

# SMASH RACISM

## ENDING INJUSTICE NEEDS MORE THAN A VOICE



### CLIMATE

Racist Native Title system gives Pilliga gas go-ahead

### VOICE TO PARLIAMENT

Indigenous activists on why it's useless

### US BASES

US Pacific power aimed at China

# 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.

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6.30pm every Thursday  
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## Things they say

**I thought he was terrific ... I found him charming.**

Supposed Republican Anthony Albanese gushes about meeting the new King Charles

**A matter between employers and their employees for discussion**

Anthony Albanese's weak response to whether workers should be allowed to have another day off and not celebrate Australia Day

**It wasn't a coincidence. They planned that. It was a full-on revolution, it was a fightback ... This is what you can expect in the new year. I know these kids. I know them very well and I speak to them all the time.**

Gerry Georgatos, National Suicide Prevention and Trauma Recovery Project on Banksia Hill

**It's a strange world we are living in, no doubt about it. Waking up one morning and thinking that a portion of production is about to be expropriated by the government ... it's very odd.**

Paul Flynn chief executive of Whitehaven Coal, which has "strangely" announced a 300 per cent increase in half-yearly profits to \$2.6 billion.

**Where the oil reserves are located has defined geopolitics for the last five decades. Where the chip factories are for the next five decades is more important.**

Pat Gelsinger, chief executive of the world's largest chip-maker, Intel

**His incarceration on charges that the high court ultimately scathingly dismissed was a modern form of crucifixion ... In his own way, by dealing so equably with a monstrous allegation, he strikes me as a saint for our times.**

Tony Abbott on George Pell

**I'll tell you one thing though: Australia wouldn't be the first or the only country that seeks advantages in commercial negotiations.**

Former Liberal Treasurer Peter Costello has no recollection of being told Australia was spying on East Timor, but...

**I believe that strategy will deliver a sustainable production and strong cash generation business for many years to come.**

Kevin Gallagher, Santos chief executive, is banking on more gas sales under Labor's climate policies

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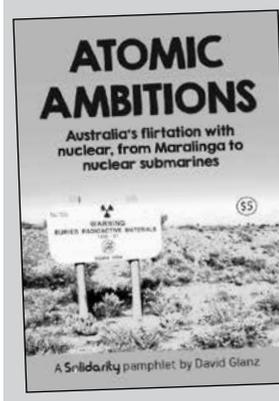
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## ATOMIC AMBITIONS: NEW PAMPHLET BY DAVID GLANZ



'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**

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## George Pell—hypocrite and defender of the establishment

GEORGE PELL'S death was greeted with tributes from all the usual conservative warriors. Former Liberal Prime Ministers John Howard and Tony Abbott joined in, with Abbott describing him as a "great leader" and "a saint for our times".

Anthony Albanese, in another bow to the establishment, refused to criticise him, limiting his comments to "condolences to all those who will be mourning".

But Pell is damned by his role in the Church's cover up and protection of child abuse within its ranks. Premiers Daniel Andrews and Dominic Perrottet at least refused to give him a state funeral.

Pell's own conviction for child sexual assault was overturned in the High Court. A series of earlier allegations against him from the 1970s never made it to trial.

The scale of the abuse by Catholic priests was documented in the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse from 2013.

Pell personally failed to act against paedophiles Gerald Ridsdale and Edward Dowlan while based in Ballarat early in his career.

He showed little sympathy for the victims of child abuse and even claimed that abortion was a worse moral crime than paedophilia.

Pell consistently put the Church's property and reputation above the interests of children abused within the Church.

The "Melbourne response" to child abuse claims he established as archbishop gave victims a paltry sum in compensation with a view to saving the Church from claims in court, saving it an estimated \$62 million.

He was a vigorous defender of conservative values over marriage, contraception, homosexuality and gender, as well as climate change denial.

And his position of power in the Catholic Church gave his ideas real clout.

That's why the conservative establishment loved him.

## Youth detention saw child 'treated like a dog'



A GIRL with severe autism was kept in solidarity confinement at the Banksia Hill youth detention centre for seven months, Federal Court documents claim.

She was left locked in a cell for 23 hours a day, allowed out only into a small room, or a concrete area surrounded by fencing. This began when she was just 13 years old. The youth detention centre in WA is now facing a class action by over 500 children and young people who were held there.

The girl's autism disorder allegedly caused her to react to disciplinary efforts from prison authorities. She was denied visits from her parents as punishment, and when she was taken to see them she was shackled and handcuffed, court documents allege.

"She would sleep on the bare floor rather than the mattress because the mattresses were dirty with saliva and excrement," an affidavit claims. She was also forced to wear underwear and uniforms with visible menstrual blood stains from other detainees, it says. "She felt that she was being treated like a dog", the court documents say.

Last month in a separate case the government admitted that issues with staffing and facilities had contributed to detainees spending long periods in their cells.

In April the Inspector of Custodial Services, Eamon Ryan, condemned the facility for "cruel, inhuman and degrading conditions" and said it was "not fit for purpose".

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children made up 75 per cent of inmates, his most recent report revealed. On New Year's eve and again in early January teenage inmates at Banksia Hill staged rooftop protests against their treatment.

## Billionaires' wealth surges

AUSTRALIA HAS 11 more billionaires since the start of the pandemic in 2020, a new Oxfam report has revealed.

Billionaires' wealth has grown by 61 per cent over the last two years, so that the 42 billionaires in Australia now control a combined \$236 billion. That's more wealth than the bottom 30 per cent of the population, or 7.7 million people.

Yet while the rest of us are facing soaring power prices and inflation, the Albanese government remains committed to further tax cuts for the rich, through the Stage Three income tax cuts.

Oxfam calculated that a wealth tax, levied at 2 per cent on those with over \$7 million, 3 per cent on those with over \$67 million wealth and 5 per cent on billionaires would raise \$29.1 billion a year. Half of this would be enough to increase payments so everyone on Job Seeker and Youth Allowance was lifted out of poverty.

## Oil company exec to run COP28 climate summit

AN OIL company boss will be the president of this year's international climate summit, COP28. Host nation the United Arab Emirates has appointed Sultan Ahmed Al Jaber, chief executive of the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company, to preside over global climate negotiations.

Campaign groups Oil Change International said it was a "breath-taking conflict of interest" and "tantamount to putting the head of a tobacco company in charge of negotiating an anti-smoking treaty."

The petrostate says it is committed to net zero emissions by 2050 yet is still planning to increase oil and gas production—despite the clear warning from the International Energy Agency that there can be no new fossil fuel projects for the world to have any chance of holding warming to 1.5 degrees. Al Jaber says he also founded another company investing in renewable energy.

The small nation is the world's seventh biggest oil producer. In climate talks it works as part of the block with Saudi Arabia.

The move comes after COP27 in Egypt was described as a "glorified fossil fuel trade show" with a huge jump in fossil fuel lobbyists at the event.

## Albanese's helicopter ride to billionaire BBQ

ANTHONY ALBANESE accepted a ride in billionaire Lindsay Fox's helicopter to attend a five-hour barbeque at his seaside mansion in Portsea in early January.

The Prime Minister refused to comment on any details about the event, which he attended alongside Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews, calling it a "private meeting". One of Lindsay Fox's sons, Andrew, who plays an important role managing his business interests, also attended.

Fox has a \$4.2 billion fortune and owns a major trucking company, industrial property and two airports. *The Age* speculated that his plans to further develop Avalon airport require support from both the Victorian and federal governments.

# EDITORIAL

## Grassroots movement needed to fight racism and injustice not a useless Voice to parliament

DEALING WITH the cost of living is Anthony Albanese's new year's resolution, he says, with inflation now over 7 per cent.

But his efforts to cap energy prices are too weak to stop power bills going up further. While the government says price rises would have been worse without its actions, bills are still expected to soar another 20 per cent this year. Labor has let the coal and gas companies off far too easily (see page 9).

Labor has also opened the year by releasing details of its climate safeguards mechanism to address emissions from industry. It, too, delivers for big companies at the cost of the climate, allowing them unlimited use of dodgy offsets instead of actually reducing emissions.

This is designed to allow new coal and gas mines to open under the pretence that their emissions can be offset.

Albanese is also campaigning for an Indigenous Voice to parliament, with plans for a referendum later this year.

Labor had hoped that Liberal leader Peter Dutton would back the idea. Instead Dutton is doing his best to drum up opposition. He is demanding Labor answers questions about how Voice members would be selected and how it would operate.

It is already clear enough what the Voice would look like—a powerless advisory body that could be ignored the minute it raised any real demands for change.

But Dutton's attack is potent because Labor wants to avoid discussing the details of the proposal. The more they do so the more obvious it is that the whole process will change next to nothing for Indigenous people.

There have been a succession of Indigenous advisory bodies established over the past 50 years. Each was abolished in turn when it began to get too critical of government.

Labor's Minister for Indigenous Australians Linda Burney has claimed that, "Enshrining a voice in the Constitution will make sure it's protected and cannot be abolished at the whim of government."

But Labor says the Constitution won't contain any of the details about how the Voice might be put together or funded. That means any future government could dissolve it and change its



**Above: It is going to take a fight over deaths in custody, child removals and against wider racist injustice to win change**

membership or withhold funding.

Linda Burney says that the Voice is "about improving the lives of First Nations people by making our voices heard".

But the idea that governments don't know what Indigenous people want due to lack of consultation is simply a nonsense. Indigenous people have been calling for decades for self-determination and Aboriginal control of Aboriginal affairs, land rights and real funding to help end the poverty, over-incarceration and deaths in custody that are a result of colonisation.

### Distraction

The referendum process is a massive distraction from doing anything serious about the poverty and racist injustice Indigenous people face.

It allows Labor to look like it is doing something for Indigenous people without tackling any of the real issues.

Despite claims the Voice has been requested by Indigenous people, there is significant Indigenous disinterest and opposition to it (see page 14).

The rallies on Invasion Day this year in Melbourne, Brisbane and Sydney are calling for "treaty before Voice", with many of the organisers against the idea of the Voice altogether.

Many Indigenous activists see treaty negotiations as a way to deliver substantial change through compensation and land rights. But there is no way Albanese is going to offer any such process.

Real land rights would be a serious

challenge to capitalism and the mining companies. Under current native title laws Indigenous people have no right to stop mining companies destroying their lands. Gas company Santos has been able to over-ride Gomeri opposition to coal seam gas mining in the Narrabri/Pilliga area in NSW.

Justice would also require self-determination and a level of funding for services like education, jobs and housing that no government has ever been willing to provide.

The biggest changes for Indigenous people came as a result of the wave of struggle in the 1970s. This resulted in the first moves towards self-determination, Aboriginal control and land rights legislation.

Winning real justice will require a return to the kind of mass struggles and union support that powered that movement.

Today unions in NSW have offered support to the Gomeri people's struggle against Santos. Albanese and NSW Labor leader Chris Minns are both backing the project.

School Strike for Climate's call for another Climate Strike in Sydney on 3 March is a chance to rally opposition to the project and build pressure on Labor to halt the 100+ new coal and gas projects in the pipeline.

Labor's efforts over the cost of living, climate, and Indigenous rights show that real change is not going to come through parliament. We need to build the kind of protests and union fightback that can win it.

**The referendum allows Labor to look like it is doing something without tackling any of the real issues**

# Right to protest threatened as jail sentence for climate protester Violet Coco sparks outcry

By Angus Dermody

THE 15 month jail sentence handed to climate protester Violet Coco in Sydney in December has drawn outrage.

She became the first person jailed under new anti-protest laws in NSW introduced in April by Liberal Premier Dominic Perrottet—with the support of NSW Labor.

The laws threaten activists with fines of up to \$22,000 and imprisonment of up to two years for blocking roads, rail lines, tunnels, bridges, or ports. Violet was sentenced for blocking traffic during a protest on the Sydney Harbour Bridge in April.

Following a storm of outrage, she was released on bail, but could go to jail again if she loses an appeal hearing on 15 March.

The last year has seen increasing repression of climate activists in NSW, Victoria and overseas.

In Victoria in May, the Andrews Labor government introduced changes to forest protesting laws, with fines of up to \$21,000 or 12 months in jail and increased powers for authorised officers to search vehicles for so-called prohibited items.

In Britain, the Conservative government is giving police more powers to take action against climate protests before they even happen by broadening the definition of what counts as “serious disruption”.

The new law will target “guerrilla tactics” used by environmental protesters, such as walking slowly and bringing traffic to a standstill, and climbing freeway gantries.

These draconian restrictions on the right to protest have faced criticism from the climate movement, the union movement and civil society groups.

## Outcry

Violet Coco’s sentencing sparked an outcry. More than 230 organisations signed a statement condemning the sentencing, including Unions NSW, Amnesty International, Oxfam, the Australian Conservation Foundation and the NSW Council for Civil Liberties.

A senior UN official weighed in on the issue, stating that he was “alarmed” at the sentencing and refusal to grant bail.

Rallies outside NSW Parliament



**Above: CFMEU Secretary Darren Greenfield speaking outside Violet Coco’s bail hearing in her support, alongside union leaders from Unions NSW, the MUA and the South Coast Labour Council**

and the Downing Centre brought hundreds onto the streets and once again united climate activists, trade unionists and supporters of civil society groups behind the demands to release Coco and repeal the anti-protest laws.

More than 100 activists took over the road and marched from parliament to the Downing Centre in defiance of the laws. Another rally at the Downing Centre on 13 December, coinciding with Coco’s bail hearing, was addressed by Unions NSW Assistant Secretary Thomas Costa and attended by union contingents from the CFMEU, ASU, MUA and UWU, as well as representatives from The Greens.

Following this rally, Coco was released after 11 days in jail under draconian bail conditions, including exclusion from Sydney unless for court.

## More charges

More than a dozen other climate activists who were charged under the new anti-protest laws are awaiting their court dates and many could face jail. Some 21 activists were arrested in relation to the protests last June which saw Blockade Australia and supporters disrupt traffic in the CBD for two days.

Many of the activists who have been charged have also been under strict bail conditions since June,

including extensive non-association orders that have made it effectively impossible for some organisations to mobilise.

The laws could become an issue in the March state election, given the role of both Liberal and Labor in rushing them through last year.

Following Coco’s sentencing, Dominic Perrottet reaffirmed his commitment to draconian restriction on the right to protest, describing it as “pleasing to see”.

Labor leader Chris Minns has said that he does not regret supporting the laws. Despite this support, some Labor members and MPs have expressed anger about the crackdown.

The response to Coco’s sentencing demonstrates both the need for and the possibility of a united fight against these laws.

There should be a demonstration outside Coco’s appeal hearing on 15 March, which will be an important opportunity to renew the demand to repeal the anti-protest laws going into the state election.

But a broader fight is needed. With major fossil fuel projects, including Santos’ Pilliga-Narrabri Gas Project, in the works across the country, mass civil disobedience will be needed. Unionists, civil society groups, and the climate movement must come together to defend the right to protest—and use that right to win climate justice.

# Racist native title system approves Santos' destruction of Gomeroi land

By Jordi Pardoel and Angus Dermody

ON 19 December last year, President John Dowsett from the national Native Title Tribunal (NTT) shamefully ruled in favour of gas giant Santos against Gomeroi native title applicants.

Dowsett's decision permits NSW to grant four petroleum production leases to Santos. These leases would extend over sections of the Pilliga state forest, the traditional land of the Gomeroi people. Santos plans to drill up to 850 gas wells across 95,000 hectares south-west of Narrabri. This will require clearing up to 1000 hectares of forest.

Santos' gas project enjoys support from both Labor and the Coalition at state and federal levels.

Gomeroi woman Suellyn Tighe, in a statement read in NSW Parliament in response to the ruling, said: "This government, and sadly many of you in opposition, whilst espousing your shiny green-washed credentials, are barrackers and enablers, paving the way for the ever increasing fossil fuel onslaught in NSW."

Gomeroi are appealing the decision in the Federal Court and alongside climate groups have vowed to continue to fight Santos. A judge has not yet been appointed for the appeal hearing, which could take months to begin.

## Racist system

A Gomeroi native title claim lodged in 2012 covers the Pilliga state forest, meaning that Santos has been forced to seek agreement with Gomeroi. In March 2022, Gomeroi voted 162-2 to reject any such agreement.

While it mandates consultation, the native title system does not offer Indigenous people genuine control over their land. Santos lodged a "Future Acts Determination Application" with the NTT to over-ride Gomeroi rights and impose the project without compensation, arguing it would be in "the public interest" due to the revenue generated by gas mining.

Gomeroi argued in the tribunal that the Pilliga/Narrabri gas project would result in an irreversible and grave impact on culture, land and waters and would contribute to climate change.

Despite the tens of thousands of years of care and connection Gomeroi



**Above: Gomeroi dancers joined hundreds in Coonabarabran to protest the native title decision on 14 January**

have to the Pilliga land and waters, Dowsett callously stated that this "assertion" was backed by no "specific evidence".

In a sick example of the racism of the system, he supported Santos' contention that gas mining would strengthen Gomeroi cultural connections to the Pilliga by employing Aboriginal people in site clearance and mining work.

Gomeroi also argued, in a native title case first, that the project could not be considered in "the public interest" because it would contribute to greenhouse gas emissions and result in "grave environmental harm".

Climate scientist Will Steffen was called as a witness, citing the most recent UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report which makes it clear that there must be no new fossil fuel extraction projects if the world wants to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees. Dowsett was contemptuous of the idea that climate change impacts were relevant to the case. He approvingly quoted Santos' witness Mr Dunn, who disagreed that emissions from the gas project would exacerbate climate change, "given that Santos would be offsetting emissions through other sources".

The idea that companies can offset their emissions is a fantasy that is central to Labor's new emissions trading scheme policy, the safeguard mechanism.

## Resistance

On 14 January, more than 300 people gathered in Coonabarabran to protest the NTT ruling. The rally was led by local Gomeroi activists and heard

speakers from the Gomeroi community, the Greens, the NSW Nurses and Midwives Association and the Independent Education Union.

Suellyn Tighe highlighted the hypocrisy of the Albanese government, criticising environment minister Tanya Plibersek for claiming to have "a strong partnership with the First Nations people" on the same day that the determination was handed down.

Another Gomeroi woman, Paris Norton, called on the federal government to "do something that is right, move towards life" and finished by stating "you wanted a voice, you got it".

A statement with three core demands was put to the rally calling on the federal government to "immediately declare the Gomeroi Native Title determination invalid", to "cancel the licences for the Pilliga-Narrabri Gas Project" and "fix the draconian and biased Native Title legislation".

Damien Davis-Frank and Matt Shields travelled from Sydney to speak on behalf of the NSW Nurses and Midwives Federation. Shields, a Gomeroi man and nurse, read a statement from the union reaffirming its support for the struggle against Santos.

The statement highlighted the destructive potential of the project in the context of climate change, "the biggest health challenge of the century".

School Strike for Climate in Sydney will push demands against Santos as a key part of the school strike planned on 3 March. The climate and trade union movements need to escalate mobilisation against Santos in what will be a key battle for climate justice and First Nations rights in 2023.

**While it mandates consultation, the native title system does not offer Indigenous people genuine control over their land**

# XR and climate— we can unite direct action with mass mobilisation

By David Glanz

THE “WE Quit” declaration by Extinction Rebellion in Britain that it will step back from disruptive, direct action to build a 100,000-strong rally on 21 April has ignited a debate about the best approach to fighting climate change.

XR rightly said: “Despite the blaring alarm on the climate and ecological emergency ringing loud and clear, very little has changed. Emissions continue to rise and our planet is dying at an accelerated rate.”

But in a shift that many have interpreted as an admission that direct action does not work, the statement added: “XR is committed to including everyone in this work and leaving no one behind, because everyone has a role to play. This year, we prioritise attendance over arrest and relationships over roadblocks, as we stand together and become impossible to ignore.”

Meanwhile XR in Australia has pledged to continue disruptive direct action, with groups in SA and Victoria focusing on the Tour Down Under bike race, which is sponsored by fossil fuel corporation Santos.

## Effective

But do we need to choose between direct action and mass mobilisations? Socialists support both mass mobilisations and direct action to achieve change. And often the most effective movements combine both.

We also argue that movements of resistance will be strongest if they involve organised workers, who have the power to stop the capitalist system that puts profits before people and planet.

When wharfies employed by stevedoring company Patrick were locked out of work in 1998, thousands poured on to picket lines to defend them and their union, the Maritime Union of Australia. Some workers walked off the job to join the protests.

When the Liberal government in Victoria threatened to break the picket with police violence and water cannons, thousands stood firm, forcing the police to surrender.

People often fear that direct action and disruption will isolate activists and lose the “middle ground”. But defiance on the picket lines ensured that the struggle was in the news and allowed the MUA to get its argument out to millions. MUA members



**Above: An XR protest at the height of the movement in Melbourne in 2019**

marched back to work, their union intact.

On 11 September 2000, activists up and down the country converged on Melbourne to protest against top corporate bosses at a World Economic Forum conference.

While some sections of the movement kept their distance, worried that militancy would lose public support, protest organisers called for direct action *and* mass mobilisation, telling the media that 10,000 people would surround the event at the Crown Casino building and shut it down—which is what happened.

Hundreds of bosses failed to get into the event on the first day. On the second, thousands of striking workers marched to Crown to join what became known as the S11 blockade.

The media interviewed protest organisers and the anti-capitalist message was heard and supported widely.

In November 2018, 200 teachers from more than 50 schools across Victoria and 150 teachers from 20 schools in Brisbane walked out to demand the government bring all children and adult refugees off Nauru and Manus.

The strike built on the momentum generated by mass protests across the country. Teachers wore pro-refugee T-shirts at school, often defying their principals or state governments. This in turn inspired similar actions by nurses, librarians, health workers and university staff.

The Morrison government buckled, bringing refugee children and

their parents to Australia from Nauru.

## Serious attempt

What all these examples had in common were direct action on a large scale, involving hundreds or thousands of people. They were also part of serious attempts to mobilise thousands more in less confrontational protests, and helped workers gain the confidence from a growing movement to move into action.

To rebuild a mass climate movement that can win demands like no new coal, oil or gas, 100 per cent public renewables and guaranteed good jobs for fossil fuel workers, we need to combine all those elements.

The campaign to stop Santos extracting coal-seam gas in the Pilliga is uniting Indigenous people, environmentalists and unionists around protests, rallies and potential union bans.

This month, Solidarity and XR members and other community activists joined the bus drivers’ picket line in Adelaide, showing the kind of unity that will be needed to win a massive expansion of public transport.

Rebuilding a large and militant climate movement can pose a challenge to the government, just as it did in 2019. That would give confidence that those at the top can be beaten.

The excitement, militancy and tactics of the climate movement could be brought into workers’ struggles. And, in return, the strength of such action can be a demonstration of where our power in society—and our potential to change it—lies.

**Often the most effective movements combine both direct action and mass mobilisation**

# Labor's price caps won't stop further power bill shock or mining profits

By James Supple

ANTHONY ALBANESE has trumpeted Labor's efforts to cap coal and gas prices as a solution to soaring power bills.

Power prices are already up 20 to 30 per cent over the past year. But the new measures won't stop further price rises, they will only reduce them. Power prices are still set to rise another 23 per cent this year.

Low income earners will get further price rebates funded by \$1.5 billion from the federal government and the same amount from the states.

Coal and gas prices have surged over the last year as a result of the war in Ukraine. This has seen the profits of coal and gas mining companies soar. Coal company profits grew by between \$39 and \$42 billion last year. Gas companies took up to \$40 billion extra.

Labor could have gone much further. The government should have insisted on price caps sufficient to lower power bills and imposed a windfall tax on the obscene mining company profits.

Instead its price caps are still generous to the mining companies. Gas prices are capped at \$12 a gigajoule, higher than the average price in 2021 of \$10 a gigajoule. The coal price cap is also slightly above the price before 2021.

And instead of cancelling contracts already signed for coal above the \$125 price cap, it will pay back coal power stations for anything above the cap. This will cost up to \$1 billion—money that will go straight into the pockets of the coal mining bosses.

The gas companies are outraged even by Labor's modest changes. Santos CEO Kevin Gallagher fumed that it was a "Soviet-style policy" and gas producers have suspended signing new contracts with retail companies claiming they need more time to understand the new rules.

Even with far tougher domestic price caps the companies would still be making massive profits, since they export the vast bulk of Australia's coal and gas.

The other reason for higher power bills is profiteering by the companies running the power stations. This is the result of privatisation in most states since the 1990s. In June last year the



**Above: Power bills are surging due to the high cost of coal and gas**

Australian Energy Market Operator temporarily nationalised the operation of power stations, after power companies withheld supply in an effort to game the system and extract higher profits.

Control was turned back over to the market after just a week. Permanent nationalisation would stop the profiteering and help push down prices.

Other governments have already done so. The French government has fully re-nationalised major power company EDF to force it to limit prices. Germany has nationalised coal and gas power giant Uniper.

Renewable energy would also deliver much cheaper power. Speeding up the transition requires government investment instead of leaving it to private companies.

Electrifying household heating and cooking instead of using gas would also reduce bills and cut carbon emissions. Rolling this out requires a government scheme to help households, including renters, meet the upfront costs of replacing appliances. The government has agreed to some measures in its next budget following demands from The Greens, but the details are not clear.

The price rises caused by fossil fuels are a historic opportunity to start phasing them out. The government could be seizing their profits and re-nationalising power in order to deliver lower prices and a rapid transition to renewable energy. But Labor is too committed to defending company profits to do that.

.....  
**Labor's price caps are still generous to the mining companies**

## Labor's offsets scheme for companies a sham

LABOR WILL allow coal, gas and other companies to buy their way out of cutting emissions, allowing unlimited use of offsets under newly released details of its "Safeguards Mechanism".

This is designed to allow an enormous fossil fuel expansion, with more than 100 new mining projects in the pipeline.

The scheme is meant to address the 28 per cent of Australia's emissions that come from industry.

The announcement follows a government-commissioned review that whitewashed Australia's offsets scheme, ignoring evidence of widespread fraud to claim it was "essentially sound".

This was despite submissions from the CSIRO and the Wentworth Group of Scientists that argued there were significant problems with the crediting of offsets, including in tree planting and land regeneration. This was backed up by the Australian Academy of Science, in work requested by the review.

Research by Professor Andrew Macintosh, the former head of the government committee that monitors offsets, found that the offsets were "a sham" and were "not delivering genuine reductions in greenhouse gas emissions".

How the panel reached its conclusions, Macintosh said "is hard to fathom." It acknowledged the criticisms of the scheme but claimed "it was also provided with evidence to the contrary". Yet it wouldn't say what that evidence was or why it preferred it.

The review failed to investigate how many of the offsets issued under the scheme to date are worthless. It also backed Carbon Capture and Storage as an offset solution.

Two of the four members of the review panel have links to companies that profit from carbon offset arrangements. And offsets are too central to Labor's plans for the Safeguard Mechanism for them to be abandoned.

The fact that Labor's plan has been welcomed by big polluting companies like Rio Tinto, the Minerals Council and the Business Council speaks volumes. It allows them to continue polluting without any challenge.

The scheme will be an abject failure in delivering any real cuts to emissions.

# Attitudes shifting to the left but struggle still yet to rise

By Cooper Forsyth

THE AUSTRALIAN Electoral Study has released a report after every election for the last 30 years. Its most recent on the 2022 election sheds light on Labor’s victory and current political attitudes.

There is plenty of good news for socialists and the left. It shows broad support for left-wing ideas.

Since the 1980s there has been a significant increase in the number of people who support access to abortion, more economic opportunities for women, land rights for Indigenous people, and a sharp decline in those who support a harsher approach to crime.

Those who think marijuana should be decriminalised have grown from 34 to 48 per cent just since 2013.

Support for social spending has risen significantly. A majority of people think big business has too much power, and there has been a sharp decline in support for anti-union laws.

Majority opinion is with social democratic policies and is largely to the left of Labor. One exception is that support for increased defence spending is up from 29 to 41 per cent since 2019.

Following three years of climate disasters there has been a significant increase in concern over climate change. In 2019 and 2022, 10 per cent mentioned climate as the most important election issue, compared to 4 per cent in 2013 and 2016. A large majority now see climate change as being either “extremely important” or “quite important”.

However, despite a popular mandate for progressive change, both major parties remain committed to a right-wing, neoliberal agenda. This is leading to a collapse in support for the major parties.

The 2022 election saw the lowest vote for the major parties since 1930, with a combined primary vote of just 68.3 per cent. The Liberals fared the worst, winning their lowest seat share since 1946—the first election they ran in. Yet Labor also received their lowest primary vote since the 1930s.

This is part of a longer term decline in the support base of both parties. The AES states:

“In the 1960s and 1970s, roughly eight out of every 10 voters considered themselves to be a partisan of one



**Above: There is broad support for left-wing ideas, but most unions are still losing members**

or other major party.

“That figure has declined consistently since then, and in 2022 just 58 percent considered themselves to be close to one or other of the major parties.”

While people who identify as working class are still more likely to vote Labor, its “rusted on” working class support has shrunk. The AES analysis concludes that, “While 48 percent of the working class voted Labor in 2016, this dropped to 38 percent in 2022. The Liberal vote in the working class declined to a similar degree”. Working class voters are increasingly supporting minor parties.

After the 2019 election, Labor shifted even further to the right, adopting a small target for the 2022 election. The predictable result is a drop in the number of people who see significant differences between the major parties—28 per cent of voters in 2022 compared to 40 per cent in 2019.

The Greens and independents were the main beneficiaries of this. The Greens increased their seats in the House of Representatives from one to four.

But the fact that neither of the parties capable of forming government is interested in delivering change has produced increasing disillusionment with the political system as a whole.

Only 30 per cent of Australians believe that the people in government can be trusted. A majority (54 per cent) believe that government is run

for “a few big interests”.

## Union membership

However, one thing this shift to the left has not changed is union membership.

Union density continues to decline—now sitting at only 12.5 per cent of employees. This comes after a nearly 2 per cent drop over the last two years—a loss of 76,000 members since August 2020.

This reflects the continuing low level of workers’ struggle.

We have seen this year that when unions do fight, they can grow. The strike campaign at Sydney Uni saw the NTEU branch there reach its biggest ever membership, growing by 12.5 per cent. After two NSW teachers’ strikes, 5000 teachers joined their union.

Strikes and mass struggle are the key to actually forcing change, not more left-wing MPs in parliament. It is involvement in struggle that can have a more decisive impact on teaching working class people that serious change is possible.

The widespread disillusionment and appetite for change needs to be turned into action. We should take heart from the AES report that there is a growing audience for left-wing ideas. It is solid ground on which activists in unions and social movements can build. But it will take a much higher level of struggle to transform this into meaningful political change.

**The majority of people believe that government is run for “a few big interests”**

# Protests push back Peru's right-wing coup

By Mark Gillespie

PERU HAS been rocked by weeks of strikes and protests following the impeachment and arrest of left-wing president Pedro Castillo in December.

Protesters have burnt government buildings, blocked highways and occupied airports. They are demanding the resignation of newly appointed president, Dina Boluarte, quick general elections, a new constitution and Castillo's release.

Castillo is a former teachers' union leader who came to national prominence during the 2017 teachers' strike that lasted nearly three months. The son of illiterate peasants and a member of the moderate socialist party Free Peru, he contested the 2021 presidential election as an outsider but—much to the annoyance of Peru's political and business elites—narrowly won.

Castillo focused on the massive divide between the rich and the poor and promised there would be “no more poor people in a rich country”.

His campaign struck a chord with Peru's workers, who have suffered from 30 years of neoliberal economic reforms that have stripped away social support while allowing the wealthiest 1 per cent to enrich themselves.

Every year billionaires from Peru are listed in *Forbes* magazine's list of world billionaires. Meanwhile, according to the United Nations, half the country lacks regular access to sufficient nutrition. During the COVID crisis, Peru had the highest death toll per capita in the world and its underfunded healthcare system was severely exposed.

## Destabilisation

Peru's business elite and their backers in the conservative-dominated congress never accepted Castillo's election victory.

His opponent, Keiko Fujimori, the daughter of former autocratic president Alberto Fujimori (in jail for abusing human rights and embezzlement), immediately made unsubstantiated claims of electoral fraud and began leading marches demanding some results be annulled.

Meanwhile a letter signed by nearly 100 retired military officers called on the military not to recognise Castillo's victory. In the end, congress used the 1993 constitution, written under the authoritarian rule of Alberto



**Above: Mass protests in Peru are demanding coup leader Dina Boluarte resign**

Fujimori, to impeach Castillo.

This constitution gives congress the power to impeach presidents on the vague grounds of “moral incapacity”.

## Appeasement

Rather than mobilise his supporters, Castillo's strategy for dealing with the campaign of destabilisation was to move to the right and appease the establishment—following the dead end of left reformist parties elsewhere.

After a flight of capital out of the country following his victory on the first round of presidential voting, Castillo responded by assuring jittery investors that he would not be nationalising companies, that he would honour the rule of law and that “there is no Chavismo here”—referring to Hugo Chavez, who ruled Venezuela for 14 years until his death in 2013.

Castillo sacked his own prime minister, Guido Bellido, after Bellido threatened the gas company Camisa with nationalisation during negotiations over domestic prices and taxes. He also appointed “business-friendly” former central banker, Kurt Burneo, as minister of economy and finance.

But Castillo's efforts to appease the right failed, so he resorted to a constitutional manoeuvre to try to stop the impeachment process. He used emergency powers to dissolve congress and to rule by decree.

His manoeuvre was ruled illegal by the constitutional court. Congress impeached him hours later and he is currently facing charges of “rebellion” and “conspiracy”.

Dina Boluarte, who was on Castillo's presidential ticket and his vice-president, became the new president. She is considered a safer pair of hands by Peru's elite, having been expelled from the Free Peru party after claiming she never embraced its ideology.

Boluarte has responded to the developing protests over Castillo's removal by declaring a state of emergency that curtailed people's rights and put the army, which has a record of human rights abuses, onto the streets to support the police.

More than 50 people have been killed by security forces, which human rights organisations accuse of using excessive force and of firing indiscriminately at protesters. Eighteen people were killed and over 100 injured in just one protest in Juliaca in early January.

The state violence, however, is just fuelling the protests and the determination of protesters to bring Boluarte down. She is clearly on the backfoot. Cabinet ministers have resigned and she has asked congress to bring the next election forward and has apologised for the deaths, but she is still refusing to resign.

A poll conducted by the Institute of Peruvian studies found that Boluarte has a disapproval rating of 71 per cent. Congress itself had a disapproval rating of 88 per cent.

As *Solidarity* goes to press, the grassroots-driven protests are continuing. This is the way forward for workers in Peru. If they can force Boluarte to resign, it will be a tremendous victory.

.....  
**Castillo's strategy for dealing with the destabilisation was to move to the right and appease the establishment**

# Iran protesters still defiant as regime cracks down harder

By Angus McFadden

THE PROTESTS in Iran that began following the death of Mahsa Amini in September have now continued for more than 100 days.

The uprising has faced brutal crackdown after crackdown. The regime has relied on police brutality, mass arrests and executions to quell protest.

Since December, it has begun carrying out executions of protesters following sham trials. Four people have been executed, and over 100 more face the death penalty.

Over 500 people have been killed during the protests, with 20,000 having faced arrest. Many protesters have been shot in the eyes or genitals by police, or beaten and killed.

While the scale of the repression has slowed the protests, they have not disappeared.

Women are still playing leading role in the protests, with demands against the compulsory hijab and against sexism at the centre of the uprising.

Victories have been accomplished in changing attitudes toward women. The protests have fused demands for furthering the rights of women to the need for social and economic justice.

University campuses have become a major focus of struggle. The power of student struggle was marked heavily on "Student Day" last month.

The day commemorates the events of 7 December 1953, when students at Tehran University protested Iran's resumption of relations with Britain. This came in the wake of US and UK-sponsored coup against the Mossaddegh government which had tried to nationalise Iran's oil.

It was marked in 2022 by three days of struggle, with a call for a nationwide strike.

Students at Tehran and Modares University decorated the walls in slogans and broke down gender segregation in their educational facilities. This led to mass arrests at the hand of Basiji paramilitary squads, who have imprisoned over 500 students.

The repression shows the regime's fear of the protest actions. Students' demands for, "bread, work, freedom" are part of a conscious effort to connect with workers and the wider population. This shows how the protests have fused demands for democracy with economic demands.



**Above: Workers protest over wages at an oil company in Iran in January**

A slogan from Tehran University proclaimed, "we are the children of workers, we will stand by their side".

There were also limited workers' strikes as part of the protests including some teachers.

In 40 cities, shopkeepers joined the three day strike. Iranian academic Peyman Jafari has noted the importance of this as "the emergence of a fragile coalition" between the middle class and protesters.

While the uprising so far has been heroic, it is not yet powerful enough to topple the regime.

As Jafari notes, this would need to involve, "hundreds of thousand or millions" taking to the streets, not just the, "thousands of people we are currently seeing".

## Strike action

Also crucial is widening the movement to include the working class and the kind of mass workers' strikes that can paralyse the economy.

Workers' strikes are taking place on a small scale. In Hormozgan, oil and steel employers have been forced to pay major wage arrears. Successful workers' action has forced the bosses to act on the demands of the workers. The bosses are well aware workers must be placated to prevent these strikes growing and becoming part of the uprising.

However over 200 workers were also arrested following protests at the Asaluyeh and Abadan Refineries in

September.

On 31 December contract workers at Iran's biggest oil refinery in Abadan held stoppages on repairs and safety checks over pay demands, and well as a rally outside the company's head office. Workers at other oil and gas installations around Iran also held protests. The Abadan refinery produces 400,000 barrels of oil daily and is of key importance to the Iranian economy.

Another round of oil and gas workers' strikes and protests began on 17 January in at least six different facilities across Iran. This time permanent employees also joined the small-scale protests and stopworks over pay.

There have been a series of other strikes since the uprising began, often held to coincide with major days of protest. Teachers staged their own strikes on December 11 and 12 over pay in over 60 cities across Iran.

The scale of state repression poses challenges for workers' organising. Iran's economic crisis is helping fuel the protests and bitterness against the regime but also makes sustained strike action more difficult. Inflation has risen to 50 per cent and the cost of living is soaring. Youth unemployment is also over 50 per cent.

For the uprising to turn into revolution there will need to be a deepening of the scale of the movement through organising much larger working class action and larger protests.

**While the uprising so far has been heroic, it is not yet powerful enough to topple the regime**

# When the Wiradyuri fought colonial capitalist land theft

**Gudyarra: The First Wiradyuri War of Resistance—The Bathurst War, 1822–1824**  
By Stephen Gapps.  
UNSW Press, \$34.99

STEPHEN GAPPS' book *Gudyarra* is a compelling account of the opening phase of the genocidal invasion of Wiradyuri lands by British imperialism and the fierce anti-colonial insurgency waged by Wiradyuri people.

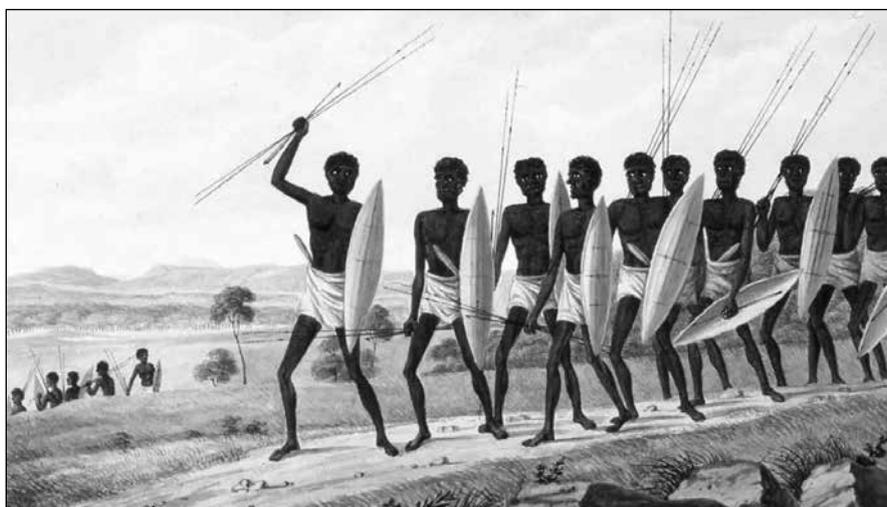
Gapps demonstrates how the expansion of pastoralism in colonial NSW was a thoroughly militarised process, with strategic concerns about how best to respond to Aboriginal resistance guiding when, where and how new settlements were established.

The story centres around Bathurst, 200 kilometres west of Sydney, initially known simply as the Grand Depot and set up as “a military outpost ... a bridgehead in the occupation of Wiradyuri lands west of the Blue Mountains”, which soon became “a staging point for further expansion”.

Governor Macquarie's tour to survey the lush new grazing lands identified on the Bathurst Plains in 1815 was conducted with heavily armed personnel, “in effect, the armed invasion of Wiradyuri lands”.

Macquarie, however, did not seriously countenance expansion over the mountains while Darug, Gandangara and other Aboriginal people continued to attack farms in outer Sydney in 1816–17, a conflict thoroughly documented by Gapps in his 2018 book *The Sydney Wars*.

The initial road over the Blue Mountains from Sydney to Bathurst was built under armed guard



A depiction of Indigenous warriors by Joseph Lycett from between 1815–1822

(and on top of existing Aboriginal tracks) during these years and there were troops garrisoned along the road for years afterwards.

The early pace of colonisation of Wiradyuri lands was slow and controlled, with a minimal presence of colonists, stock and military conflict from 1815–1821.

Gapps quotes Wiradyuri historian Mary Coe who has argued, “As long as the whites didn't interfere with their lives, [Wiradyuri people] would be prepared to share a part of the land with them.”

This peace was short-lived. A change in approach under the new Governor Brisbane in 1822 was driven by the demands of the new colonial elite in Sydney, comprised of stock owners making fortunes from the expansion of pastoral capitalism into stolen Aboriginal lands. Up to 1821 only 2520 acres of Wiradyuri Country had been allocated to pastoralists. In the next four years this increased more than 36 times, reaching 91,636 acres in 1825.

**Class dynamics**  
A major strength of

Gapps' work is his attention to the class dynamics driving colonial policy. A “who's who of all the well-known figures of the colony”, including Wentworth, George Palmer and Samuel Marsden, all craved potential profits from the “promised lands” west of the mountains and soon became absentee landlords of large holdings.

The flood of armed colonists, sheep and cattle from 1822 constituted a “colonial apocalypse” for the Wiradyuri. Gapps borrows this concept from Ambeyang historian Callum Clayton-Dixon's work on invasion and resistance in New England. Faced with the destruction of their livelihoods and increasing settler violence, Wiradyuri began to wage “all-out resistance warfare”.

Gapps sets out to “shatter the idea”, prevalent in existing literature, that Aboriginal resistance was sporadic and opportunistic.

He carefully documents coordinated attacks by multiple warbands with hundreds of people, across the vast expanse of Wiradyuri Country.

Unity among the Wiradyuri was extraor-

dinary, with the complete withdrawal of all Wiradyuri people from Bathurst and surrounding stations during the fighting, including characters who had been important guides and helpers for the British.

By the winter of 1824, Wiradyuri forced outstations and even major government stations like Swallow Creek to be abandoned.

Gandangara people from the mountains to the south and even Aboriginal people from South Coast NSW had travelled to join the fighting.

In the face of this intense resistance, the most wealthy and powerful figures in the colony, the “stockholders of NSW”, convened in Sydney and petitioned the governor for decisive action.

In May 1824 the Australian Agricultural Company had formed in London, to capitalise on the new opportunities to “breed fine woolled sheep” in NSW.

Securing Bathurst and surrounds from Wiradyuri resistance was key to unlocking the potential of these new lands and necessitated Wiradyuri genocide. “The unfettered march of ‘large

Capital' west of the Blue Mountains could not be jeopardised.”

## Martial law

Governor Brisbane declared martial law in August 1824, precipitating a series of massacres, openly discussed in the Sydney press as a “war of extermination”.

While the devastating scale of this mass slaughter has been documented previously, Gapps is concerned to ensure that readers understand, “This was not just a series of massacres. Far from it—it was a period of all-out resistance warfare that was only put down by massacres.”

Massacre parties, often raiding unsuspecting camps at dawn, were devastating and became the premier anti-insurgency strategy used across the continent in the decades to come.

After sustaining heavy losses (Gapps estimates more than 200 dead in direct warfare), Wiradyuri decided on an orderly surrender, led by the legendary Windradyne, from late October 1824.

The same 4 November edition of the *Sydney Gazette* that reported on “greater peace and security than ever” at Bathurst also announced a million-acre land grant for the Australian Agricultural Company and capital investment of a million pounds.

The expansionist needs of capitalism would continue to drive genocidal massacres across the continent for more than 100 years.

Gapps' work is crucial for understanding both the class and military dynamics behind this process and the fierce Black resistance encountered every step of the way.

**Paddy Gibson**

# ANOTHER WORTHLESS ADVISORY BODY INDIGENOUS ACTIVISTS WANT REAL CHANGE NOT JUST A VOICE

Many Indigenous people are sceptical about the planned Voice to parliament, despite the media focus on its support. Solidarity spoke to three Indigenous activists about why

## Callum Clayton-Dixon: ‘Parliament doesn’t have to listen to anything this Voice says’

### What kind of powers would the Voice to Parliament have?

It helps to back and look at how and why the ‘Voice’ model was originally formulated as a proposal. It wasn’t something that was conceived out of any grassroots Aboriginal movement. It was designed to appeal to the conservative side of politics who don’t want anything that they can’t control.

The constitutional amendments that are being proposed give this body no powers. They only state that there shall be this so-called Voice with the role of providing advice, comment or representation on particular issues to the parliament. We’ve had advisory bodies for decades and decades now in Aboriginal Affairs and this is just the latest iteration.

The parliament has complete say over the roles, responsibilities and membership of this body. Albanese says it’s going to be “subservient” to the parliament. There’s no guarantee at all that Parliament has to listen to or act on anything that this Voice says.

### Why do you think Labor is pushing it?

The push for constitutional recognition has been going on for decades now. Ten or so years ago, there was the You Me Unity campaign, which became Recognise. Now there’s the ‘Voice’. The kinds of constitutional ‘recognition’ proposed thus far have been highly problematic for a multitude of reasons, and the ‘Voice’ model is no different. Consecutive Australian governments have jumped on the constitutional recognition bandwagon in one way or another, using it as a way of trying to look like they’re doing the right thing.

I think the picture that Labor is trying to paint of where the ‘Voice’ model and the mandate for it came from is a dishonest one. There were also fundamental flaws with the so-called consultation process that supposedly arrived at the conclusion that the ‘Voice’ is what people want. And



there is no doubt in my mind that the ‘Voice’ model was the predetermined outcome from the get-go.

### Many of the prominent opponents of the Voice are from the right, including the Nationals, or racists like Pauline Hanson. How do you think people should vote in the referendum?

Rather than a ‘no’ campaign run, I hope to see an Aboriginal boycott of the referendum—because it’s a referendum being put up on a dishonest foundation, and because it’s such a flawed model which could actually set back the push for self-determination.

I would rather see no referendum than a failed referendum. If there is no referendum and the government ends up going down a different path in terms of some other sort of more substantial reform, like designated Aboriginal seats in the parliament, that would be a better situation. And instead of spending millions and millions of dollars on such a problematic and pointless referendum, why not use that money for land justice? How many thousands of hectares of ‘private’ land could be put back in the hands of dispossessed Aboriginal communities?

**Callum Clayton-Dixon is an Ambēyaŋ man, a founding member of the Anaiwan Language Revival Program and author of *Surviving New England***

## Suellyn Tighe: ‘They have ignored the Gomeri voice on mining’



I see little to no value in the Voice to parliament while Gomeri continue to be attacked by these fossil fuel companies.

Gomeri people have used their voice loud and strong to say no to Santos, yet the state and federal government have supported Santos in the Native Title Tribunal, which has resulted in our native title rights being extinguished.

They have ignored the Gomeri voice on climate change, and climate change is going to impact us all because it does not discriminate.

I have concerns about the Voice because Albanese talks about the tyranny of powerlessness and then he says don’t sweat the details ... First Nations people should not have to have a Voice to parliament to be heard.

The fatal flaw of any advisory group is that they can give advice but there is nothing to commit the government to taking that advice.

**Suellyn Tighe is a Gomeri woman fighting the Santos Narrabri/Pilliga gas project in NSW**

# Michael Mansell: 'Most Aboriginal people would say, we want a treaty, we want land back, we don't want a Voice to parliament'

## What's being proposed in terms of the Voice and why don't you think it will deliver any real power for Aboriginal people?

If the referendum gets up it will produce an Aboriginal advisory body. That advice can be taken up or ignored.

With all the Aboriginal advisory bodies that have existed over the last 30 or 40 years, how much of their advice has ever been taken up by government?

The effect of it is to permanently marginalise Aboriginal political representation to the level of being advisers, rather than decision-makers. That's bad enough, but to put it in the Constitution means it's a permanent mark against Aboriginal people ever having a right to self-determination.

## We're often told that the Voice is something that Aboriginal communities have called for, based on its adoption at the Uluru Convention in 2017. You were at that Convention, what happened there?

It is true that the Uluru Convention agreed to, among other things, a Voice to parliament entrenched in the Constitution.

But for the advocates of the Voice to claim that the proposal had support from Uluru is mischievous.

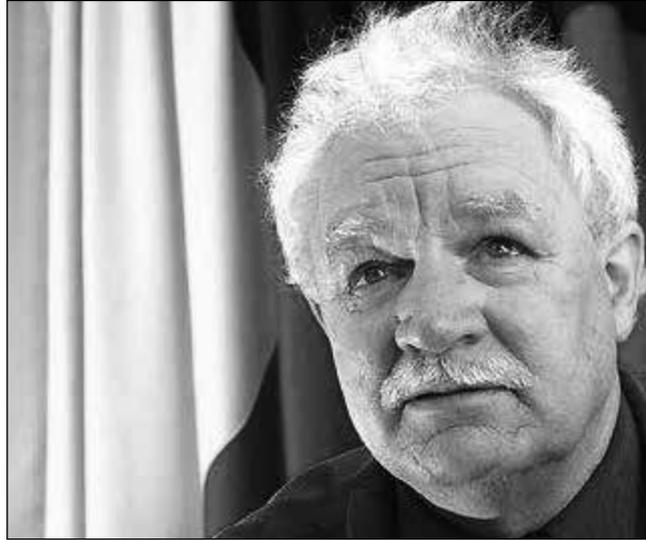
The group who are pushing for the Voice to parliament controlled the Convention so that you had to vote against all of the propositions, that is a treaty, sovereignty and truth-telling, if you wanted to vote against the Voice.

Back in 2016 when the preliminary dialogues leading up to Uluru took place, Tasmania voted in total opposition to the Voice to parliament. Noel Pearson came down to Tasmania and argued in favour of the Voice to parliament model and the 110 Aboriginal delegates simply rejected it out of hand.

Melbourne did the same but I was told later that the way the vote was carried out gave the impression that both Victoria and Western Australia supported the Voice to parliament, when in fact there was a lot of dissent.

My guess is that most Aboriginal people are opposed to it. But I don't have any hard data to show that is the case. The claim by the proponents of the Voice that there is Aboriginal support is equally based on guesswork.

Since Uluru in 2017 there has



been not a single Aboriginal community meeting anywhere in the country to find out if Aboriginal people support it. One of the reasons why is they are concerned that most Aboriginal people would say, we want a treaty, we want land back, we want real empowerment, we don't want constitutional recognition and we don't want a Voice to parliament.

## Given that, why do you think the Voice has been taken up so enthusiastically by the Labor government?

Albanese is taking the easy way out by getting people to vote in favour of improving the image of the Labor party on Aboriginal policy without having to give any form of empowerment, without having to run the risk of a clash with the mining companies and the states, if they legislate to give land back to Aboriginal people, or a clash with the redneck shock-jock radio hosts.

## Why do you believe a treaty is more important than the Voice?

Aboriginal people have been calling for a treaty now for nearly 50 years. When the first national Aboriginal body called the National Aboriginal Conference was formed in 1975, they proposed a national treaty.

The federal Reconciliation Council's Report proposed a federally legislated treaty and at Uluru that was the primary concern and focus of most of the Aboriginal delegates.

The other advantage of a federal treaty is that it provides actual results rather than being a symbolic gesture. The Voice to parliament can only comment on things inside the federal

parliament, it can't provide land to Aboriginal people, it cannot provide services or distribute resources to the Aboriginal community.

On the other hand, you can't have a treaty with Aboriginal people that does not deliver land. There would have to be some form of national empowerment and the idea of six Aboriginal seats in the Senate, one from each state, could be incorporated.

There would have to be a national Aboriginal representative body to determine the priority of needs of Aboriginal people. It would have to have a guarantee of resources, probably 3 per cent of Australia's gross domestic product. A treaty requires government commitment to do something that is real and practical and it delivers things that the Voice to parliament could not even contemplate, let alone bring about.

## Do you think people should vote against it in the referendum?

They should vote against it. If you are voting on solid moral and political grounds, you don't have to worry about the reasons that other people are voting for. Anyone who supports Aboriginal people and believes that Aboriginal people are entitled to an equal form of access to political power could not possibly vote in favour of this advisory body.

The argument of Noel Pearson and Megan Davis is that it needs to be in the Constitution to give it permanency. But anyone who thinks that the body would be permanent because it's in the Constitution is plainly wrong.

We've already seen that in section 101 of the Constitution there are very clear words there shall be an interstate commission. There isn't one, and it hasn't existed since 1950, when the federal parliament lost interest in it, didn't set it up and didn't fund it. Just because you put a Voice to parliament in the Constitution does not bind any government to carry it out.

It's constitutional recognition dressed up as giving some sort of benefit to Aboriginal people which, when you dissect it, condemns us permanently to a marginalised position. It is racist and it stinks and people should vote against it.

**Michael Mansell is an Aboriginal lawyer and activist, secretary of the Aboriginal Provisional Government and chairman of the Aboriginal Land Council of Tasmania**

.....  
**'Tasmania voted in total opposition to the Voice to Parliament. Melbourne did the same'**

# US BASES POSITIONED FOR WAR AGAINST CHINA

The US remains the overwhelmingly dominant military power in the Pacific with a string of bases encircling China, explains **Tom Orsag**

THE US and Australian governments constantly present China as a military threat, pointing to its claims over Taiwan and its actions in the South China Sea.

But the US has a far more intimidating military arsenal and has not been afraid to use it—from its invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq, pouring of weapons into Ukraine and constant bombing of countries from Syria to Yemen, Somalia and Libya.

China is effectively encircled by US bases all across the Pacific—threatening a catastrophic war between the world’s two greatest powers.

The US became the preeminent power in the Pacific after the defeat of Japan in 1945.

It was US military power that won the war, eclipsing the old imperial powers of Britain, France and the Netherlands, who began retreating from their Asian colonies.

Since then the US has sought to maintain control over the entire Pacific Ocean through a string of bases. And it is now expanding its military footprint in the area further as part of preparations for war against China.

In 1951 US military planners developed the “first island chain” security theory in an effort to preserve US control of the Pacific—right up to the Chinese coastline.

This was a response to the development of the Cold War in Asia. In October 1949 the US-backed Guomindang lost the civil war in China to the Chinese Communist Party and fled to Taiwan.

Then the US fought a bloody war in Korea against North Korean and Chinese troops backed by Russia.

Just as the US Joint Army and Navy Board developed “War Plan Orange” for a possible war with Japan in the 1920s and 1930s, the US devel-

oped plans for war against China.

It sought to secure a “first chain” or fence stretching from the Japanese islands to Taiwan, the Philippines, and the island of Borneo (split mainly between Malaysia and Indonesia).

The threat of US firepower stopped Chinese efforts to reclaim Taiwan in 1954 and 1958.

The US also established new military bases across South Korea and occupied Japan and re-established control of bases in the Philippines, which had been a US colony before the war.

Most of these bases remain active today. In 2021, the US defence magazine *19FortyFive* wrote that, “The U.S. Indo-Pacific Command has some 375,000 military and civilian personnel working across the Asian Pacific.”

The US maintains 56,000 active duty military personnel at more than 80 bases and other facilities across Japan, the most in any one country outside the US. About half are based in Okinawa.

Through the Cold War, the US pointed nuclear weapons at China from bases in Japan, Taiwan and South Korea.

Nuclear weapons were moved from Okinawa to the Iwakuni base near Hiroshima in 1966. When the US ambassador to Japan, Edwin O. Reischauer, learned of their presence, which was a violation of the treaty with Japan, he told the US State Department that he would resign and go public with the information if they were not removed within 90 days. The weapons were removed shortly thereafter.

Improvements in ballistic missile technology and nuclear-armed submarines mean the US no longer needs these nuclear weapons bases.

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## The US has sought to maintain control over the entire Pacific Ocean through a string of bases

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Today there are still 5000 marines and two air force squadrons stationed at Iwakuni.

The US ran Okinawa via an appointed US High Commissioner until May 1972, with local people having no say, after which it was “returned” to Japan. But US troops stayed.

Another 30,000 US personnel are based in South Korea, which the US has never left following the Korean War in the 1950s.

Camp Humphreys, southwest of Seoul in South Korea, is the largest US overseas military base in the world with more than 500 buildings.

It is just 540 kilometres from the city of Dalian on the Chinese mainland, with a population of more than seven million people. That is the same distance as driving between Sydney and Wodonga on the Victorian border.

The US Army calls the base “the largest power projection platform in the Pacific”.

With the addition of the nearby Osan air base and the Kusan air base another 116 kilometres south, the US can project power both north into North Korea and west into China.

In the Philippines the US still has access to five airbases, following the closure of its large naval base at Subic Bay and the Clark air base in the early 1990s. *The Financial Times* reported in January that the country is planning to “allow US forces to pre-position weapons and other supplies on five more bases in addition”.

Taiwan is another key link in the chain. The US seeks to guarantee Taiwan’s de facto independence from China through arms sales and military support.

A procession of US politicians including Nancy Pelosi have staged provocative visits in the last year to

declare their “solidarity” with Taiwan and US President Joe Biden has repeatedly said the US would defend it against any Chinese invasion.

The US also has an agreement with Singapore that allows it to use naval and air bases there, which sit in a vital strategic chokepoint on the straits of Malacca at the entry to the South China Sea.

### Blockade

Euan Graham, a fellow in defence and security at the Lowy Institute, has described the island chain as “the US defensive perimeter in the Western Pacific”, adding that “no powers have ever really contested it, not even the Soviet Union during the height of the Cold War”.

Control of it gives the US the capacity to impose a military blockade against China, which is dependent on trade and imports carried by sea, including for 60 per cent of its oil.

A blockade of the sea lanes that pass along the islands could be crippling.

The US bases here were never just “defensive”. They have been used to wage a series of US wars in Asia. Clark air base in the Philippines was a major launching pad for the Korean War (1950-1953) and an important logistics hub during the Vietnam War (1954-75).

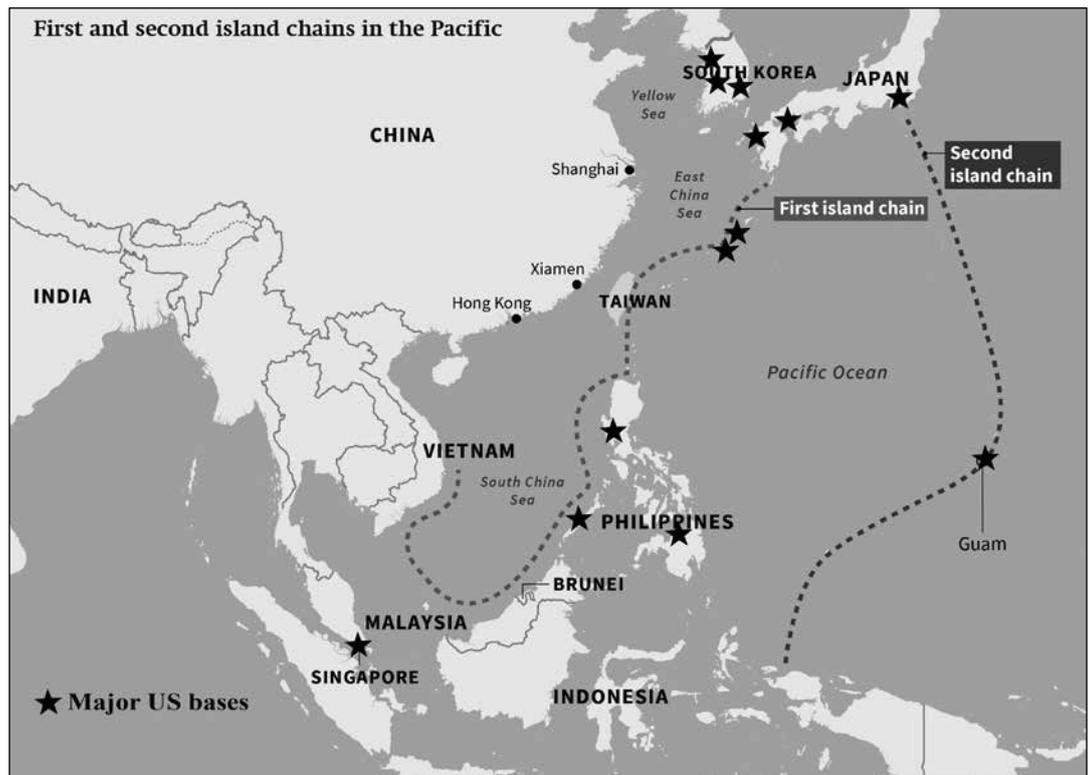
US Admiral Grant Sharp, commander of Pacific Forces, said in December 1965, “Without Okinawa we couldn’t continue fighting the Vietnam War.” US B-52 bombers flew missions into Vietnam from bases there, which were also a transit point for US combat troops bound for Vietnam.

To assert its control over the Pacific, two more “island chains” have been identified and built up by the US since the theory was first devised.

The “second island chain” stretches from the Bonin (or Ogasawara) islands 1000 kilometres south of Tokyo to the Mariana Islands including Guam, the Caroline islands (part of Micronesia) and West Papua, controlled by Indonesia. South of these are the US bases in Australia around Darwin.

Guam is already one of the most important US bases in the Pacific. The US is expanding its operations there to boost its aircraft strike capacities in any war with China.

US bases on Guam, the largest island in the Marianas, include the Andersen Air Force base hosting 8000 US military personnel and their families.



**Above: The first and second island chains beyond China’s mainland coast are dotted with US bases**

A further 5000 marines are relocating from Okinawa alongside a build-up that “also involves more submarines, ship repair facilities and a planned \$1.3 billion missile defence system”, the ABC reported last year. That’s because Guam today is vulnerable to China’s long-range missiles.

The ABC report was headlined “Guam, America’s forgotten speck of an island in the Pacific, is the new frontline against China”.

It noted, without a hint of irony that, “The island...is the westernmost piece of American territory in the Pacific, allowing a military build-up that would be more difficult for bases on foreign soil.”

That’s because colonial conquest decimated the Indigenous people—the Chamorro—and the US military force them to sign away their land after it was occupied in 1898, with the military still controlling almost 30 per cent of the island.

The island’s size and strategic location gives it great value to US war plans. “The amount of firepower that we could generate from that island is tremendous,” General Kenneth Wilsbach, the US Pacific Air Forces Commander has noted.

“The airfield itself is enormous, with two runways ... lots of parking areas, a very large munitions storage area.”

The US also has agreements with Palau, the Federated States of Micro-

nesia and the Marshall Islands, giving it exclusive rights to base military assets there.

The US plans to build a new military base in Micronesia and install a high-tech radar surveillance system on Palau.

### Third chain of bases

The “third island chain” is an arc from the Aleutian Islands off Alaska to Hawaii through to Fiji and New Zealand.

It includes Wallis and Futuna, part of the French empire and northwest of Fiji. This is why Biden patched up relations with France during President Emmanuel Macron’s state visit to Washington in early December 2022.

A recent article in *The Diplomat* titled “Why France-US Relations Matter for the Pacific” argues improved US-French relations “should assist geopolitical stability and a democratic rules-based order in the region”, or in other words ongoing US control.

US bases in Australia and the growing integration of Australia’s armed forces into the US military are another part of its push against China.

We should oppose all the US bases in Australia, including Pine Gap (NT), the North West Cape (WA), and the new B-52 build-up at Tindal (NT).

The US is not some force for democracy. It is a ruthless imperialist power that seeks to dominate the entire planet. We should oppose US bases and its preparations for war with China everywhere.

# MORRISON'S POWER GRAB AND THE LIMITS OF DEMOCRACY IN PARLIAMENT

Scott Morrison's ministerial power grab was not an aberration but an example of the secrecy and lack of democracy that exists under capitalism argues **Rory Larkins**

WHEN FORMER Prime Minister Scott Morrison's power grab over several ministries was revealed last year, there was outrage about his contempt for democratic institutions. But his move indicated how limited the democracy we have is.

Morrison secretly appointed himself Minister for Health, Finance, Home Affairs, the Treasury, as well as Industry, Science, Energy and Resources. These appointments were only revealed by a journalist after Morrison lost the election.

The powers he assumed as health minister in the pandemic under the Biosecurity Act were similar to introducing martial law. They meant an ability to close international borders and deploy the military with effective impunity.

Morrison used these powers on only one occasion: to block an offshore gas exploration project that some Liberal MPs feared would tip their electorates towards the Teals. But the full scope of the powers that Morrison consolidated, the ease with which he secured them and his success in keeping them secret caused outrage.

After Labor's win, Anthony Albanese criticised Morrison for threatening "public confidence in government" and said his secret appointments "fundamentally undermined the principles of responsible government".

The response from the mainstream press was much the same. *The Financial Times* wrote, "It is a reminder of the need for vigilance in shoring up the processes and institutions of democracy."

Labor's parliamentary inquiry into the appointments recommended several measures to try to prevent this kind of power grab in future, including requirements to make ministerial appointments public.

However, the saga has exposed how the system we have allows a tiny group of people to run the government

in secret and to avoid accountability from parliament or the media for months if not years.

## Parliamentary democracy

Every three years we are given the opportunity to vote in a new government. What happens between elections, however, is up to the politicians who are elected. Quite often, politicians promise to improve our lives in the lead up to an election but then walk back or junk their promises afterwards.

For the length of their term, they can govern with impunity, so long as they regain public face by the time of the next election.

For instance, when Tony Abbott broke his promises and forced through a horror budget of cuts in 2014 we had to wait two years before his party dumped him out of fear they'd lose the coming election.

Albanese promised ahead of last year's federal election that all refugees on Temporary Protection Visas would be granted permanent visas—something that could happen within weeks. But he has spent the last eight months stalling and still hasn't said when he will honour his promise.

Governments work to keep their decisions secret all the time. In 2018, ASIO raided the offices of the ABC after it obtained secret "classified" documents left in a filing cabinet which detailed government decisions over more than a decade.

They included evidence of how Morrison, as immigration minister in 2013, had demanded ASIO delay security checks so he could prevent a group of asylum-seekers being granted permanent visas. They also showed John Howard sought to remove the right to remain silent in custody in 2007.

Cover-ups, false promises and power grabs are all so common in our parliamentary democracy that the

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**The parliament we vote for is fundamentally restricted because it is subordinate to the wider capitalist system**  
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word "politician" has become a by-word for dishonesty and corruption. The Australian Election Study completed after last year's election found only 30 per cent believe people in government can be trusted, although satisfaction with democracy jumped from its previous 59 per cent with the change of government.

## Why so undemocratic?

Although we can choose who controls government, the parliament we vote for is fundamentally restricted because it is subordinate to the wider capitalist system.

Capitalism distorts democracy in all sorts of ways. Politicians are paid enormous salaries, with a starting rate for backbenchers of \$211,250. This means MPs come to see themselves as part of the elite, distant from the mass of ordinary people. Being a politician is also a career that encourages shifty, self-serving and back-stabbing manoeuvres to ensure re-election.

The parties and politicians need big money to run their campaigns. Open corruption, where companies exchange money for contracts or favourable decisions, is discouraged. But the reason the major parties get corporate donations is that big companies know they will generally support business interests, mining developments and greater capitalist profits.

Parliamentary structures are also undemocratic. While we have federal elections every three years, we get the chance to elect only half the senate each time. This acts as a brake on major shifts in Australia's political landscape.

Parliament has no power over the wider capitalist economy, the vast bulk of which is controlled by the small group of CEOs and senior managers who run the major companies.

Funding for healthcare, the unemployed or preventing climate catastrophe are all seen as less important than

making sure that the biggest companies in Australia maintain their investments and operations in the economy.

Even at the height of government stimulus during the pandemic, federal government spending still accounted for less than 30 per cent of the economy. Including state governments and councils it is now around 38 per cent. This means that the vast majority of business and investment decisions are in the hands of private capitalists.

This gives business the power to force any parliamentary government to serve its interests. The left-wing deputy leader in the Whitlam government, Jim Cairns, explained that many of his economic plans came to grief because “we have to respond to the needs and demands of the large companies”.

Any government that angers businesses too much risks companies deciding to close up shop, threatening thousands of jobs and the disappearance of goods from the market.

Numerous left-wing governments have been broken or disciplined by the power of capitalists and the money markets. Recently they even went after a British Tory government.

When Liz Truss announced plans for massive spending and tax cuts for the rich last year, the fact that it was all funded by debt so appalled business that the government’s creditors on the stock market tanked the price of the British pound and bonds, threatening an economic meltdown.

Truss had to resign and the policies were abandoned. An attempt by a left-wing government to pursue radical change would get even more ruthless treatment.

Even beyond this, the heads of government departments and other parts of the state, such as High Court judges, military generals, police chiefs and senior public servants, are completely unelected.

Any government seeking to introduce radical change against the interests of the billionaire corporations would face opposition from within these state institutions that could force them from power.

In Chile in 1973, Greece in 1967 and Argentina in 1976, this led to military coups that toppled governments and saw thousands of their supporters killed to re-establish capitalist order.

### **Workers’ democracy**

In a genuinely democratic society the whole economy would be under popular control. The history of attempts at radical change have shown that this requires getting rid of the existing



**Above: Parliaments is a weak and limited form of democracy that is beholden to capitalist interests outside it**

capitalist state and its standing army and police through socialist revolution.

Workers have seized control of their workplaces and begun running them under democratic control many times over the past 150 years. Some examples are in France in 1968, Chile in 1973, Spain in 1936 and in the Iranian revolution of 1979.

The most developed example was the workers’ councils known as soviets during the Russian revolution in 1917, but such bodies have emerged time and time again at times of high levels of workers’ struggle.

In Russia, workplaces were run through a mass meeting with open debate and discussion. Each workplace would make democratic decisions about what needed to be produced, in co-ordination with delegates elected to larger meetings at a regional and national level.

These delegates were instantly recallable if they misrepresented their workmates and never paid more than the average workers’ wage.

During the Russian revolution, soviets were also set up to represent women and other oppressed groups.

In place of the separate police and military institutions today which exist above and outside of society and protect the ruling class, all state functions were put under democratic control, organised directly by workplace delegates through the soviets.

A workers’ state would be run according to the democratic decisions made through the active debate and

participation of the majority of society. Such a democracy would be totally hostile to secret appointment to any ministries, or government run outside democratic scrutiny. The Russian soviets produced the most democratic society achieved in history to date.

The Russian revolution saw workers seize power and overthrow capitalism for a few short years. But the lack of development in Russia, its isolation from the rest of the world and the brutal impact of civil war led to a counter-revolution.

Workers lost control to an overgrown bureaucracy. Under the leadership of Stalin, this bureaucracy introduced a system of state capitalism that killed all that remained of genuine workers’ democracy.

But the possibility of real democracy and an end to the misery and inequality of capitalism has been shown again and again at high points of workers’ rebellions and social movements.

Every strike and grassroots movement in the here and now that draws wide layers of workers and ordinary people into struggle around climate action, refugee rights, women’s rights, and anti-war campaigns gives a glimpse of the kind of democracy based on mass participation that we need.

The challenge is to build a stronger understanding within them of the need for a socialist society based on workers’ democracy instead of the undemocratic capitalist world in which we live.

# ALBANESE LEAVING REFUGEES BEHIND IN PNG

By Ian Rintoul

ON 16 January four refugees flew from Port Moresby to be resettled in Canada; they had been in Papua New Guinea for nine and half years. About 88 of the refugees forcibly exiled from Australia to Manus Island in 2013 are still in PNG.

Anthony Albanese visited PNG on 12 and 13 January and became the first foreign head of state to address the PNG parliament. Albanese said nothing of the refugees who had been sent to Manus Island in 2013 when Albanese was deputy prime minister in the Rudd Labor government that imprisoned them offshore.

Kevin Rudd held a press conference with PNG Prime Minister Peter O’Neil on 19 July 2013, announcing that asylum-seekers who arrived by boat would be sent to Manus Island, never to resettle in Australia.

Then Coalition leader Tony Abbott welcomed the announcement as “a promising development in offshore processing”. He went on to turn back asylum boats and make Manus Island a charnel house of abuse and torture.

But Albanese said nothing about that. He was in PNG to announce a new security pact promising increased defence cooperation and more money to increase PNG’s “law and order” capacity.

There is a sickening irony that people who were no threat to national security were imprisoned on the PNG navy base on Manus which has now become the site of a joint US, Australia and PNG defence facility to prepare for war on China, also in the name of national security.

## Physical scars

Every one of the asylum-seekers imprisoned on Manus Island and Nauru carries the physical and mental scars inflicted by Australia’s deterrence policy. Since December several refugees needing medical treatment have been brought from Nauru to Australia.

But Labor is insisting that it has no responsibility for refugees in PNG since Morrison washed its hands of



**Above: Bangladeshi refugee Alamgir in PNG, who has liver, kidney and dental, as well as mental health problems, surrounded by his medications**

them with a deal to hand control of refugees to PNG from 1 January 2022.

There has been a list of refugees in need of medical treatment in Australia on the desks of both the Home Affairs and Immigration ministers since Labor was elected last May. Refugees with debilitating mental health issues as well as serious medical and dental problems are being left to suffer.

In January, hundreds of Manus refugees now in Canada, US, France, New Zealand and Australia wrote to Home Affairs Minister Clare O’Neil asking for the refugees languishing in PNG to be urgently transferred to Australia.

The United Nations Committee Against Torture insists that Australia “maintains legal responsibility because [the refugees and asylum-seekers] remain under Australia’s effective control”.

Labor’s policy commits it to “improve the medical transfer process, establish an Independent Health Advice Panel to provide medical advice and maintain ministerial discretion in all decision making”. But Immigration and Home Affairs have turned a deaf ear to the requests for urgent medical transfers from PNG.

## Boat turnbacks

Yet Labor has a particular responsibility. The deal brokered by the Rudd government in 2013 created the

horror of offshore detention on Manus Island and introduced the policy that denied offshore refugees resettlement in Australia.

On the very day that Labor was elected last year, it approved the navy sending asylum-seekers intercepted at sea back to Sri Lanka, in line with Scott Morrison’s turnback policy.

Recent news reports have revealed that two other boats with Iraqi and Indian asylum-seekers arrived at Ashmore Reef in Australian territorial waters in December and January respectively. Asylum-seekers on those boats were returned to Indonesia, yet Labor’s policy clearly states, “Protection visa applications made in Australia should be assessed by Australians on Australian Territory.”

## Still waiting

Despite numerous announcements that the government was about to grant permanent visas to the 19,000 refugees on temporary protection visas or SHEVs, they are still waiting.

Labor has abolished the Administrative Appeals Tribunal but asylum-seekers refused protection visas by the fast track system overseen by the AAT are also still waiting for justice.

Hazara refugees are protesting in Canberra from 6 February. Palm Sunday “Justice for Refugees” rallies on 2 April will also call for “permanent visas for all”.

**Refugees with debilitating mental health issues as well as serious medical problems are being left to suffer**

**Solidarity**