as well as their existing conditions. These struggles serve as important examples and lessons for all of us.

As long as our bosses continue their fight, ours too does not end, not until every last cent of equal pay is in our pockets, not theirs.

Queensland LNP no friend to union members



Paul DM

Under the guise of making unions more "accountable" to their members, the state Liberal National Party government is forcing Queensland unions to publish their spending details online from this month. In the latest attempt to undermine the key force in the state that can resist its attacks on workers and the poor, the LNP is accusing unions of "winning and dining" at members' expense.

Under the new rules, credit card statements, along with details of political donations, campaign costs and salaries of union employees, must be uploaded to a publicly viewable site each month. Predictably, employers and their organisations will not

be subject to the same requirements.

Union members should reject outright any notion that the LNP is acting in our interests. Unions are correct to argue that this is simply the latest in an ongoing smear campaign aimed at further weakening the ability of unions to fight the LNP's agenda. Given the LNP's track record, with mass sackings and constant attacks on our unions, it is contemptible for it to feign concern for the interests of union members. This is a cynical attempt to foster discontent among members as a means of breaking down unity in our organisations.

Members have every right to demand accountability from our unions. We should insist that the leadership act in our

interests at all times and that our unions have democratic structures that ensure we have control over union activities. But the priorities of our unions, including how they spend our dues, are no one's business but ours. It should be for union members alone to pass judgment on the performance of our officials.

Campbell Newman and his cronies want a union movement that is weak, divided and unable to mount a serious fight back. Those who want strong and united unions that can push back his agenda should not be fooled by LNP posturing about accountability. We need to be clear that the LNP is no friend to union members and reject its feeble attempt to fool us into thinking otherwise.

Standing up to transphobia in the workplace

Angela Domingos speaks to Red Flag's Liz Ross

"Divide and conquer" has long been the watchword of the ruling class. Capitalism forces workers into competition with each other – local versus foreign-born, skilled versus unskilled etc – exploiting every opportunity to keep workers divided.

While unions are the first line of defence against attempts to divide us, to attack our conditions, not everyone is in a unionised workplace.

That's the case for Angela Domingos. "I grew up with the belief that working people from all walks of life need to join a union in order to obtain a voice at work", but she is the only union member among hundreds of other workers.

However, that didn't stop her standing up for what was right. "I couldn't ignore attempts made by my employer to divide and bully us, the workers. I couldn't wait for a union body to represent us, simply because there is none on the job!"

Deciding she couldn't close her eyes or shut her ears to the unjust treatment of a transgender colleague, she decided to get her workplace together to talk about what was happening. Without union protection, it was a risky move to discuss workplace issues with a group of fellow workers.

So, under the guise of a special morning tea, Angela took up the question of transphobia. Challenging others to "walk a mile" in their co-worker's shoes, she asked them how they'd feel if people mistreated them because they came from Italy or had red hair, were left-handed, Catholic or Muslim and so on.

"Not everyone was supportive. I didn't expect such a 'utopian' result." But it certainly helped change attitudes. "What is important is that we

achieved the right for a transgender employee to dress as they chose providing they followed the company dress code.

"In addition, we were able to secure the right for our fellow worker to be addressed by their preferred name and without any need for gender references. Then we were able to negotiate the abolition of gender identification requirements on forms.

"This was further validated by an announcement received by employees from the CEO stating that the company stands for 'gender equality'."

The CEO tried to implement longer working hours (without pay) outside the current signed work agreement. So at another morning tea, "Workers in my section agreed to take action, to walk out at the stated time with a copy of the signed agreement in hand."

However, "Management was not just going to take this on the chin without retaliation. So they have taken away the 'lunch room', but we have now reclaimed the very public space of the foyer for our get-togethers – much to management's displeasure!"

As Angela says, "Not all workers find themselves in workplaces with high union membership, a delegate structure and so on, but this shows that it need not be a barrier to beginning to raise workplace issues with co-workers and to start to build a presence as a union activist.

Indeed, taking even small steps of organising regular opportunities to talk to colleagues about whatever issue you can find to relate to is an important step in laying the basis for future recruitment to the union." And even finding an audience for Red Flag.

University workers make it six in a row

Alma Torlakevic, branch committee member, Sydney University NTEU

Nearly a year into bargaining at Sydney University, the fight has come down to wages. A strike on 20 August was held to send a clear message to management that a pay cut is unacceptable. This action brings the strike tally for the campaign to six.

The campus was deserted, with many classes cancelled and traffic disrupted at university entrances. At the Ross Street gate, more than 65 cars were turned away in a couple of hours, and even delivery truck drivers with no particular connection to the university chose not to cross the picket.

Management once again called riot police onto campus to fight their battle. In one scuffle, a student who stood up to a Liberal supporter was arrested.

The unions involved in bargaining have rejected management's latest offer of a 2.9 percent annual wage increase. This is up from the 2 percent that was put a year ago. Management claim the offer is generous. Staff who

have not had a pay rise in 18 months disagree.

In response to the ongoing union campaign, senior management have now hired a public relations team to sell staff and interested parties the idea that a pay cut is the only way to finalise negotiations. Scaremongering emails about the union sending the university bankrupt and threats to job security are being sent to staff.

A cheat-sheet designed to help university executives answer tough questions at staff forums advises that when asked about their own 15 percent "performance bonuses", senior management should deflect by pointing out that the Sydney University vice-chancellor is only the 10th highest paid VC in the country!

In fact, reportedly earning a mere \$899,143 a year, they would just about call Michael Spence a volunteer if they thought they could sell that.

Right now, there is a debate going on over the issue of "performance bonuses" and managerial salaries. While staff are threatened with job losses and a pay cut, the union campaign will continue.

Child welfare workers strike over shortages



Kate Doherty, member of PSA Central Council (elected on Progressive PSA ticket)

Pru Goward, the NSW minister for community services, has been caught lying about staffing shortages in her department.

Workers in the Department of Community Services, members of the Public Services Association, shone the spotlight on Goward's lie when they walked out in stop-work actions across the state on Tuesday 20 August.

Goward has repeatedly claimed that there are more than 2,000 caseworkers across the state, despite now admitting that she received a report which detailed that the real figure is much lower. Striking workers in Parramatta carried placards representing those who had disappeared from the department, explaining that colleagues were not being replaced when they left the job or went on maternity

leave. The remaining workers are left to pick up the slack.

The extra strain on the remaining caseworkers is taking its toll. "I've got a number of staff across the region that are really stressed, they're hanging on by the skin of their teeth", PSA spokesperson Steve Meares told the media.

Staff shortages are a chronic problem across the NSW public service, and with the government slashing a further 15,000 jobs, the problem will only get worse. The pressure on workers to do more with less is immense, and the government has shown a complete disregard for the services public servants provide.

This latest strike is a reminder of why the union campaign against staff and funding cuts needs to intensify in order to tackle the understaffing, overwork and insecurity that are daily life for NSW public servants.

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No US attack on Syria!

Lee Sustar

Evidence of a horrific chemical weapons attack by the Syrian regime against civilians has revived liberal calls for “humanitarian” intervention by the US military – despite the US armed forces’ own recent record of mass death and destruction in Iraq, Afghanistan and beyond.

For example, *Washington Post* columnist Eugene Robinson wrote that President Barack Obama should “punish Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad’s homicidal regime with a military strike” because “any government or group that employs chemical weapons must be made to suffer real consequences. Obama should uphold this principle by destroying some of Assad’s military assets with cruise missiles.” “[S]omebody,” says Robinson, “has to be the world’s policeman.”

The *New York Times* editorial board cautioned against an open-ended intervention, but said that because Obama had made the use of chemical weapons a “red line” that would trigger a US response, the president now had to “follow through”. In other words, the credibility of the US empire is now on the line, so a military strike is unavoidable, according to the *Times*.

But the threatened US military attack on Syria is motivated solely by Washington’s imperial aims in the Middle East, not by any desire to save civilians from further repression by a brutal regime. The US objective is to contain and roll back the democratic revolutions of the Arab Spring, a project it shares with allies Israel, Saudi Arabia, the Gulf State monarchies and, now, the Egyptian military that has reasserted its power.

Certainly the US hasn’t been stirred to consider military action by the fact that Syrians are dying in large numbers. An estimated 100,000 have perished since the revolution against

the Assad regime began in March 2011 – the overwhelming majority of them civilians killed at the hands of Assad’s forces.

At least 1,000 people have died in the Ghouta region from the chemical weapons attack. Yet it wasn’t the horror of the weapons that caused Washington to prepare military action. As the *Foreign Policy* website reported August 26, “[A] generation ago, America’s military and intelligence communities knew about and did nothing to stop a series of nerve gas attacks far more devastating than anything Syria has seen” – when Iraq, led by then-US ally Saddam Hussein, used such weapons against Iran in the 1980-88 Gulf War.

The US, still struggling to recover

A US-led military strike will not only add to the killing, but will play into the hands of the regime as it uses nationalist appeals to justify still more barbaric repression.

from its failed occupations in Iraq and Afghanistan, is highly reluctant to put forces on the ground in Syria. But politicians and military leaders appear to have reached a consensus on a limited attack, possibly with Tomahawk missiles fired from warships and submarines.

US policymakers are not only worried about al-Qaeda-linked jihadists taking power. They’re also concerned that the revolutionary movement, the Local Coordination Committees (LCC), will bring to power a popular democratic government in the wake of Assad.

As Joseph Daher of the Syrian Revolutionary Left Current points out, the LCCs are the wellspring of the revolutionary movement and have challenged the Islamists’ repression and attempts to impose sharia law on areas they control. “Our choice should

not be to choose between on one side the USA and Saudi Arabia, and on the other side Iran and Russia. Our choice is revolutionary masses struggling for their emancipation,” Daher said.

US policy, therefore, is contradictory. It tolerated Gulf state Qatar’s support for Islamist fighters even while declaring the Syrian rebel group Jabhat al-Nusra to be a “terrorist” organisation. Washington has also insisted that Islamists take a back seat in the latest version of the mainstream Syrian opposition, the National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces. The US and its ally Turkey, moreover, have blocked heavy weapons from reaching the fragmented opposition.

The bottom line is that the US

for military intervention.

Secretary of State John Kerry played to the outrage over the use of chemical weapons when he denounced the Syrian regime: “As a father, I can’t get the image out of my head of a father who held up his dead child, wailing,” he said.

But Kerry lacks credibility when it comes to speaking out against the savagery of the Assad regime. As chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, he made outreach to Syria a personal project, in the name of encouraging Assad’s pro-market economic reforms. Even after the regime moved to repress pro-democracy protests in early 2011, Kerry continued to praise Assad as a reformer.

Key to Assad’s staying power is his ability to whip up fears among ethnic and religious minorities that they will be slaughtered if Sunni Islamist groups come to power – as well as his claim to be the defender of the Syrian nation against foreign powers.

A US-led military strike will not only add to the killing, but will play into the hands of the regime as it uses nationalist appeals to justify still more barbaric repression. Already, the US and its ally Turkey are trying to bring Syrian Kurds into the embrace of the pro-US regime in Iraqi Kurdistan. US intervention will only aggravate ethnic and sectarian violence, as it did in Iraq, which is suffering through the worst sectarian violence since 2008.

While Western imperialist powers and their regional allies might like to see Assad go, they are willing to tolerate his rule for now in order to foreclose the possibility of revolutionary change in Syria. As the Revolutionary Left Current put it in a statement after the Ghouta attack: “Our revolution has no sincere ally, except for the revolutions of the peoples of the region and the world and the militants who work to free themselves from obscurantist, oppressive and exploitative regimes.”

would like to contain the civil war in Syria, hoping for an outcome acceptable in Washington – like an ex-general taking power who can preserve as much as possible of the existing state.

The mass killing in Ghouta was so awful that it forced the debate on Syria to a head. The warheads filled with sarin gas were targeted not at rebel fighters, but women and children in their beds. Their lungs filled with fluid, suffocating them. Hundreds more suffered severe and crippling injuries. Anyone with a sense of justice will be incensed by such a calculated effort to terrorise a vulnerable civilian population.

Now Western politicians are cynically trying to turn this horror to their political advantage. British Prime Minister David Cameron and French President Francois Hollande are joining Obama in preparing the ground

The reality of law and order hysteria



Yusef Salaam was one of those wrongfully convicted.

Louise O'Shea

"I'm always behind. Those years that it took from me, I lost a lot. And even now at the age of 36 when I should be fully in a career, have a house, a car, maybe married, I don't have any of that. I don't know how to regain any of that stuff anymore. So I'm just here."

— Raymond Santana, one of the Central Park Five

The impact of the wrongful conviction and jailing of five teenage boys for a 1989 rape cannot be quantified. The 41 years they collectively served in prison cannot be given back to them. The devastation their families experienced, the breakdown of relationships and the grief, cannot be reversed. The emotional trauma and abuse at the hands of the criminal injustice system, politicians and mass media can never be fully compensated for.

But a documentary by filmmakers Ken Burns, Sarah Burns and David McMahon at least gives them, along with the rest of the world, the truth.

The Central Park Five documents in heart-wrenching detail how five Black and Hispanic teenage boys, all of whom lived in the Schomburg housing project in Harlem, were in April 1989 rounded up by police, coerced into making false confessions, convicted on rape and attempted murder charges and sent to jail for a crime they did not commit.

Their actual crime, like so many of those who make up the over 2.25 million-strong prison population in the United States, was being young, Black and working class.

New York in 1989 was a city divided by what *New York Times* reporter Jim Dwyer calls in the film "a social moat". The economic downturn of the late 1980s, the arrival of crack cocaine and the associated crime on New York's streets, and the onset of the AIDS epidemic had created mass social anxiety

about the decaying fabric of society.

The term "underclass" had just been coined to describe the growing numbers of youth, mostly Black and Latino, at the margins. Gentrification driven by a super wealthy professional class continued unabated just blocks away. Central Park, the location of the rape and assault the five were wrongly accused of, was the symbolic space that brought these disparate elements together.

"The park," as academic and author Kristin Bumiller puts it in her book *In An Abusive State* "is the focus for the clash over the ownership of public space between a woman who represents the hopes of a new professional class and teenage boys who represent young lives wasted by the forces of racism and poverty."

So while 3,254 rapes took place in New York in 1989, the rape of a young, white, professional woman jogging in Central Park on 19 April 1989 became, according to then Mayor Ed Koch, the "crime of the century". For Governor Cuomo, it was "the ultimate shriek of alarm".

The law enforcement apparatus, political establishment and mass media saw in the Central Park Jogger case an opportunity, as Bumiller describes, to "stimulate the passions of mass audiences while reassuring this audience of the state's capacity to respond to the threat".

The mass media played its part in generating a lynch-mob mentality by splashing headlines like "Teen Wolf Pack Beats and Rapes Wall St Exec on Jogging Path", "The Jogger and the Wolf Pack. An Outrage and a Prayer", "None Of Us Is Safe" and "Fiendish Crime of Negro Brutes".

The victim, on the other hand was portrayed, as Joan Didion described at the time, as "New York's ideal sister, daughter, Bacharach bride: a young woman of conventional middle class privilege and promise whose situation was such that many people tended to

overlook the fact that the state's case against the accused as not invulnerable."

The case unleashed not only racist hysteria against the five, but a law and order frenzy. This culminated in the extension of policing to schools, the notorious stop-and-frisk laws which targeted Black and Latino youths and a range of other measures which strengthened the repressive apparatus of the NYPD. It set the scene for the "Giuliani era" of zero tolerance of

The case unleashed not only racist hysteria, but a law and order frenzy. This culminated in the notorious stop-and-frisk laws which targeted Black and Latino youths.

crime, including heavy penalties and prosecutions for petty offences such as graffiti, turnstile jumping and cannabis possession.

Adding to the hysteria surrounding the case, millionaire tycoon Donald Trump took out full page ads in four New York newspapers calling for the teenagers, all of whom were 16 years old or younger, to be executed and for the death penalty to be reinstated in New York – which it was two years later.

In the immediate aftermath, the NYPD's main concern was getting charges laid quickly. For them, finding the perpetrator within days of the rape was, as Dwyer says, "a home run from a law enforcement standpoint". The guilt or otherwise of the five teenagers charged was a secondary consideration.

This was the tragic confluence of events that saw Yusef Salaam, Corey

Wise, Kevin Richardson, Raymond Santana and Antron McCray charged with rape and attempted murder. The boys had been messing around with a group of twenty or so other boys in the park on the night of the attack, and were apprehended for "disturbing the peace" as part of routine harassment by police.

When news of the discovery of the jogger's body arrived at the precinct the teenagers were still in custody, and the police decided they had the perpetrators. They then proceeded to coerce confessions from the boys throughout the night and into the following day. The description in the film of how this was done should turn any viewer into a lifelong hater of the police.

It is fairly widely acknowledged today that the treatment of the Central Park Five represents a gross miscarriage of justice, despite their exoneration receiving shamefully little publicity (especially when compared to the circus surrounding their conviction).

As tragic as the Central Park Five's story is, their eventual exoneration may make them some of the lucky ones. Statistics from the Innocence Project indicate that coerced confessions were involved in a quarter of all cases of wrongful conviction. The continuing racism and inequality of the criminal injustice system means that innocent people will continue to be victimised, and for most the crimes committed against them by the state will never be publicly acknowledged.

As the coercive apparatus of states everywhere are strengthened as part of neoliberalism and anti-crime hysteria, *The Central Park Five* is a timely reminder about the consequences of such developments. It is essential viewing.

Sole parents hit hard by cuts



children have been widely attacked. Around 90 percent of people impacted by the changes are women. "There are single people who don't have children that can't afford to pay rent on Newstart. How on earth is someone who needs that extra bedroom or two going to survive? Rents have skyrocketed, and it's no longer as simple as moving out further ... people are scrimping and cutting back and cutting back but there's no future for people who are doing that, there's no hope", said Kerry Davies, spokesperson for the Council for Single Mothers and their Children, speaking at a recent rally against the changes.

In Victoria, latest figures show that eviction rates are spiking in many of Melbourne's outer suburbs. For many sole parents, there is nowhere further out to go. One woman posting to an online forum said she felt fortunate to have found a small country block where she can camp with her children until she can pay down some of her bills.

Minister for families Jenny Macklin has told single mothers to pull their socks up, get a job and "show their children a strong work ethic". Most women hit by the changes were already in paid work. The government well knows this.

The government also knows that poverty is cutting deeper and deeper into the lives of sole parent families. Its own much maligned Social Inclusion office points to Melbourne University's latest "Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia" survey, which reports that the number of one parent families in poverty has jumped by 15 percent in the last decade.

Labor has calculated that the lives of sole parents and their children are worth about \$728 million in savings to the budget bottom line over the next four years. This is much less than the government has budgeted to spend on "income management" since it was introduced.

Steph Price

Turning eight doesn't usually mean much. If you're lucky, it might be worth an extra half an hour of television at night. Maybe it's when you're first allowed to walk to the milk bar on your own. Nothing special, it used to be just another stop on the slow march towards counting your age in double digits.

The Australian government has set about fixing all that. No longer an also-ran in the birthday stakes, turning eight is now life-changing for thousands of children and their parents.

Since January this year, the federal Labor government has cut off parenting payments to an estimated 84,000

sole parents because their youngest or only child has turned eight.

Tens of thousands more whose youngest or only child hasn't yet turned eight are now racing against a clock they can't beat. "I've got a few years left, but as soon as she turns eight, then I don't know", says a single mother, looking at her three-year-old, who's running in circles around us both as we talk. Another with a seven-year-old son describes feeling "as if a cloud of doom is approaching".

Sole parents forced off parenting payments have been redefined as "job seekers" and told they can apply for Newstart allowance, better known as the dole.

Under the changes, a sole parent on Newstart will receive anywhere between \$75 and \$110 a week less than

if they had remained on the parenting payment. But a shrinking basic income is just part of the picture. Many sole parent families will lose the health care card that gives them access to discounts on medication and utilities. Most will no longer be eligible for the education supplement that was available to help single parents with some of the costs associated with study and training.

Though they are by definition working as the primary carer for their children, single parents on Newstart will also have to juggle parental responsibilities with the laborious and degrading run-around that Centrelink calls "participation requirements".

The magnitude of the cuts and their disproportionate impact on the living standards of women and their

The hypocrisy of Honi Soit censorship

The editors of *Honi Soit*, Sydney University's student paper, recently ran a front cover featuring photographs of 18 vulvas. Each of the vulvas belongs to a different Sydney University student, all of whom volunteered.

Shortly before publication, the editors were warned that, were they to print and distribute the paper, they would likely be guilty of publishing "indecent material", an offence under NSW criminal law. They were ordered to censor the "indecent" images by printing a black bar over each photograph.

However, this proved an insufficient safeguard for decency. The humble black bar failed to obscure enough of each vulva. All 4,000 copies of the paper were quickly pulled from distribution and locked away until they could have their front covers guillotined off.

The editors report that some 200 papers were put to the guillotine before a compromise was reached with lawyers acting for the Students Representative Council. The paper was returned to circulation in sealed plastic packets and labelled with a R 18+ rating, the same restrictions that apply to the distribution of pornography. **Mariana Podesta-Diverio**, one of the editors of *Honi Soit*, here explains why they chose to publish.

The events surrounding last week's *Vagina Soit* controversy serve as a reminder that sexism is rife in contemporary society; women's bodies are still looked upon with contempt and scrutiny. Although the intent of the editors (the project was driven autonomously by the female editors) was to publish the vulvas without censoring them, the possible legal repercussions of publishing – God forbid – a body part belonging to half of the population forced us to put bars over the vulvas.

The project's participants were accused of being everything from "bourgeois individualists" to "privileged

little white fucker(s)". Neither of these accusations is true.

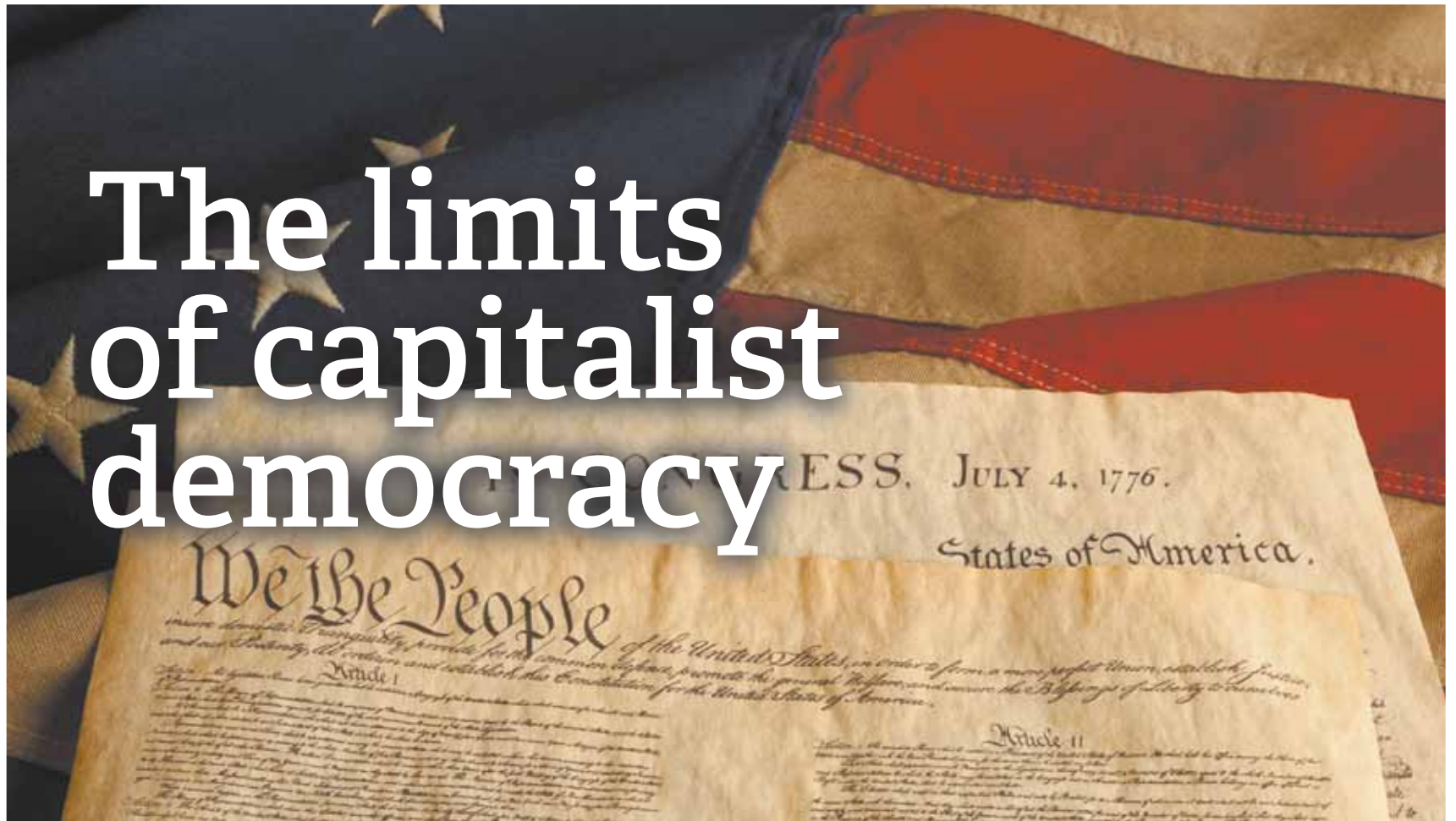
Women's oppression is often an intersectional issue – meaning that their oppression is compounded by racial and economic inequalities. The "privileged little white fucker(s)" line particularly stung me, as I am a Hispanic woman with working class roots and was one of the subjects on the cover.

The reaction to *Honi Soit's* publication of censored vulvas elicited the usual diatribe of sexist reactions from conservatives ("You clowns just let the champ know when you're doing a male genitalia cover"; "men's bodies are stigmatised, too!"). Of course,

the intent of the cover was not to depict genitalia in an attempt to sensationalise or sexualise the female body. In fact, that was the very point that we were trying to make – most of the time when we see vulvas, they're either in a highly sexualised context or they are being scrutinised to fit into socially constructed ideals of beauty, which are omnipotent in a capitalist society where women's unpaid labour is routinely exploited.

Hopefully *Vagina Soit* has at least made a dent in the sexist status quo of our society. The fight for the liberation of all oppressed social groups, however, is far from over.

FEATURE



The limits of capitalist democracy

The federal election has revealed just how limited our democracy is. In this issue's feature, **Sandra Bloodworth** looks at the history of the struggle for democracy, and the way in which capitalism limits meaningful democratic control of our society.

The meaning of democracy is contested. On one hand, it was invoked by George Bush and then Barack Obama to justify wars in the Middle East and Afghanistan. Every fascist party in Europe today either has democracy in its name or as part of its rhetoric.

On the other hand, striking workers, movements from the student and worker rebellions of the 1960s to the anti-capitalist protests at the turn of this century, to the Occupy Movement of 2011, have taken democracy to include the right to organise, the right to protest, free speech and equal civil rights irrespective of class, race, gender or sexuality. And they have exposed the severe limits of representative government as a vehicle for the defence of any of those rights.

The history of democracy

Capitalism emerged from revolutionary struggles against the old feudal order. In the English Civil War of the 1600s, the US War of Independence and the French Revolution, the new capitalist class that aspired to rule employed the language of democracy and universal rights to mobilise the masses to fight beside them.

But in every revolution, the capitalist class moved, as soon as they thought they could get away with it,

to constrain the rights of the masses and entrench their own power and privileges. In 1660, one parliamentarian in London was explicit in his justification of the reinstatement of Charles II as head of state: "The government of a king though tyrannical is far better than the usurping tyranny of many plebeians."

In the US War of Independence, while they mobilised the masses to defeat the British, the capitalists employed more radical rhetoric than their predecessors. Just as the French would raise the banner of "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity", the US founding fathers talked of the "rights of man". The Declaration of Independence pronounced that governments derived "their just powers from the consent of the governed".

But the capitalist elite faced the question of how to consolidate their rule. The masses expected to be included in the outcome of the revolution they had backed – and they were armed. And so, as New Zealand historian Brian Roper put it in his book *The History of Democracy*, "[T]he framers of the Constitution embarked on the first experiment in designing a set of political institutions that would both embody and at the same time curtail popular power."

Selection by voting, as James Madison, one of the authors of the US Constitution, put it, it would "re-

fine and enlarge the public views, by passing them through the medium of a chosen body of citizens". Intense competition for a few government seats supposedly ensures a body of the most talented.

The actual agenda was to ensure the rich would retain power commensurate with their economic privilege. Madison was completely transparent, arguing that the protection of the "rights of property" was to be "the first object of government". A pure participatory democracy like the Athenian democracy of antiquity, in which people in government positions were selected by lot, would be fatally flawed because they are "spectacles of turbulence and contention [which] have ever been found incompatible with ... the rights of property". The ideological justification for this was articulated by Alexander Hamilton, a lawyer and banker who helped to bring about the Constitutional Convention, attended it and then was influential in getting the Constitution ratified:

"[A]s riches increase and accumulate in few hands ... virtue will be ... considered as only a graceful appendage of wealth ... the advantage of character belongs to the wealthy. Their vices are probably more favourable to the prosperity of the state ... and partake less of moral depravity [than the poor]."

One of the key US institutions

which enabled representation but no control was the Supreme Court. A layer of law professionals grew up which ensured that "private property became truly sacred, inviolate from state and anarchism alike". However, this separation of powers is not unique to the US. It is a feature of how capitalists rule.

The struggle for universal suffrage

The settlement after the English Revolution was not seriously disrupted until the "Great" Reform Bill of 1832, which granted the franchise to the new middle class emerging in the industrial revolution, bringing the proportion of adult males able to vote to about 18 per cent.

On another note, dozens of Luddites and others – including Glasgow weavers in 1820 and the famous Tolpuddle Martyrs who formed a union in 1834 – were transported to New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land. Five hundred agricultural labourers were transported in 1830 in response to the Swing riots, famous for their arson and machine breaking across the rural south of England. They were not over until 1848, by which time the Chartist movement had become the first working class movement for universal suffrage. Between 1839 and 1847,

FEATURE: The limits of capitalist democracy

No elected government actually controls what happens at the point of production. We do not vote for unemployment, what kind of cars to produce, which companies will collapse in a financial crisis.



Part of a mural celebrating the Chartist movement in Newport, Wales. There is currently a campaign by local residents to prevent the council demolishing the mural to make way for developers.

102 Chartists also sailed to Australia as convicts.

The Chartist movement regularly mobilised hundreds of thousands demanding suffrage for all males over 21, payment of MPs and other reforms that would enable working class men to enter the political arena as never before. It reflected the growing recognition that the poverty and exploitation the vast majority suffered could not be ameliorated by trade unions and protest alone. Governments, made up of representatives of the rich and privileged, sided with the exploiters at every turn.

In this great movement we see the emergence of what has become the alternative to capitalist democracy. Marx and Engels were inspired by this and other workers' struggles and came to see this very struggle as the means by which society could be founded on a new basis. Mass organisations mushroomed, inspired by the idea of a stand by the vast masses against the tiny layer of rulers. This sense of a common identity led to an unprecedented sympathy of British workers for Irish immigrants, whose suffering was now recognised as part of the general oppression of workers. Some of the most determined and respected leaders were black, in spite of the dominant racism invoked to justify slavery not long ended.

Even though the Charter called only for male suffrage, many leading male Chartists wrote pamphlets and articles calling for workers to support female suffrage. One, in his pamphlet *Rights of Women*, written in jail, criticised the men of the movement for too little attention to women's political and social rights. Hundreds of thousands of women organised and attended meetings. According to Dorothy Thompson, a historian of the movement, "[B]y the early 1840s [women's suffrage] seems to have been

one of the main reforms which most Chartists expected to follow from the gaining of the Charter."

However, the vote would not be extended beyond a tiny layer of men until 1867, and even in the reform act of 1884 only two of every three men got the vote. Women would not get the vote until 1928. It would be more than a century before most male workers, women, blacks and Indigenous people in other capitalist countries would win the vote. The southern states of the US were eventually forced by the federal government, after the massive civil rights movement, to allow African Americans to participate as voting citizens in 1965.

In Australia, invaded and colonised with the hard labour of convicts, many political and trade union activists, South Australia granted universal male suffrage in 1856, the first government in the world to do so. Federally, Australia was the first country to introduce universal suffrage for the non-Indigenous population, in 1903, but all limitations on Indigenous people's right to vote were not removed until the 1960s.

It is no coincidence that universal suffrage became a reality in a string of European countries between 1918 and 1920, when revolutionary sentiments spread like wildfire after the 1917 Russian Revolution and the horrendous experience of the World War.

Capitalism and democracy

There are social scientists who argue that capitalism necessarily brings democracy. The truth is, capitalism creates the conditions in which representative democracy is possible but not inevitable. Under feudalism, the peasants produced their basic necessities on the land, and the landed ar-

istocracy relied on brute force to seize enough for their own consumption. Capitalism, by contrast, has separated workers from any control over the means of producing wealth.

Separated from any control over what will be produced or how, workers confront employers seemingly as equal citizens. Marx pointed out in *Capital* that they are "free" to take their labour power to the market, forced only by "the dull compulsion of economic facts" to work for capitalists. The reality of exploitation and the resultant unequal power hidden by this transaction is what forces workers to unite in trade unions.

No elected government actually controls what happens at the point of production. We do not vote for unemployment, what kind of cars to produce, which companies will collapse in a financial crisis. In other words, while government legislation can purport to exert controls, the fundamental decisions that determine the lives of millions are taken in the boardrooms and on CEOs' yachts.

Fritz Thyssen, one of the capitalists who bankrolled Hitler, explained why capitalists can live with representative democracy:

"An industrialist is always inclined to consider politics a kind of second string to his bow ... In a well ordered country, where the administration is sound, where taxes are reasonable, and the police well organised, he can afford to abstain from politics and devote himself entirely to business."

It is this separation of economics and politics that provides the context for representative democracy that ensures the continuation of rule by an exploiting minority. But even limited democracy is not inevitable. State force hovers behind the facade of democracy, often used simply to intimidate and warn.

A system of recurring crises and

war, capitalism cannot always maintain the facade, and the state can be used to maim, jail and even kill those who refuse to accept the barbarities of capitalism. Capitalists have turned to fascism or military dictatorship in times of crisis – Hitler’s Germany, Mussolini’s Italy, Spain and Portugal from the late 1930s until the 1970s, Pinochet in Chile 1973, the Greek colonels’ junta 1967-74, Suharto’s regime in Indonesia after 1965 – when they judged it necessary. These regimes were hailed as saviours of civilisation when they inflicted mass slaughter on their populations – until of course the West went to war with Hitler. Paul Keating, the ALP elder statesman and former prime minister, wrote that Suharto’s massacre of possibly a million was one of the best things to happen in Australia’s “neighbourhood” because it brought “stability”.

The present crisis has produced mass unemployment at levels not seen since the 1930s Great Depression in countries across Europe. Attacks on workers in even the US, the most powerful imperialist state, have forced car workers to take cuts to their wages of up to a third. As a result, new methods of limiting democracy have come into play.

In November 2011, George Papandreou, the Greek prime minister, proposed a referendum on a “rescue package” – a brutal austerity programme negotiated with the European Central Bank (ECB) and IMF. The whole of European respectable society reacted with absolute fury. The very idea! Giving people a vote on managing the economic crisis! Within days Papandreou was replaced by the *unelected* Lucas Papademos. The media call this former governor of the Bank of Greece and vice-president of the ECB from 2002 to 2010 a “technocrat”.

Then, as the Italian debt crisis mounted, Silvio Berlusconi resigned and was replaced by another *unelected* “technocrat”, Mario Monti – actually a European commissioner and an international adviser to Goldman Sachs and Coca-Cola. He was appointed “senator for life” and a week later sworn in as prime minister at the head of a “national unity government” of bankers and businessmen.

In the situation of extreme economic crisis, the democratic “right” of the people to elect their government was simply “suspended” to impose

savage austerity, which governments subject to the pressure of actually getting elected might balk at adopting.

In Australia four decades of neoliberalism laid the basis for an increasing negation of democracy. Social policy and notions of public good are now openly determined entirely by reference to what they imply for the Treasury. Increasingly, governmental tasks have been devolved to unelected institutions.

Workers’ democracy

The history of parliamentary democracy makes it clear that if mass poverty, war and oppression are to be eradicated, if the environment is to be saved, an alternative form of democracy is absolutely necessary. The history of workers’ struggles illuminates what this alternative looks like.

In 1871 the workers of Paris rose up, took control of the city and replaced the old state machinery with the Paris Commune. Marx saw that workers had found the answer to the question of how to replace capitalism and its systems of power. Workers had created their own genuinely democratic organisations – not the result of abstract theory, but of the actions of the revolutionaries who seized Paris. Then in 1905, when the workers of Russia rose in revolution, the working class was more a force in its own right, giving us an even clearer picture.

In Paris, delegates to the Commune were chosen by geographical area, giving middle class reformers undue influence. In Russia in 1905, workers created representative bodies made up of delegates from workplaces. This brought the question of democratic control into the workplaces where society’s wealth is produced. Delegates were recallable at any time, unlike our politicians who are secure in their fixed terms. They were paid the wage of a skilled worker and remained at work, where they experienced the consequences of their decisions beside those who voted for them. Think how much more accountable this makes delegates than the people we vote for but never meet face to face unless we are pounding on their office door to protest – and even then you’re unlikely to meet them.

These kinds of structures – so-

viets in Russia, workers’ councils in English, *shoras* in Iran in 1979 before they were smashed by the Islamist clerics – have been created in many revolutionary workers movements since. They bring the administration of economic and social affairs into the representative bodies, a point Marx drew out as of great significance in 1871. Workers create the wealth that can be used to enrich the whole of society. So they cannot separate political rule from control over the process of production the way exploiters can. And the revolutionary struggles that produce workers’ councils, like the Chartist movement, change workers, making them “fit to rule” as Marx put it, overcoming divisions, becoming capable of building a new humane society – unlike numbering a few boxes in elections.

There are those who say that society is too complex today for workers to organise it. But alongside the growth of a literate, educated, skilled working class, capitalism has developed immense systems of communication. In Poland in 1981, workers used the telephone system to broadcast through the factories the proceedings in meetings between their representatives and the bosses. Today it’s not difficult to imagine workers’ councils in workplaces linked up not just city or nation-wide, but internationally. There would be no need for secrecy; delegates could be made accountable and replaced if they did not carry out policies their electors supported.

Of course there would be disagreements about how to achieve a better world. But once the power of the capitalists was broken, those discussions could be conducted by people with common interests. In a class society, where exploiters live off the labour of the majority, the conflicting interests cannot be resolved by debate; that is why the capitalists rely on a repressive state to impose their interests when necessary.

Capitalist democracy is a compromise between the classes, a concession won generally by workers’ struggles. While democratic rights have to be defended at every turn, they should be seen only as the basis on which we can fight for rule by the people for the people. We could hardly make as big a mess of it as the present mob who rule.

The history of parliamentary democracy makes it clear that if mass poverty, war and oppression are to be eradicated, an alternative form of democracy is absolutely necessary.



The Liberal vision for a bosses' Queensland

Paul DM

Campbell Newman's Liberal National Party (LNP) has made clear its vision for Queensland: one inspired by the neoliberal method of attacking workers and defending the interests of the bosses and their profits.

Newman has slashed jobs and services, attacked workers at every opportunity and legislated to make it increasingly harder for our unions to fight back. So at this half way mark, it's worth taking stock of the story so far.

Ongoing job cuts

From the very beginning, the LNP has had Queensland workers in its cross hairs, with public sector workers bearing the brunt of the attacks. Although promising no forced redundancies, once elected, Newman appointed Peter Costello, former Howard treasurer, to head an "independent" audit of the state's finances.

After the audit warned of a looming budget crisis, Newman declared he had little choice but to slash public spending. First to go were up to 3,000 temporary staff, axed together in one fell swoop on what became known as "Black Friday", 30 June 2012. However, even permanent employees were not safe, as the budget for the 2012-13 financial year included 14,000 cuts of permanent staff from across the public service. To facilitate this, Newman unilaterally removed job security provisions in the existing EBA, which he enshrined in legislation despite union protests.

Those public sector workers who managed to keep their jobs are now subject to "contestability", which Newman describes as "testing whether someone else can do it for less money, do the same job or an even better job for less money than is currently occurring".

This paves the way for outsourcing to the private sector, with treasurer Tim Nichols declaring, for example, that Queensland's TAFE institutions are at "the top" of the government's hit list. Contestability is also being used to drive down wages, as is occurring in WorkCover, where 188 positions are being downgraded, workers having to choose between accepting an average of \$10,000 less per year and being retrenched.

Services savaged

Newman also stripped funding from a range of community organisations that provide services to some of the most disadvantaged sections of the population. Under the \$260 million Grant Funding Efficiencies program, savings are being made by "ceasing or reducing funding for lower priority projects and services".

Such "low priorities" have includ-

ed sexual health services, subjected to the loss of 30 jobs, despite health care professionals warning that this will lead to "a public health catastrophe".

Although Kevin Rudd has since announced, as part of the federal election campaign, funding to keep services going for another year, the Queensland health minister has dismissed the move, describing it as "ridiculous".

Such is the LNP's disdain for the community sector that it completely rejected a similar \$2.5 million lifeline from the commonwealth that would have allowed the state's Tenancy Advice and Advocacy Service (TAAS) to remain open.

As a result, the service was forced to close its doors on 30 June, despite increasing demand, including from a growing number of homeless. One Brisbane TASS office described the service as being for many "the difference between having a roof over your head and homelessness". Clearly, those living under the constant threat of eviction, or who are already living rough on the streets, are another "low priority" for the LNP.

Attacking unions

Newman's vision includes a strong state that stamps out dissent and supports the bosses against any fight back. Newman quickly moved to introduce cumbersome balloting procedures, making it more difficult to engage in protected strike action. From 1 July 2013, the LNP introduced a new code of practice aimed at cracking down on union activity in the building industry following a heroic and successful nine week strike over equal pay at the Queensland Children's Hospital late last year.

The new code aims to prevent major projects being "held to ransom by militant unions" – in other words, preventing unions taking similar successful action in the future. Newman has even taken away the official May Day holiday, long celebrated in Queensland, as a deliberate insult to unions and an assertion that we should recognise just who's boss in this state.

Newman has also passed legislation requiring unions to get members' approval before embarking on campaigns that will cost more than \$10,000. Under the guise of empowering members, this measure is aimed solely at making it more cumbersome for unions to campaign on behalf of their members. Although rejected by the Industrial Relations Commission, Newman went so far as to attempt to ban the Together public sector union from communicating with its members or adversely commenting on current EBA negotiations.

Such is the arrogance of the LNP that one MP even threatened on his Facebook page to have organisers of a demonstration against the closure of a nursing home charged with



Queensland Premier Campbell Newman.

contempt of parliament after he was heckled when he tried to address the rally. And of course Brisbane has the G20 to look forward to in November 2014, when police and security powers will be bolstered and local residents will require passes just to access their own homes.

Newman's government is an expression and reinforcement of existing class divisions within the state, Newman's "reforms" clearly targeting workers and the disadvantaged. With moves to continue outsourcing government functions and services, including handing over control of the \$1.8 billion Sunshine Coast University Hospital currently under construction to private sector interests, it's also clear that the LNP will continue to serve the interests of business at our expense.

Meanwhile the LNP parliamentarians have their snouts well and truly in the trough, pocketing a 42 percent pay rise while crying poor and offering public servants a measly 2.2 percent. The trend will continue until our side can build a sustained fight back in our unions and on the streets.

Newman's vision includes a strong state that stamps out dissent and supports the bosses against any fight back.



Bad sport and bad blood

Lindsay Fitzclarence

The Essendon Football Club (EFC) "supplement scandal" has been the burning issue of the AFL 2013 season. During the long period of investigation by the AFL and the Australian Sports Anti-Doping Authority, the corporate media have focused primarily on the tensions, ambiguities and irregularities between the AFL, the EFC and coach James Hird.

The issue has often been reduced to a very public soap opera. The wider public has been deprived of critical insights about the incorporation of sport into the master frame of "the market". A deeper analysis, acknowledging the social roots of this problem, is required.

The myopic culture of capitalist sport

There are five key elements to the neoliberal transformation of sport.

First, the key principle in growing a market in sport is to establish a brand that will attract and hold spectators and participants. Prior to establishing a viable competition, basic "plant" in the way of facilities and infrastructure is also required. In the case of football, this means appropriate stadiums and playing facilities. In selling the brand, active involvement of mass media, with the associated benefits of advertising, then follows. In securing such basic infrastructure, endorsement and material support follow from the state, through policy and regulation.

Second, hyper-competition is the ultimate code. Hard-edged competitive practices shape interactions between codes and, within each code, between clubs, inside clubs and into the hearts, minds and bodies of athletes. In the 1987 film *Wall Street*, the principal character, Gordon Gekko, asserted that greed is good and that it captures

the essence of the evolutionary spirit. The architects of neoliberal capitalist sport have reworded Gekko's axiom into the belief that "sport is greed".

Third, the brand rules. While the spectacle of tight contests and fierce competition is of utmost importance, the growth and security of the brand, not the sport itself, matter most. This means that the context of competition must be carefully managed by sharing success between competitors in order to guarantee ongoing interest in and loyalty to the brand. Policy

The process of market management and manipulation also generates serious contradictions and perhaps unintended effects.

designed to effect "equalisation" between clubs has been one lever used to help manage the tension between competition and tangible equity.

Fourth, sporting specialists of all stripes must be mobilised to the max and unite in the cause. These include administrators, coaches, medical staff, sports scientists and the media. They are the essential technicians behind the quest for the "winning edge", "competitive advantage" and the "one percenters".

And finally, athletes' bodies and minds must be controlled, commodified and, it seems, medicated.

The AFL as a prime example

The AFL understands itself as a leading brand in sports entertainment. Its branding process reaches across a wide range of symbols, activities and sub-units. Further down the corporation are the independent

clubs, which are tightly controlled units. And further down still are the elite athletes, who are shaped as active but docile machines and as commodities for the mass market of the AFL brand.

Australian Bureau of Statistics data offer one measure of the success of this branding process. The AFL, including its incorporated sub-leagues, attracts more spectators than other sports. Under the two network broadcasting arrangement, including Fox Footy and Network Seven, television audiences continue to grow.

The AFL has actively courted state and federal governments as well as private corporations to help fund code infrastructure. Some examples of these financial and market-driven relationships include "partnerships" in the Gold Coast Stadium, Sydney Olympic Park, Adelaide Oval, the redevelopment of the Great Southern Stand at the MCG and the SCG.

The AFL has enacted a range of initiatives designed to create "equalisation" across the clubs. Equalisation involves measures and controls designed to foster revenue sharing as well as limiting the extremes of performance between clubs. It involves devices such as early draft picks for lower placed clubs and the enforcement of "salary caps" on player payments.

In August 2013 a deputation of officials from the AFL visited the US to study methods of equalisation in the major sports of football and baseball. On return, AFL deputy chief executive Gillon McLachlan said he saw effective strategies designed to promote competition equalisation and thus to give all supporters hope that their club would be competitive. His summary comment is telling: "Very capitalist endeavours support these socialist policies."

Here we detect vital clues about the dynamics behind the Essendon supplements scandal. Equalisation is

a label for the processes designed to secure and grow the AFL brand within the sport/entertainment market. The problem, as this scandal highlights, is that this process of market management and manipulation also generates serious contradictions and perhaps unintended effects. Primarily, players have been used as high performance guinea pigs. Individual clubs, within the managed market, understand that their time in the spotlight of success, at the top of the league table with the chance of a premiership, is limited.

In order to achieve success, clubs must carefully harness their collective resources, manage their playing list wisely and, all going to plan, capitalise on their chance for a premiership when their turn arrives. It is around this imperative to win within a narrow opportunity that temptations to push the envelope arise.

Understood in these terms, capitalist sport is designed to generate contradiction. Obvious examples include the growth of illegal gambling and the burgeoning use of drugs by athletes. In turn the health and well-being of participants caught up in this maelstrom of incentives, inducements and pressures are put at risk, and so is the public's faith in sport itself.

The Essendon supplement scandal raises an alert about such socio-political contradictions. Within the burgeoning framework of capitalist sport culture, supplement use is a stark example of clubs, officials, experts and obedient players striving to find that small edge of competitive advantage.

Neoliberalism, as a meta-ideology, fosters this ugly climate within which such contradictions flourish and fester. In the end, we get good entertainment but bad sport and bad blood.

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NOTES AGAINST THE U.S. EMPIRE

BARRY SHEPPARD

Manning and Snowden have changed the discussion



When Edward Snowden gave his first public interview in Hong Kong, he said his greatest fear was the possibility that his revelations would fall on deaf ears.

Chelsea (formerly Bradley) Manning and Snowden have paid a steep price for their revelations of the war crimes and massive violations of the Bill of Rights by the US government against its own citizens and its vast collection of electronic communications worldwide.

Manning was sentenced to 35 years in a military stockade for telling the truth, and Snowden has been forced into exile, hunted down by the criminal administration in Washington.

But their sacrifice has not been in vain. In a real sense, Manning and Snowden have met their objective of initiating a serious discussion of these matters nationally and internationally, whatever further crimes may be inflicted on them.

Snowden's revelations, coming after those of Manning, changed the context of Manning's court martial. The exposure of the secret NSA programs caused many to begin to call into question Washington's real intentions in prosecuting the soldier.

Julian Assange said Manning's sentence was a partial victory, in that it was much less than the administration wanted. The prosecutors argued strongly for a life sentence without the possibility of parole for "aiding the enemy" – in essence, treason. Having lost that in the atmosphere created by Snowden's revelations, their final demand was a sentence of 60 years.

Manning's lawyers say she will be eligible for parole in about seven more years, having been given credit for the over three years she has already been held in prison, which included some months of torture.

Her defence now moves into a new phase. After she was sentenced, Manning issued a strong open appeal to President Obama for a pardon. That will be pursued legally.

Then Manning came out publicly that she would now live her life as a woman, and changed her name to Chelsea. She said she would seek medical treatments to change her physical body accordingly. The army immediately responded that it would allow no such treatments. Now Chelsea is challenging that in the courts. This is part of the fight for her to receive fair and good treatment in prison in general.

These campaigns will help keep her case in the public eye, and prepare, if necessary, to fight for her early release at the first opportunity for parole.

Ruling class worries

The *New York Times* editorialised that Manning's sentence was "excessive", while saying she deserved some punishment. The *Times*' position reflects a division in the ruling class concerning the Manning-Snowden revelations.

Another indication was the close vote in the House of Representatives, which almost defunded the NSA's program of monitoring every phone call in the US.

The *Times* also ran a lengthy article in its Sunday magazine of 18 Au-

Manning and Snowden have met their objective of initiating a serious discussion nationally and internationally, whatever further crimes may be inflicted on them.

gust how Laura Poitras, a journalist and film-maker, who worked with Snowden and Glen Greenwald to get his revelations out to the world.

Her photo was on the magazine's cover, with the headline "How Laura Poitras helped expose what the American government does in the name of security". The article portrayed Snowden, Poitras and Greenwald as not only quite intelligent in how they circumvented the US repressive apparatus, but was sympathetic to their cause. Poitras deserves more credit, and I urge readers to look up this article.

Another aspect is freedom of the press, even the capitalist press. The Justice Department is seeking to force *New York Times* reporter James Risen to testify in its case against former CIA officer Jeffrey Sterling. It alleges that Sterling leaked classified information to Risen, who used it to write about the CIA. So far Risen has resisted testifying, but he might face contempt of court charges.

The administration would like to move against the *Times* and other papers for printing some of Manning's and Snowden's revelations. It fears to create a backlash, however.

Now some officials and people in Congress are seeking to put organisations like WikiLeaks in a new category of "non-legitimate" journalism, and so not protected by constitutional guarantees of freedom of the press.

Such a move would raise its own problems for the ruling class, for example for reporting by social media. Would a teenager who posted Snowden's documents be fair game for the spooks?

It is quite likely that Julian Assange is already under secret indictment, probably citing the Espionage Act, for publishing Manning's material as well as aiding Snowden.

A section of the ruling class doesn't want to go that far in tearing up the Bill of Rights.

Repercussions

Another cause for concern in ruling class circles has been the wide international repercussions of Manning's release of State Department cables, and the wide international net of the NSA's spying.

A recent release of Snowden documents by Greenwald, reported in *Der Spiegel*, of new information of US spying on Germans has created consternation in that country.

Adding to Greenwald's release of

information of US spying on Brazil, where he is living, was the detention at London's Heathrow airport of Greenwald's companion David Miranda for nine hours.

Miranda was on his way back to Brazil from a meeting in Berlin with Laura Poitras, who is working with Greenwald on further Snowden releases.

The British political police claimed they were acting under a law to ferret out information about terrorism.

"What's amazing is this law, called the Terrorism Act, gives them a right to detain and question you about your activities with a terrorist organisation or your possible involvement in or knowledge of a terrorism plot", Greenwald said.

But the spooks didn't raise anything about terrorism when they grilled Miranda. "The only thing they were interested in was NSA documents and what I was doing with Laura Poitras", Greenwald noted.

The British cops then confiscated all Miranda's electronic documents and equipment. A court later ruled that his computers and records would have to be returned to Miranda, but gave the police seven days first to copy them.

The Brazilian government strongly objected. Obviously, London didn't do this on its own, but in collaboration with Washington.

The British political police also threatened to shut down the *Guardian* newspaper, its editor, Alan Rusbridger, has revealed. This was in retaliation for the paper's publishing material from Wikileaks and Greenwald.

The police said they would shut down the *Guardian* unless it turned over its hard drives containing the leaked material, or destroyed the hard drives. Rusbridger decided to do the latter, and destroyed them under the watchful eyes of three police thugs. This might seem ridiculous since the material on the hard drives exists elsewhere. The intent was clearly to intimidate.

The credibility of the US administration has been damaged, both by what Manning and Snowden have revealed (and there is more to come), and by the violent way it has responded to the leaks.

That this has caused consternation at the top presents new opportunities to expose the truth about Washington's crimes. When the thieves fall out, we should take advantage.

OBITUARY

Amber Maxwell, a rebel and a fighter

Lewis Todman

The revolutionary socialist movement lost a great fighter on Saturday, 24 August.

Amber Maxwell lived a difficult life. As a transgender woman, she found it impossible to find permanent work or accommodation. But through all her hardship, she put everything she had into the fight for socialism. Amber seemed to have boundless energy and enthusiasm for politics. Every week she would catch the bus from the homeless youth hostel where she lived to the University of Western Australia to help us build the organisation, sell *Red Flag*, fight cuts to higher education and campaign for refugee rights.

Amber was always the one leading impromptu paper sales, organising extra chalking and poster for demonstrations, selling far more copies of *Red Flag* than anyone else on stalls. Even when she was in her most depressed state, she always told me that socialist activism and fighting for a better world was the one thing that made life worth living. Rarely have I met a comrade so determined and dedicated.

Amber took her own life at the age of 20, unable to deal with her oppression any longer. Her death should not be viewed as a random tragedy, but as a product of transphobia and a lack of essential services for young people. Suicide is an epidemic among LGBTI youth. Studies in Australia show the attempted suicide rate among LGBTI people is between 3.5 and 14 times that of their heterosexual counterparts.

A survey in the USA found that 32 percent of transgender people interviewed had attempted suicide.

It's not hard to see why. Amber faced discrimination at every turn. When applying for a room to rent, she was told several times that only "real girls" were wanted. One homelessness service hung up on her after informing her that they "only had room for females". She was consistently rejected when she applied for jobs or apprenticeships. Even when she was able to find a hostel to live in, she suffered from demeaning paternalism, including a curfew which often made it difficult for her to come to political meetings at night.

Amber was killed by the system she despised so much. Her death is a tragic reminder that institutionalised homophobia and transphobia cost lives. As Amber herself wrote in issue 4 of *Red Flag*, "Life as a transgender or gender diverse person is often characterised by difficulty and discrimination. Family rejection, homelessness, depression, attempted suicide – these are a regular part of our existence."

Amber was a well-known activist for equal marriage rights, a fighter against the discrimination that killed her. She chaired the Equal Love rallies with her typical fiery tone and could electrify crowds of hundreds with her anger. On every demonstration, Amber was the first on the megaphone and the last off.

In her spare time she fanatically researched Perth labour history. She wrote some wonderful articles, including the one published below on the 1910 tram strike. She would enthusiastically regale us with stories she'd



PHOTO: ALEX BAINBRIDGE.

read of unemployed workers' protests, wildcat strikes and battles against the fascists.

She especially loved the songs of the Industrial Workers of the World, Australia's first serious revolutionary organisation, and would bust out the anti-Labor Party classic "Bump Me Into Parliament" whenever the opportunity arose.

She had the most wonderfully irreverent attitude towards all authority and her political enemies; she never

cared about offending anyone. Amber could always be relied on to give off-the-cuff speeches about police brutality the moment anyone was arrested on a demonstration, to give the fences at refugee detention centres a solid kick with her steel-capped boots or to start up a controversial chant on the megaphone. She was a true revolutionary.

You will be missed so much comrade. Rest in peace.

When workers put the brakes on Perth

Amber Maxwell

Perth is often portrayed as a city with little interesting history. It may surprise some people to learn that Perth was once brought to an almost total standstill by a six and a half week tram strike, from July until September 1910.

An appeal to the arbitration court for a new award (setting out the wages and conditions of employment for all workers in the industry) had led to one with very loosely defined clauses. It allowed for the slashing of workers' wages and conditions.

A new roster was issued for with workers on split shifts that potentially put some on call for well over 14 hours a day. This was legal because the award specified the number of hours to be worked but not the number of hours "on duty".

The award specified a new minimum wage, to which the Perth Tramways Company promptly lowered all workers' wages. When the workers

appealed, the presiding judge declared that he had "no business regulating industry". Incensed, the workers voted to take action. One by one they stopped work and presented overtime claims to the company when they

For the duration of the strike there was, in effect, no tram service at all in Perth.

reached their specified maximum hours per fortnight. They even pulled in one freeloading scab who had up to that point refused to join the union.

For the duration of the strike there was, in effect, no tram service at all in Perth. At a time when most people did not have their own vehicles, this meant that the city was brought to a virtual standstill. Many shops did not open, and some of the larger

department stores resorted to hiring private cars to ferry wealthy customers in and out. The tram company, unable to find many scabs, proceeded to board up trams inside the depot to prevent sabotage.

There was mass public support for the strike. The "Letters to the editor" section of the *West Australian* was full of letters urging people to boycott scab trams. The *Westralian Worker* (the paper of the Western Australia Labor Party) devoted considerable space to coverage of the strike.

Mass meetings were held on the Perth Esplanade and in places as far afield as Kalgoorlie; a lot of money was raised for the relief of the families of the striking workers. When the company attempted to train some scab drivers in August, a riot broke out, and the scabs were pelted with fruit and various other objects.

When the company was finally able to restore a limited service, police on horseback had to escort the trams up and down Hay Street to prevent hostile crowds from attacking them.

The resumed service was also disrupted by sabotage, including the cutting of crucial power lines and the attempted demolition of the tram depot and line with dynamite.

For all this, however, the strike unfortunately ended in defeat. The workers were forced back to work on the conditions of the award that they had rejected at the start. The defeat almost broke the union. The leadership bowed out of the dispute and advised the men to make their own decisions about a return to work well over a week before they finally capitulated.

A large number of non-union workers were also now employed on the trams and were given seniority over the returning strikers. An attempt to begin a second strike a short time later in protest against this was quickly wound down.

Despite the defeat, the strike stands as an inspiring example of workers' struggle. We can take from it important lessons of the need for rank and file organisation and the need for workers' solidarity across industries.

THIS MONTH IN HISTORY

Land Rights protests at '82 Commonwealth Games



Liam Byrne

26 September 1982. The streets of Brisbane are clogged with thousands. The Commonwealth Games are in town, promising a bonanza for business and the best seats in the house for Queensland's corrupt political elite.

The gangster state was headed by the infamous Joh Bjelke-Petersen, the most dictatorial ruler in Australia since Robert Menzies.

Queensland was a virtual police state as the Commonwealth Games arrived, with special laws to prevent embarrassing protests. Bjelke-Petersen even declared a state of emergency to deter any form of public defiance.

But special laws were not enough to block the courage and determination of the Indigenous people and their supporters who defiantly marched through Brisbane, bringing their struggle into international focus.

The Indigenous struggle had been one of militant protest, particularly over the previous decade. The protests were against racism, but

also for that most vital of demands for any form of justice for Australia's first peoples, land rights: for control of their land to be in the hands of Indigenous people, not the mining bosses and the pastoralists.

On 26 September, at least 2,000 marched past the grim stares of Bjelke-Petersen's cowboy cops to make their demands heard. It became known as the largest Aboriginal rights march in Queensland's history and sparked a flurry of protests and marches for the games' duration.

On 30 September a demonstration during the opening ceremony resulted in 39 arrested. On 4 October, 109 were dragged to police cells during a peaceful sit-in. Two hundred and sixty were arrested three days later.

Despite this attempt at intimidation, the courage and the pride of the protesters were not dented in the slightest. Against the batons and the darkened cells of the Queensland police, backed by all the legislative power of the government, the Indigenous protesters demonstrated that they could not, would not, be ignored.

WORLD OF STRUGGLE



MEXICO CITY, Mexico, 21 August: Striking teachers clash with police outside the Congress building in Mexico City. More than 70,000 teachers, mainly from the southern states of Oaxaca and Michoacán, participated in the strike, shutting down around 24,000 schools at the start of the new school year.

The focus of teachers' anger is proposed changes to education laws that will subject them to stringent new performance assessment measures. Mexican politicians, led by President Enrique Peña Nieto, claim such measures are necessary to improve the education system. Teachers around the world will be familiar with the script, whereby the problems of a system ground down by lack of funding and incompetent and often corrupt officials are blamed solely on teachers.

The Mexican government wants

to make teachers the scapegoats for a neoliberal agenda in which investments in areas like education, health and welfare appear as trifles in comparison with the main game of support for big business and the rich. Fortunately, the teachers aren't taking it lying down.

The clashes outside the Congress occurred as up to 20,000 teachers laid siege to the building to disrupt voting on the new laws. Following these clashes, on 23 August, 7,000 teachers participated in a blockade targeting Mexico City's main international airport. In April, teachers attacked and burned government offices in the state of Guerrero after officials there approved the changes.

The militancy and determination being shown by teachers in their fight against neoliberal "reforms" in Mexico provide an inspiring example and lesson for workers everywhere.



CHOCONTA, Colombia, 22 August: Small farmers and agricultural workers march along a highway in Choconta, around 75km north-east of the capital Bogota, during a general strike that has paralysed Colombia's rural economy for over a week.

Colombia's arch-neoliberal President Juan Manuel Santos is determined to push through policies that will entrench Colombia's status as a honey pot for multinational capital, particularly in mining and agriculture. Over the past few decades, hundreds of thousands of small farmers, miners and other rural workers have been forced off the land to make way for large scale, export-oriented industry. Those who remain are struggling to hold on.

The current strike is the culmination of growing unrest over the past year. It has drawn in hundreds of thousands of workers – including coffee, coca, potato and rice farmers, alongside truck drivers, gold miners and many others. The workers have participated in actions aimed at dis-

rupting the wider Colombian economy, mainly through blocking major transport routes. In many places, strikers have fought off police attempts to dismantle their blockades.

The power of the movement in rural areas has inspired solidarity actions in the cities, students joining together with teachers and other unionists in providing support to the strike.

The demands of the strikers are straightforward: the rolling back of free trade agreements and other policies that have benefited big business at the cost of small farmers and ordinary workers, along with adequate investment in rural infrastructure, in education, health, housing, public services and roads.

In the cutthroat world of multinational capitalism, even the most marginal reforms are likely to be resisted tooth and nail by those at the top. Resolution of the issues underlying the strike will require escalation of the struggle in the weeks and months ahead.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Now they tell us

"[US] widespread incarceration at the federal, state and local levels is both ineffective and unsustainable." – US Attorney General Eric Holder. The US has 5 percent of the world's population and 25 percent of the prisoners.

Vote of confidence

A "vote of confidence from the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills." – British company Offshore Group Newcastle, when it won a £4.5 million government grant last October. Since then, the company has given the Tories £140,000.

How to become a billionaire

"The five largest employers in the US, including Walmart and McDonald's, all pay minimum wage, or close to it. They only succeed in this strategy because they're massively subsidised by the government through food stamps and Medicare." – Professor John Mason, of William Paterson University in New Jersey.

Clear choice

"It is my belief that the side we choose must be ready to promote their interests and ours when the balance shifts in their favour." – General John Dempsey, chairman of the US joint chiefs of staff, on how the US should interfere in Syria.



What Socialist Alternative stands for

1. SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE is a revolutionary Marxist organisation. We stand for the overthrow of capitalism and the construction of a world socialist system.

2. BY SOCIALISM we mean a system in which society is democratically controlled by the working class and the productive resources of society are channelled to abolishing class divisions. Only socialism can rid the world of poverty and inequality, stop imperialist wars, end oppression and exploitation, save the environment from destruction and provide the conditions for the full realisation of human creative potential. A system under the democratic control of the working class is the only basis for establishing a classless, prosperous, sustainable society based on the principle "from each according to their ability, to each according to their need".

3. STALINISM IS not socialism. We agree with Trotsky's characterisation of Stalin as the "gravedigger" of the Russian Revolution. The political character of the regime established by the Stalinist bureaucracy in Russia most closely resembled that placed in power in capitalist countries by victorious fascist movements – an atomised population ruled over by a ruthless bureaucratic dictatorship masquerading behind social demagoguery. We stand in the tradition of the revolutionaries who resisted Stalinism, and we fight today to reclaim the democratic, revolutionary politics of Marx, Engels, Luxemburg, Lenin, Trotsky and others from Stalinist distortion.

4. SOCIALISM CANNOT be won by reform of the current system or by taking over the existing state. Only the revolutionary overthrow of the existing order and the smashing of the capitalist state apparatus can defeat the capitalist class and permanently end its rule. A successful revolution will involve workers taking control of their workplaces, dismantling existing state institutions (parliaments, courts, the armed forces and police) and replacing them with an entirely new state based on genuinely democratic control by the working class.

5. THE EMANCIPATION of the working class must be the act of the working class itself. Socialism cannot come about by the actions of a minority. The struggle for socialism is the struggle of the great mass of workers to control their lives and their society, what Marx called "a movement of the immense majority in the interests of the immense majority".

6. FOR WORKERS to be won to the need for revolution, and for the working class to be cohered organisationally and politically into a force capable of defeating the centralised might of the capitalist state, a revolutionary party is necessary. Such an organisation has to cohere in its ranks the decisive elements among the most class conscious and militant workers. Laying the basis for such a party is the key strategic task for socialists in Australia today.

7. IT IS NOT enough for a revolutionary party to organise the vanguard of the class. For capitalism to be overthrown, the majority of the working class must be won to revolutionary action and the socialist cause. It is not enough to simply denounce the non-revolutionary organisations and political currents in the workers' movement. Revolutionaries have to engage reformist organisations via the method of the united front in order to test the possi-



Who is behind Red Flag?

Socialist Alternative is the organisation behind Red Flag. We are a revolutionary socialist group that sees class struggle, not parliament, as the key to changing society. We are organised very differently to the main political parties like Labor and the Greens. Our members don't just hand out how to vote cards for candidates in elections. We are activists wherever we are, trying to organise others, build solidarity and encourage resistance – in workplaces, on campuses, in progressive campaigns, and on the street.

As well as being involved as unionists and activists, it is crucial that we build an organisation that can combat all the lies and justifications for capitalism that spew out of the media, the education system and from the government. That's why we also hold meetings to discuss political ideas, the history of the struggle, and the issues of the day (see our upcoming events on the next page).

The following are the principles of Socialist Alternative. They provide the foundation for the organisation's broader political positions and analyses, and guide our political practice.

bility for united action in practice and demonstrate to all workers in a non-sectarian way the superiority of revolutionary ideas and practice. We support all demands and movements that tend to improve the position and self confidence of workers and of other oppressed sections of the population.

8. SOCIALISTS SUPPORT trade unions as the basic defensive organisations of the working class. We stand for democratic, militant, class struggle unionism and reject class collaborationism. We also stand for political trade unionism – the union movement should champion every struggle against injustice.

9. CAPITALIST EXPLOITATION of the working class and the natural world has created a situation where the profit system threatens the habitability of the planet. We oppose attempts to halt climate change and environmental destruction through measures that place the burden on working class people and the poor. We demand instead fundamental social and political change that directly challenges the interests of the ruling class. The environmental crisis can only be solved under socialism, where the interests of people and the planet are not counterposed.

10. SOCIALISTS ARE internationalists. We reject Australian patriotism and nationalism and fight for international working class solidarity. The struggle against capitalism is an international struggle: socialism cannot be built in a single country.

11. THE IMPERIALIST phase of capitalism has ushered in an era of military conflict that has no precedent in human history. The core element of imperialism is the conflict between imperial powers, or blocks of capital, which attempt by military, diplomatic and commercial means to divide and redivide the world in their own interests. In the conflicts between imperial powers (open or by proxy), revolutionaries do not take sides, least of all with our own ruling classes. Nor do we call for the resolution of inter-imperialist conflict by the "peaceful" methods of international diplomacy. Instead we fight for international working class solidarity and unity, and embrace Lenin's revolutionary call to "turn the imperialist war between nations into a civil war between classes". In the case of wars waged or diplomatic pressure exerted by military threat by the imperial powers against colonies and non-imperialist nations, we oppose the imperial power and defend the right of national self-determination.

12. AUSTRALIA IS an imperialist power in its own right. Through its own economic and military strength, and in alliance with US imperialism, Australian capitalism seeks to politically and militarily dominate its region and project power more broadly. This gives revolutionaries in Australia a special obligation to stand in solidarity with struggles of workers and the oppressed in our region against Australian imperialist intervention and control.

13. WE RECOGNISE Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the first people of Australia. We acknowledge that sovereignty was never ceded and condemn the crimes of genocide and dispossession committed by European colonists and the Australian state. We support the struggle for land rights, sovereignty and economic and social justice for Indigenous people.

14. WE OPPOSE all immigration controls and support open borders. We fight to free all refugees from detention and for the right of asylum seekers to reach Australia. We oppose racism towards migrants. In particular we reject racism towards Muslims, whose right to religious and political freedom is routinely attacked on the spurious grounds of "fighting terrorism".

15. WE OPPOSE all oppression on the basis of sex, gender or sexuality. We oppose all forms of discrimination against women and all forms of social inequality between men and women. The struggle for freedom from exploitation and freedom from all forms of oppression includes the liberation of lesbians, gay men, bisexual, transgender and intersex people. We fight for an end to all legal and social discrimination against LGBTI people and all forms of sexist discrimination. We support full reproductive freedom for all women.

16. ALL THESE forms of oppression, and others like the oppression of the young, the disabled and the elderly, are used to divide the working class and to spare capital the expense of providing for the needs of all members of society. Combating them is an essential part of building a united working class struggle that can win a socialist society. Only a socialist revolution can bring about the genuine liberation of the oppressed and the ability of every human being to realise their full potential.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Socialist Alternative hosts regular public meetings across Australia on history, theory and the campaigns and struggles of today. Left wing and progressive people welcome.

If you too hate the Liberals and despise the ALP, don't despair in front of the TV. Instead, join us to discuss how to build a real opposition to the major parties and the system that they serve. Come along to the Socialist Alternative election night party in your city!

Melbourne

Saturday 7 September 6pm
Socialist Alternative election night party!
AMWU building, 251 Queensberry Street
Carlton South

Perth

Saturday 7 September, 6:30pm
Socialist Alternative election night party!
State School Teachers Union
150-152 Adelaide Terrace, East Perth

Adelaide

Saturday 7 September, 5pm
Call James for details:
0412 906 978

Sydney

Saturday 7 September, 6pm
Socialist Alternative election night party!
The Gaelic Club, 64 Devonshire Street
Surry Hills (entry: \$5)

Brisbane

Saturday 7 September, 6:30pm
Socialist Alternative election night party!
Kurilpa Hall, 174 Boundary Street, West
End (entry: \$5 unwaged, \$8 waged)

Canberra -no party but:

Thursday 12 September, 6pm
George Orwell and the surveillance state
Hayden-Allen G050 @ ANU

For more details on how you can get involved with Socialist Alternative, simply visit sa.org.au or contact us at: info@sa.org.au

A twice yearly journal covering key political debates and issues from a revolutionary Marxist standpoint. To order a copy or to subscribe visit **MARXISTLEFTREVIEW.ORG**



Introduction to Marxism discussion groups

Interested in left wing ideas? Want to know more about the fundamentals of Marxism and the politics of Socialist Alternative?

We host a series of discussions for left wing people to learn about the Marxist critique of capitalism, and about the socialist project to change the world. Every week we discuss topics including:

- What is capitalism?
- The working class and trade unions
- The capitalist state and how it works
- Revolution and socialism
- Imperialism
- Oppression
- The Russian Revolution
- Why we need a socialist organisation

You can join in any week. Each session begins with an introduction, followed by small group discussion. It is a great way to familiarise yourself with the revolutionary ideas of Marxism.

Melbourne:
6:30pm every Monday @ Socialist Alternative Centre, Trades Hall.

Sydney:
6pm every Thursday @ Socialist Alternative Centre, 246 King St (upstairs), Newtown.

Perth:
6:30pm every Tuesday @ Citiplace Community Centre, Perth train station.

Brisbane:
6:30pm every Monday @ 136 Boundary Street (upstairs), West End.

JOIN SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE

If you agree with what you read in "what Socialist Alternative stands for" on the opposite page, and want to get involved in helping to build a fighting socialist organisation, why not join us? Fill out the application form below and send to

SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE,
BOX 4013, MELBOURNE UNIVERSITY,
VIC 3052

You can also apply to join at www.sa.org.au

YES, I WANT TO JOIN SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE!

NAME

PHONE

EMAIL

ADDRESS

Someone from your nearest branch will be in touch soon.



From asylum to Ashes

Australian cricket's next great hope was on the verge of being deported as a failed refugee. If he wasn't good at cricket, he could be dead. Many others aren't so lucky.

Trevor Grant

Australian cricket's six-year search for the next Shane Warne has gone through a conga line of promising prospects who disappear as quickly as they emerge. Fawad Ahmed, 31, an asylum seeker from Pakistan, is the latest leg spinner to have this crushing burden thrust upon him. He's no Warne, but he's a talented bowler who was selected in the Australian squad for the one-day series in England in September.

At first glance, it's a feel-good story about big-hearted Australia welcoming a desperate, frightened human being with open arms, and who is about to repay his adopted country by taking precious English wickets.

As usual, the reality is more complicated. Without being lucky enough to have the powerful lobby of Cricket Australia to plead his case, Ahmed would now be back in Pakistan, fearing that he would end up like a friend and fellow cricketer from his homeland – tortured, murdered and left in

pieces in a bag.

Pakistan-born Ahmed fled his homeland in 2010 after receiving constant death threats from religious fanatics because he was coaching women cricketers and promoting women's education and health. "They terrorised me, they made death threats to me", he said in an interview with Melbourne media earlier this year. He spoke of the death of his friend, Nauman Habib. "We played together. He was a good friend of mine. They kidnapped him. After a few days somebody found him in a bag in pieces."

Ahmed also told his story to the Immigration Department several times but, after being initially rejected and then failing through two stages of appeal, he was told to prepare for deportation last September.

As he made clear, the only reason he managed to avoid deportation was the actions of officials at his district cricket club, Melbourne University. They called on James Sutherland, a former bowler at the club and current CEO of Cricket Australia, who no doubt used his access to the halls

of power in Canberra to lobby for Ahmed.

It was a successful campaign. The then minister for immigration, Chris Bowen, used his ministerial discretion to grant Ahmed a protection visa late last year. Bowen's successor, Brendan O'Connor, fast-tracked Ahmed's citizenship application in time for him to play for Australia in England.

Cricket aside, the Ahmed case has done much to highlight the ability of the government to do one thing and say another on refugee policy. As O'Connor was welcoming Ahmed as a new citizen at a ceremony at the MCG a couple of months ago, and personally validating his claim that he was a victim of persecution, his federal cabinet colleague Bob Carr was on a media blitz to signal a tougher policy on refugee applications. Carr claimed, among other things, that all recent asylum seekers to Australia were economic migrants.

The most recent Immigration Department figures show that 91 percent of asylum seekers arriving by boat are granted refugee status. The figure was

92 percent for Pakistanis. "When it comes to these threats on your life, you don't have options", Ahmed said, emphasising that economic reasons, including cricket, had nothing to do with his flight to Australia. "I just came here to live as a normal human being, as a safe human being."

Carr has not backed off his campaign of demonisation against refugees, continuing to claim that people following the same path as Ahmed were getting an easy ride under a lenient assessment system, the same system that, but for the high-powered intervention of the elite cricket establishment, would have sent Ahmed back to the terror from which he fled. Had a tougher approach on refugee assessments been in place a year ago, our "next Shane Warne" could very easily have ended up in pieces in a bag, not in an Australian cap.

[Trevor hosts Refugee Radio at 3CR in Melbourne. Visit 3cr.org.au/refugeeradioshow to listen to the podcasts]