

Solidarity

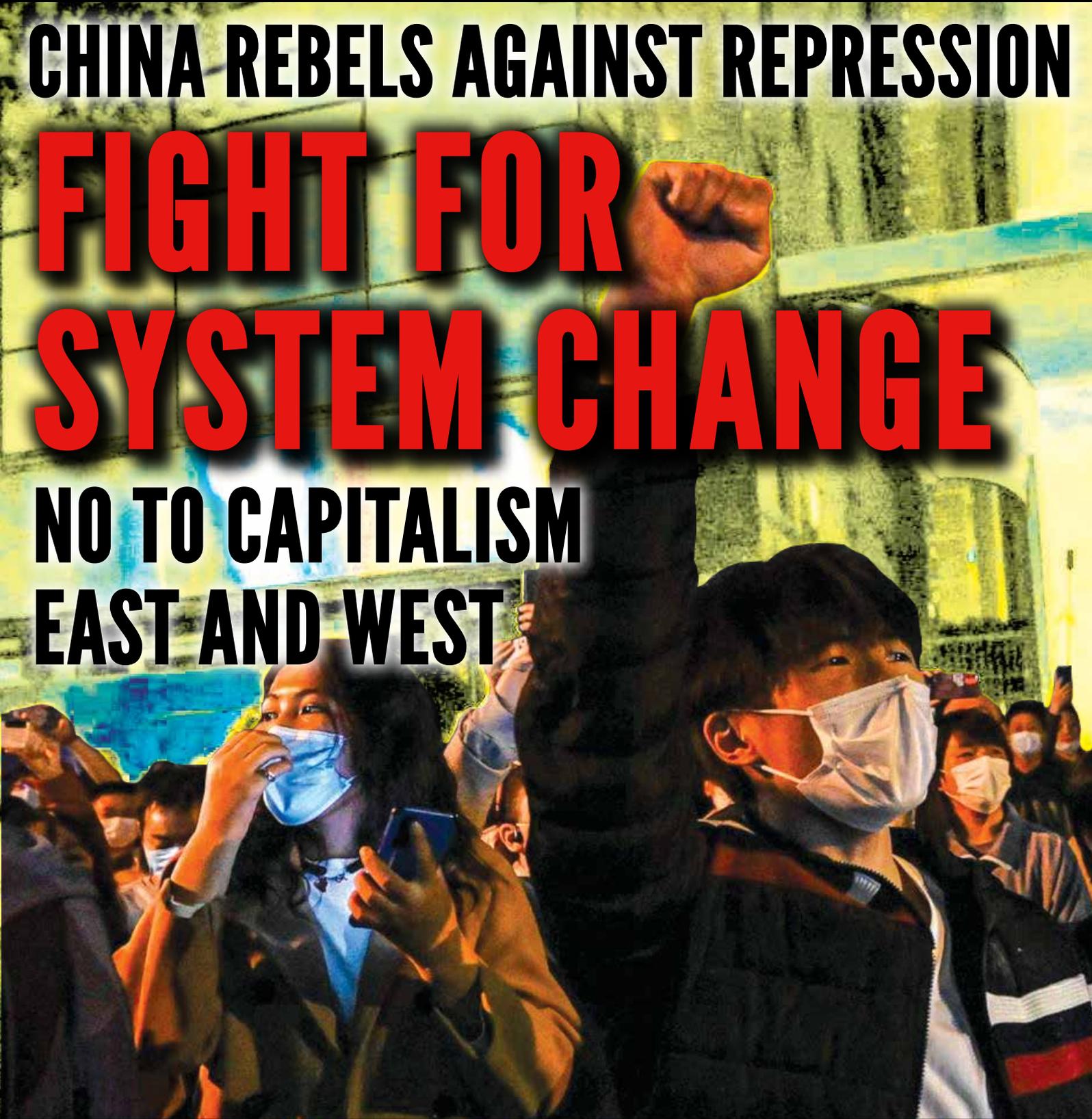
Issue No. 166 / December 2022

\$3/\$5

CHINA REBELS AGAINST REPRESSION

FIGHT FOR SYSTEM CHANGE

NO TO CAPITALISM EAST AND WEST



VICTORIA

Liberals rejected despite anger at Dan Andrews

IRAN

Defiant protests and strikes battle regime

MILITARISM

New book on Australian subimperialism

Solidarity **WHAT WE STAND FOR**

Capitalism is a system of crisis and war

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

Workers power and socialism

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

What about elections and parliament?

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

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

We are internationalists

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

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

We oppose imperialism and support all

genuine national liberation struggles. We oppose Australian nationalism.

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

Oppression and liberation

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

Linking up the struggles

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

Educate, agitate, organise

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

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

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

SOLIDARITY MEETINGS AND BRANCHES

National

Online meetings via Zoom
6.30pm every Thursday
See fb.com/soliaus/events for details or contact solidarity@solidarity.net.au

Sydney

For more information contact:
Adam on 0400 351 694
sydney@solidarity.net.au

Melbourne

For more information contact:
Chris on 0403 013 183
melbourne@solidarity.net.au

Perth

For more information contact:
Phil on 0423 696 312

Brisbane

For more information contact:
Mark on 0439 561 196 or
brisbane@solidarity.net.au

Canberra

For more information contact:
canberra@solidarity.net.au

CONTACT US

Magazine office

Phone 02 8964 7116
Fax 02 9012 0814

Email

solidarity@solidarity.net.au

Website

www.solidarity.net.au

Facebook

Search for "Solidarity Magazine" or go to fb.com/soliaus

Twitter

[@soli_au](https://twitter.com/soli_au)
twitter.com/soli_au

Solidarity No. 166

December 2022

ISSN 1835-6834

Responsibility for election
comment is taken by James
Supple, 410 Elizabeth St, Surry
Hills NSW 2010.

Printed by El Faro, Newtown
NSW.

SUBSCRIBE TO SOLIDARITY MAGAZINE

Solidarity is published monthly. Make sure you don't miss an issue—pay by credit card online at www.solidarity.net.au/subscribe or send in this form with a cheque or money order and we will mail you *Solidarity* each month.

5 issues—\$15 One year (12 issues)—\$36 Two years (24 issues)—\$65

Name Phone

E-mail Address

Cheques payable to Solidarity Publishing. Send to PO Box 375 Strawberry Hills NSW 2012.

Things they say

Among people I see as part of the Liberal base, I don't find any reaction to the Voice other than one of hostility.

John Howard, revealing more about the Liberals' base than he realises

Bitcoin is going to go to zero...well if it doesn't go to zero it's never going to be a forecastable commodity out of which you can make money.

Who knew? David Walsh, mathematician and professional gambler, as FTX crashes and Genesis suspends withdrawals. He added he keeps away from stock markets too.

The first thing that goes is your boat, and then your holiday house if things go bad. But for the moment things are pretty good. It's been a record couple of years.

Yachting magnate and millionaire Australian rich-lister, Ian Malouf, is expanding his yachting business

At the heart of [the Liberals'] disquiet is the current difficulty distinguishing a Liberal government from a Labor one

Tony Abbott, a little confused after the Victorian election result

[It's] beginning to look like Jonestown. They keep drinking the Kool-Aid.

Tony Barry, former Liberal Party strategist, on the Victorian Liberals' state of denial of their election loss

If we do not change, we will die in Victoria

Asher Judah, failed Liberal candidate for the seat of Ashwood, is more realistic

The ANF have demonstrated a complete inability to manage their membership or control industrial action to date.

WA Health Minister Amber-Jade Sanderson is upset that the WA nurses' union officials can't control their members

This year our expenditure in the budget on disability insurance surpassed our spending on defence – there needs to be a truly massive smartening up here

Former Labor leader Kim "Bomber" Beazley thinks the military is getting short-changed to fund the NDIS

CONTENTS

ISSUE 166 DECEMBER 2022



Timid Albanese avoids serious change

5 Editorial

7 Labor's climate smoke and mirrors

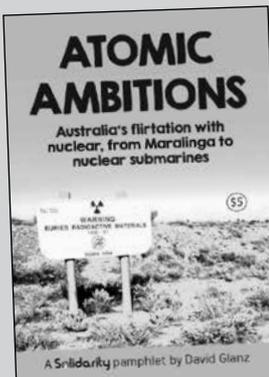
9 Anti-strike laws still crippling unions at Svitzer

20 Refugees' unfinished business with Labor



14 Labor and the Whitlam legacy 50 years on

ATOMIC AMBITIONS: NEW PAMPHLET BY DAVID GLANZ



'Australia's atomic ambitions pose a real and present danger. Against the current backdrop of moves to impose radioactive waste on Aboriginal land, promote domestic nuclear power and escalate military risks with nuclear-powered submarines and nuclear weapons-capable B52s, David Glanz takes an important look at how past resistance can help inform our future efforts to contest the drift into nuclear-fuelled militarism and mistakes.'

Dave Sweeney—Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) nuclear free campaigner, International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) co-founder

For \$5 or \$7 incl postage email solidarity@solidarity.net.au to order

Australia

6 Victorian election

8 NSW nurses strike again

8 WA nurses face deregistration

10 Crypto crash shows crisis of capitalism



International

11 China rises up against COVID repression

12 Russia and US prepare for long war in Ukraine

13 Iran protests win concessions

Features

16 Australia as a subimperial power

18 Can change come from inside Israel?

Fossil fuel lobby overruns COP27

MORE THAN 600 fossil fuel lobbyists attended the COP27 climate summit, up by 25 per cent on the year before. This was a larger contingent than any individual country except the United Arab Emirates.

“Delegations from African countries and Indigenous communities are dwarfed by representatives of corporate interests”, according to campaign group Kick Big Polluters out.

Not surprisingly, the final declaration agreed at the summit dropped all mention of phasing out fossil fuels or the target agreed at previous summits of holding warming below 1.5 degrees.

Oil and construction company Bechtel said that COP27 was the first summit where “international oil companies have been invited to participate”. Saudi Arabia led a push to declare that fossil fuels were somehow not the problem, with Saudi minister of state for foreign affairs Adel al-Jubeiri claiming “You can achieve carbon neutrality while producing fossil fuels”.

The event was riddled with talk about gas being a “transition fuel”, with host country Egypt declaring gas would “continue to play a key role in the future energy mix”. But gas is a carbon-intensive fossil fuel that releases large amounts of methane, even more harmful to the climate than carbon dioxide.

Next year’s summit will be held in the United Arab Emirates—a petrostate keen to launder its image and protect fossil fuels.

Offsets agency interferes in inquiry

THE CLEAN Energy Regulator has been accused of interfering with an independent inquiry into itself.

Senior executive Shayleen Thompson contacted the Wentworth Group of Concerned Scientists about its submission to the inquiry in what was described as a “robust” exchange.

The review is a response to claims by academic Andrew McIntosh that the carbon credit system is a “sham”, with millions of credits issued for projects that did little to reduce emissions. The Wentworth Group says that “our submission... has remained unchanged since it was submitted”.

Sexist system put Brittany Higgins on trial



THE TRIAL of Bruce Lehrmann, who was accused of raping Brittany Higgins, has been abandoned, with a decision not to proceed with a re-trial. The ACT’s Director of Public Prosecutions, Shane Drumgold, ruled that proceeding would pose an “unacceptable risk to the life of the complainant [Ms Higgins]”, who is receiving mental health treatment in hospital.

She “faced a level of personal attack” that he had “not seen in over 20 years of doing this work”, he said.

The case has shown again how rape cases put the victim on trial. Lehrmann denied there was any sexual act between them.

As Higgins put it “My life has been publicly scrutinised, open for the world to see. His was not... it’s very clear who has been on trial. He hasn’t had to be publicly accountable for his actions or any part of his story.

“This is the reality of how complainants in sexual assault cases are treated. Their lives are torn apart, their families and friends called to the witness stand and the accused has the legal right to say absolutely nothing.”

The defence case in the abandoned trial played on a series of rape myths, suggesting Higgins was an unreliable witness because of her actions after the alleged rape, or was motivated by trying to keep her job or securing a book deal.

Brittany Higgins helped expose how rife sexual assault is at the very top of society, from private schools to the halls of parliament. Fully 41 per cent women say they have experienced sexual harassment at work in the last five years, a survey released at the end of November by the Human Rights Commission found. Sexism remains structured into the system—and a renewed fight against it is desperately needed.

Queensland coal to be in use until 2099

TWELVE COAL mines will still be operating in Queensland after 2050, when Australia is supposed to reach net zero emissions, Queensland government documents have revealed. The Adani coal mine will still be running in 2071, with two others still mining until 2099.

The state government claimed the coal would be needed to make steel. But eight of the 12 are fully or partially thermal coal mines for power generation.

Coal mines release methane gas as part of the process of mining—implying they will produce high levels of emissions domestically as well as overseas, where coal is exported.

NT Labor wants ‘intervention’ against Indigenous kids

CHILDREN FOUND on the streets of Alice Springs at night could be taken by police for a child protection assessment, under a plan being examined by the NT government.

Instead of being returned home they would be assessed for removal by child protection based on “neglect”.

Police and Territory Families Minister Kate Worden said the government was working through “some legal issues” but wanted “to make sure that we can legally have an intervention to take those young people into a safe environment, and then make some Territory Families follow-up interventions”.

The plan is driven by law and order politics in response to complaints about crime. The number of young people in custody in the NT has already doubled since tougher bail laws were introduced last year—the majority of them Indigenous children.

Another 40 police have already been deployed to Alice Springs in advance of the decision.

Interest rates fuel bank profits

THE BIG banks have boosted profits by 10 per cent, up to a combined total of \$29 billion in the year to September. Rising interest rates are set to send their profits soaring further.

The Commonwealth’s CEO Matt Comyn said he was “conscientious” that customers were “feeling very concerned” about interest rates and the cost of living even as he boasted of the bank’s \$9.6 billion profit.

Days later the bank announced another 116 sackings.

ANZ made \$7.1 billion, NAB \$6.8 billion and Westpac \$5.6 billion over the year.

Westpac celebrated by closing another 23 branches around the country and axing 92 jobs. More than 550 branches have been closed across the big banks since the start of 2020.

EDITORIAL

Labor's support for the system means only small change—fight for pay, climate action and refugees

SEEING THE back of Scott Morrison was the political highlight of 2022.

But six months on from the election, Labor's modest agenda and political timidity means we are yet to see the change many hoped for.

The Liberals are in complete disarray. They were humiliated again in the Victorian election. But rather than take advantage of the Tories' crisis, Labor is more concerned with running the system than changing it.

It claims its new industrial relations laws will finally get wages moving. Albanese said they were "a win for the heroes of the pandemic, the cleaners, the disability workers, the aged care workers, the early childhood educators". But the new laws leave the same restrictions on taking strike action in place.

Union leaders have welcomed the new multi-employer bargaining rules. Yet the ACTU's Sally McManus admits there will be "limits" to their use because "there are so many hurdles".

Multi-employer bargaining was already going to be difficult for unions to access. But changes demanded by independent Senator David Pocock make it even harder. Businesses with fewer than 20 workers are excluded, and unions will have to prove why those with fewer than 50 workers should be part.

Fair Work can refuse to allow access to the "common interest" multi-employer bargaining on a whole range of grounds. This includes where it is not a low paid industry, where companies have different pay and conditions, or face different business conditions.

Any company with an existing enterprise bargaining agreement is also excluded.

Two of the worst measures have been softened, with the Better Off Overall (BOOT) test having to consider "reasonably foreseeable" future employees, instead of ignoring future employees altogether. But the test has still been watered down.

The requirement to re-ballot for industrial action every three months is also gone.

But the changes also increase the arbitration powers of the Fair Work Commission to intervene in disputes. To get wages moving, we need strikes for above-inflation pay rises.

Pampas workers in Victoria are showing the kind of fight needed, out on indefinite strike for job security for



Above: Nurses in WA taking a 24 hour strike

labour hire casuals and pay. Solidarity action could fully shut down production, but warehouse workers inside the factory on a separate enterprise agreement are still working.

WA nurses took a 24 hour strike in defiance of the Industrial Relations Commission, demanding at least a 5 per cent pay rise. But like too many union leaders, the nurses' officials have backed down from further action in the face of legal threats.

Workers at tugboat operator Svitzer, who have not had a pay rise since 2019, have had their ability to strike suspended for six months—but the union declared this a victory and has ruled out any move to defy the law.

On university campuses, the NTEU has rushed to accept mediocre deals at UTS and ACU, after university managements elsewhere began putting non-union agreements to a vote.

Without a real fight, and a willingness to break the industrial laws, real wages will keep falling.

Power prices

Labor says it will act on surging power and gas prices before Christmas. It is set to announce a price cap on gas, and something similar on coal. But the measures now won't kick in until July.

This could have happened months ago but Labor wasn't willing to take on the big mining companies.

They can easily afford it. The vast bulk of their profits won't be touched, with the measure only affecting domestic consumption.

Aged care, hospitals and other

public services are crying out for funding, but Labor has refused to tax their massive windfall profits.

Albanese is also backing more gas projects. He told ABC's 7.30 the government was strongly supporting Santos' coal seam gas plans in the Pilliga.

This is a climate wrecking project that has to be stopped. There is no need for more gas. The government should be paying to electrify households and reduce gas consumption to help cut emissions.

While Labor used the COP27 climate summit to promote its climate credentials, it is actually presiding over a massive expansion of coal and gas mining.

Much more action is needed to deal with the unfolding climate emergency. The appalling 15 month jail sentence against climate protester Violet Coco in Sydney is an indication of the NSW Liberal government's determination to protect the profits of the fossil fuel companies. The right to protest and the future of the planet are at stake.

We can take inspiration from the courageous protests in China against COVID repression, and the months of defiant demonstrations and strikes in Iran.

Voting out the Liberals is nowhere near enough to win change. It is struggle outside parliament that is needed to take on the bosses' system. For that we need more socialists, working to build the fightback in the workplaces and on the streets for real wages rises, climate action and to free the refugees. Join us.

.....
Without a real fight, and a willingness to break the industrial laws, real wages will keep falling

Frustration at Dan Andrews but voters won't back the Liberals

By Lachlan Marshall

VICTORIA'S ELECTION delivered humiliation for the Liberals and ended with Labor's Daniel Andrews comfortably re-elected for the third time.

Before the election the media speculated that Labor might be forced into minority government. But its majority in parliament is likely unchanged on its "Danslide" victory in 2018. The Greens increased their seats in the lower house to four.

While Labor's primary vote fell 6 per cent, the Liberals also lost 0.8 per cent of the vote, with the trend of declining votes for the major parties continuing.

Despite frustration with Labor, most voters could not bring themselves to back the Liberals. A range of smaller parties gained votes that flowed back to Labor on preferences.

The election was widely seen as a referendum on Andrews' pandemic management—with the Premier claiming vindication in the aftermath. But the result showed the different experience of the pandemic in class terms.

Labor suffered large swings against it in Melbourne's poorer north and west, which bore the brunt of lockdowns, authoritarian policing and COVID fines.

In two party terms there was a 12.6 per cent swing to the Liberals in St Albans, 11 per cent in Thomastown and 10.8 per cent in Kororoit in Melbourne's west. But Labor's big margins here meant the party was able to avoid losing any seats.

Lack of services in western Melbourne were another source of anger—symbolised by the Melton hospital, where the construction start date is still two years away.

By contrast Labor increased its vote in some of the wealthier seats in Melbourne's east, even taking seats such as Bayswater, Glen Waverley and Hastings from the Liberals. Here most people had jobs where they could work from home, unlike the essential workers who had to keep going into work during lockdowns.

In the upper house Labor, The Greens, Legalise Cannabis and Animal Justice will also probably have 22 of the 40 seats, meaning there will be a progressive majority in the new Legislative Council.

Liberals trounced

The Liberals' result exposed a deep crisis—with the party shunned by



Above: Dan Andrews celebrates, despite big swings against Labor in working class seats

young voters, women and multicultural communities.

They were discredited by far-right candidates such as Renee Heath, member of the homophobic, transphobic and anti-abortion City Builders Church, and Timothy Dragan, who was recorded saying that he wants to ban abortion and didn't think Indigenous people should be recognised.

Leader Matthew Guy distanced the Liberals from Heath and said she would be a "Liberal independent" but the link between the Liberals and conservative religion was established. Still listed on the Liberal ticket, Heath went on to win a seat in the upper house.

The Liberals are tainted by corruption scandals like Guy's infamous "lobster with a mobster" dinner in 2017. Two weeks before election day Guy and his former chief of staff Mitch Catlin were referred to the anti-corruption commission after Catlin asked a billionaire donor to pay over \$100,000 to his marketing company.

Labor portrayed Guy as "the cuts guy", which they contrasted with Labor policies like bringing back the State Electricity Commission and increasing spending on childcare, which includes establishing 50 affordable, government-owned childcare centres in so-called "childcare deserts". Guy resigned as Liberal leader following the election loss.

The Nationals won back some regional seats from independents, and teal independents also failed to take any seats.

Victorian Greens leader Samantha Ratnam initially described The

Greens' performance as a "Greenslide" but in the end The Greens took only Richmond from Labor, with the help of Liberal preferences.

The Greens also retained Melbourne, Prahran and Brunswick. While their vote increased, this came overwhelming from inner-city seats, flatlining or declining in outer-suburban areas.

The Victorian Socialists got close to 10 per cent of the vote in some seats, like Footscray and Broadmeadows, benefiting from the disillusionment with the major parties. But they were unable to win hoped-for seats in the upper house.

Despite Daniel Andrews' boast about his progressive government, there are serious problems around the health system, public sector wages and public housing. Labor has presided over a declining public housing sector, while massively increasing spending on police and prisons.

The Victorian government has started the process of negotiating a treaty with First Nations Victorians. But, according to Jill Gallagher, CEO of Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation, "In Victoria, more Aboriginal people have died in custody in the last five years than the previous 25."

Teachers' and public servants' pay is falling due to inflation and the 1.5 per cent pay cap, with little opposition from the unions, who simply fell in behind Labor. Strike action is needed to scrap Labor's pay cap.

The left needs to channel anger over the neglect of public services into struggle through our unions and in campaigns on the streets.

.....
Labor suffered large swings against it in Melbourne's poorer north and west, which bore the brunt of lockdowns

Labor's climate con job covers up fossil fuel expansion

By Paddy Gibson

ON 8 December, Minister Chris Bowen delivered the first Annual Climate Change Statement to Federal Parliament, reporting on progress towards its emissions reduction target of 43 per cent on 2005 levels by 2030.

Tabling a report from the Climate Change Authority (CCA), which said that Labor's major policy initiatives would only drive reductions to 40 per cent by 2030, Bowen insisted "we are on the right track" and that further measures taken to the election would make up the remaining 3 per cent.

Bowen detailed the increasingly destructive impact of climate change, arguing that "not acting would be an unforgivable act of intergenerational negligence". But behind these fine words is the catastrophic reality of Labor's approach to fossil fuels.

Labor's climate strategy revolves around obfuscation and excuses for a massive expansion of fossil fuel production in Australia, with 69 new coal projects and 45 new oil and gas projects currently in the pipeline.

The government's calculations leave out emissions from fossil fuels mined here but burned overseas. However, energy used and emissions released during mining are still a major source of domestic emissions.

A slew of new projects means these emissions will easily wipe out any reductions from the transition to renewable energy. Indeed, the CCA report said that emissions reductions in the electricity sector in 2021-22 were "more than offset by increases in stationary energy, agricultural and fugitive emissions", primarily due to "the upward trend in mining activity, particularly coal and natural gas".

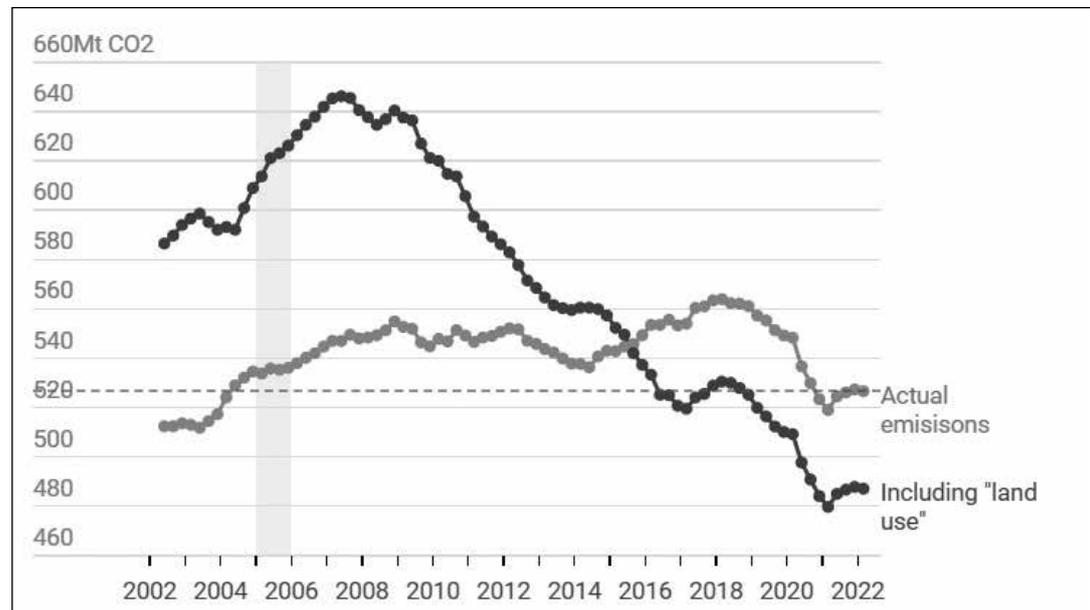
But Bowen did not mention the words "fossil fuels", "coal" or "gas" once in his 20-minute speech.

Smoke and mirrors

The real situation is considerably worse than acknowledged by Bowen and the CCA's creative carbon accounting. Labor claims that Australia has already reduced emissions by 21 per cent since 2005, meaning only another 22 per cent reduction by 2030 is needed.

In reality, emissions coming from economic activity in Australia have only decreased 1.8 per cent since 2005.

The other supposed reductions come from "land use" and rely on the bogus idea that carbon "sequestered"



in soil, forests and other vegetation can cancel out emissions from industry.

Offsets from land use play a central role in both projected baseline reductions to 2030 and in Labor's flagship Safeguard Mechanism policy.

But carbon stored in vegetation, which can quickly burn or decompose, has little impact on the greenhouse gases in the atmosphere caused by burning fossilised carbon.

A revamped Safeguard Mechanism is set to begin operating next year to regulate emissions from more than 200 of the country's heaviest industrial polluters.

Companies are set to be given the option of continuing with business as usual and simply buying Australian Carbon Credit Units (ACCUs) to meet their emissions obligations.

This is despite a report released earlier this year by Professor Andrew Macintosh, the former head of government body set up to monitor carbon credits, who denounced ACCUs as a "fraud" that had no serious impact on forest cover or emissions reductions.

A review of the scheme is due to report in December, but this has not stopped active planning for major reliance on ACCUs.

Bowen is also pushing ahead with legislating new "Safeguard Mechanism Credits", that will also allow companies to buy their way out of actual emissions reductions. These will be granted to companies who claim to have reduced emissions further than required, allowing them to sell them on.

But as the Australia Institute points

Above: Australia's emissions have barely decreased since 2005, once land use changes are excluded

Source: The Australia Institute based on Dept of Climate Change data

out, there is currently no plan to stop companies gaming this system by, for example, claiming credits when particular operations were scheduled to close anyway. There is also no plan for how the system will absorb new coal and gas projects that come online.

The only section of the Australian economy which is making real cuts to emissions is the electricity system, as renewable energy replaces fossil-fuel power generation.

This sector will do the heavily lifting for Labor's reduction target, with Bowen claiming renewables will rise from the current 30 per cent of electricity generation to 82 per cent by 2030.

While the government's "rewiring the nation" plan commits significant investment to transmission infrastructure, investment in generation capacity will be left almost entirely to the private market. And there are worrying signs of slowing investment in new renewable energy over the last year.

A transition with the speed and scale required to meet the climate crisis requires massive, direct government investment and planning. In Victoria, Dan Andrews' election policy to "bring back the SEC" and build "publicly owned renewable energy" was enormously popular.

This company however, will be 49 per cent owned by private interests and has only committed \$1 billion to new renewable projects, a tiny fraction of what is needed.

Despite the hype, Labor is accelerating down the road to climate catastrophe.

.....
Emissions coming from economic activity in Australia have only decreased 1.8 per cent since 2005

NSW nurses strike again as health system chaos continues—but electing Labor not enough to fix it

By Angus Dermody

NURSES AND midwives across NSW joined a 24-hour strike in late November, their fourth strike in nine months. Several thousand members of the NSW Nurses and Midwives Association took to the streets in Sydney to continue their call for safe staffing ratios and pay.

“It’s now our fourth strike and we’re still being pushed around. We have been bullied, we’ve been fined, but we’ve stayed strong,” the union’s general secretary, Shaye Candish, told the crowd. The union again defied the threat of fines from the Industrial Relations Commission to push ahead with the strike.

“We still can’t get proper staffing, proper breaks, proper resources. Our patients go without proper care,” she said.

Nurses and midwives have been demanding action all year from the Perrottet Liberal government to fix the broken health system.

Melissa Mansell, the president of the union’s Liverpool Hospital branch, explained how her experiences as a nurse during the pandemic have made her feel “neglected, abused, and taken for granted”.

As a result of working in horror conditions in a COVID emergency ward with just two staff, she developed PTSD. “Since then I have had multiple panic attacks on the job and sleepless nights because similar [horror stories are] still happening now.”

The union has won “a commitment from the ALP to deliver ratios” in some areas, including emergency departments, intensive care, maternity wards and multipurpose services, Candish pointed out.

But this falls short of the union’s demands. “We’ve got to keep the pressure up,” she told the crowd. “We want more”. Paediatric departments, neo-natal intensive care units and mental health, among others, have been left out.

Labor has also failed to promise pay rises that keep pace with inflation.

Perrottet has imposed a hefty wage cut on nurses with a pay rise this year of just 2.53 per cent, with inflation heading for 8 per cent. This comes after a decade of wage caps.

Nurses and midwives have kept up the fight. But the focus on a long



Above: NSW nurses on the march during their strike on 23 November

The focus on a campaign in the public sector aimed at voting out the Liberal government in March has slowed momentum

campaign across the public sector unions aimed at voting out the Liberal government at March’s state election has slowed momentum.

The Sydney strike rally was noticeably smaller than on previous strikes. The NSW Teachers Federation has already wound down strikes in favour of an electoral campaign for a Labor state government.

We do need to end Dominic Perrottet’s Liberal government. But the federal election this year has shown that we cannot simply rely on electing Labor to make the changes necessary.

Fixing the crisis in the health system, and across the public sector, means escalating the strikes and building a more powerful industrial campaign—not just for one day but for as long as necessary.

United public sector-wide strikes involving nurses, teachers, rail workers and public servants could shut down the state and cause the kind of political crisis that would force Perrottet to give in.

Shaye Candish told the rally, “Nurses and midwives are nothing if not determined. We will not go down without the fight of our lives.” That fight has to continue whether it is Dominic Perrottet or Labor in power.

WA nurses union faces deregistration threat

THE NURSES union in WA says it has avoided deregistration, after a threat from the Industrial Relations Commission (IRC) following its strike in defiance of Commission orders.

Deregistration would be a major attack on the union, denying it the ability to strike agreements with employers or to represent members in the IRC.

Australian Nursing Federation (ANF) secretary Janet Reah, speaking after a meeting with the IRC’s Senior Commissioner, said that she was not allowed to disclose the details of the discussions and “all we are permitted to say is that the ANF remains a registered Union”.

But instead of pressing ahead with further strikes in defiance of the law, she added that the union was not planning further industrial action, instead telling members “we are in for a long campaign”.

Union members voted to demand

a 10 per cent wage rise at a mass meeting in October.

Thousands of nurses staged a 24 hour statewide strike in late November, with the union officials reducing the demand to 5 per cent annual pay rises and the introduction of improved nurse to patient ratios in hospitals.

The strike only took place because of rank-and-file anger, after union officials earlier agreed in principle to accept a pay offer from the government and suspended industrial action.

In a farcical attack on union democracy, the IRC then tried to stop the union holding a vote on whether to accept the agreement.

The nurses’ determination to keep fighting for 5 per cent should be an inspiration to union members all across the country. But they are going to have to force their own union leaders to stage the industrial action that is necessary to win it.

Lockout fails, but Svitzer's using anti-strike laws to tame unions

By Erima Dall

LAST MONTH tug boat operator Svitzer dramatically escalated its attack on its workforce, moving to lock them out indefinitely at 17 ports around the country.

Svitzer has a monopoly over tug boat operations in Australia. Ports all around the country would have ground to a standstill, since ships cannot be in port without tug operators on standby.

The workforce has been on an expired agreement since 2019, when they received their last pay rise of just 1.5 per cent.

The Fair Work Commission (FWC) rushed to intervene, holding an immediate hearing.

While the Commission stopped the lockout, it also suspended all industrial action for six months, from both the company and the workforce—jointly represented by the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA), the Australian Maritime Officers Union (AMOU), and the Australian Institute of Marine and Power Engineers (AIMPE).

The whole affair was a calculated move to try and terminate workers' ability to take industrial action completely.

Svitzer were hoping the Commission would agree to this and then arbitrate—deciding on an agreement and imposing it on the workforce.

The unions argued successfully against this outcome, and hailed the Fair Work decision as a victory. But they also mistakenly dropped all planned industrial action instead of escalating against Svitzer's threat. Tug boats were operating in the harbour right up to the time of the planned lockout, awaiting the decision.

Svitzer was able to manipulate the anti-strike laws to their benefit, smashing the ability of the unions to take action over the Christmas period, and further dragging out the dispute.

Industrial laws ban any strike action causing "significant damage to the economy". These laws are routinely used against workers seeking to flex their industrial muscles.

In fact the FWC ruled against Svitzer's workforce taking 48 hour strikes across ten ports in February.

Tug boat operators were hailed as heroes in July, and again in October, after performing daring and highly skilled rescues of cargo ships that lost



Above: Action in support of Svitzer workers on the day the lockout was supposed to begin in Sydney

power at sea.

Yet the company has been able to get away with a savage attack on its workers.

One Svitzer worker at a solidarity protest in Sydney told *Solidarity*:

"Svitzer's trying to casualise the workforce. They haven't filled a vacant permanent position for 12 months—they've filled them with casuals or contract labour, paying them 25 per cent less per week.

"This is an industry that works 24/7, 365 days a year. Rosters with permanent employment is a necessity. They want employees to be on two hours' notice 365 days a year.

"We don't want two people doing the same job and one of them being paid 25 per cent less."

Rob Campbell, another Svitzer worker and delegate, said that Svitzer was taking a "death by a thousand cuts" approach and dragging out the dispute so they could maintain a three year wage freeze, with no back pay on the table. "That's the way they wanted it. But we're not just going to lay down and let them smoke us."

Svitzer are owned by Danish company Maersk, one of the biggest shipping lines in the world. Last year Maersk turned a profit of over \$US22 billion.

Svitzer have never been serious about reaching agreement, but the unions have let bargaining drag on for three years.

In February the company applied to terminate the agreement altogether, threatening major cuts to wages and

conditions through pushing workers back onto the award.

Labor

Employment relations minister Tony Burke has used the dispute to promote the government's Secure Jobs, Better Pay Bill, which gives the FWC new powers to "resolve intractable disputes before it ever comes to this".

This new Bill will allow the Commission to arbitrate agreements after just six months if a dispute is judged "intractable".

This is terrible news for unions. It is the democratic right of workers to fight—and to withdraw their labour—in pursuit of decent working conditions. Having government appointed technocrats decide on our workplace agreements will weaken our collective power and threatens the loss of hard-won conditions.

Companies are able to drag out disputes because the industrial laws are designed to stop workers taking decisive industrial action. Labor's new legislation does nothing to change this. As a result unions usually restrict themselves to actions such as overtime bans, go-slows or short strikes—but these take longer to get a result and allow companies to grind the workforce down.

Svitzer workers need to prepare for a powerful confrontation to build the strike action that can win.

Unions also need to mobilise against Labor's new attack on our right to strike. Our unions still have enormous power—but we need to use it.

.....

Companies are able to drag out disputes because industrial laws stop workers taking decisive industrial action

Crypto crisis exposes chaos of the system

By David Glanz

THE CRYPTO bubble has burst, destroying billions of dollars of notional wealth. It's not just the "crypto bros" who have lost out. Many ordinary people who got caught up in the hype have lost savings.

The collapse of crypto exchange FTX has ripped off 30,000 people in Australia. "I am financially crippled now," one wrote. "I want my money back," another said.

The collapse of the crypto market will affect workers. In Canada, the Ontario Teachers Pension Plan has written off \$143 million in members' funds.

In the US, firefighters in Houston, Texas, will be worse off in retirement—their fund "invested" \$38 million cryptocurrencies.

Earlier this year, Rest became the first Australian super fund to buy into crypto, although in modest amounts.

The crisis began to unfold in mid-November when FTX, run by Sam Bankman-Fried or SBF for short, went bust.

FTX, the second largest such exchange in the world, posed as an oasis of reliability in the unregulated world of cryptocurrencies, the most famous of which is Bitcoin.

Bitcoin launched in early 2009, less than four months after Wall Street financial giant Lehman Brothers went broke as markets melted down in what became known as the Global Financial Crisis.

Banks had lent money to people who couldn't pay their debts—and when the realisation hit in 2008-09, the financial system teetered on the brink of collapse until governments bailed out the bankers.

Blockchain

Cryptocurrencies, based on a new digital technology known as blockchain, seemed to offer a different way of running finance. Anyone with a computer could "mine" Bitcoin. No banks were involved.

The decentralised nature of the system made it very attractive to right-wing libertarians like the pro-Liberal Party thinktank, the Institute of Public Affairs. It hailed the "blockchain revolution", saying "some of the most fundamental principles governing our society are up for grabs".

A major problem with the likes of Bitcoin was the way it worsened



Above: Crypto prices are plummeting

global warming. "Mining" the coins meant running computers around the clock. As the stockpile of potential Bitcoins was reduced, computers had to become much more powerful to find them in a race against other miners.

According to one estimate, Bitcoin consumes 0.55 per cent of global electricity production each year, or about the annual energy usage of Malaysia.

The other problem was that attempts to use Bitcoin as a practical currency failed and it quickly became something speculators bought into in the hope of turning a profit.

Massive FOMO drove the price of Bitcoin and its many competitor cryptocurrencies to eye-watering levels. In 2010, a Bitcoin was worth 11 cents. A year ago, the price peaked at \$93,000. Today, Bitcoin's price is sinking fast.

Despite the hype, cryptocurrencies were not a rival to the old world of finance but increasingly interconnected. A forest of brokers, investment funds and advisers sprang up. And everyone was looking to skim cyber wealth and turn it into real dollars.

FTX was no exception. The money SBF took from investors was "stored" in an in-house cryptocurrency token while he siphoned off \$12.5 billion to his hedge fund, Alameda, to speculate on the markets.

The problem was that Alameda backed its activities with FTX's in-house tokens, which were essentially worthless. The whole thing was a sham and, once the whistle was blown, FTX, Alameda went bankrupt. It was

a digital echo of the Lehman Brothers fiasco.

Fictitious

All of this is what Karl Marx called "fictitious capital"—the web of lending, borrowing and gambling that's wrapped around the production of goods and services.

It can seem that profits are being generated by clever trading, whether in shares or crypto. But the financial speculators are merely squabbling over the actual profits generated by workers in the production of goods and services.

The problem is that as investment in machinery and technology increases, it reduces the proportion of living labour in production. And as value is generated by workers, the rate of profit in the system tends to decline.

Marxist economist Michael Roberts has calculated that, globally, the rate of profit has declined from 15 per cent in the mid-1960s to little over 10 per cent today.

That makes capitalists reluctant to invest in production. Instead they speculate on assets like real estate, art, shares or cryptocurrencies in a bid to make money at the expense of others.

This can send the price soaring temporarily, but eventually these speculative bubbles burst because they are not based on increases in the value of goods and services in the real world.

When things go bad, it's workers who pay the heaviest price. It's a system that needs to go.

.....
Attempts to use Bitcoin as a practical currency failed

China rebels against COVID repression—workers' power can bring down the CCP

By Jordi Pardoel and Jayden Rivers

CHINA HAS seen the most significant nation-wide protests since the Tiananmen Square uprising in 1989, with thousands of people taking to the streets demanding an end to brutal “zero COVID” policies.

The trigger was a fire at an apartment building in Urumqi that killed ten people—with COVID lockdown measures widely blamed for preventing firefighters from arriving.

Students have protested at more than 80 universities shouting “Freedom or death”, a slogan from 1989. Street protests also took place all across China, including in Hotan, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Wuhan and Beijing.

At the Foxconn iPhone factory in Zhengzhou hundreds of workers also clashed with riot police over fears they were being sent to work alongside people who were COVID-positive, as well as delayed bonus payments. This followed protests over the closed loop production system that forced them to continue working alongside COVID-positive workmates.

After three years of lockdowns and restrictions China's working class and students have reached breaking point. This has brought into question the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) legitimacy. Many protesters are not only calling for an end to the zero COVID policy but also for an end to the regime itself.

Zero COVID

The CCP has so far avoided large numbers of COVID deaths through an elimination policy involving lockdowns, mass testing and quarantine. As a result China has the lowest COVID-19 deaths per capita worldwide. But three years of brutal COVID restrictions have seen people imprisoned in their homes, often without food.

COVID-positive patients have been crammed together in unsanitary, makeshift quarantine centres that are “worse than prisons”. Numerous people have died after being denied medical care due to lockdowns. Workers have lost months of income.

The government is using lockdowns because of its failure over vaccination and adequate health preparations. Roughly 60 per cent of those over 80, the age group most at risk,



Above: Protesters in China have held up blank pieces of A4 paper in defiance at government repression

have not had a third dose, and many are not vaccinated at all.

The government has failed to increase the number of intensive care beds, with only five critical care beds per 100,000 people compared to around ten in South Korea, Thailand and Australia.

The fight for democracy

The protests have also raised political demands for democracy and an end to CCP rule.

At Tsinghua University in Beijing on 27 November, hundreds of students held up blank sheets of paper, chanting “democracy, rule of law, freedom of expression” and “long live the proletariat”.

The best hope for democracy lies in mass workers' struggle. Workers' strike action is the most powerful weapon in the fight for democratic change, with the power to shut down the economy and create a political crisis for the CCP that street protests alone cannot. This is how democratic rights were won in the West, as well as in countries like South Korea, Brazil and South Africa.

Western governments like those in the US and Australia are no friends of the Chinese people.

Western companies like Apple and Amazon benefit from the intense exploitation of Chinese workers under the CCP's repressive labour laws.

If the right-wing in Australia seem sympathetic to the protests in China it is only because they want to increase Western power—and are already preparing for war with China. Any war

would risk a nuclear exchange and millions of deaths in China, the US and Australia.

We must also not limit our democratic vision to that of Western liberal democracy. We cannot have illusions that this will bring freedom.

There are severe limits on democracy in the West. In the US, Congress has voted to ban rail workers from striking, imposing a labour contract with no paid sick leave.

In Sydney a climate activist was recently sentenced to 15 months in prison for holding up traffic for 25 minutes.

Real democracy can only be won through a fight for both democratic rights and against the massive inequality in China, where 10 per cent of the population control 70 per cent of the wealth. Western-style democracy would leave power in the hands of the Chinese billionaires.

The recent protests have involved students, migrant workers in Zhengzhou and Guangzhou as well as ethnic minorities such as Uyghurs in a common cause. They are not yet on the same scale as 1989. But they have already forced the CCP to make concessions and lift some of the COVID restrictions in several cities.

Protests work. But ending the repressive rule of the CCP will require a much more powerful movement involving workers' action on a mass scale against the authoritarian regime.

The fight for democracy needs to go beyond the kind of democracy that exists in the West—and fight for a genuinely socialist China with the economy under workers' control.

The government is using lockdowns because of its failure over vaccination and health preparations

Ukraine war set to grind on as US and Russia dismiss negotiations

By Rory Larkins

RUSSIA HAS suffered a further defeat in Ukraine, withdrawing from Kherson, the only regional capital that Russian forces successfully occupied since their invasion earlier this year.

The Ukrainian advances have relied on massive quantities of US and NATO weapons, in particular precision guided HIMARS missile systems that have allowed Ukraine to target Russian ammunition depots and command posts behind the front lines.

The US is fueling the war with over \$19 billion in military aid, supplying over 10,000 anti-aircraft systems, nearly 40,000 anti-armour systems, nearly one million artillery rounds, over 100 million small arms munitions, and thousands of armoured vehicles, aircraft, and tanks. The total support from NATO members reaches over \$40 billion—around \$150 million every day.

The EU has also stepped up its monetary support for the war voting on 24 November to approve a conditional loan to Ukraine of \$28 billion that is enough to cover roughly half of the estimated \$5-6 billion monthly funding Ukraine needs in 2023.

The EU says the loan is to assist Ukraine both for reconstruction and its path towards EU membership, inflaming one of the contentious issues of the war.

Putin is desperate to hold onto the territory he has already seized, and resist any move by Ukraine to re-take Crimea. Russia has responded to the loss of Kherson by attacking Ukraine's power grid and water supply.

No end in sight

General Mark Milley, the US Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, has publicly urged Ukraine to seek a diplomatic resolution to the war, saying a complete Ukrainian military victory was not feasible.

But other US officials have reinforced their commitment that the US is "going to be with Ukraine for as long as it takes in this fight." And that "There will no wavering, no flagging, no flinching in our support as we go forward."

But the opposition to negotiations and the wider implications of the war



for Western imperialism was made clear by former Ukrainian member of parliament Hanna Hopko, at a recent international security forum.

"So, this is our answer to all negotiations," Hopko said. "It's about defeating Russian imperialism so that they never become a threat, not just for Ukraine—for Belarus, Moldova, for Georgia, Venezuela, Syria. And not supporting China in a potential attack on Taiwan and others."

Russia and Ukraine have both suffered an estimated 100,000 casualties, but it's clear the war is set to drag on. And the threat of Russian use of nuclear weapons is an ever-present danger in the face of increased military escalation by the West.

After a visit from French President Emmanuel Macron US President Joe Biden announced that he would be "prepared to speak with Mr. Putin" if he was "looking for a way to end the war."

However, Biden also said he had "no immediate plans" to reach out to Putin and secured a joint statement with Macron that the US and NATO will "stand as strong as ever against Russia's brutal war in Ukraine."

Such is the extent of the arms going to Ukraine that the US and NATO are beginning to reach the capacity of their military production.

Above: Weapons continue to pour into Ukraine from NATO and the US

In some munitions factories, shifts have been running for 24 hours a day—prompting discussion of opening further large-scale arms manufacturing plants, including in Poland, to meet demand.

As the *Financial Times* put it, "At stake is not only the west's ability to continue supplying Ukraine with weapons... but also [the West's] capacity to show adversaries such as China that they have an industrial base that can produce sufficient weaponry to mount a credible defense against possible attack."

In other words, the US is using the war to send a signal to China about its ability to defeat its rivals.

Australia has been in lock-step with the US, sending hundreds of millions in military aid, including dozens of Bushmaster armoured vehicles.

Ordinary people have nothing to gain from this conflict.

While we suffer soaring energy prices and falling wages, Labor is pouring millions into weapons, nuclear submarines and extending US bases, rather than funding public health, or a desperately needed transition to renewable energy.

We need to oppose our government's efforts to send arms that are only further fuelling the conflict between the West and Russia.

.....
The US is using the war to send a signal to China about its ability to defeat its rivals

Protests continue to rock Iran as regime wavers on headscarf law

By Adam Adelpour

PROTESTS IN Iran are still ramping up pressure on the regime, entering their third month despite a brutal crackdown by the state.

The protests have displayed incredible resilience and are now calling for the fall of the authoritarian Islamic Republic.

The regime is clearly under pressure. In early December Iran's Prosecutor General Mohammad Jafar Montazeri said the hated "morality police" had been suspended. According to Al Jazeera, the white police vans of the morality police had not been seen patrolling the streets in the lead up to the statement. Many women no longer wear the headscarf when on the street.

He also reportedly said that the mandatory headscarf law was being reviewed. If confirmed this would be a significant concession to the movement.

But as yet there is no sign the morality police are fully or permanently disbanded. Before the protests began the regime had already promised to use facial recognition on public transport to police dress codes.

To seriously threaten the regime protests will have to grow and workers' strikes will have to spread.

New wave of protest

The Prosecutor General's comments came after a major three-day protest in mid-November coinciding with the anniversary of widespread protests in 2019. Three years ago, the state killed at least 1500 people during the "Bloody November" crackdown.

The protests last month included demands against poverty, price hikes and low wages. These echo the demands of the movement in 2019 that started over price increases, escalating into calls for the fall of the regime.

Street protests took place in at least 62 cities, in many cases involving battles with police, barricading streets and lighting fires on the barricades. Dozens were killed by live fire from state forces, who also hit protesters with a barrage of tear gas and mass arrests.

The November action was labelled a "general strike". Mostly this meant small shopkeepers closed their businesses and students at several universities shut down classes. But significantly, metal workers in the city of Isfahan went on strike for the entire



three days. The strike was about wages but was timed to coincide with the protests.

The protests were met with repression, which was particularly fierce in Kurdish areas. Military vehicles and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps were deployed in large numbers to crush protests in the Kurdish city of Mahabad, a hotbed of dissent.

Video of heavy military equipment and weapons entering the city was posted on social media, as well as live fire in the streets and reports of several killings.

Protest and strikes continue

The end of November saw more strikes including at a car factory, a metal plant and a strike by truck drivers.

According to some reports the truck drivers' strike in several cities lasted for three days. The strike was over fuel costs, but the Union of Truckers and Drivers Organisations says it was also against government repression, particularly in the provinces of Baluchistan, Kurdistan and Sistan.

Another strike broke out at the Iran tyre company in Tehran, where workers chanted "we are all together" and "death to the dictator."

The metal workers in Isfahan who had earlier walked out for three days, struck again. They marched in their hundreds demanding higher wages. Workers at Bafaq steel plant were also

Above: Protests against the compulsory headscarf law and the Iranian regime still continue

reported to be on strike for health and safety following an explosion.

There were also reports of strikes at Sarma Afarin Company in the Alborz Industrial Complex and in the Pars Home Appliances Company, also in Alborz.

From the streets to the work-places

More action by organised workers is essential if the movement is to build the power it needs to win. Oil workers' strikes dealt the death-blow to the Western-backed dictator, the Shah, who was brought down in Iran's 1979 revolution.

Up until now, workers' action has been relatively limited and the core of the movement has been on the streets and in the universities. Before November there had been some teachers' strikes as well as strikes by contract oil workers and others. But the permanent core workforce in the oil industry is yet to strike.

Another three-day protest began on 5 December in the lead-up to Iran's Student Day on 7 December. The date marks the anniversary of the murder of three students in 1953 at the hands of the Shah's police.

Inflation in Iran is soaring, and poverty continues to bite the workers of Iran. More, bigger protests and demands connecting economic discontent with calls for political freedom and an end to state repression can help spread the movement in the streets into the workplaces.

The end of November saw more strikes including at a car factory, a metal plant and a strike by truck drivers

GOUGH WHITLAM'S LEGACY 50 YEARS ON WHAT'S HAPPENED TO LABOR?

Gough Whitlam is remembered as a radical reformer, but his demise laid the ground for Labor's move to the right, writes **Mark Gillespie**

GOUGH WHITLAM'S Labor government was swept to power 50 years ago on 2 December 1972, ending 23 long years of conservative government. Whitlam had an agenda of substantial progressive reform and set about implementing it immediately.

Within days conscription was abolished but much more was to follow.

Fifty years on Anthony Albanese is keen to paint his government in the same progressive reforming tradition, listing Whitlam's policies of, "Universal healthcare. Land rights. Urban renewal. Equal pay. Better school and university funding", and adding, "We are proud to build on that legacy in our government".

While the election of Albanese after nine years of Coalition governments is a relief, the gap between Labor today and 50 years ago is enormous.

Whitlam not only ended conscription but abolished university and TAFE fees and doubled school funding; quadrupled funding for housing; tripled urban development expenditure; increased health spending by 20 per cent and introduced a universal national health care system. He established diplomatic relations with "Communist" China; formally ended White Australia; granted Papua New Guinea its independence; drafted the Racial Discrimination Act; handed Wattie Creek back to the striking Gurindji stockmen; introduced no-fault divorce, legal aid and much much more.

Albanese's agenda in comparison is mild. There is more continuity with the past than change—summed up by Labor's commitment to keep the massive stage three tax cuts for the rich.

So moderate is Labor's agenda that some argue they have broken with their reforming social democratic traditions. Adam Bandt, for example, praises Whitlam glowingly while claiming The Greens are now the only party "offering a social democratic alternative".

But this idolises Whitlam and misses the real weakness with the social democratic tradition that both Whitlam and Albanese share. To understand why Whitlam was so much bolder than Albanese today, we need to look at the context of his 1972 election.

Mass movements

Whitlam was elected on the back of a rising mass movement that shook Australian capitalism to its foundations. Support for the Vietnam War collapsed in 1968 and by 1970 there were massive moratorium marches against the war. Trade unions, too, were on the offensive after an almost spontaneous general strike freed the jailed tramways union official Clarrie O'Shea in 1969 and made the Liberals' anti-union penal powers a dead letter.

The struggle for Indigenous rights was on upward curve, beginning with the famous freedom rides in 1965 that challenged segregation in outback towns in NSW; the 1966 strikes by Aboriginal pastoral workers in Northern Territory who demanded equal pay and later land rights; through to the establishment of the famous tent embassy on the lawns of Parliament House in 1972.

The Women's Liberation Movement and the Gay Liberation Movement, too, burst onto the scene during this period. The depth of radicalisation in society is probably best measured by the involvement of trade unions in industrial action to support progressive political causes such as the anti-war moratoriums, the opposition to the 1971 South African Springbok tour, and the famous Green bans.

It was these movements that created the mood for change in society and shifted Whitlam to the left.

This is best demonstrated by his changing position on the Vietnam

Whitlam was elected on the back of a mass movements that shook Australian capitalism to its foundations

War. Whitlam became Labor leader following Labor's crushing defeat in the 1966 election over the issue of Vietnam. His response was to try to "de-escalate" the issue, watering down the party's already ambiguous opposition to the war.

In 1967, following a hysterical backlash against Monash University students who announced their intention to aid the enemy by collecting money for the Vietnamese National Liberation Front (NLF), Whitlam denounced them as a "handful of anarchists and exhibitionists" and voted with the conservatives to outlaw collections.

But by 1969 Whitlam had come to see opposition to the war as an "electoral asset" and promised: "Under Labor, there will be no troops in Vietnam after June 1970". He also began endorsing "peaceful demonstrations" saying they "are as legitimate and as necessary a part of the democratic processes as elections". Only a year earlier he'd been saying Labor's foreign policy would not be determined by petitions and mass meetings.

According to right-wing Labor politician Fred Daley "Whitlam had sniffed the breeze and being pragmatic, changed his attitude on Vietnam".

Economic boom

The other factor shaping Whitlam's ability to bring change was the shape of the economy. Whitlam was elected at the peak of the post-war boom when capitalism could live with substantial reforms.

Whitlam's reforms, however, were never about redistributing wealth but about modernising capitalism. Investment in health and education made sense from a capitalist point of view as business required a well-educated, healthy workforce to compete within the modern, changing and increasingly global economy.

These reforms were always predi-

cated on the economic boom continuing, ensuring capitalism's ability to pay without threatening profits. As Whitlam said, "Our program, particularly in education, welfare, hospitals and cities, can only work successfully within a framework of strong uninterrupted growth".

Whitlam never wanted to challenge the madness of the market, but rather to make it work more efficiently. In 1973 he cut import tariffs by 25 per cent across all industries as part of the process of opening up the economy to global competition and forcing industry to restructure and to invest in new technology.

This explains why the Murdoch press and other leading business figures happily endorsed Whitlam in the 1972 election.

Whitlam increased government spending by 40 per cent in the 1973 budget and still had a surplus of \$211 million. This stands in sharp contrast to the economic conditions Albanese faces today where the budget has not been in surplus since 2008 and government debt its highest as a share of GDP since 1950.

Whitlam's dream run, however, ended with the 1973-75 global recession. After decades of growth and virtual full employment, unemployment climbed to about 5 per cent while inflation ballooned, reaching a staggering 22 per cent.

And just as the Albanese government uses the "trillion dollars of debt" as an excuse today not to increase the JobSeeker allowance, so too did Whitlam use the state of the economy to wind back reforms.

Many argue that Labor's embrace of neoliberal economics and its move to the right began with the Hawke and Keating governments from 1983. But Whitlam's response to recession was not so different. Handouts went to the corporate sector to try to get them to invest while government spending was cut, alongside an attempt to restrain wages.

"We are no longer operating in that simple Keynesian world" said Whitlam's Treasurer, Bill Hayden in his 1975 budget speech, "today, it is inflation itself which is the central policy problem". Hayden cut corporate taxes by 2.5 per cent while exercising "the utmost restraint on government spending" with cuts across the board.

The Whitlam government also moved to rein in the unions that were using their industrial power to fight the effects of inflation. First they appealed to unionists to "Go easy mate", then



Above: Gough Whitlam speaks at a rally following the Dismissal

they attacked sections of the movement for "bloody-mindedness", and finally introduced wage indexation (where arbitration courts set the wage rates). By the end of 1975 metal industry bosses expressed their support for indexation as it "helped to dampen a dangerous pattern of wage growth".

The Dismissal

This was the first serious recession since the end of the Second World War—and it sent the ruling class into a panic. Business felt Whitlam wasn't acting fast or hard enough and were desperate for a government that would take savage measures against unions and the working class.

Regardless of Whitlam's efforts to give them what they wanted, he nonetheless faced an extraordinary extra-parliamentary campaign by the corporate media, business executives and the establishment, in co-operation with the Liberal Party, to hound him out of power.

This culminated with the unelected Governor General, John Kerr, sacking the elected Prime Minister on 11 November 1975.

Whitlam's dismissal provoked outrage, with immediate mass demonstrations and strikes. Seafarers, wharfies, rail workers, building workers, meat workers and metal workers all walked off the job in protest. There was immense pressure on Bob Hawke, then President of the ACTU, to call a general strike.

But Whitlam, forever committed to working through parliament, was not about to unleash this tiger. Instead, he urged workers to "maintain your

rage" until election day, while Bob Hawke told workers to "cool it" and donate a day's pay to Labor's re-election campaign instead of striking.

This mobilised workers, leaving them more isolated and exposed to the mass media hammering the message that Whitlam had wrecked the economy. The predictable result was an election win for the Liberals' Malcolm Fraser.

Whitlam's dismissal has allowed him to go down in Labor mythology as a great social democratic reformer who stood up to the powers that be. The Labor Party responded to his sacking by concluding he had gone "too far, too fast" and vowing to never attempt anything similar again.

But it is important to see what Whitlam and the Labor leaders that followed him have in common. They all seek to manage the capitalist economy in a "fairer" way for workers. But this means accepting responsibility for guaranteeing the profits and wealth of big business and the rich.

When capitalism is sick and profits and investment are weak, it means implementing the cuts to wages and public services needed to get the system back to health. This is why so many Labor governments end up attacking their own working class supporters. Whitlam was no exception.

Rather than idealise Whitlam and the social democratic tradition we need a new set of politics—one that looks to the power of organised workers and mass movements outside of parliament. This is the power that forced Whitlam to the left and made the changes he did deliver possible in the first place.

AUSTRALIAN SUBIMPERIALISM

SUBMARINES, SOVEREIGNTY AND CLASS

Clinton Fernandes' new book explains how Australia works as a subimperial power alongside the US, but still argues for a nationalist policy says **Robert Stainsby**

THE NEW book by UNSW Professor of International and Political Studies Clinton Fernandes, *Subimperial Power: Australia in the International Arena*, is both exciting and frustrating. It challenges orthodox understandings of Australia's position in the world, among both the foreign policy establishment and left-wing activists.

Yet *Subimperial Power* ultimately provides no real alternative to the push towards war and militarism championed by the US and Australian ruling classes.

Fernandes correctly says that the US "sits at the apex of a hierarchically structured imperial system", projecting power across the globe, economically, technologically and culturally.

In particular: "It is the only country whose military is designed to leave its own hemisphere, cross vast oceans and airspace, and then conduct sustained, large-scale military operations in another hemisphere."

With its partners like Australia, the US enforces the "rules-based international order", which is notably not based on the UN, but on asserting "the rights of private investors over the sovereignty of most states".

Courageously, Fernandes has put his weight behind the campaign against the AUKUS agreement to share cutting-edge military technology between the US, UK and Australia. Discussing the agreement, he observes: "Australia's [planned] nuclear-powered submarines are focused not on defending Australia from hostile powers but on supporting the United States in its determination to project power globally."

In particular, they would be critical for the US's ability to conduct military and intelligence operations in other countries' coastal waters. Fernandes points out that China is even more dependent than Australia on sea-borne imports, so US access to seas near China gives it major leverage over its

rising imperial rival.

Taiwan is a flashpoint, not because the US has any special love for democracy, but for its position and the importance of its world-leading semiconductor industry. Taiwan aside, "China's priority is not to invade or occupy areas of the Asia Pacific ... but rather to raise the cost of hostile US action."

Fernandes accurately describes AUKUS as "the military, intelligence and cyber equivalent" of Australia's free trade agreements with the US and US: "The three agreements reflect Australia's full-spectrum search for relevance to great power allies in the era of Cold War 2.0."

Break

Three themes in *Subimperial Power* make a welcome break from mainstream left thinking. These concern Australia's decisions, motives and practice in the global imperialist order.

First, the book makes clear that cooperation with a larger imperial power has always been a choice made by Australia's rulers, not something they have been forced into.

For example, with regard to the perception that Australia is continually forced to fight "other people's wars", Fernandes quotes military historian Craig Stockings: "The reality is that 'Australia's wars have been Australia's choices, or at least the consequence of the willing decisions of Australian politicians and policy-makers in pursuit of the perceived national interest'."

Second, the motivations for these decisions are rational in these decision-makers' terms: "it is not easy to argue that the status quo generally harms Australians when balanced against the other benefits that flow from a liberal international trading order underpinned by US power. That

.....
The book makes clear that cooperation with a larger imperial power has always been a choice made by Australia's rulers

order produces winners and losers; Australia is in the former group, and there is very little consideration of the interests of the latter."

There is a fascinating account of how the British Empire worked to lay the foundations of Australia's current prosperity. While the Empire poured wealth into public spending here, "Indian income collapsed by half and average life expectancy dropped by a fifth from 1870 to 1920."

Third, while Australia willingly subordinates itself to the US, it bullies its own neighbours. Fernandes recounts how Australia took economic control of Fiji, Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu around the turn of the 20th century, with forced indentured labour a key feature.

More recently it has undermined Timor-Leste's control of that country's oil and gas resources. Its "boomerang aid" to the Solomon Islands, which mostly ends up in Australian pockets, just makes China's offers of aid more attractive.

Australia gives every indication it will go to war over a Chinese invasion of Taiwan yet stands firmly against self-determination for its own neighbour West Papua.

Fernandes singles out Israel as a country in a similar subimperial role to Australia, while noting that Australia's region is not such a focus of global tensions.

Like many on the left, he recognises Israel as an apartheid state worthy of international condemnation. The fact that Australia plays such a similar role in world affairs should give leftists who sympathise with Australian nationalism pause.

Sovereignty

Socialists can wholeheartedly endorse Fernandes' description of Australia as a subimperial power. However, his

definition of “imperialism”—“control of other countries’ sovereignty”—is not the one we use, and this difference is critically important.

Our critique comes from the Russian Bolsheviks Bukharin and Lenin, who saw imperialism as more than the age-old pattern of one country controlling another. It was a consequence of the development of capitalism to a point where capital became ever more entwined with states competing to retain and seize territory, and to control trade and markets.

In this understanding, military competition and the domination of a few powers is not a matter of mistaken government policy. Rather it is structured into the very nature of the global economic system.

Each major power is locked into a continual struggle to defend its influence and power across the world against its rivals. Inevitably this regularly breaks out into shooting wars, as we are seeing now in Ukraine based on the tensions between Russia and NATO.

Fernandes laments Australian elites’ choice to surrender elements of sovereignty to the USA. But a state’s possession of more complete sovereignty does not necessarily benefit the majority of its people. Workers in the more “sovereign” United States face worse living standards and levels of social services than those in Australia.

For a work so concerned with the question of sovereignty, it’s telling that *Subimperial Power* ignores the rightful claims of unceded sovereignty by Australian First Nations people. The sovereignty of the Australian state over this continent and surrounding islands was established through a genocide against First Nations people, a fact the book completely misses.

The limitations of *Subimperial Power* stem from a failure to interrogate the notion that there is an Australian “national interest”, shared by all its people, bosses and workers alike. Fernandes does identify some fault lines inside Australia, notably the division between the defence and foreign affairs establishment and the public, from whom it keeps secrets.

Sometimes he writes as though the establishment is simply carried away with a mistaken view of Australia’s true interests and the solution is to bring more of the population into the debate: “People can understand Australia’s role in the international arena if institutions do not work actively to exclude them. That calls for long-term collective efforts to reveal rather than mystify Australian foreign policy.”



Above: Anthony Albanese and Labor have continued to lock Australia is behind the US military

At other times, he is more sombre and realistic about the possibility of Australia’s elites taking a different path, concluding “Australia is unlikely to make a serious commitment to neutrality, multipolarity or a democratic and equitable international order”.

The demand for an “independent Australia” is popular among peace campaigners. Yet Fernandes inadvertently exposes how it would mean anything but peace: “Such a policy would require a posture known as the ‘strategic defensive’: making Australian forces an aggressive, elusive military that avoids detection, seeks battle on very favourable terms, and compels a hostile adversary to abandon its goals.” An independent Australia would need its own fleet of deadly submarines, albeit not nuclear ones.

As David Brophy argues in his superior 2021 book *China Panic*, this is a vision of “an Australia further sacrificing the health and education of its people so as to ‘independently’ seek advantage in the regional rivalries it will remain embroiled in”.

Brophy continues: “If, like me, you look at this menu and think ‘none of the above’, we need to consider the third, all too neglected option: a conscious commitment to dismantling the drivers of competition between states.” And we need to understand those drivers lie in the global domination of capitalism—and, for Australia, in its place as a subimperial capitalist power far from the centres of empire.

Craig Stockings comments on the back cover that readers “might just have uncovered a new lens through

which to see the world about you”. But the lens we really need is class, a dimension that’s sadly neglected in the book.

The Australian state does not serve the interests of the whole population, but belongs to the Australian capitalist class. This class and its state are no more interested in workers’ welfare than their international rivals.

They have calculated time and time again that it’s in their interests to align themselves with the USA and dominate our island neighbours. They are just as happy to risk workers dying in war as they are to trash our living standards and working conditions, and destroy the climate.

In clearly laying out that Australia has power and benefits from its place in the imperialist system, and that it has constantly chosen the subimperial role, Fernandes makes a valuable contribution to the peace movement’s understanding of the enemies we face. Yet he sows illusions in the scope for this subimperial settler state to operate differently.

Rather than bolster the sovereignty of the Australian state, the left should be concerned with strengthening movements of workers and Indigenous peoples oppressed by Australia, both here and across the region, to control the damage it does.

The final chapter of *Subimperial Power* is titled “Neither their war nor their peace”—an excellent slogan. Only we need to be clear that “they” are the international capitalist ruling class, which for us in Australia means Australian rulers first and foremost.

A peaceful world will come not from the UN, or a neutral capitalist Australia, but from workers’ united international action against all capitalist war machines.

SETTLER-COLONIALISM AND PALESTINE CAN CHANGE COME FROM INSIDE ISRAEL?

Israeli politics is becoming more racist and right-wing, as a result of its foundation as a settler state based on Palestinian dispossession argues **James Supple**

ISRAEL'S ELECTION in November saw right-wing leader Benjamin Netanyahu return to office, after the coalition that replaced him collapsed after just over a year in power. His new government will be even more right-wing than before, including parties committed to extreme racism against Palestinians.

Netanyahu has become the dominant figure in Israeli politics, as Prime Minister almost continuously since 2009. A warmonger and strong supporter of Donald Trump, he announced plans to formally annex large areas of the occupied West Bank, which would make any future peace settlement with the Palestinians impossible.

Netanyahu openly supports racism and apartheid against the Palestinians, declaring that, "Israel is not the state of all its citizens. According to the Basic Law that we passed, Israel is the nation-state of the Jewish people—and its alone."

After some of his previous right-wing allies abandoned him, Netanyahu brokered a deal last year between small extremist parties to run under the Religious Zionism list. They are now the third biggest party in the Knesset, Israel's parliament.

One of the grouping's leaders is Itamar Ben-Gvir, a far-right figure who came out of the viciously anti-Arab Kach party, which was banned after one of its members, Baruch Goldstein, massacred 29 Palestinians at a mosque in Hebron. Ben-Gvir has repeatedly praised Goldstein and hung a portrait of him in his office.

He openly calls for the expulsion of Palestinians living inside Israel who are not "loyal" to the idea of a Jewish state and wants the annexation of the West Bank under a regime of explicit apartheid, where Palestinians would have no right to vote.

Israeli politics is becoming more and more ultra-nationalist and right-wing. Even the opposition to Netanyahu, like the party led by Yair Lapid, wants peace with the Palestinians only on terms of abject humiliation.

Over time the mainstream "left" in Israeli politics has become more and more marginal. The Labor Party, once dominant, is a shadow of its former self.

The Meretz party, seen as the representative of the peace movement, has won less than 5 per cent at every election since 2003 and is now without a single parliamentary seat. And even Meretz is a Zionist party that ultimately sides with the state against the Palestinians.

Settler-colonial state

Gideon Levy, a well-known Israeli critic of the occupation and journalist at the *Ha'aretz* newspaper, wrote that Israeli Jews who oppose Zionism and are prepared to live on equal terms with Arabs "comprises all of a fraction of one per cent" of the population.

The bulk of Israeli society embraces extreme racist attitudes towards the Palestinians.

Last year's assault on Gaza showed anew Israel's brutality. In less than two weeks 256 Palestinians were killed and Gaza's buildings and infrastructure devastated again in the fourth major bombing campaign since 2008.

Yet on the day the ceasefire was agreed, an opinion poll found that almost three-quarters of Israelis believed the bombing should continue. A separate poll last year found 62 per cent of Israeli Jews agreed that "Arabs only understand force". A poll in 2015 found almost half of Israeli Jews believed that Arabs should be expelled from Israel completely, where they are around 20 per cent of

Israel remains reliant on massive support from US and Western imperialism

the population, and 79 per cent said Jewish citizens deserved "preferential treatment", effectively endorsing racist discrimination.

All this is the result of Israel's foundation as a settler-colonial state based on imperialist domination and racial exclusion. This project, which remains reliant on massive support from US and Western imperialism, has fostered a violent hostility to Palestinians.

Zionism, the idea that the Jewish people had a right to establish their own exclusive state in Palestine, is the founding ideology of Israel.

This was only possible through seizing the land from the Palestinian Arab population that already lived there.

Although Zionist settlers began arriving in Palestine from 1882, they recognised that their cause needed the sponsorship of a great power, which they eventually found in Britain, the leading European colonial power of the day.

After the First World War Britain took control of Palestine and allowed a rapid increase in Jewish settler migration.

The Zionists sold themselves to Britain as a dependable European colonial population, with Theodor Herzl, the founder of modern Zionism, commenting that they would be "a part of the wall against Asia and serve as the vanguard of civilization against barbarism".

The Israeli state was eventually established through the dispossession and ethnic cleansing of around 700,000 Palestinians in 1948. Even today any Jewish person has the right to migrate to Israel and claim citizenship under the law of return.

Yet the right of return for Palestinian refugees expelled from their homes is denied and Israel continues to grab

more and more Palestinian land.

Change from inside Israel

Socialists argue that workers everywhere have an interest in fighting oppression and imperialism. But from early on, the nature of the settler-colonial project ensured that Jewish workers and their organisations put nation building before class.

Jewish workers gained significant material benefits from their support for settler-colonialism and the Israeli state. To ensure Jewish settlers remained in Palestine, the World Zionist Organisation forged an alliance with Jewish workers' organisations to ensure that they received a "European standard of living" higher than that of Palestinian Arab workers.

To achieve this, the Zionist trade union federation, the Histadrut, organised to exclude Palestinians from the labour market. More than a trade union, it operated as a "state in embryo" running businesses as well as providing workers' social needs like banking, housing and education.

When Israel was established its leaders took control of the state, through the Labor Party and its predecessor Mapai, continuing the same approach, underpinned by capital transfers sent to Israel from abroad.

After the British withdrawal from Palestine following the Second World War, Israel received support from a range of imperialist powers. In the 20 years after its creation it received \$7 billion in capital investment from the West, most if it in the form of aid. According to British socialist Tony Cliff this was equal to almost \$3000 per person per year, higher than the profits Britain drew per person from imperialism at the height of its empire.

Privatisation and cuts to the welfare state since the 1980s have brought an increase in inequality. But this has not led even a section of the working class to break with settler-colonialism.

In 2011 there were demonstrations of almost 500,000 Israelis nationwide against the cost of living and housing. But at no point did the movement challenge the huge levels of government spending on the military or the occupation of Palestinian territories seized in 1967, let alone the broader racism and discrimination against the Palestinians.

The way Israel's population has grown through Jewish migration, including Mizrahi Jews from countries like Iran, Iraq and Egypt who arrived after 1948, and those who arrived from Russia in the 1990s, has reinforced rac-



Above: Benjamin Netanyahu's new coalition reveals the ugly face of Israel's violence and racism

ist nationalism. Despite making up the poorer sections of the Jewish Israeli working class, the more recent Jewish migrants have sought to intensify the dispossession and racism against the Palestinians instead of turning their rage against wealthy Israelis.

US backing

Israel remains an imperialist outpost, dependent on support from outside powers. Following Israel's victory over the Arab states in the 1967 war, the US became its key imperialist sponsor.

Israel in turn acts as a "watchdog state" for US interests in the Middle East. This has helped entrench militarism within Israeli society.

The country has received around \$190 billion in US aid since 1945, more than any other country.

This allows Israel to maintain a "qualitative military edge" over other states in the region through access to high-tech military equipment.

And as British socialist Anne Alexander writes, it has also had other spin-offs for Israel's economic development: "These huge subsidies turned the 'burden' of military spending into a means to attract further external sources of funding. They also played a critical role in laying the basis for the boom in hi-tech and research-intensive manufacturing and services."

These industries deliver high-wage jobs for Israeli workers.

The colonial war for control of Palestine has never ended, with Palestinian military resistance from the PLO and Hamas still ongoing. The process of dispossession is also ongoing, through settlement building and the seizure of land in the territories

Israel occupied in the 1967 war in the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem.

This means that Israel's relationship to the Palestinians remains the dominant issue in Israeli politics. Military control of the occupied territories has a major ideological impact inside Israel, due to the role of settlers in Israeli politics and the compulsory military service which sees many young Jewish Israelis spend time as part of the occupation force in the West Bank.

All this means there is no significant social force inside Israel that offers any hope for change. The material interests of the Israeli working class are bound to the Israeli state similarly to the way those of the white working class of South Africa were tied to the apartheid state.

The key to winning Palestinian liberation lies outside Israel—in the working class across the wider Middle East.

Despite the complicity of the Arab ruling classes with imperialism, the Arab population still strongly supports the Palestinians. Solidarity with Palestine was a key issue around which Egyptian workers organised against the Mubarak dictatorship before their revolution brought him down in 2011.

In what was termed the Arab Spring, workers in Egypt and Tunisia in particular showed their power to potentially reshape the region.

The revolutions of 2011 failed to grow over from a fight for democracy into a fight against capitalism and imperialism. But further revolts in the future are inevitable. It will require a revolutionary struggle across the whole region to liberate Palestine along with the wider Middle East from imperialist control.

REFUGEES HAVE UNFINISHED BUSINESS WITH LABOR



Above: Rallying outside parliament house in Canberra in November

By Ian Rintoul

ON 29 November more than 1000 refugees rallied on the lawns of Canberra's Parliament House to once again demand Labor make good on its pre-election promise to grant permanent visas to refugees on temporary visas.

Priya Nadesalingham from the Home to Bilo campaign joined the rally, calling on the government to grant permanent visas to all 31,000 refugees and asylum seekers on temporary refugee and bridging visas. Labor was willing to grant visas to the Nadesalingham family when they thought it would look good in the media.

Just two days later a jolly end-of-the-Parliamentary-year message from Home Affairs Minister Claire O'Neil proclaimed, "We have been working non-stop to create a better future for Australia." O'Neil mentioned cost of living, wages, the anti-corruption commission, and aged care. She even said she is trying to fix the migration system. But asylum seekers and refugees didn't get a mention.

In response to the growing anger, Labor has announced two concessions. People on temporary refugee visas are now allowed to travel, meaning they can arrange to visit their families after almost ten years of separation. And Direction 80 that denied family reunion to refugees with permanent visas, if they were boat arrivals, by placing them at the end of the processing queue has been lifted. But these are small steps when refugees have been discriminated against for ten years.

Ministers Giles and O'Neil keep repeating that they are committed to implementing the promise, but they haven't even offered a timeline six months after the election. It is widely expected that when the announcement finally comes, Labor will also address the issue of the 10,000 claims that have been rejected under the fast track system of refugee assessments.

As yet, nothing has been said about Labor's promise to scrap the fast track system, despite the constant revelations of corruption and Liberal party cronyism in the Administrative Appeals Tribunal that deals with appeals.

Unfinished business

Labor's message to the Medevac refugees and others transferred from offshore detention is still that they will *never* call Australia home, even though some have already been here for nine years, and have Australian partners and children at school.

Zahra Hashemi, an Iranian refugee, held with her husband and children on Nauru before being transferred under the Medevac law in 2018, told the Canberra rally:

"The refugees sent to Nauru and Manus have been punished for a decade. Offshore refugees have been denied protection just because of the date we arrived. Some people who arrived after 19 July 2013 weren't sent offshore and will soon get permanent visas. Labor's policy towards ex-offshore refugees is like a cruel lottery."

Although the first six refugees

from Nauru to be settled in New Zealand flew in November, and another handful will leave for Canada and the US this month, there are still almost 200 held offshore in Nauru and PNG.

Labor's delay over permanent visas and its attempt to ignore its responsibility for refugees from offshore are driven by two things. It is paralysed by its pitiful concern that any shift in policy will see asylum boats attempt to come from Indonesia.

And secondly, Labor remains completely committed to offshore processing. Just after the May election, Labor enforced its turnback policy just as ruthlessly as the Coalition, intercepting boats and returning asylum seekers to Sri Lanka. Labor's Richard Marles said, "We will continue them [turnback operations] without hesitation."

Labor is throwing around \$1 million a day to the notorious US prison company MTC to keep Nauru open while it has turned a deaf ear to the sick refugees on the island and to those from Nauru and Manus Island who are in Australia.

Permanent visas for refugees in Australia is only one part of the unfinished business the refugee movement has with the Labor government.

The refugees and asylum seekers in Nauru and PNG still need to be brought to Australia, and the ban on UNHCR refugees in Indonesia will have to end. To completely dismantle the Fortress Australia policies, Nauru will have to be closed and we will have to open the borders to all asylum seekers, including those who arrive by boat.

Labor's message to the Medevac refugees transferred from offshore is still that they will never call Australia home

Solidarity