

Solidarity

Issue No. 48 / August 2012

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JOBS, TEACHERS, DISABILITIES

**STATE LIBERALS
WIELD THE AXE**



“AUSSIE JOBS” AND 457 VISAS DEBATE:

MIGRANT WORKERS ARE

WELCOME HERE, RACISM IS NOT

SOLIDARITY: WHO ARE WE?

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

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

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

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Things they say

I am looking at everything. You have to do the hard things and you have to do them up front. And there'll be a hell of a lot more.

Campbell Newman when asked why he axed funding to the Premier's Literary Awards, and programs such as Sisters Inside (for women in prison) and the Queensland Association for Healthy Communities (which runs HIV awareness programs)

This calendar year is going to be incredibly busy because this government is in such a mess.

Newman again

I can say we owe our lives to these two people.

Refugee Mehdi Joharchi tells a people smuggling trial his opinion of the two "very nice" Indonesian people smugglers who brought him to Australia

Now the dispute is over. Toll gave in. The *Financial Review's* Grace Collier sums up the outcome of the Toll dispute

We've been completely out-spent... In fact, every nation on earth has been out-spent by Great Britain at these Games. In some sports, it's three or four times the funding that Australia is receiving in those sports.

Nick Green, chef de mission of Australia's Olympic team, is already demanding more elite sports funding

But we've retained the essence of the Titanic by having first, second and third class. I think that's very important.

Clive Palmer on his plans to rebuild the Titanic, and keep the lower orders in their place

This is just for me to go for a little sail around the world in.

Palmer explains why he isn't interested in business partners for the venture

I don't know.

Aung San Sui Kyi, when asked if the ethnic Rohingyans (90,000 of who were being driven out of their homes by the Burmese army) were Burmese

Labor holds off Greens in battle for inner city

By James Supple

LABOR BREATHED a sigh of relief after holding off The Greens in July's by-election for the state seat of Melbourne. Victorian Labor feared that the vicious attacks on The Greens, begun by members of the NSW Labor Right, would cost them the seat.

The Greens came close, topping the primary vote with 36.4 per cent. Labor only won on preferences from Family First and the Australian Sex Party.

Labor is facing an increasing challenge from The Greens in progressive inner city seats. But the thinking behind Labor's assault on them is that the party should chase right-wing votes by denouncing The Greens' policies. Their message to anyone on the left thinking of voting Greens has effectively become, "we don't want you".

Having held Melbourne, Labor will now feel confident to continue their attacks, thinking they can do so without sacrificing seats in the inner city. Victorian Labor leader Daniel Andrews claimed the by-election victory was a vindication of a slightly different approach. Only Labor could form an alternative government, he argued, while The Greens simply spruiked, "unfunded uncosted policies, telling everybody what they want to hear".

But this is simply an effort to tailor Labor's message to different electorates, presenting a more left-wing face in the inner city. Labor's overall plan remains to race Tony Abbott to the right, with the hope this will win over voters in marginal seats. It's exactly the approach that has already undermined their base inside the working class—and also pushed voters to The Greens.

Challenges for Greens

Labor can hardly draw too much relief from the result in Melbourne. Its campaign focused on attacking Liberal Premier Ted Baillieu's cuts to TAFE and the public service. Federally Julia Gillard is still plumbing the depths of poll ratings around 30 per cent.

The chance of The Greens picking up further lower house seats at next year's federal election remains real. But too often The Greens have let the quest for electoral respectability and influence dilute their criticisms of Labor. Even after the Melbourne by-election Greens federal MP Adam Bandt was still defending Julia Gillard, saying Labor's attacks on The Greens were destabilising the government and



"white-anting the Prime Minister".

But the thing "white-anting" the government is their own policies—like backing away from taxing the mining bosses, slugging voters with a useless carbon tax, and refusing to properly fund public schools. Defending the record of the Gillard government won't win The Greens more support.

The Melbourne result shows the limits of The Greens' narrow electoral strategy. While Labor campaigned against the Victorian Liberals' cuts to TAFE, The Greens focused on talking up their own policies around issues like public transport. When Labor accused them of being unable to implement policies through forming government they had little response.

Chances for The Greens to enter coalition governments, like that resulting from the hung parliament federally, are rare. Asking voters to wait two or three elections for sufficient parliamentary representation is hardly an inspiring prospect. Nor is there evidence such coalitions deliver real results. The Greens' have very little to show for their alliance with the Gillard government. They have been drawn behind defending Gillard's plans in exchange for a few minor concessions—such as over the carbon tax.

The Greens can be a force for winning change if they get more serious about building movements of resistance on the ground—such as against state government cutbacks and Gillard's drift to the right.

EDITORIAL

Turn the axe around on the state Liberals

IF ELECTIONS were held in Queensland tomorrow, Premier Campbell Newman would lose his own seat.

After trouncing Labor only a few months ago, millions of Queenslanders are now realising that the Liberal National Party's agenda is to take the state back to the days of the notoriously corrupt, authoritarian and enthusiastically pro-business Joh Bjelke-Petersen.

The scale of Newman's cuts is astonishing. Along with 20,000 public servants facing the axe, thousands more will not have their contracts renewed. *Brisbane Times* columnist The Watcher described the mood, "Staff in some areas are waiting to be called in for 'the talk'. Others are waiting for 'the letter'. Positions and entire services and units have disappeared over night."

The government has demonstrated its nastiness by deregulating Breast-Screen, defunding a School Band Competition, Fanfare, and tearing up the Wild Rivers legislation. This is on top of cuts to tenancy services, HIV services, job search providers, environment organisations, prisoner advocacy organisations and too many more to mention.

In NSW, Liberal Premier Barry O'Farrell is cutting 15,000 public service jobs, has attacked Workers' Compensation, privatised the ferries, and wants to sell off the ports and power generators. In Victoria, Liberal Ted Baillieu is cutting 1000 jobs, attacking TAFE and de-funding services like homelessness prevention.

Tony Abbott will be watching what happens in Queensland, NSW and Victoria closely. If his mates can get away with trouncing the unions, attacking jobs and promoting bigotry, he'll be more than ready to do the same if he rides to power in 2013.

But there are promising signs that the state LNP government face a fight (see below).

Ruling for The Boss

Labor federally could be using the state Liberals' savagery to expose what Abbott really stands for. But Labor, both state and federal, agree with too much of what the Liberals are doing. The recently defeated state Labor governments in Victoria, NSW and Queensland were just as committed to AAA credit ratings, public sector pay



Above: Ambulance officers join the mass demonstration in Queensland against Newman's cuts

limits and privatisation as the Liberals. And Julia Gillard's public service "efficiency dividend" relentlessly cuts public service jobs.

The announcement of a trial for a National Disability Insurance Scheme (NIDS) is one of the few areas where Labor has managed to land a blow against the Liberals, who aren't happy about spending the money needed. But it's far from clear how Labor will fund the scheme, given its commitment to the budget surplus and cutting corporate tax (see page 10).

Wayne Swan's lecture tribute to Bruce Springsteen continued his bluster against Gina Rinehart and the mining billionaires. But Labor remains unwilling to impose a mining tax that would actually cost the billionaires something substantial.

Economist Andrew Leigh released research showing that 2009-10 was a fantastic year for Australia's one per cent. They declared 8.9 per cent of all taxable income in Australia, almost twice their share from 30 years ago, pocketing a minimum of \$194,365 each. Where is Labor's talk of taxing the rich to get any of it back?

Labor has continued its attacks on The Greens, racing Abbott to the bottom to denounce The Greens' opposition to offshore processing of refugees.

Determined to maintain her conservative credentials, Gillard is also refusing to rule out a constitutional challenge to the Tasmanian state Labor-Green government's plan to

legalise same-sex marriage.

A fightback against the state Liberals could help turn the political tide. It is Queensland that holds the most immediate chance of giving the Liberals a serious kick.

The unions have begun calling meetings and rallies, and ballots for strike action are underway or set to begin (see page 8).

In each state, the teachers' unions are crucial to turning the tide around. In Queensland, Newman is offering the teachers an insulting 2.7 per cent in exchange for scrapping every single one of their hard fought for conditions.

There are teachers' strikes in the pipeline in three states. A concerted fight can give the lead to others and help push for the more general strike activity that will be needed to stop the Liberals' cuts.

But in each state, union leaders are talking about a "long campaign", aimed at no more than electing Labor back into power. With Labor reduced to just seven MPs in Queensland and not much more elsewhere, that would be a very long campaign indeed—and no guarantee that Labor would reverse the damage the Liberals will have done by then.

Campbell Newman has called Queensland the "Spain of Australia." But the other side of Spain's debt crisis is growing resistance to austerity and cutbacks.

Just a little bit of that spirit can wipe the smile off Newman's, and Abbott's, faces.

.....
A fightback against the state Liberals can turn the political tide

Unions, Labor members say no more Income Management

By Geraldine Fela

A COMMITMENT to organising with unionists has paid off for the campaign against the NT Intervention and the rollout of Income Management into Bankstown. Child protection workers in the Public Service Association (PSA) in New South Wales have put an industrial ban on participating in the implementation of Income Management and on referring their clients to Centrelink.

The PSA's action is a powerful antidote to Indigenous Affairs' Minister Jenny Macklin's line that Income Management "helps families" and is "in the interests of children." It is an embarrassment to the government and shows that child protection workers regard Income Management as a policy that punishes and stigmatises the people they work with. Importantly, many of the workers involved see their action as part of opposing the racism of Income Management and the entire Intervention in the Northern Territory.

The PSA's action comes on top of another recent victory. In July, the NSW ALP conference unanimously passed a motion calling on the government to halt the rollout of Income Management in Bankstown and any other community and review the Stronger Futures legislation that extends the Intervention for ten years.

The motion also called for the redirection of all funds earmarked for Income Management into programs to provide real support for people, such as job creation and social services and called for the right for anyone on the system to be able to exit immediately.

This gives the campaign a powerful tool in forcing the debate about Income Management and the NT Intervention as the government's roll out to five "trial sites" enters its second month.

APY push

However, despite these developments, Macklin is determined to extend the paternalism of Stronger Futures to the remote Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) lands in South Australia.

The NPY Women's Council—the only Aboriginal organisation that unequivocally supported Stronger Futures in submissions to the Senate inquiry on the legislation—has called for the introduction of Income Management. They've long been a conservative organisation that Macklin relies



Above: Sue, a PSA member, addresses a Stop the Intervention Collective demonstration

upon to cover up for the mass hatred of Intervention policies amongst Aboriginal people.

Macklin is using their latest call as a battering ram against the huge opposition to Stronger Futures, which extends as widely as the entire Catholic Church of Australia. At the conclusion of the National Assembly of the Uniting Church in Adelaide in July, church representatives led a march to parliament to hold a prayer vigil against Stronger Futures.

The NPY Women's Council's call does not reflect the views of people on the ground in the APY Lands. Mr Murray George, a member of the executive of the APY Land Council, travelled to six community consultation meetings on Income Management within the area where people overwhelmingly rejected proposals to introduce the scheme. The extent of the opposition was such that Centrelink officials dropped out of the consultations. As Mr George said, "They're not listening to people, you know...I walk the communities, I go and sit down with the community and I talk to those people and I know what they want."

This truth was acknowledged by a recent meetings of SA Unions, the peak union body in South Australia. They passed a motion opposing the

roll out of Income Management in the APY Lands, noting that "...all communities in the APY Lands have rejected the introduction of compulsory Income Management at a recent visit by federal government officials despite the claims by Indigenous Affairs Minister Jenny Macklin...".

They also expressed their opposition to Income Management in Playford, Adelaide, one of the five trial sites, as well as the NT Intervention which they declared has, "had serious detrimental effects on the culture and wellbeing of Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory."

Rather than measures to control people, APY Lands communities desperately need money for jobs and investment in social services. Labor has progressively axed 400 jobs—from a community where 900 people are of working age—since it began cuts to the Community Development Employment Program (CDEP) in the APY Lands in July 2009. Now they want to blame Aboriginal people for the misery they've inflicted.

The push only reinforces the importance of the campaign in Bankstown. A victory there could be a real boost to those in the APY lands opposing this, as well as those in the Northern Territory bracing themselves for a decade of Macklin's Intervention.

Sri Lanka's repression brings boats of Tamil refugees to Australia

By Mark Goudkamp

MORE THAN three years since the Sri Lankan government declared "victory" in the 33 year-long civil war against the Tamil Tigers (LTTE), there has been a spike in the number of asylum seeker boats arriving at Australia's Cocos Islands directly from Sri Lanka.

The numbers of people are small, but predictably both the press and the government have raised fear-mongering calls to "stop the boats." But the boats are arriving because of the ongoing persecution of Sri Lanka's oppressed Tamil minority.

In 2009, UN Secretary Ban Ki Moon visited Menik Farm, the largest of the government internment camps for Tamils. 200,000 Tamils were imprisoned there. Describing it, he said: "I have travelled around the world and visited similar places, but this is by far the most appalling scene I have seen."

Today, around 20,000 Tamils remain in these appalling camps. A further 69,000 Sri Lankan refugees live in 112 camps in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu.

A United Nations' report last year recommended that the government of Mahinda Rajapaksa be investigated for war crimes, saying it was responsible for the vast majority of 40,000 civilian deaths, that its forces had deliberately shelled hospitals and Red Cross ships and had engaged in mass rape and summary executions.

The end of the war has not diminished discrimination against the Tamils. Indeed the Rajapaksa government refers to Sri Lanka as "the land of Sinhala" (referring to the majority Sinhalese population), with all others seen as "visitors". Not only Tamils, but also Muslims and Christian minorities are under threat. It's also worth noting that a small minority of those fleeing by boat are Sinhalese.

"White van abductions", where people are grabbed from city streets by plain-clothed men driving unmarked vehicles, are still commonplace. Amnesty International says 32 activists disappeared between October 2011 and May 2012. Human Rights Watch Asia recently reported that Tamils deported from Britain were beaten with batons and burnt with cigarettes.

The Tamil's current situation was summed up at a recent London protest to commemorate Black July,



Above: Tamil refugees arrive for processing on Christmas Island

an anti-Tamil pogrom in 1983. Ravi Kumar from the British Tamils Forum said: "During the 1983 pogrom, the Eezham Tamils could flee to the North as a sanctuary. Now, the extensive land grabs and militarisation of the Tamil homeland has made it unsafe for them."

Despite the UN condemnations, the Rajapaksa government has received support from countries as divergent as Britain, China, and Israel. The US continues to block any challenges to Bush's administration's declaration that the LTTE is a terrorist organisation.

Tamils protested during the London Olympics opening ceremony, circulated petitions calling for Sri Lanka's suspension from the games, and some activists went on hunger strike.

Australia's role

As one of the Sri Lankan government's strongest supporters, Australia is complicit in the repression of the Tamils. The Labor government has ignored Rajapaksa's human rights abuses as it pursues its "stop the boats" agenda.

Shamefully, last October, Julia Gillard gave Rajapaksa the red carpet treatment at CHOGM in Perth. Labor has ignored Canada's proposal to boycott the CHOGM 2013 in Sri Lanka if Rajapaksa's human rights record doesn't improve.

Immigration Minister Chris Bowen praised the regime when he visited Sri Lanka in May, saying, "We appreciate Sri Lanka's ongoing cooperation in the area of people

smuggling, in particular its new people smuggling legislation".

Bowen also touted for more international students, and negotiated a bilateral agreement for more flight connections to boost tourism and trade.

While Labor is critical of Abbott's policy to tow refugee boats back to Indonesia, Bowen actively encourages tow backs by the Sri Lankan government. More than 700 people, 400 in July alone, have been arrested and jailed this year as they tried to flee Sri Lanka.

When the *Sydney Morning Herald's* Ben Doherty visited a poor west coast Tamil village, one man told him: "No job, no education, we have trouble from the police and army. We are desperate people". Another said that after his boat was intercepted he was interrogated for two days and jailed for more than a month: "We slept chest to back, all packed in like sardines. I could not sleep and there was hardly any food". He was released only after his sisters paid tens of thousands of rupees.

Tamil asylum seekers are now the second largest group in Australia's detention centres (after Afghans) and in community detention (after Iranians). Some 60 Tamils are incarcerated indefinitely, found to be refugees, yet given negative ASIO security assessments. They are unable either to appeal or even see the text of ASIO's decision.

The persecution of the Tamils is undeniable. The vast majority of the Tamils arriving in Australia are found to be genuine refugees. The Tamil asylum boats must be welcomed, not stopped.

Bowen actively encourages the Sri Lankan government to turn boats back

Newman's slash and burn justified with lies about debt

By Rob Nicholas

QUEENSLAND PREMIER Campbell Newman has launched an avalanche of cuts and an ideological offensive aimed at moulding the state of Queensland in the neo-liberal image.

The breadth of the cuts is staggering. At least 7000 public servants have been sacked already (maybe more). The community sector is now also in the firing line. Organisations with a record of speaking out for those they represent were the first to go.

Cuts to the Queensland Association for Healthy Communities (QAHC), with two years to run on its funding agreement, combined with watering down civil unions and the attempt to ban surrogacy for same-sex couples points to who the LNP is targeting.

At least 70 per cent of Indigenous health programs have been cut alongside Sisters Inside and the Tenants Advocacy and Advisory Service (TAAS), which is funded by bond interest not taxes.

There will also be an attempt to sell government owned caravan parks which provide low income housing, mainly to older pensioners pushed out of the rental market.

Even the initially supportive Murdoch tabloid *The Courier-Mail* has called on Newman to stop appeasing the, "vocal libertarian cheer squad for any regime that delivers smaller government" and focus on how to "deliver services for its constituency."

Is there a debt crisis?

The short answer is no. The LNP government has repeated over and over that unless action is taken the state will be \$100 billion dollars in debt. This figure is the projected debt figure for 2018-19 from the Queensland Commission of Audit's (QCA) Interim Report.

The report averaged out Labor spending over the last ten years and simply projected the same spending for the next seven years. But this includes funds from the 2008 federal stimulus package and federal grants for rebuilding after the floods and Cyclone Yasi.

Treasury estimates incorporating Labor's cuts in spending over the last two years (through asset sales and the sacking of 5000 public servants)



The Queensland Teachers Union are balloting for strike action against new Liberal-National Party Premier Campbell Newman's effort to strip conditions

actually had the budget in operating surplus by 2014-15.

The QCA Interim Report lists actual state debt for the 2010-11 financial year at just over \$41 billion compared to total net worth of \$171 billion.

In the same year Queensland recorded a small operating deficit of \$1.5 billion, in the wake of an economic crisis and natural disasters.

The report, produced by a taskforce headed by a Peter Costello, is a document specifically designed to create an atmosphere of crisis

Manufacturing a crisis

The report, produced by a taskforce headed by former Howard government Treasurer Peter Costello, is a document specifically designed to create an atmosphere of crisis where there is none.

While most financial, government and political commentators assert we must pay down debt, they miss the point of the Commission of Audit and the strategy of the Newman Government.

The attempt by the QCA Interim Report to use ratings agencies to create a sense of crisis is one such example.

The downgrading of Queensland Government bonds to AA+ status by Standard and Poor's and Moody's is referred to often in the report and the need to restore a AAA+ rating is central to the objectives of the cuts.

Yet these are the same agencies which until the 2008 crisis graded the US subprime mortgage backed securities as AAA+.

The spectre of ratings agencies also points to the influence of unelected neo-liberal institutions on public finances and the use of their ratings as ideological propaganda to justify cuts to the public sector.

This is being done to pursue a class project to further shift the burden of paying for the services we receive onto the working class, and marks a dramatic escalation of the neo-liberal project in Queensland.

Fightback against Ne

CAMPBELL NEWMAN'S sacking spree has coincided with enterprise bargaining periods for key groups of public sector workers—state school teachers, ambulance workers, firefighters and core agency public servants.

As if mass sackings weren't doing enough damage, in negotiations the government has sought to attack workers by attempting to remove no forced redundancy clauses from agreements to make sackings easier, and remove conditions, such as restrictions on class sizes, parental leave, and penalty rates out of agreements altogether.

The result is Queensland's biggest union rallies since WorkChoices, with multiple nighttime rallies of teachers and supporters, and a rally of core public servants that drew upwards of 7000 people.

A Queensland Council of Unions (QCU) combined union delegates' meeting on August 1—the first since 2007—voted for a "day of action" on September 12. Union members around the state will rally and hold workplace events in support of the QCU's "Workers' charter for Queensland."

Militancy wins: Toll workers show how to fight

By Chris Breen

WORKERS EMPLOYED by Toll at the Coles warehouse in Somerton, Melbourne have shown that militancy wins. After a two-week strike, the workers, covered by the National Union of Workers (NUW), have won improved conditions and a better pay offer.

The pay deal does, however, fall short of their original demand for equal pay with interstate Coles warehouse workers. Coles runs most of its warehouses across the country itself, but has contracted out operations at two of its Melbourne centres to cut costs. Even after the wage rise just won, Somerton workers are still paid about \$5 per hour less than workers in the warehouses directly run by Coles interstate.

The win was a direct result of their solid strike and picket that completely shut the warehouse down, preventing any trucks moving in or out of the warehouse. They also stood up



Above: Toll workers picketed to stop trucks moving in or out of the warehouse for two weeks

to attempts by Toll to have the picket declared illegal, including an order demanding the picket be lifted and the naming of 20 workers in the Supreme Court.

The action showed the power of strike action to hurt major corporations and force them to concede. Both Toll and Coles claimed publicly that the strike was not having much impact on Coles.

But Toll let the truth slip in documents they lodged in court. The company estimated that contingency plans Coles put in place to deal with the strike cost them “a six figure sum on a daily basis”.

Conditions won

Workers have won accrued time RDOs (rostered days off), shift allowances, a voluntary system for working public holidays, the right for casuals to convert to permanent after nine months (currently it’s 12 months) and better rights for union delegates.

The wage deal is a 10.25 per cent wage rise over three years, an improvement on the company’s initial offer of 2.75 per cent to 3 per cent per year, but less than the original 7 per cent per year claim (later dropped to 5 per cent).

The NUW produced some very good material revealing the massive profits of the companies involved. Coles made \$1.9 billion in the last financial year and Toll \$295 million. Massive salaries were paid to the bosses—the Coles CEO got \$15.6 million, while Toll’s boss scored \$4.7 million. Toll even managed to sponsor Essendon football club to the tune

of \$1.5 million *at the same time* as it claimed that it could not afford to pay the Somerton workers the same as other warehouse workers.

Standing together

Solidarity spoke to one worker who said the improved conditions were good, and that the afternoon shift workers were happiest, but the pay rise “should have been a bit more”. “The picket has been a good experience,” he said, “We all stuck together, even though it was tough for everyone.”

Workers showed a tremendous will to fight. Interstate workers in Goulburn NSW refused to do distribution work that had been shifted to them from Victoria. The Goulburn workers were ordered back to work by Fair Work, but spreading this kind of solidarity action could have seen the Somerton workers win all their demands.

Victorian Nurses defied both Fair Work and Federal Court orders earlier this year, and won against the nasty Victorian Liberal state government.

Somerton workers have struck a blow against Coles’ strategy to cut costs by outsourcing its warehouses. Now the union leaders have to make sure that all Coles’ warehouses (including the outsourced sites) are covered by the one bargaining agreement.

CFMEU members recently successfully staged a national strike at all Lend Lease sites across the country. Developing links between workers at all Coles’ warehouses will be key to taking coordinated action in future to stop Coles’ divide and rule tactics and to winning the fight for equal pay and conditions for all warehouse workers.

They stood up to attempts to have the picket declared illegal, including an order in the Supreme Court

wman’s cuts begins

Newman has rushed through new industrial laws to hamper unions’ ability to strike. Electoral commission ballots are now required for strike action and Ministers have the power to “cancel” industrial action altogether in certain circumstances.

Together, the union that represents public sector workers, has submitted more than 300 ballot applications for industrial action, and the teachers’ union plans to strike. These strikes will be crucial in kicking off the fight against Newman’s cuts.

Progressive unionists and NGO workers have established a new organisation, Queensland UNCUT, to build community support for unions’ industrial campaigns, and to ensure the community is mobilised in protest against the cuts.

Uncut is off to a flying start. 170 attended our initial launch meeting, and more than 70 people attended the first organising meeting. We have called a community protest during parliament’s sitting time on August 22 and will mobilise for the September 12 union day of action.

Emma Ross

For more info email queenslanduncut@gmail.com

Funding proper disability care the challenge for Labor

By James Supple

PLANS FOR a National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) are a centrepiece of the Gillard government's efforts to re-badge Labor as committed to public services. The aims of the scheme are very welcome—but the key question is how it will be funded.

Julia Gillard told an NDIS rally in Sydney in May that, "An NDIS will give all Australians with a significant disability the peace of mind to know that their care and support needs will be addressed, no matter where they live or how they acquired their disability."

The scheme aims to do something that is long overdue: end the lottery where people with disabilities get different levels of support depending on where they live and how they acquired a disability, whether through a car accident, workplace accident, at home or at birth.

The Federal Government announced spending of \$1 billion over four years in this year's budget for a series of trial sites covering 10,000 people to test the scheme. Disgracefully, the Liberal state premiers initially refused to put in money to fund a trial.

After a few days of public outrage, however, Victorian Premier Ted Baillieu and NSW Premier Barry O'Farrell reluctantly agreed to contribute \$42 million and \$35 million respectively to secure trials for their state.

True to form, Queensland Premier Campbell Newman refused. Newman is more focused on cutting disability services, axing a \$6.50 bonus to taxi drivers to compensate for the extra time it takes to pick up disabled people.

Crucially, one of the starting points of the Productivity Commission report that outlined plans for the NDIS is that, "much more funding would be required to meet the current demand for services".

The report estimates funding for disability care needs to roughly double. The cost of the NDIS would be an additional \$6.5 billion a year when fully implemented, on top of current levels of \$7.1 billion of funding for disability care.

"So how will the disability scheme be paid for?" asked Ross Gittins in the Fairfax press. "No one has any idea."

The Liberals clearly don't want



Above: Julia Gillard visiting a disability services centre in Parramatta

to pay for it. Although Tony Abbott has pledged his support, his Treasury spokesperson Joe Hockey refused to commit to funding it, saying, "I'm not going to raise expectations and then not deliver".

But Julia Gillard has not outlined how she would find the money either. Her only concrete commitment so far has been to rule out a new tax to pay for it.

The money can easily be found: restoring the mining tax to its original level would raise billions. Special corporate tax write-offs cost the government \$5.4 billion in 2010-11. And the corporate tax rate has been slashed from 40 per cent down to 30 per cent since the 1980s. But Gillard and Swan say they want to cut it further.

Labor's obsession with its budget surplus also restricts how they can find the money to boost funding for services. All this means that finding another \$7 billion a year will likely mean cuts to other public services.

The NDIS model

Following an assessment to determine their needs, the scheme is designed to offer support to anyone with a permanent disability, defined as, "significantly reduced functioning in self-care, communication, mobility or self-management and require significant ongoing support."

It would also provide early intervention support to people where there was a good chance this would make a

difference to their lives. For example, early intervention can make a big difference to people with degenerative diseases like multiple sclerosis. It is estimated the NDIS would assist 410,000 people.

Individuals would be entitled to receive a range of supports and would be able to choose the service providers they wanted to deliver these. Some have criticised the NDIS as a neo-liberal "vouchers system", but it is actually more like Medicare. There is no dollar amount of funding, simply an entitlement to access services.

However the Productivity Commission report, on which plans for the NDIS are based, makes it clear that people will also be able to cash out their entitlements to be spent on other services agreed to by the NDIS.

This could introduce a market mechanism into disability services, running the risk that profitable areas could be cherry picked by the private sector. The government needs to make sure that there is no shift away from existing publicly funded disability services or pensions.

Some neo-liberal economists have suggested that the scheme could pay for itself by pushing more people back into the workforce.

The boost in disability spending is well overdue. The challenge will be to make sure the government funds it and implements services to meet the needs of all those with disabilities.

The cost of the NDIS would be an additional \$6.5 billion a year when fully implemented

Syria—armed revolt the product of popular uprising

By Mark Gillespie

AS *SOLIDARITY* goes to press the Assad regime is using tanks, jet fighters and helicopter gunships to re-establish control in Damascus and Aleppo. Though severely out-gunned, the opposition continues to hang on.

This violence will push more people into opposition to the regime. “Every time there are 15 people killed in a village, 500 additional sympathisers are mobilised, roughly 100 of whom are fighters”, claims the former head of the UN monitoring mission in Syria, General Robert Mood.

Opposition forces now control large areas of the Syrian countryside and in July fighting entered the two largest cities, Damascus and Aleppo.

There are increasing signs that the Assad regime is on the ropes. In early August the prime minister, Riad Hijab, along with two other government ministers joined the 27 generals, government minister and leading diplomats who had already deserted the regime.

Some claimed the regime would never fall without Western military intervention. But once again the Arab masses are showing otherwise.

The bombing inside the national security headquarters in mid-July came as a particular shock to the regime. It killed four leading officials, including the defence minister and Assad’s brother in law. The attack was almost certainly an inside job, showing that opposition to the regime has reached even its inner sanctum.

Brigadier General Manaf Tlass, a commander in the elite republican guard and personal friend of the Assad family, also defected in July. His father was the Syrian defence minister for 30 years. Border posts on the Turkish and Iraqi borders have fallen to opposition forces. Kurdish groups have taken control of numerous towns in western Kurdistan.

Armed revolt

The revolution in Syria is now more of an armed uprising compared to Egypt and Tunisia, where protests and strikes predominated. But it remains a genuine people’s struggle and deserves our support.

It’s been the massive violence of the regime against peaceful protests that’s led people to take up arms. Assad has killed, detained and tortured thousands and pulverised whole suburbs with tanks and artillery. The



Above: Syrian rebels take up position against the regime

regime has armed the Shabiha, a thug militia group, to do much of its dirty work. In Houla in May they massacred over 108 people, including 34 women and 49 children.

By July last year there were enough deserters from the army, appalled at being ordered to shoot unarmed civilians, to form the Free Syrian Army along with civilian volunteers. At first they simply protected demonstrations. But the more the regime responded with violence, the more their ranks grew and the revolution took the form of an armed uprising. Even as late as July this year, there were large demonstrations and merchant strikes in Aleppo and Damascus.

But politics and not guns are crucial for determining the outcome. The revolutionaries are making gains because soldiers are deserting the regime and joining the opposition, not the other way round. This means Assad has lost the argument that the opposition are just “terrorists” and part of a foreign conspiracy.

Reaching out to the Alawite, Christian and other minorities, too, remains a central political task.

While brute force might allow Assad to retake Damascus and Aleppo, it will be difficult for him to win in the long run. With popular support the insurgents will run a very effective hit-and-run campaign.

This will take time, however, and that’s a danger. The militarisation of the struggle gives the West the opportunity to use money and arms to influence and shape the opposition.

The *New York Times* is already reporting that a, “small number of CIA officers are operating secretly in southern Turkey, helping allies decide which Syrian opposition fighters across the border will receive arms”. Gulf states like Saudi Arabia and Qatar have been funding sections of the rebels. But the fact the rebels remain so poorly armed is evidence the West does not trust them.

The Western powers still hope for a “negotiated transition” to ensure a neo-liberal, and preferably pro-Western, regime emerges. Former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan has resigned as official negotiator and his “peace plan”, which rested on convincing Assad to step aside, is in tatters.

The West is desperate to maintain as much of his murderous regime intact as possible. According to the *Wall Street Journal*, US officials have even mooted General Tlass as a replacement for Assad, arguing this, “would help win Russian support for a transition in Damascus because of the Tlass family’s long ties to the Assad regime”.

But whether the West will step up its direct military intervention remains to be seen. If they do it would be a disaster and could lead to the Balkanisation of the whole region as Russia and other regional powers, some with sectarian agendas, join the scramble for influence.

We have to oppose all Western intervention, either in the form of an engineered change at the top, or armed groups with allegiance to the West. The Syrian people must remain in control.

The militarisation of the struggle gives the West the opportunity to use money and arms to influence and shape the opposition

Summer of discontent: crisis and resistance in Spain

By Daisy Farnham and Pau Alarcón

SPANISH PEOPLE have risen up in a new surge of resistance to the government's relentless austerity reforms.

On 19 July, 800,000 marched in Madrid alone, along with hundreds of thousands more in 80 cities around Spain. Teachers, students, doctors, nurses, firefighters, the unemployed and even police united with the "indignados" movement in an historic display of trade union unity.

Spain's economy remains mired in deep recession. Unemployment is at record levels with almost one in four people jobless. Fifty three per cent of under 25s are unemployed, prompting an exodus of youth, mostly to northern Europe.

The government recently admitted that the slowdown is expected to continue for the next two years.

The growth of poverty is alarming. More than 400,000 families have been evicted from their houses since 2008. Shanty towns and suicide rates are growing and life expectancy is diminishing for the first time in 35 years.

In June, the government was forced to request an EU bailout of 100 billion euros to rescue its zombie banking sector, sending warning bells ringing across the eurozone. A full scale sovereign debt bailout of Europe's fourth largest economy would be a massive hit to the unstable monetary union.

Estimates of the potential cost of a Spanish bailout tower at around 300 billion euros. If Spain were to default, it would threaten a domino effect across the Eurozone.

Under pressure from Brussels to meet stringent deficit limits, Spain's conservative government, led by Mariano Rajoy, has pledged to mete out new austerity reforms "every Friday".

Divisions

The crisis is forcing divisions inside the ruling class. They are not yet deep, but expose the growing problems for the ruling Popular Party in enforcing austerity. Arguments about the need for a national unity government, where all parties are brought together to cooperate in pushing through austerity, have started to appear in the mass media.

While billions are thrown at the banks (to the tune of 21 per cent of the GDP), the government continues to make workers and the unemployed



Above: The Asturian miners march into Madrid

pay the bill.

A stinging new austerity package has been announced which will hike Spain's GST equivalent from 18 to 21 per cent, privatise airports, trains and ports, and launch new cuts to the already minimal unemployment benefit, and to public sector workers' pay and bonuses.

These add to the barrage of cuts pushed through since the conservative government's win, including a 66 per cent hike to university fees—as well as the cuts dished out by the previous Socialist Party government in 2010, when public sector workers' wages were slashed by five per cent.

But public sector workers have responded with magnificent defiance. Mass demonstrations were held for three consecutive days following the announcement. Taking inspiration from the "indignados" movement, workers organised spontaneous occupations, road blocks and pickets of the Popular Party's local offices.

Firefighters led the charge on the parliament building at the end of one major demonstration. There is a strong feeling of anger and willingness to struggle, despite the main trade union bureaucracies' failure to mobilise.

Miners' fight

In the last few months Asturian miners have given a huge boost to the fight against austerity. Thousands of miners sustained a 67-day strike against

a government cut of 63 per cent to industry subsidies.

The miners, who are renowned for their union strength and history of struggle, put up staunch resistance, with occupations of mines, barricades and even homemade firework rockets to defend themselves from the police.

Other workers showed phenomenal solidarity with the miners. Three columns of miners and their families marched from the north of the Spanish state all the way to Madrid in mid-July and were greeted by a crowd of 150,000. Demonstrator Laura Fraile said "the miners have instilled everyone with their courage and strength".

The end of this strike is bad news. But the struggle is far from over. A general strike is being discussed for September, as well as an indefinite strike in primary and high schools in Madrid, called by the "Marea Verde" (Green Tide) workers movement and some small trade unions.

The "indignados" movement plans to "Take the Congress" by holding the parliament building under siege until a new constitutional process is announced. Local and sectoral strikes are also spreading, like the public transport workers against privatisation.

As one teacher from Madrid said; "it is a very hot summer. Even though the streets aren't burning, sparks are flying. And we know whose side the firefighters are on".

Life expectancy is diminishing for the first time in 35 years

Open letter to the left to welcome 457 workers

Dear Comrades,

Over recent weeks there have been a number of union rallies, particularly in Western Australia, around slogans such as, “Local workers first” or “Aussie jobs first”.

The unions’ “Local workers first” campaign is fundamentally directed at keeping out “foreign workers”, especially those employed on 457 visas.

Tragically, almost all of the left has got behind the union leaderships’ call for the abolition of 457 visas. In the context of a campaign against 457 workers coming here, this can only feed nationalist and racist responses to the economic crisis.

Many unions and left groups have tried to say they are for permanent migration, although they know full well that the bosses and the government set the migration quotas and there is no other avenue for the 457 workers to get here.

Socialist Alliance has explicitly called for scrapping both “Rinehart’s Migration deal and 457 visas” at the same time as promoting “full residency and industrial rights for migrant and guest workers”. But the call for full rights is empty if 457 workers are barred from entry.

Socialist Alternative unequivocally supported the “Local workers first” rally in Perth. Their more recent ambiguous and abstract slogan, “...457 visas should be scrapped immediately, with workers on such visas given full residency rights without qualification,” can’t hide that the rally was essentially a call to close the door to immigrant workers, rather than fight for their rights.

There is a tradition of working class internationalism and anti-racism in Australia stretching back to the efforts of the IWW and the Communist Party to unite migrant and local workers in struggle. Unions have supported the demands for Aboriginal land rights as well as refugee rights and the national liberation struggle in Vietnam.

In the 1990s, the left played a critical role mobilising opposition to the rise of One Nation—supporting mass demonstrations and protests directly confronting Pauline Hanson’s meetings.

There is an even greater need in the present situation for the left to play such a role in the union movement to ensure that the widespread



concern about job losses is not directed at foreign workers.

No group on the left would ever suggest that the way to prevent the exploitation of international students is to deny them visas or cut their work rights. But the same support is not being extended to 457 workers.

Uniting 457s and local workers

The 457s are victims of the same bosses that cut the wages and conditions of Australian workers. They are placed in a particularly vulnerable position—forced to rely on their employer for the right to work in Australia and often forced into far worse conditions.

We can either allow the bosses to leave them vulnerable and create two tiers of workers or we can unite *all* workers to fight together.

The unions have done good work organising and defending 457 workers. The need now is to fight to extend that solidarity. Rather than falling behind the mobilisation against foreign workers, we need to advocate the right for workers to come, their right to work and their right to stay.

Allowing union leaders to deflect anger onto foreign workers will only make it more difficult to fight against the Australian and multi-national bosses that are responsible for unemployment.

The racist policies of White Australia did find support amongst the trade union leaders. The deep influence of left nationalism, suggest-

Above: One of the Perth rallies demanding “local workers first”

ing there is something in common between Australian workers and Australian bosses, is a sad fact of labour history.

To fight for jobs means tackling Gina Rinehart and the mining bosses over rosters, the spread of hours, overtime, apprenticeships, outsourcing, and so on. The fight by miners in central Queensland has been a good example of what can be done. The unions also need to campaign for shorter hours with no reduction in pay.

These are things that the left has historically argued and fought for. 457 workers are allies in that fight. The 457 workers (and Rinehart) need to know that the unions will fight against any attempt to victimise them and also fight for their right to stay.

Of course, Gina Rinehart and other bosses would like to create divisions in the workforce, to have two tiers of workers on different sets of conditions. The tragedy is that the union mobilisations against 457s assists them to do that.

The Left can play a crucial role challenging the nationalism and underlying racism of the anti-457 campaign if it argues for its principles of and for a struggle based on internationalism, solidarity and anti-racism.

We urge you to support the 457 statement as a basis on which we can build a truly united campaign for workers’ rights.

Signed Solidarity

.....
The rally was essentially a call to close the door to immigrant workers, rather than fight for their rights

Statement: Welcome 457 visa holders into the unions

WE THE undersigned would like to express our concern over the anti-foreign worker sentiment from sections of the union movement to the announcement of the EMA (Enterprise Migration Agreement) that will allow Gina Rinehart to employ 1715 overseas workers (of a total workforce of 8000).

A campaign directed at overseas 457 workers is misdirected and detrimental to building our unions and the unity we need to face up to aggressive mining bosses and the challenge of job losses in manufacturing sector.

Thousands of jobs have been lost over the past few months. More than 3700 jobs went in the first five weeks of 2012—from banks, Qantas, Telstra, Heinz, Mortein and others.

These jobs were not lost because of foreign workers, but because of greedy employers who are only concerned with boosting company profits. It is big business, Australian bosses included, that are determined to cut wages and conditions, outsource to contractors, impose short time and push to casualise the workforce to exploit Australian workers and overseas workers alike.

On paper guest workers on 457 visas are meant to have the same pay and conditions as Australian workers, but if 457s are sacked, they have only 28 days to find another employer—or they must leave the country.

Recent reports that 250 Chinese workers on the Sino Iron project in the Pilbara are only getting \$70,000 to \$80,000 for jobs for which Australian workers would be paid about \$150,000 is just the most recent example of how bosses will try to exploit 457

workers.

Without oversight and with the employer having the power over their visa and therefore to determine whether they stay or go, 457s remain vulnerable and open to exploitation.

The right to permanent residency has to be a central demand of the union movement to prevent any attempt to divide the workforce between local workers and 457 workers.

Enterprise Migration Agreements and the employment of 457 workers must be subject to union oversight and employment under a union-negotiated enterprise agreement.

The best way to fight Gina Rinehart and other bosses is to recruit the 457 workers into the unions, fight for their right to stay, and build a united union movement that is willing and able to fight for every job.

To ensure 457 visa workers are not exploited we demand that they have:

- (i) the right to permanent residency;
- (ii) the same rights and conditions as local workers on the job; and access to on-the-job training;
- (iii) information provided in different languages, with translators are available on the job;
- (iv) paid English classes on the job.

We reject all attempts to weaken our unions' collective strength by dividing worker against worker.

Please email solidarity@solidarity.net.au to add your name

Signatories include:

Alex Loke, Sensis AMWU Delegate
Andrew Martin, AMWU member, WA
Anne Picot, NTEU member, University of Sydney
Anthea Vogl, NTEU member, UTS
Antony Loewenstein, independent journalist and author
Aran Mylvaganam, Victoria FSU Organiser
Ben Convey, member MEAA (Victoria) & ASU private sector
Bill Dunn, NTEU member, University of Sydney
Chris Breen, Sensis, AMWU delegate (FoC) & AMWU Victorian State Councillor
Christina Ho, Senior Lecturer, Social Inquiry and NTEU member, UTS
Clr Christine Donayre, Greens Councillor, Industrial Officer with the FBUEU & member, USU
David Glanz, RMIT branch, NTEU
Dr Nick Riemer, NTEU member, University of Sydney
Dr Sarah Gregson, NTEU Branch President, University of New South Wales
Dr Tad Tietze, ASMOF member (personal capacity)
Elizabeth Humphrys, NTEU Member, University of Sydney
Gabriela Australia
Greg Platt, CPSU Statistics Section Councillor (personal capacity)
Hamish McPherson, Victorian Branch Councillor (Primary Sector), AEU
James Goodman, Assoc. Prof., Academic VP NTEU, UTS Branch
Jeff Rickertt, Together Member, Queensland
Jeff Sparrow, author and editor, *Overland*
Jim Casey, NSW Secretary, FBUEU
Jodi Sita, NTEU member, La Trobe University
Jon Clarke, TWU National Education Coordinator (personal capacity)
Judy McVey, CPSU member
Julie Ross, NSW Teachers Federation councillor, Eastern Suburbs Teachers Association
Katherine Morris, AMWU member, Sensis
LASNET (Latin American Solidarity Network)
Le Tam Tu, PhD student, CPCE, FASS, UTS

Lorenzo White, organiser CFMEU (ACT)
Lucy Honan, St Albans, AEU
Marisol Salinas, member ASU
Mark Goudkamp, NSW Teachers Federation Anti-Racism Policy Committee and Blacktown Teachers Association
Martin Rospin, Sensis AMWU Delegate
Matthew Henderson, Bargaining Campaign Officer, Strategic Industrial Bargaining Team, NSW Nurses' Association
Melanie Lazarow, University of Melbourne NTEU
Mel Slee, President, RMIT NTEU branch committee
Michael Thomson, President, University of Sydney NTEU Branch
Migrante Australia
Migrante Melbourne
Mike Beggs, NTEU member, University of Sydney
Neha Madhok, National Environment Officer, National Union of Students
Paddy Gibson, NTEU member, Jumbunna Indigenous House of Learning, UTS
Paul Young, CPSU Section Councilor, DHS
Penny McCall Howard, USU member and MUA Research and Policy Coordinator - International issues (personal capacity)
Peter Farago, NTEU Member 1972 - 2007
Phil Griffiths, Lecturer, Political Economy, USQ and NTEU member (personal capacity)
Professor Heather Goodall, NTEU member, UTS
Professor Verity Burgmann, University of Melbourne, NTEU
Ramesh Fernandez, RISE
Renea McCauley, CPSU Section Councillor
RMIT University NTEU branch committee
Sam Salvidge (personal capacity)
Sean Redmond, NTEU member, Deakin Uni
Shane Reside, Organiser Syd Uni Branch NTEU
Stephen Stefanac, Delegate, CPSU
Tim Hardman, BJ Ball (Boomerang Paper), AMWU Delegate
Ushter Abbasi, casual organiser, NUW NSW

Fightback in the workplace is the way to save jobs

By Amy Thomas

“THE VERY week when workers are being given their marching orders out of a job at Kurri Kurri and Tullamarine, 1700 Chinese workers are given the go-ahead to march into Western Australia.” Those were the words of Labor Left Senator Doug Cameron in response to the approval of Gina Rinehart’s Enterprise Migration Agreement for her Roy Hill mining project.

But jobs for Chinese workers over 4500 kilometres away had nothing to do with the sackings at Caltex’s Kurri Kurri plant. Nor would providing jobs for “Local workers first” on far away resources projects be any solution for saving the jobs.

Like thousands of others in manufacturing, the Caltex workers are the victims of bosses putting profits first.

These job losses are far from inevitable. They could be stopped if there was a fightback in the workplaces where the cuts are happening. But this is exactly what the “Local workers first” campaign isn’t. Rather than fight for jobs many union leaders and Labor figures have taken the easy option of directing anger at foreign workers.

While the “local workers first” campaign is focused on Western Australian resource projects at the moment, the rhetoric about foreign workers is constantly linked by union leaders to the job cuts in manufacturing in the Eastern states.

When over 3000 people lost their jobs at Hastie’s in June (based in Victoria, ACT and NSW), ACTU Secretary Dave Oliver argued that there were “five hundred highly-trained experienced electricians available right now” to work on resource industry jobs, and that they should be considered before overseas workers. But what about saving their jobs at Hastie’s? The 630 jobs at Caltex, 90 at APV Automotive Parts, 440 at Ford, 200 at Darrel Lea, 164 jobs in aircraft engineering, the 1200 jobs at Fairfax all lost in July—where is the fight for these jobs?

It’s bosses, many of them “Aussies”, who are to blame for the jobs pain. And to fight them we need unity between migrant and local workers.

Fighting for jobs

Recent examples show how militant unionism at a workplace level can



beat job cuts.

Perhaps the most inspiring union victory this year has been that of the Victorian nurses, who defied both their Liberal state government and Fair Work Australia.

At its heart, this was a fight for jobs that united 457 workers and others. The key issue in the dispute was preserving nurse-patient ratios. Accepting higher ratios would have meant nurses taking on more patients each, threatening staffing levels.

At Sydney University this year, staff and students saved 55 jobs with a campaign of rallies and occupations. Now, staff are fighting for better job security protections in their Enterprise Bargaining Agreement. This campaign involved overseas academics on 457 visas in a united fight against a nasty Vice-Chancellor.

Historically, migrant workers have played an important role in working class struggle in Australia. A nine-week strike at the Ford Broadmeadows factory in 1973 against a speed-up in production involved 6000 workers, 75 per cent from non-English speaking backgrounds, mainly Greek, Italian and Turkish. The strike was waged in defiance of the union officialdom and involved militant picketing and pitched battles with police. Despite attempts by management to divide workers along ethnic lines, they won.

The successful Baiada workers’ strike last year also united workers

Above: The closure of the Caltex refinery in NSW cost 600 jobs, but it was corporate profit making that was to blame

speaking many different languages in a common fight against the boss.

457 workers

The same approach of fighting together can be taken into industries with large numbers of 457 workers. At Gina Rinehart’s Roy Hill project, the 1700 workers on 457 visas will work right alongside 6300 others employed there. Initiatives like multilingual union leaflets can help the unions recruit on site and prevent attempts to pit workers against one another.

Many unions have done good work organising 457 workers, but that is at risk if they focus on fighting to exclude them. The CFMEU WA’s website section on their 457s campaign begins with, “If you’re in the construction industry and have been told there is no work, only to discover the job has been given to temporary visa workers we want to know about it.”

A 457 worker suffering exploitation is pretty unlikely to call the advertised number—or to join any union that argues “Aussies” or “locals” should get jobs before them.

There is no doubt the conditions for 457 workers are designed to make it harder for them to fight back. Racism from the union movement will only compound that and make it easier to exploit them.

To fight for jobs we have to fight together.

Migrant workers have played an important role in working class struggle in Australia

Understanding 457s and temporary work visas

What is a 457 visa?

A 457 visa is a temporary visa allowing someone to work in Australia for four years.

It is designed to allow employers to deal with skill shortages, and so can only be granted to workers with a specified skill level. After the four years expires they can apply for another four year temporary work visa or for a permanent visa.

What industries are 457 workers concentrated in?

Altogether there were 90,280 workers on 457 visas at May 31 this year. Yet despite all the talk about how they are taking jobs in WA, just a quarter of new 457 visa grants were made in that state in the last year. Fully 67 per cent of all new applications were for occupations classed as managers and professionals.

Construction topped the list for the number of 457 visas per industry last year for the first time, but the 8410 workers in construction were not that far ahead of the 7330 in health care and social assistance and 6940 in information media and communications. Construction and mining together made up only 22.8 per cent of visa applications granted.

The number of 457 workers is growing, with a 46 per cent rise in visas granted in the last year. But the number of permanent migrants has been growing too: up 12.5 per cent or 21,000 people in the last two years.

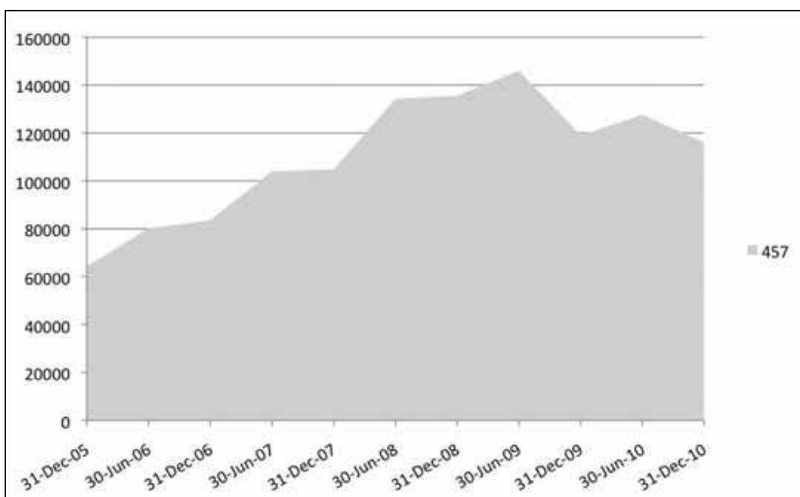
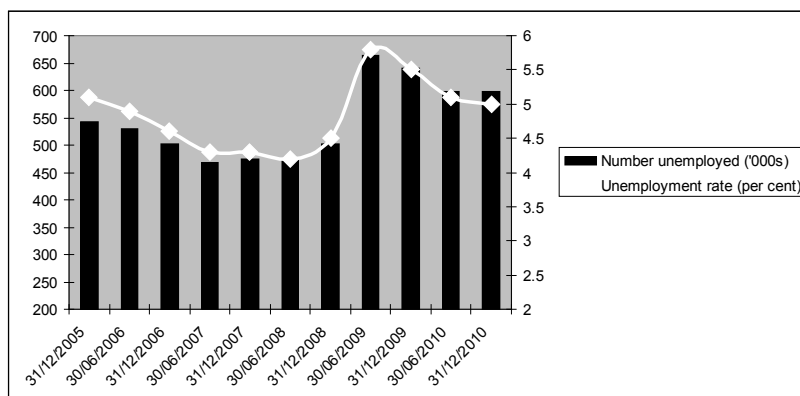
Are there other forms of temporary work visa?

There are separate types of temporary visas for international students, overseas tourists such as backpackers and New Zealand residents that allow them all to work in Australia on a temporary basis. Including 457 workers there were over one million temporary workers living in Australia at the end of 2010.

In a speech earlier this year journalist Peter Mares estimated that together, “these four groups now account for about ten per cent of the total workforce.”

This shows that compared to the 190,000 permanent migrant visas to be granted this year, temporary migrants make up a very substantial portion of Australia’s migrant workforce.

.....
Construction and mining together made up only 22.8 per cent of 457 visa applications granted



These two graphs compare the level of unemployment (top graph) and the number of 457 visas over the same time period, December 2005 to December 2010, showing that there was no connection between unemployment levels, which dropped as the number of 457s workers rose

Sources: Bureau of Statistics data, Peter Mares “Temporary Migration and its implications for Australia” Papers on Parliament No. 57, February 2012

Can 457 workers gain permanent residency?

For many workers a 457 visa is a path to staying in Australia permanently. According to research by journalist Peter Mares as many as half the number of those who arrive on 457 visas in any given year go on to become permanent residents.

Over 40,000 former 457 visa workers became permanent migrants in both the financial years 2009-10 and 2010-11.

How do 457 workers have less rights than other migrants?

Workers on 457 visas are particularly vulnerable because they rely on their employer to keep their visa. If they lose their job they have only 28 days to find another one—otherwise they can be deported.

If they hope to stay in Australia permanently they are especially reliant on their employers. All this puts

them at risk of exploitation.

Legally 457 workers must receive the same wages and conditions as any other worker at their workplace with the same skill level. But there have been many cases where employers have ignored this provision to force 457 workers to accept lower wages.

How are Enterprise Migration Agreements (EMAs) different?

EMAs are a new way for employers to bring out large numbers of 457 workers for individual mining projects.

They are only available for projects with over \$2 billion of capital expenditure and a peak workforce of over 1500 people.

They allow employers to override the usual rules that 457 visas can only be granted for workers who meet specified skill levels. Gina Rinehart’s Roy Hill iron ore project was the first to gain approval for an EMA.

Immigration not to blame for cuts to jobs and wages

By James Supple

THE SUGGESTION that bringing 457 visa workers from overseas is coming at the expense of “local jobs” reinforces the myth that immigration causes unemployment and drives down wages.

In fact evidence from Australia and internationally shows that immigration actually creates jobs. In his book, *Immigration and the Australian Economy*, William Foster’s surveys over 200 studies on immigration and wages. He found there was, “a marginally favourable effect on the aggregate unemployment rate, even in recession”.

In a 2003 paper economist Hsiao-chuan Chang wrote that, “there is no evidence that immigrants take jobs away from the local Australian over the past twelve years... This supports the conclusion from existing research”.

This is because new migrants generate demand for products and services, such as housing and food. Many of them bring savings to help pay for these things, further boosting the economy and jobs.

Wages

But because new migrants are often forced to accept lower-paid jobs or cash-in-the-hand that might be lower than union wages, there is a common belief that this can drive down wages and conditions, especially in low-skill areas of construction and manufacturing.

Union leaders, for instance CFMEU national secretary Dave Noonan, have argued that 457 visas are a way that, “Australian businesses use the [immigration] system to avoid paying decent wages”.

But studies have shown that immigration has no significant effect on wages.

Ross Garnaut, in a report prepared for the Immigration Department, found, “The conclusion that, for Australia at least, there is a positive effect of population growth on average incomes is broadly consistent with the weight of recent economic opinion”. And low-income earners saw their wages increase proportionally more than other groups.

In fact some research indicates immigration may slightly increase



Australia’s workforce has been built on successive waves of migrants, like these Pacific Brands workers but there is no evidence this has cut wages or jobs

wages. The opening of the UK to higher immigration from Eastern Europe after eight new countries joined the EU in 2004 was a demonstration of this effect.

It provided a particularly good opportunity to test the impact of immigration, as the 560,000 new migrants that arrived over two years in Britain were concentrated in particular areas. Some areas received many new migrants and others very few. Only a tiny difference in wage rates between these areas was observed, but the wages in areas of higher immigration were marginally higher.

It’s undeniable that migrants have been used at individual worksites to undermine wages. But bosses do the same thing with “local” workers all the time, through trying to replace permanent workers with casuals and looking to undermine union organisation.

Low wages and job cuts are caused by bosses’ cost cutting in order to boost profits. Migrant workers on 457 visas were not responsible for the recent job cuts at Ford or Darrell Lea.

Historically there is no connection between immigration and unemployment. In the 1930s for example there was virtually no immigration yet unemployment went to over 30 per cent.

In the early 1990s, net migration fell from 160,000 in 1989 to just 30,000 in 1993, but unemployment continued to grow.

Over the last 12 months, 62,610 workers arrived on 457 visas. At the same time total employment climbed by 123,400 of which 59,300 were full time jobs and unemployment has trended down.

Living off welfare

Another claim is that immigrants move here so they can live off welfare payments, wasting government resources.

New immigrants do tend to have higher rates of unemployment than the rest of the population. Migrant workers have always been forced to fill the worst jobs and are often the first to be sacked when recession hits.

But research by anti-immigrant academics Bob Birrell and James Jupp found that, “overseas-born persons showed slightly lower welfare-recipient rates than their Australia-born counterparts for each age group”. Despite this the Howard government vindictively banned new migrants from accessing any social security benefits for their first two years in the country.

Blaming migrants for unemployment, low wages and the state of public services is nothing more than racist scapegoating.

It is the standard line of racists like Pauline Hanson, who called for a halt to immigration, “so that our dole queues are not added to”. It diverts people’s anger away from the profiteering bosses and government cutbacks that are the real cause of these problems.

Racism divides workers and weakens the struggle in the workplace for decent wages.

Our unions are stronger when they take a stand against racism and the bosses’ attempts to divide and rule.

Studies have shown that immigration has no significant effect on wages

RACISM, WHITE AUSTRALIA AND THE UNION MOVEMENT

Jasmine Ali examines how racism has affected the history of the union movement in Australia, as well as the history of anti-racism within the movement

THE FURORE over overseas workers employed on 457 visas has generated an important political question for the labour movement and the left. Some of the best organised sections of the union movement in Western Australia have adopted a campaign that is calling for the exclusion of 457 workers from Australia and preference for “local workers first”.

When such arguments were uttered by John Howard and Pauline Hanson (and it is instructive that Hanson has given support to the unions’ campaign), the refugee movement, the unions and the left attacked them for whipping up racism. But this time, the nationalist “Aussie first” slogans are accepted and even endorsed by union leaders and many on the left as if it is a way to fight for working conditions and against job cuts.

While there is a strong tradition of internationalism in Australian trade union history, there is also a history of racism that has involved trade union leaders advocating for immigration controls, racial exclusion and anti-migrant campaigns.

Some stark examples include the anti-Chinese campaign that was part of the Seaman’s strike in 1878, the exclusion of Kanakas (indentured Pacific Island labourers) from attending the strike camps of white sugar workers in Queensland, and the notorious colour bar of the Australian Workers Union which excluded “coloured” labourers from membership.

The history of racism and anti-racism in the unions needs to be discussed in order to understand how racism can influence the unions and how this can be fought.

Trade unions and White Australia

Trade unions in Australia developed in the context of the White Australian nationalism that dominated Australia’s ruling elite from its origins in the colonial settler state to Federation and beyond. Most historians attribute the adoption of the White Australia policy to working class racism. But that is a myth.

Historian Verity Burgmann has shown that the idea that the working class had the power and influence to determine immigration policy during the late nineteenth century is quite unrealistic. Even the anti-Chinese seafarers strike of 1878—when sailors struck to prevent the use of Chinese labour to replace European seafarers—was unable to force the NSW parliament to pass legislation restricting Chinese immigration. The labour movement in Queensland was terribly weak when it became the first colony to implement a White Australia policy in 1877.

The ruling class had its own interests in pursuing White Australia—in particular concerns that Chinese immigrants would sympathise with imperialist rivals in the region. Racism was also used to justify the brutal dispossession of the Aboriginal population.

Fear of the “yellow peril” was an explicit feature of Australian politics until the end of the Vietnam War. But it lives on in the anti-refugee policies of the Labor and Liberal Parties.

While the ruling class was responsible for White Australia, some of its staunchest supporters were among the trade union and Labor Party leaders. The first NSW Labor Premier, J.T. McGowan, declared, “While Britain is behind us, and while her naval power is supreme, Australia will be what Australians want it—white, pure and industrially good.”

Even the left of the labour movement accepted racial discrimination. Andrew Markus records that the Australian Socialist league called for the, “exclusion of races whose presence under present competitive conditions might lower the standard of living of Australian workers”.

Historian Julia Martinez has looked at White Australia and the unions in the first half of the 1900s.

She describes how in 1911, Labor Prime Minister Andrew Fisher made it government policy to grant “absolute preference” to white unionists in workplaces—and to encourage

The AWU excluded Chinese, Japanese, Kanaka, Afghan and any “coloured race” from joining the union

employers to fire “coloured” workers. In 1914, when Fischer lost to the Liberals, the incoming government granted exemptions to Japanese workers in Queensland. But when Fischer was re-elected that year, the unions campaigned for the Japanese workers to be sacked.

More graphically, in 1914 the Australian Workers Union (AWU) in Darwin successfully appealed to the Federated Waterside Workers, “to assist in the fight against the employment of Asiatics and for a ‘White Australia’ by refraining from landing any cargo for Port Darwin”. The campaign was successful, and the AWU was granted preference on the wharf, including unloading the ships, which had previously been done by the ship’s so-called “coolie” Asian crews.

In Darwin in the 1920s, the newly formed NAWU (North Australian Workers’ Union) maintained the racial discrimination of the AWU, which excluded Chinese, Japanese, Kanaka, Afghan and any “coloured race” from joining the union.

So why did trade union and Labor leaders become agents of such nationalist ideology?

Divide and rule weakens the unions

The arguments made by the AWU in the early 1900s against organising non-white workers and in 2012 for immigration controls to exclude 457 workers, are underpinned by the same false assumptions. Racial exclusion, or exclusion of workers on temporary visas, is sold to the working class by linking their experience of job insecurity—the competition to find jobs and maintain decent pay—with racist ideas about Asians.

Migrant workers are often regarded as “cheap labour”. But bosses seek to exploit whomever they employ. Whether they are successful depends on union organisation and struggle.

From the militancy of Vietnamese workers at the Redfern Mail Exchange in the 1980s to the Ford Broadmeadows strike of 1973, to recent ex-

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amples of 457 workers standing up to unscrupulous bosses, migrant workers have shown themselves to be as determined, if not more determined, than “Aussie” workers, to fight for their rights.

The recent attack on conditions and jobs has come from the Australian bosses who run companies like Hasties, Qantas, Bluescope Steel and Westpac. At the Toll warehouse in Melbourne, 600 workers from many different nationalities recently took strike action to stop Toll’s attempt to pay them less than warehouse workers in the rest of the country. This situation confronts workers across the world, from Sydney to Beijing to the Philippines.

Another claim is that increased immigration will lead to higher unemployment. The facts shows this is not true (see page 17).

But the fear about unemployment and wage cuts can be easily misdirected at immigrants rather the bosses who control the economy. That’s why any attempt to use racism has to be vigorously resisted.

The trade union leaders, while seeking to represent workers’ interests, do so within the framework of the system. This means they ultimately accept the framework of capitalism and the idea that companies will only provide jobs if they can make a profit. So they often fall for the idea workers have a common interest with Australian bosses to protect “our” manufacturing jobs or “our” resources, against foreign competition. But “our” bosses are only interested in profits not maintaining jobs.

The trade union bureaucracy’s reluctance to organise industrial action also means that it is easier for them to go along with the idea that the problem is foreign workers, rather than lead a fight for jobs.

An example of this was on display in the recent Qantas lockout, when Transport Workers Union official Tony Sheldon complained about Qantas’ industrial relations tactics, but instead of organising any industrial action simply said that his union would, “stand by the workforce, the Australian brand of Qantas and not have it Asianised”.

A history of anti-racism

But racism in the unions has also been contested by left-wing militants who have fought to include migrant workers in the unions, or encouraged them to set up their own unions when excluded.

The IWW (Industrial Workers of

Right: The rulers of the Australian nation adopted White Australia out of fears about strategic competitors in the region, as illustrated in this cartoon from *The Bulletin*



the World), founded in 1907, regarded White Australia as a strategy by the bosses to undermine class struggle and unionism. The Wobblies attacked the AWU for excluding Asian workers, which resulted in them forming their own union organisations. The IWW campaigned actively to recruit Asians to their own organisation, and published leaflets in multiple languages.

The early Communist Party, too, opposed White Australia and participated in the Pan Pacific Trade Union Federation based in China. Typically, the more conservative trade union and Labor Party leaders attacked the Communist Party saying, “the Reds are soft on the yellows and the browns”.

The examples of the IWW and Communist Party putting internationalism and solidarity—emphasising that workers in any one country have the same exploitation, oppression and employers as anywhere else—is important. From the period of the colour bar in the AWU, to today’s debate about 457 visas, there has been another tradition, of support for open borders and challenging racial divisions to more effectively fight the

bosses who want to exploit both local and migrant workers.

There is a contradiction between the recent efforts of many of the trade unions to actively fight racism—in backing the refugee movement and organising to defend 457 workers for example, and the politics of the “Aussie jobs first” campaign. The ACTU recently carried a resolution opposing any asylum seeker deportations to Sri Lanka, Afghanistan or any other dangerous country. Hundreds of 457 workers have joined the CFMEU and the AMWU (and others unions like the nurses’) who have defend them from ruthless bosses trying to rip them off or even deport them.

The MUA has a fine tradition of defending the rights of overseas workers so often exploited on “ships of shame”.

Our argument with Gina Rinehart is not about 457 workers; it is about union rights and union conditions, individual contracts and permanency. A united union movement—with 457 and local workers fighting together—can be a formidable force in fighting racism and Gina Rinehart.

.....
The IWW campaigned actively to recruit Asians to their own organisation, and published leaflets in multiple languages

MALCOLM FRASER'S REFUGEE POLICY: NO MODEL FOR TODAY

Malcolm Fraser's policy of processing the wave of Vietnamese refugees in the 1970s has drawn much praise recently, but it is nothing to aspire to, explains **Hal Hewson**

REFUGEE RIGHTS advocates have countered Julia Gillard and Tony Abbott's attempts to justify offshore processing by championing a genuine "regional solution". This would be based on Australia processing and resettling larger numbers of refugees directly from Indonesia and Malaysia. Giving people a real hope of resettlement, instead of forcing them to get on a boat to get here, could reduce the need for dangerous boat journeys. But there is confusion as to what a "regional solution" should look like and how it can be achieved.

Some refugee supporters, the Centre for Policy Development's John Menadue in particular, see the solution developed by the Fraser government to deal with the Vietnamese refugee crisis of the late 1970s as a model.

Greens' refugee spokesperson Sarah Hanson-Young stated recently that, "By increasing the number of refugees Australia accepts and working with the United Nations and our neighbouring countries, we can prevent asylum seekers from feeling so desperate they risk boarding a boat. Experts know this works because it's what Australia and other nations did after the Vietnam war."

Fraser's era is often held up as a time when both political parties were able to put political games aside and uphold humanitarian principles. Academic Robert Manne declared the Fraser years as "the halcyon era of Australian refugee policy"

This is a part of the widespread misconception that under Malcolm Fraser's Liberal government of 1975 to 1983, Australia had a humane refugee policy. But a closer examination of Fraser's version of a "regional solution" shows that, like today, his government was focused on "stopping the boats".

Under Fraser the annual intake of refugees reached 22,500 in one year—almost double the paltry 13,750

of today.

Yet it was the Fraser government began the false divide between the "unauthorised" arrivals of asylum seekers by boat and "legitimate" refugees in overseas camps. This fact is often obscured when people recall this era; for example high profile lawyer and refugee supporter Julian Burnside recently claimed that Malcolm Fraser had resettled 25,000 "boat people" a year. It was soon pointed out that almost all of these people were in fact selected from camps. Asylum seekers who arrived in Australia by boat were still the target of hysteria and discrimination.

The end of the Vietnam War with the fall of Saigon in April 1975 triggered a wave of refugees, with over one million people fleeing the country in the following years. Australia became a country of first refuge in 1976 as small numbers of refugees from Vietnam arrived by boat. They did not face detention, but were initially just referred to charities for assistance while their claims were assessed. Later boat arrivals were housed in migrant hostels.

A total of 53 refugee boats had arrived in Australia by 1981. But they brought a total of only around 2100 people.

Most of the Vietnamese refugees remained in camps in Malaysia and Thailand. Prior to 1978, the government refused to accept more than a few thousand refugees a year from the camps. Their distance allowed the state to control exactly who would arrive, allowing them to keep the number of people to a minimum. They could do this and still maintain they were honouring international treaties, although they were increasingly criticised internationally for not taking their share.

Crisis and solution

In 1978 the number of refugees arriv-

ing in Australia on boats began to shoot up, along with the blood pressure of many politicians in Canberra. About 1400 arrived by boat between July 1977 and June 1978.

That same year five large freighters carrying refugees from Vietnam arrived in Southeast Asia. Each one carried around 1500 asylum seekers, sending local governments into a fury. Many of them were Chinese-Vietnamese, who had left Vietnam in response to government actions prior to China's war with Vietnam in 1979.

Fraser's then immigration minister, Michael MacKellar, flatly refused to recognise the passengers as refugees, worrying that such boats were capable of bringing large numbers of "unauthorised" refugees to Australia.

This was despite the provisions in the Refugee Convention and despite a direct appeal from the UNHCR and the US. In January 1979 the Australian government announced that it "would deny entry to any passengers on such ships". It declared its intention to "legislate to introduce severe penalties for those who profiteered by bringing people into Australia without prior authority".

Some of the political rhetoric used at the time is very similar to today's hysteria against people smugglers. Organisers of these vessels were termed "entrepreneurs of evil" and these large-scale refugee operations were said to be, "organised by unscrupulous traders in human suffering and misery". They were in fact organised by the government of Vietnam, which was keen to be rid of certain people seen as hostile to the new Communist government. For a price, people who didn't like the new regime were helped to leave.

The Australian government's solution was to create "regional boat holding arrangements" with Malaysia and Indonesia. In return for Australia taking larger numbers of refugees from the

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Some of the political rhetoric used at the time is very similar to today's hysteria against people smugglers

camps, Malaysia and Indonesia would prevent boats leaving for Australia.

But the numbers Australia was willing to resettle were still meagre: only 9000 a year, while an estimated 373,000 were languishing in South-east Asian camps. And as noted by historian Nancy Viviani, Australia would, “choose refugees who best fitted migration rather than humanitarian entry criteria”, hand picking who they would accept.

Preventing boat departures was a key plank of the comprehensive “regional solution” implemented following an international conference in July 1979, which secured pledges to resettle refugees from countries including the US, UK, France and Canada. Indonesia and the Philippines agreed to establish regional processing centres and the Australian government lifted its annual resettlement quota for Indochinese refugees to 14,000 between 1978 and 1982.

But alongside this was Fraser’s determination to “stop the boats”. The government even sent immigration officials to sabotage the boats bringing asylum seekers so they could not undertake a voyage to Australia.

In the documentary *Admission Impossible* Greg Humphries, an Immigration Department official, recounts how he was sent to Malaysia for this purpose and gives an account of their methods: “We bored holes in the bottom of the ships, of the boats, and they sank overnight, so they had to be landed. And we were very successful in stopping many of the boats, by one way or another.”

‘Queue jumping’

Fraser spoke of the country as having a front and back door. Refugees who waited in camps were coming in the front door, while the boat arrivals were coming through the back. His view was that the “solution to people coming in the back door was to open the front door wider”. In other words those arriving by boat were “bad” refugees and a problem that needed to be dealt with.

This position marked a continuity with the Immigration Department’s early objections to the Refugee Convention. When Australia signed the Convention in 1954, the department immediately voiced concerns. Of particular concern was Article 31, which stated that refugees should not be punished or discriminated against based on their mode of arrival in a country—for instance by boat, without prior approval through the normal immigration processes. This section of



Above: A boatload of Vietnamese refugees lands in Darwin

the Convention recognises that asylum seekers cannot always abide by the usual immigration rules when fleeing desperate and dangerous situations.

In Australian politics, much is made of asylum seekers arriving by boat with no passports. But to obtain a passport, people have to write an application to the government and wait for a reply. This would be suicide for someone facing serious state repression. The only option many people have is to try and travel on a fake passport, which in most countries is a serious offence. It is little wonder then that asylum seekers throw away fake documents before being intercepted by Australian customs officials. It is exactly this type of scenario that the Refugee Convention was designed to address.

Nevertheless, the Department of Immigration was not impressed. One immigration official was frank: “It is rather ridiculous to ask any state to subscribe to a convention which would deter it from imposing a penalty on an undesirable refugee who deliberately flouted its immigration law. To my mind it would be a definite step towards abandoning effective control over immigration.”

And the Immigration Department Secretary Tasman Heyes believed the idea that they, “should not be discriminated against and should not be subjected to any penalty for illegal entry would be a direct negation of the immigration policy followed by all Australian Governments since Federation.”

Perpetuating this position would see the government sink to new lows

in its depictions and attitudes towards asylum seekers arriving by boat. Discriminating between “good” and “bad” refugees led straight to the creation of one of the labels: queue jumpers.

The term queue jumpers entered the Australian dialogue in official government broadcasts. In response to an increase in boat arrivals in April to May 1978, the government made announcements through Radio Australia to Southeast Asia warning against “queue jumping”, according to research by Jack Smit.

This approach spurred the government to pass the Immigration (Unauthorised Arrivals) Bill of 1980. This introduced penalties for people smuggling aimed at boat organisers and crew of ten years imprisonment and/or a fine of \$100,000. This is the real bipartisanism of the Fraser era—bipartisan support for legislation to keep boat people out. The laws were used to carry out the deportation of 140 people who arrived on board the boat VT838 that arrived via Malaysia in late 1981.

The real history of Fraser era shows how refugee “solution” based on “stopping the boats” means capitulating to the racist xenophobia against refugees and the myth that refugees arriving by boat are doing the wrong thing. Despite his opposition to the anti-refugee policies of today, Fraser’s government did not challenge this racism: it perpetuated it. The lesson is that a genuine welcome refugees policy will not come through appealing to a “progressive” section of the ruling class. It will come with a movement from below that challenges the anti-refugee racism from above.

LONDON 2012: SORE LOSERS, NATIONALISM AND FAT PROFITS

The Olympics are surrounded in high ideals—but the reality is a festival of corporate power and nationalism writes **Amy Thomas**

THE OLYMPIC Games have been associated with some of the most inspirational moments in the struggle for black emancipation.

In August 1936, Jesse Owens humiliated Hitler by winning an unprecedented four gold medals at the Games in Berlin.

Twenty four years later Cassius Clay was crowned as the light heavy-weight boxing champion in Rome. He was lauded on his return to the US, but still found himself refused service in “whites only” restaurants and targeted by racist gangs. Influenced by Malcolm X, he joined the Nation of Islam and changed his name to Muhammed Ali. At the height of his fame, he was stripped of his world heavyweight title for refusing to fight in Vietnam.

In the revolutionary year of 1968, in Mexico, following their success in the 200 metres, gold and bronze medallists Tommie Smith and John Carlos stepped onto the podium. As The Star Spangled Banner began, they proceeded to raise a gloved fist to symbolise their affiliation to the growing Black Power movement. If you look carefully at the image, you’ll see that the white Australian athlete, Peter Norman, who separated the two on the line is also wearing a round badge in support of his fellow athletes. The sporting careers of all three men lay in tatters but lifelong friendships were born. Smith and Carlos were pall bearers at Peter Norman’s funeral in 2006.

This year, Aboriginal boxer Damien Hooper stirred controversy by wearing an Aboriginal flag T-shirt as he walked into the ring. The mere acknowledgement of the existence of Aboriginal people and culture in Australia led to a flurry of condemnation. An International Olympic Committee (IOC) official declared that Hooper “did not understand the damage that could be caused” by wearing the flag.

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The Australian team have made a name for themselves in London as sore losers

It was a powerful symbol in an era of assimilationist Intervention policies that are stripping Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory of their basic human rights.

Sore losers of a generation

But contrast these acts of defiance and solidarity with the rest of the London Olympics—and the history of the Olympics itself.

The Australian team have made a name for themselves in London as sore losers. Rower Josh Booth went on a drunken rampage through an English village after his eights crew finished last in their final, racking up \$2600 in damages in broken windows, because, in his words, he was “disappointed and frustrated” with the loss.

Tears flowed as the swimming team lost out to the US, China and South Africa. The in-fighting and recriminations have already begun. Former Olympic champion swimmer Susie O’Neill decried the swimmers’ work ethic on TV, head coach Leigh Nugent blamed Australia’s “easy living lifestyle” and ex-coach Ken Wood said the women swimmers were “carrying too much weight”.

References have been made to the Australian “disaster” performance in Montreal in 1976, after which millions were poured into the creation of the Australian Institute of Sport to rescue Australia’s sporting reputation.

A 2009 government report, the Crawford report, proposed a revision of Olympic funding to more local sporting initiatives. But Labor has by and large rejected the report’s recommendations and reaffirmed their commitment to elite sports with a boost in funding in 2010. Nevertheless, John Coates, head of the Australian Olympic Commission, blamed the report for delaying the funding and said it came too late. Kevin Gosper,

senior Australian representative on the International Olympic Committee said “money is the difference between silver and gold.” Wayne Smith, The Australian’s sport journalist, has predicted a backlash against Gillard over sports funding.

The medal tally has damaged the ability of politicians and sports officials to sell the glory of the Australian nation’s sporting prowess and celebrate our “national achievements”. Tellingly, Sports Minister Kate Lundy is worried the poor performance will hurt Australia’s reputation as a powerful nation on the world stage, saying, “For Australia, it is not just how that inspires people to play sport. It is how we look out into the world and what opportunities are derived from that.”

Nationalist circus

The Australian sporting elite’s tantrums expose the myths behind the Games. Rather than breed international friendship and solidarity, they encourage people to identify with “their” state against the rest, promoting nationalism.

Athletes compete for national teams, not individually. Every event ends in flag flying and a rendition of the winner’s national anthem during the medal ceremony.

Nationalism is used to foster a false sense of unity between governments and the rest of us, and distract attention from the real divisions in society between bosses and workers. Racism is the flow-on effect—already, two Olympians have been sent home for racist outbursts (a Greek who issued a racist slur to African athletes and expressed her support for the Greek fascist party Golden Dawn, and a Swiss soccer player who tweeted a racist comment about South Koreans).

The Olympics encourage national competition, and powerful states’ ef-

forts to dominate others. In the words of George Orwell, sport “is war minus the shooting”. The 1980 Moscow Games, at the height of the Cold War, were boycotted by the US and 64 other countries. A tit for tat boycott of Los Angeles was subsequently mounted by 14 Soviet Bloc countries.

The myth of the “Olympic spirit” is symbolised by the oath taken on behalf of all athletes at the opening ceremony and the torch, nobly relayed from the ancient site of Olympia to the main stadium at every games. IOC president Jacques Rogge declared, for example, that London’s torch relay would “promote peace and make our world a better place”.

But the modern torch relay was invented as a Nazi propaganda tool at the 1936 Berlin Olympics—as was the parade of nations that is at the centre of the opening ceremony. Even after the Holocaust, the Olympics in 1948 maintained the torch relay and most of the elements of the Nazi’s Olympics.

Corporate jamboree

In more recent decades, the Olympics have become the biggest advertising jamboree in the world. Starting with Ronald Reagan’s Los Angeles Games in 1984, host states now collectivise the cost of hosting the games, while the profits are privatised—and come tax-free.

In London, a fancy new Westfield shopping centre, “Stratford City”, has been marketed as the “gateway to the Olympics”. This is quite literally the case. The lucky few who have got tickets have been corralled through Westfield in order to reach the Olympic site, passing by huge outlets for posh retailers such as Gucci, Tag Heuer and Prada—designer clothes and flash watches that are well beyond the budgets of most people living in east London.

The International Olympic Committee has no shame in accepting sponsors who are antithetical to the supposed purpose of the Games. Well-known promoters of healthy living, McDonald’s and Coca-Cola, paid millions to be the official food and drink of the Olympics. The site includes the world’s biggest ever McDonald’s.

BP, whose annual carbon emissions are greater than 120 countries, is the “sustainability partner”. The outside of the Olympic stadium will be covered by a \$10 million “wrap” paid for by Dow Chemicals. A subsidiary of this corporation, Union Carbide, will forever be associated with the world’s worst chemical disaster at Bhopal in 1984 which has claimed an



estimated 25,000 lives.

Legacy?

The web site of London 2012 says that this Olympics will leave a “legacy” and “[provide] a catalyst for positive change and inspiration.” But while British people were promised that sporting facilities would be made available for community use after the Games, the huge stadium, paid for by taxpayers at a cost of \$750 million, is to be largely dismantled and sold off.

The corporations are paying only 2 per cent of the cost of the Games. British taxpayers face the bulk of the \$35 billion bill, more than the ruling Tories’ latest cuts to the welfare budget.

Most people will have no chance to enjoy what their money paid for, with the cost of tickets well beyond what people can afford. While the opening ceremony paid tribute to nurses in Britain’s National Health Service (NHS), few of them would have been able to afford a ticket: the best seats at the opening ceremony cost \$3000.

Alongside the astronomical cost, few of the tickets for the most attractive events are even available for the public to purchase. Less than 50 per cent of the spectators at the 100 metre finals were ordinary people—instead

Above: Australian swimmer James Magnussen isn’t pleased after coming second in the men’s 100m final

they consisted of corporate sponsors and elites, so-called “Friends of the Olympics”. Many of them have failed to show up to their free seats. The embarrassed IOC has filled the empty seats with troops in civilian clothing.

A steady diet of pension reform, attacks on student allowances and cuts to public services are hurting British workers. Youth unemployment is 21.9 per cent. It’s only a year on from the riots that showcased the desperation in a divided Britain. Perhaps fearing similar scenes at the Olympics, London has invested in a weapon known as a sonic cannon that emits a pain-inducing noise that can be used to “disperse large crowds”.

In Greece, there are reports of people sleeping in old, disused Olympic venues from the Athens 2004 Games because of the effects of austerity. There is no reason to believe London won’t look the same in the near future.

A more commendable “legacy” is that left by the London Tube cleaners, who took strike action on the day of opening ceremony to demand a living wage, and then again in week two of the Games. Actions like this, and those of the black activists before them, can actually, as the tagline goes, “inspire a generation”.

Adapted from an article by Brian Richardson in Socialist Review UK

Well-known promoters of healthy living, McDonald’s and Coca-Cola, paid millions to be the official food and drink of the Olympics

REQUIEM FOR A DREAM: LABOR'S SELF DESTRUCTION

Labor's attacks on The Greens shows they can't comprehend their own crisis or save themselves from Abbott, argues **Paddy Gibson**

THE ORCHESTRATED attack on The Greens by the NSW Labor Right represents the death throes of a desperate party, incapable of escaping from the crisis it has created for itself and incapable of understanding the reasons for its calamity.

The Gillard government has done virtually nothing to reverse the savage attacks of the Howard era, a bitter disappointment for the union and activist base of the party. And Labor's attempt to out-flank the Liberals from the right on refugees has conceded massive ideological ground to Abbott.

The attacks are completely contrary to the views of Labor voters. Recent AC Nielsen polling shows that two-thirds of Labor supporters believe The Greens should get Labor preferences, and that their relationship is "about right, or not close enough". In contrast, only 23 per cent agree that The Greens should be put last.

Both the strategy and assumptions underlying the attack on The Greens are clearly illustrated in two major feature articles in the latest edition of *Voice*, the official journal of the NSW Labor Right faction. The publication was timed for release on the opening day of the NSW Labor conference. It attempts to set out a theoretical justification for the full frontal assault on The Greens, arguing that the only way to improve its polling is for Labor to move even further to the right.

Both *The End of the Party?* by Tim Watts and *The Decline of Social Democracy* by Daniel Mookhey attempt to situate Labor's current slump

The attacks on The Greens are completely contrary to the views of Labor voters

in an historical context, drawing lessons from the failures and alleged successes of the past to chart the rightward forward march.

But just as Labor detaches itself even further from its base, so too these articles are detached from historical realities. All sorts of factors are blamed for Labor's woes both now and in times gone by—from "ideologically-driven" left wing forces that "split the progressive movement", through to a failure to effectively "sell" their policies with suitably inspiring rhetoric.

Neither essay will face the fact that, throughout history, the fundamental reason Labor loses the support of its working class base is that its determination to run the system means it ends up attacking its own supporters.

The end?

Tim Watts' essay makes an explicit case for breaking the parliamentary alliance with The Greens that Gillard has relied on to maintain government. He rejects assertions that disastrous opinion polls facing Gillard pose an "existential crisis" for Labor. Watts reminds the Labor faithful that there have been parallels in history when support has been equally low, and Labor has recovered.

In particular, Watts draws a strong parallel with the catastrophic collapse of support for the Scullin Labor government at the time of the Great Depression. The 1931 federal election saw Labor turfed from

power with an unprecedented 22 per cent swing against Scullin. The federal party's support fell even further, to a now familiar 26 per cent, in the 1934 election.

According to Watts, these extraordinary swings had nothing whatsoever to do with bitter disappointment in the performance of the Scullin government. In fact, Scullin's policies going into the 1931 election don't even warrant a mention.

It is important to set the record straight. In his efforts to manage Australian capitalism in a time of economic meltdown, Scullin savaged his working class support base, forcing them to pay for the crisis. He coordinated the infamous Premiers' Plan, which cut public spending by 20 per cent. He stood by while employers slashed wages, sacked thousands of workers and landlords evicted them from their homes.

Striking mining workers in New South Wales had gone hungry to help raise money for Scullin's election campaign. But, despite calls from his own Labor MPs for nationalisation of the mines in the face of employer intransigence, Scullin did nothing. A striking miner was killed on the picket line at Rothbury. And the workers were forced back to work with reduced wages.

While contemporary Labor-led attacks on workers are nowhere near as stark, there are important parallels which can be drawn and lessons learned (more on this below).

But Watts argues, in entirely similar terms to the current attack on The Greens, that Scullin's massive electoral



Above: Treasurer Wayne Swan has been turning on performances railing against the super-rich, yet done nothing to take a greater share of their fortunes for the rest of us

defeat was thanks to an “opportunistic Left wing challenger” with an “extreme policy agenda”.

Watts is referring to the NSW Labor Premier Jack Lang and his supporters, who were expelled from the federal party following a sharp dispute with Scullin over the Premier’s Plan: “On one side is an insurgent minority group supported by 10-15 per cent of voters and advocating an extreme policy agenda to which the majority of the electorate is hostile. On the other side is the bulk of the progressive movement, weakened by internal conflict and external vicissitudes, fighting a war on two fronts and losing the vital middle ground necessary to form government.”

Comparisons between Lang Labor and The Greens are simply absurd. Lang came from the right-wing of the Labor party and had mass support in

the trade union movement. He was the elected premier of NSW. Lang’s refusal to implement Scullin’s Premiers’ Plan was enormously popular. In 1932, when the NSW governor sacked the Lang government, 400,000 people rallied in Sydney in his defence out of a population of one million at the time.

Watts’ ridiculous thesis cannot explain why Lang Labor remained popular while federal Labor was thrown out of office. Nor can the Watts argument explain the massive votes against Labor in the recent state elections in New South Wales or Queensland.

The death of social democracy

Daniel Mookhey’s essay, *The death of social democracy?* shows a similar disregard for historical fact. The essay argues that the period from the

election of Gough Whitlam, until the close of the 20th century, Labor led a profound period of “social democratic” advance.

The Hawke and Keating governments in particular are credited with being global pioneers of a form of social democracy which, while “discarding useless orthodoxies”, carried forward the “historic mission” of Labor to “create an active State—to use its taxation and welfare powers to redistribute wealth, to have it bear responsibility for equal societies, to guarantee individual opportunity”.

In reality, Hawke and Keating initiated a period of “economic rationalist” reform that has made Australia a profoundly more unequal society and greatly undermined the position of Labor’s working-class base. The Accord saw union leaders preside over no strike and no extra claims agreements, which paved the way for gutting of rank-and-file organisation on the job. The introduction of enterprise bargaining in 1991 imposed an industrial relations regime built around productivity gains for the corporate sector, not the cost of living.

Mookhey acknowledges the scourge of mass casualisation of the workforce and the feelings of intense insecurity this engenders, but fails to acknowledge its roots in the labour deregulation process initiated by Labor.

Privatisation and corporatisation of public services, a process begun by Hawke and Keating and continued mercilessly by Howard, has increased the cost paid by working class people for access to education, healthcare, child care and utilities.

Profit share as a percentage of GDP has risen dramatically, from 17 per cent when Hawke took office, to 29 per cent in 2009. The top 1 per cent of Australians now receive 10 per cent of household income, up from 5 per cent in 1980. And the redistribution of wealth has been even more dramatic than income.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics estimates that the richest 20 per cent of households now own 62 per cent of household wealth—including 90 per cent of equities—while the poorest hold just 1 per cent.

Keating neatly summarised the impact of his government’s reforms in an address to the Australian Mining Industry Council (AMIC) annual dinner in 1993: “If anyone at an AMIC seminar in the 1970s had said... ‘we will get real wages down and profits up, we will radically change our industrial relations scene, we will remove

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the double tax on dividends', I am sure everyone would have fainted at the tables".

The fate of Labor's primary vote bears a remarkable resemblance to this decline in equality. Labor has never repeated its high-point of 50 per cent of the primary vote with the election of Hawke in 1983.

Since then there has been a general trend downward, save two spikes to 45 per cent and 43 per cent with the elections of Keating in 1993 and Rudd in 2007 respectively. In both of those elections, Labor was able to momentarily recuperate support by positioning itself on the correct side of sharply posed questions of inequality—the GST and WorkChoices.

A right turn

Both essays argue strongly that the key consideration for Labor should be how to win government, how to gain the "power of the state". Gaining power unashamedly comes before all else, including principles, or the interests of those you purport to represent. And both authors regard winning as a purely electoral question. Labor values are completely subordinated to electoral expediency and whatever it takes to get votes or curry favour with the rich and powerful.

The assumption of both essays is that the one and only concern is to win government. To dress this up as somehow representing the will of the voting public is sheer fantasy and reveals Labor's willingness to be the servants of the capitalist class.

It is the capitalist class that control the economic levers of society. And the state is their state, existing to protect their property rights and promote the smooth functioning of their system. Witness the way Alan Joyce was unilaterally able to ground Qantas in late 2011 and pressure the Gillard government to intervene to support a Fair Work order to prevent unions striking and thus shore up Joyce's advantage. Witness how the mining bosses' campaign could drive the government into crisis in 2010 to stop a paltry tax. There are even starker examples from history, like the sacking of Gough Whitlam by the unelected Governor General in 1975, or the sacking of Lang in 1932 by the NSW Governor.

Labor's commitment to running the system requires a commitment to consistently deliver for the Australian capitalist class. So while Labor in 2007 was elected on the back of a mass campaign against Howard's



Above: Protests are part of building a left alternative

WorkChoices legislation, their new Fair Work laws are more pro-employer than the industrial relations regime of the early Howard years. While they have increased spending on education, most of this money has gone to building contractors rather than better wages for teachers and smaller class sizes in public schools.

The interests of the ordinary workers and unionists they are supposed to represent are completely missing from the pages of *Voice*. Ordinary people are regarded as passive voters, hostile to any ideas of "radical change".

It is true, a Watts points out, that for every one Labor voter who has gone to the Greens, there are ten who say they will vote Liberal. Bizarrely, Watts seems to think there is something positive in that. The fact that he could argue it is better for ex-Labor supporters to vote Liberal than Greens says everything about what's wrong with Labor's outlook.

A further lemming-like shift to the right by Labor won't shift their electoral fortunes. It will only further hasten their demise and further legitimise the destructive, anti-worker agenda of Tony Abbott, all the better to deliver the Liberals an even more crushing victory.

Both of these essays reveal the scale of delusion that now infects the Labor Party. The fact that the Labor Left has positively adopted the same approach is just the most recent indication of their political degeneration.

Build an alternative

Understanding the politics of Labor's demise is essential if we are to learn

the lessons. Some Labor members have already taken the hint from Labor's most recent lurch to the right and have left to join The Greens.

As Labor progressively vacates the social democratic space it traditionally occupied, there is a huge opportunity for The Greens. They have rightly condemned Labor's attack on them as an "own goal" and "a gift to Tony Abbott".

Against the abuse heaped on them for refusing to compromise to allow offshore processing of refugees, The Greens have stood their ground. Leader Christine Milne has also rightly responded that a humanitarian asylum seeker policy "won't cost votes".

But The Greens remain conflicted about what sort of party they want to be. They are inclined to stress their responsible role in a minority government with Labor, brokering legislation like the carbon tax.

Labor dismisses The Greens for being a "protest party". But a genuine protest party is what is really needed. If there is one lesson in Labor's degeneration it is that electoralism is a dead end.

While representation in parliament can be a platform for campaigns for social change, real change does not come through parliament.

It is the struggles against the Intervention, for refugee and union rights, the fight for same sex marriage, and the fight against the cuts being pushed by the Liberal state governments that hold the possibility of building an alternative to Labor that is committed to fighting the system itself.

.....
A further lemming-like shift to the right won't shift Labor's electoral fortunes

Telling the story of socialist refugees who resisted Hitler

All that I am
By Anna Funder
Penguin, \$29.95

ALL THAT I am is a dizzying (and compulsory) read for the left-wing activist. Anna Funder's novel reaches past the common myths about who fought the Nazis and exhumes a history that is, unusually for a novel on this period of history, accurate.

But is also frighteningly familiar in unexpected ways for those of us fighting for refugee rights in Australia.

At the foreground of this novel is the courage, passion and political clarity of socialist activists in their drive to stop both World Wars, defend the German revolution and fight Nazism.

The central characters are a group of young comrades in the Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany (USPD) who threw themselves into all manner of agitation to expose to the world Germany's rearmament and the cruel suppression of Germany's revolution.

The fierce resistance of the left was met with the full force of fascism. In fact, as Funder reminds us, Hitler's speech on becoming chancellor of Germany began with the rallying call to fight communism ("Germany must not, Germany will not, go under in the chaos of communism").

The comrades read the writing on the wall just in time to flee: they are the first refugees of Nazism.

Funder's well researched rendering of the life of these refugees in Britain belies the myth that the allies went to war to fight the inhumanity of Hitler.

Gillard's approach to Sri Lanka's war criminal

President Mahinda Rajapaksa and the refugees his regime produces is like a leaf torn from the British approach to Nazism in the 1930s.

One can't help thinking of the warm handshake Gillard gave Rajapaksa at CHOGM, or of Bowen collaborating with the regime in Sri Lanka to stop boats of refugees escaping when the narrator says that, "the British government was insisting on dealing with Hitler as a reasonable fellow, as if hoping he'd turn into one".

Allied complicity

By supporting this delusion of decency and disguising the mounting evidence of the reality of fascism, the Allied governments constructed a bureaucratic indifference to German refugees that makes them complicit with the brutality of the Nazis. (In fact, the US had a functioning embassy in Berlin until 1941 that turned away Jewish refugees.)

The refugees were banned, on threat of deportation, from any political agitation whatsoever: "We were offered exile on the condition that we were silent about the reason we needed it", comments Ruth, the surviving refugee.

She and her comrades bravely persisted with their illegal exposure of Hitler and the German rearmament nonetheless—all while legally protected and condoned Nazi clubs terrorised them, raiding their houses, stalking them, hanging banners inciting the public to kill Germans who had been rendered stateless by the Nazis.

In fact, in 1933 these Nazi groups were discussed in the House



of Commons, where the Home Secretary explained that the government felt obliged to discourage, "overt propagandists like Trotsky but hesitated to interfere with internal matters such as the private meetings of the National Socialists".

Like the Temporary Protection Visas (TPVs) that Abbott—and now Bowen—are planning on reintroducing, the German refugees, "every three months... respectfully begged His Majesty the King of England to be allowed to stay".

They were not allowed to work and had no entitlement to government benefits. Poverty, isolation and fear weighed heavily.

Most haunting is the slow motion unravelling of the fates of the Jewish refugees on board the *St Louis*.

As Funder reminds

Above: Jewish refugees on the *St Louis* were refused entry to Cuba, the US and Canada and were forced to return to Europe

The Allied governments constructed a bureaucratic indifference to German refugees that makes them complicit with the brutality of the Nazis

readers, this boatload of refugees ran up against closed borders in Cuba, the US and Canada.

Finally the US and Britain negotiated what might now be dubbed a "regional solution" in Western Europe, pressuring countries soon to be occupied by the Nazis to resettle the refugees.

Historians estimate that the majority of these refugees died in the Holocaust.

Lessons of history

In seeing our own refugee predicaments reflected back to us in *All That I Am*, there is a risk that the reader will feel paralysed in a kind of ugly and predetermined pattern repeating itself.

Funder does allude to the mistakes of the German left, and between the lines there is a dim suggestion that Nazism was not a necessary fate at all, for instance, if the USPD weren't led astray by pacifism as Toller suggests, or if the left formed a united front to fight Hitler. Chris Harman's excellent book, *The Lost Revolution*, can fill out the picture for those who want to understand these historical could-have-beens.

The best defence against the repetition of history that Funder gives her readers is to learn the lessons from it. It is so important to be reminded that the nationalism of the 20th century produced both fascism and border brutality. And that the socialist movement could see right to the rotten heart of these systems and fought relentlessly for alternatives. This is a legacy that *All That I Am* properly remembers—and that we must seek to revive today.

Lucy Honan

STOP THE REFUGEE BASHING NO OFFSHORE PROCESSING

By Ian Rintoul

AS WE go to press, the Gillard-appointed expert panel on asylum seekers panel is set to bring down its report. The Labor Cabinet will consider the report on Monday August 13. *Sydney Morning Herald* journalist, Philip Coorey, says, “it is understood it [the report] favours a hardline approach, such as the Malaysia plan.”

No surprises there. It will just as surely say that opposition from Indonesia makes Abbott’s plan to turn back boats to Indonesia impossible.

It will ignore the host of submissions from refugee groups arguing that the government must stop talking about stopping the boats and start providing safety and security for asylum seekers, and that that must include guaranteed, timely resettlement of refugees in Australia. It will ignore the options for giving asylum seekers safe passage from Indonesia to Australia.

The scene is set for yet another round of the government’s push to impose the Malaysia solution to expel 800 asylum seekers.

Both Immigration Minister Chris Bowen and Opposition spokesperson Scott Morrison are wedded to the politics of deterrence. Chris Bowen says that “without deterrence, more boats will arrive and more lives will be put at risk on the high seas.”

He remains willing to make massive concession to the Liberals, saying the government will start processing on Nauru as long as the Labor government can expel people to Malaysia. Labor is even prepared to review Howard’s policy of temporary protection visas (TPVs) that Rudd had abolished.

Rob Oakeshott has already announced that he will be re-submitting his pro-Malaysia solution bill. The Liberals have said they will oppose it, as will The Greens. That means nothing is likely to pass the Senate and the “debate” and refugee-bashing from Gillard and Abbott will continue.

A common feature of the submissions from refugee groups was complete opposition to offshore process-



ing. Importantly, many also argued to de-link onshore refugee applications (the asylum seekers who come by boat) from the Special Humanitarian Program, under which most applications for family reunion are made.

Howard linked these two programs together in 1996. It means that for every asylum seeker who arrives on a boat and is accepted as a refugee, the government takes one place from the Special Humanitarian Program.

It was a deliberate, vindictive measure to divide refugee communities already in Australia from those arriving by boat. Supposedly,

it provides an incentive for “orderly” migration of families of refugees to Australia.

But as the number of boat arrivals has grown, the linkage has meant that family reunion is now almost impossible. So the policy is actually pushing the families onto boats because they can’t get here any other way.

Chris Bowen says the government is concerned about asylum seekers taking boat journeys. But delinking the two programs is one very simple thing he could do to ensure that some people had an alternative to a boat. He won’t do it. Saying one thing and doing another has a name—hypocrisy.

.....
Chris Bowen remains willing to make massive concessions to the Liberals

NO DEPORTATIONS TO DANGER

THE FORCED deportation of Tamil asylum seeker Dayan Anthony to Sri Lanka in late July is a taste of things to come. Nearly 200 people are attached to a High Court case whose judgement is expected in the next few weeks. There are a similar number of Tamils and Afghans in detention who the government regards as being “available for removal”.

The Australian government says it has no responsibility to guarantee or even monitor the safety of asylum seekers returned to Sri Lanka, Afghanistan or anywhere else. But a report from Human Rights Watch has documented 13 cases of people who, after being returned from Europe to Sri Lanka, were subsequently tortured by government security forces (see page 7). On arrival, Dayan was handed to the Sri Lankan Criminal Investigation Department (CID) and questioned for 16 hours. While he has been released, a stage-managed press conference after his interrogation made it obvious that he had been threatened. It is clear that neither he nor his family are out of danger.

An anti-deportation resolution carried at the recent ACTU Congress has given refugee groups a solid basis to build cooperation with the unions for action to stop forced deportations. There are also plans to target Thai Airways, the company that was used to deport Dayan, and which was so often willingly used to deport asylum seekers under the Howard government.