

Solidarity

Issue No. 172 / July 2023

\$3/\$5

**COST OF LIVING UP
INTEREST RATES UP
PROFITS UP**

**FORCE UP WAGES—
MAKE THE
BOSSES PAY**

SEXISM

The backlash against
Brittany Higgins

UKRAINE

Counter-offensive
set to create bloodbath

TRANSPHOBIA

Fighting discrimination
at its roots

Solidarity **WHAT WE STAND FOR**

Capitalism is a system of crisis and war

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

Workers power and socialism

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

What about elections and parliament?

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

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

We are internationalists

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

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

We oppose imperialism and support all

genuine national liberation struggles. We oppose Australian nationalism.

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

Oppression and liberation

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

Linking up the struggles

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

Educate, agitate, organise

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

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

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

SOLIDARITY MEETINGS AND BRANCHES

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Things they say

At the end of the day what matters is the sanctity of our defence force and the sanctity of our nation and the standing of Australia.

Defence Minister Richard Marles, looks for divine intervention following Ben Roberts-Smith's war crimes verdict

I do worry about some of the commentary that is smearing the entire ADF that will make it very hard to recruit

Nationals MP and former Minister for Defence Michael McCormack is also concerned, not about the war crimes but about the ADF

People can cut back spending, or in some cases find additional hours of work

Reserve Bank Governor Phillip Lowe's advice to those struggling with interest rate hikes

It's been approved and there are obviously a number of parts that need to come through with that, but we're just watching as they roll out. NSW Labor Environment Minister Penny Sharpe is happy to let the Narrabri gas project roll out, even though pipelines for it are still not approved

Yes, in Europe we have a war in our borders, but the epicentre—the core of the global competition—is in the Indo-Pacific; it's here.

The European Union's top foreign affairs official, Josep Borrell

I guess the important point to make here is going to university makes you money.

Education Minister Jason Clare defends the 7.1 per cent increase to student loans due to indexation this year

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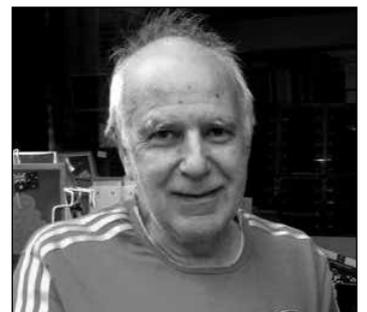
- 18** *The new age of catastrophe* by Alex Callinicos

Vale Agustin Perez: Newtown printer and friend of trade unions and the left

SOLIDARITY WAS sad to hear of the sudden passing of Agustin Perez last month. As an immigrant who escaped Franco's Spain, Agustin identified with the political left and was a long-term supporter of trade unions and social movements from environment and anti-war issues, to refugees and the Indigenous struggle. His El Faro print shop was an icon of Newtown, Sydney, in its less gentrified days.

Agustin was a legend, who, for 40 years, was the extremely generous printer of choice for students, student unions and the socialist left in Sydney, willing to work all hours to meet a deadline for whatever often cash-strapped activist groups could afford.

Agustin also printed *Solidarity* magazine from its inception in 2008, continuing to produce the magazine even after he had retired from most other printing work. His generosity and dedication was an enormous help to the magazine and a much valued contribution to the struggle for workers' rights and social justice. He will be greatly missed.



Greenhouse emissions at all time high

ANNUAL GREENHOUSE emissions have hit an all time high, equivalent to 54 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide, a new study by 50 leading scientists has found.

The Earth was already 1.14 degrees hotter over the last decade than in 1800, it concluded, and is warming at a record pace of 0.2 degrees a decade. Temperatures over land have increased twice as fast.

Half the carbon budget to avoid 1.5 degrees of warming that was left in 2020—the total emissions that can be released before the target is likely to be breached—have been used in just the last three years. The research was published in the journal *Earth System Science Data*.

It comes as massive fires across Canada have left cities across the eastern US including New York blanketed in thick smoke. Haze has even reached as far as Norway. More than 440 fires have been burning after a record heat wave in May—and the fire season there is just beginning.

Around 2.7 million hectares of forest burned in May, compared to an average of only 150,000 hectares in the same month over the past ten years.

Aboriginal prisoners in NSW at new high

THE PROPORTION of prison inmates in NSW who are Aboriginal has hit a record high, at 29.7 per cent of the adult prison population in February, NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research figures have revealed.

Aboriginal people make up just 3.4 per cent of the NSW population, as well as more than 50 per cent of the population in youth detention.

Karly Warner, chief executive of the NSW Aboriginal Legal Service said the system was “stacked against Aboriginal people at every step of the way”.

“Our communities are overpoliced, overcharged, denied bail at higher rates, and vastly over-represented in prisons.”

Around 40 per cent of the prison population in WA is Indigenous, as well as almost 90 per cent in the Northern Territory.

War crimes the real face of Australian militarism



BEN ROBERTS-SMITH is officially a war criminal, after the judge in his defamation trial ruled he was responsible for the murder of at least four unarmed Afghans. Judge Besanko found that Roberts-Smith had murdered one Afghan man with a prosthetic leg himself, souveniring the prosthetic and encouraging other soldiers to drink out of it.

He was also found responsible for three other murders, including that of Ali Jan, who he kicked off a cliff and then ordered other soldiers to shoot, as well as authorising or pressuring subordinates to kill two other unarmed Afghans. The judge said he was a “criminal” who “broke the moral and legal rules of military engagement”.

Senior politicians are desperate to claim his actions don’t reflect the whole Australian military.

Anthony Albanese has refused to comment beyond praising “those brave soldiers and whistleblowers who stood up, spoke out, and said, ‘Enough’” to assist the Brereton report into war crimes. Liberal MP and former SAS soldier Andrew Hastie echoed this saying those who gave evidence against Roberts-Smith “have, in a sense, rescued the regiment”.

Yet the Brereton inquiry alleged 25 current and former soldiers carried out 39 cases of war crimes in Afghanistan. One is already facing a criminal trial.

Afghanistan was presented as a “good war”. In reality it was an imperialist occupation, where Australian troops were part of a foreign army imposing control through violence and terror.

The war and occupation itself was a war crime. The US simply backed a new set of corrupt rulers, reliant on brutal warlords, to run the country. The corruption and violence was so hated that it allowed the Taliban to revive.

The war crimes are the result of a war waged to boost US and Western power. That is the whole purpose of Australian militarism.

Gas company gains from Labor’s Middle Arm funding

GAS COMPANY Tamboran Resources has been allocated space at Darwin’s Middle Arm development to build a LNG terminal to export gas from the Beetaloo Basin.

Yet the Albanese government has tried to pass off the precinct—which is receiving \$1.5 billion of government funding—as a “sustainable” development.

Briefing documents released under FOI show that the federal Infrastructure Minister Catherine King knew it was a fossil fuel development—with four of five wharves at the site labelled as set aside for shipping of LNG or gas byproducts and just one set aside for hydrogen, where green hydrogen providers may be based.

Yet she tried to claim the government funding was “not a subsidy for fossil fuels” but instead “an important way of setting up our economy for a sustainable future”.

Other information in documents prepared for Environment Minister Tanya Plibersek said Middle Arm was “seen as a key enabler” for allowing gas export from the Beetaloo Basin to begin, and important to the “feasibility” of plans to use carbon capture and storage to bury emissions from nearby gas projects.

The Beetaloo Basin is a carbon bomb that could create up to 117 million tonnes of carbon pollution each year, equivalent to 22 per cent of Australia’s current total emissions.

Coal mines polluting far more than claimed

WHITEHAVEN’S NARRABRI coal mine in NSW is releasing more than three times the greenhouse pollution it gained approval in 2015.

It is now releasing half a million tonnes of carbon dioxide a year, equivalent to 100,000 extra cars on the road, up from an estimate of 113,000 tonnes a year. An ABC investigation found that Adani’s Carmichael coal mine similarly emitted eight times what it had estimated in its first year in operation per tonne of coal.

It comes as satellite data has indicated that some coal mines are releasing far more methane, a potent greenhouse gas, than they are admitting. The International Energy Agency suspects Australian coal mine emissions may be under-reported by 60 per cent—putting another huge question mark over the government’s emissions reduction claims.

EDITORIAL

Rate rises and cost of living bite but Albanese does nothing

MILLIONS OF workers are being pushed into poverty by the surging cost of living, yet the Albanese government does nothing.

The Reserve Bank caused even more shock when it raised interest rates for the 12th time in June, with further rate rises still expected. It seems determined to drive the economy into recession.

Workers will pay the price as unemployment rises and mortgages and rents skyrocket.

Home loan payments have more than doubled, rising an extra \$1200 a month on average. Almost a million people are facing a jump in repayments as fixed-rate terms expire.

Household spending is plummeting following the cost of living squeeze. Commonwealth Bank economists expect a per capita recession later this year, with a 50:50 chance of an outright recession.

Workers on Award wages will get a 5.75 per cent pay rise this year, following the Fair Work Commission's decision. Most workers are getting far less—with a real wage cut of 3.1 per cent over the last year on average. Real wages have dropped back to the levels of 2009.

But not everyone is suffering. Big companies and the rich are still rolling in cash. Qantas is expecting a record profit of \$2.48 billion and the big banks raked in a combined \$16 billion over the last six months.

CEOs pocketed 15 per cent pay rises. The average pay of bosses at the top 200 companies is now \$1.1 million. Profits have been driving inflation, with OECD research in June showing that profits took most of the benefits of higher prices as inflation was accelerating in early 2022.

As a result the profit share of the economy has hit a record high and workers' wage share is at its lowest in history.

The Albanese government could tax the rich to subsidise power bills, which are set to rise another 20 to 30 per cent. Queensland's Labor government has announced a \$550 subsidy for every household. But Albanese has done nothing.

The money is there. Labor managed to find an extra \$2 billion for social housing in the face of pressure from The Greens after the stand-off in the Senate over its hopeless housing fund.

There are billions more going on



Above: A determined union strike campaign is needed to push up pay

the Stage Three tax cuts and nuclear submarines—as well as far more that could be raised through taxing obscene corporate profits.

AUKUS opposition

Opposition to Albanese's appalling \$368 billion spending on nuclear submarines is growing among unions and Labor Party members.

The Queensland Labor state conference voted down a motion in support of the nuclear subs 229 votes to 140 in early June.

A motion opposing the nuclear subs also went to the Victorian state Labor conference, before it was pulled and referred to the national conference in August in a factional deal.

Unions including the AMWU and ETU oppose the plan, continuing a long history of labour movement opposition to the nuclear industry.

Albanese's ridiculous argument that the nuclear subs are a "jobs bonanza" has been blown out of the water. It was already clear that \$368 billion could deliver far more jobs elsewhere, say in building public housing or renewable energy. Albanese has claimed the project would deliver 20,000 jobs—at a cost of over \$600,000 per job a year.

But the Defence Department has now confirmed that five of the eight nuclear subs could be bought directly from the US. The first three will definitely be US-made Virginia submarines, with an option to purchase four or five from the US if local construction falters.

Every union and Labor Party

branch should back a motion against the nuclear subs, and back the protests planned outside Labor's national conference in August.

The court ruling that Ben Roberts-Smith committed war crimes in Afghanistan shows the real face of Australian militarism. Australia is an imperialist power that works in lockstep with the US to dominate the world.

We need to oppose the surge in military spending that's feeding the power struggle between the US and China in the Asia-Pacific and increasing the chance of a catastrophic war.

A union campaign for pay rises is also desperately needed. Unions that fight win more pay. Even though pay increases are still behind inflation, Sydney University won 4.6 per cent this year, while Onelink workers in Sydney won 7 per cent this year after five strike days.

NSW public sector workers including nurses and teachers have been offered 4 per cent by the new state Labor government after strikes last year—but should keep fighting for more.

The NSW Health Services Union has rejected the offer saying it "falls short" of what's needed, holding stop-work meetings in hospitals.

The Albanese government is refusing to act on the crises around housing, the cost of living or climate action, protecting the wealth and profits of corporations and the rich. It is going to take a fightback through grassroots organising, protests and strikes to win the real action needed.

.....
Opposition to the \$368 billion nuclear submarines is growing among unions and Labor Party members

Unionists at Brotherhood show organising can win gains

WORKERS AT the Brotherhood of St Laurence (BSL) in Melbourne have rejected management's proposed enterprise agreement in a non-union ballot, 61 per cent to 39 per cent.

The outcome is a testament to grassroots organising, with union members convincing colleagues that the money exists for pay rises that keep up with the cost of living.

The agreement included pay rises of 5 per cent this year, 4 per cent in 2024 and 3 per cent in 2025 plus improvements to cultural and parental leave.

But with inflation well above this, and management refusing to deliver other leave entitlements, Australian Services Union (ASU) members ran a strong No campaign.

It was a win for solidarity over division. In information sessions held to sell the agreement HR suggested that the union should accept smaller wage rises in return for reproductive leave, gender affirmation leave and additional leave entitlements for First Nations staff, conditions the union has been campaigning for.

Workers refused to be black-mailed. Workers shouldn't have to accept a real pay cut in return for other rights.

Unprecedented

The day after the ballot results were announced union members held a four-hour strike and protest at a meeting of the BSL Board. Staff read out messages sent by union members who couldn't physically attend.

They then marched to the Board meeting, chanting "we need more pay in our EBA". Placards read "BSL staff need reproductive leave", "Respect our voice—more leave for First Nations staff", and "Gender affirmation leave now".

This is the first time in memory that BSL staff have rejected an enterprise agreement and the first time that staff have struck and protested at the Board.

The agreement covers about 1100 staff working across NDIS, aged care, early childhood, migrant services, financial education, research and admin.

Like much of the community sector, about 80 per cent of BSL staff are female. Unpaid overtime is rife.

There is a culture in social and community services (SACS) of workers sacrificing their own well-being for the sake of vulnerable clients. SACS workers often perform "caring work"



Above: Union members at the Brotherhood of St Laurence out on strike

associated with women's unpaid labour in the home and volunteer work.

This has led to the gendered undervaluation of SACS workers, which was acknowledged by Fair Work Australia in the equal pay case of 2012 when unions, led by the ASU, won pay rises of between 19 and 41 per cent.

Those hard-fought gains are now being undermined by inflation. BSL workers have suffered two and a half years of below-inflation pay rises.

Building the union

More than 100 workers have joined the union since negotiations began. The union's strength is based on a strong network of rank-and-file delegates and activists. Regular union meetings provide a space to discuss issues and plan actions.

BSL workers are spread across dozens of sites, so these meetings are hybrid, held online and in-person with members gathering at offices.

During protected industrial action these have become stop work meetings. In these meetings members heard about each others' struggles with the cost of living, and from First Nations and trans staff about why more leave entitlements are important to them.

The successful No vote was just as much about fighting for the rights of women, First Nations and gender diverse workers as it was about pay.

And the stop work meetings are a space for members to discuss how to escalate industrial action.

This rank-and-file organisation laid the basis for the successful No vote. ASU officials leafleted sites where membership was weak.

Following the No vote and strike action BSL has made concessions. They have agreed to four weeks' paid gender affirmation leave and look like they will agree to additional leave for First Nations staff.

But the organisation has not committed to improving the wage offer. Union members will need to turn up the pressure to guarantee these entitlements and real wage rises.

In coming weeks workers will write union messages on office windows and company cars using liquid chalk markers.

Union activists are taking every opportunity to mobilise members and campaign at public BSL events.

In late June BSL had an expo at State Parliament to promote its programs among MPs, public servants and other VIPs. Union members at the expo wore campaign badges and handed out leaflets.

There will be another strike and protest at the next BSL Board meeting and a protest at the BSL Sambell Oration on 11 July where Federal Treasurer Jim Chalmers will, according to the website, "Address our current economic challenges and the impact these are having on people living in poverty."

Ending poverty should start with real pay rises for workers. Escalating industrial action is the way to win it.

By an ASU member

More than 100 workers have joined the union since negotiations began

Governments back fossil fuel criminals with attack on right to protest

By Angus Dermody

GOVERNMENTS ACROSS the country are targeting climate activists with draconian anti-protest laws, at a time when climate protest is desperately needed.

On 31 May, South Australia introduced laws imposing fines of up to \$50,000—increased from \$750—and up to three months' jail for any protester who “intentionally or recklessly obstructs the free passage of a public place”. Introduced by the SA Labor government, these are the most severe fines for protesting anywhere in Australia.

This was a response to Extinction Rebellion protests against the gas industry's Australian Petroleum Production and Exploration Association (APPEA) conference. The laws were introduced to parliament just a day after an XR activist abseiled off a bridge to block traffic.

Last year the then NSW Liberal government passed its own anti-protest laws with the support of NSW Labor. Climate activists in NSW now face up to \$22,000 fines and two years in jail for blocking or disrupting major roads or train stations, ports, and other infrastructure. This followed disruptive actions by Blockade Australia and Fireproof Australia.

Anti-protest laws aimed at forests activists in Victoria came into force in May, threatening fines of \$20,000 and a year's jail for entering restricted logging areas. Activists entered the areas in defiance on their first day in operation, carrying out a mass “citizen scientist” survey.

In Western Australia, activists involved in the Disrupt Burrup Hub campaign have been the focus of a severe police crackdown, with their homes searched and personal belongings seized for participating in protests against fossil fuel company Woodside's plans to destroy Aboriginal rock art at Murujuga for their Burrup Hub project. This includes the Scarborough gas field, a carbon bomb that would release the equivalent every year of 15 new coal power stations.

Direct action protests for climate action in Europe are also facing increased police repression. In Italy and Germany, the group Last Generation have been subjected to police raids and are treated as criminal organisations.

The UK government has recently



introduced unprecedented police powers in an attack on climate group Just Stop Oil. Police can now stop any protest if they believe it could cause “more than minor disruption to the life of the community” and arrest those involved.

The main target has been small-scale direct action protests against the fossil fuel industry. Whether the actions involve blocking coal trains or traffic, it has become increasingly clear that governments are willing to attack fundamental democratic rights to protect the interests of the fossil fuel industry and ensure business as usual—even in the face of climate catastrophe.

SA Labor's Minister for Energy and Mining, Tom Koutsantonis, told the APPEA conference that “The South Australian government is at your disposal, we are here to help”.

United response

The attacks on the right to protest have pushed unions and civil liberties groups to oppose the repression of climate protesters—in a model for how to respond.

Unions expressed outrage at the laws in SA. The union peak body SA Unions as well as the United Workers Union, Australian Services Union and Australian Education Union joined protests against the laws. SA Unions Secretary Dale Beasley criticised Labor's decision to pass the legislation, calling the bill “a mess of overreach and unconsidered consequences.”

Amnesty International, Human Rights Law Centre, the Conservation Council of SA and others also signed a statement against the laws.

Above: Unions and other activist groups joined climate activist to oppose the SA's government anti-protest laws

In NSW when Violet Coco was handed a 15-month jail sentence under the laws, there was opposition from unions, civil society groups, and the climate movement.

More than 230 organisations signed a statement condemning the sentence, including Unions NSW, Amnesty International, and the NSW Council for Civil Liberties. Rallies brought hundreds onto the streets, including significant union contingents.

Following this, Coco was released on bail after 11 days in prison, and the jail sentence was dropped altogether on appeal. Another 18 people arrested under the laws who have faced court have escaped with fines.

Some people are understandably looking to more drastic forms of action as a response to government inaction and the scale of the climate crisis. But disruptive action involving small numbers of activists does not have the power to stop the fossil fuel industry.

Governments are not introducing anti-protest laws because there is any major threat to the industry.

Anyone facing repression for such actions deserves solidarity. The real criminals are the fossil fuel bosses and the governments that aid them.

We need forms of protest that can draw larger numbers of people into action. Mass demonstrations involving tens of thousands of people, alongside mass civil disobedience of hundreds, should be the aim.

Action on this scale can encourage workers to go on strike for the climate. That is the sort of power that could strike down these rotten laws and hold the climate criminals to account.

Governments are willing to attack fundamental democratic rights to protect the interests of the fossil fuel industry

Labor falling short on women's equality and wages

By Caitlin Doyle

THE LABOR government has been talking up its commitment to women's rights since it came to power. Minister for Women Katy Gallagher called this year's federal budget "the most significant single year investment in women's equality in at least the last 40 years".

But with wages trailing behind the skyrocketing cost of living, coupled with decades of neoliberalism, life for the majority of women in Australia has gotten even harder over the past year.

The federal election result was clearly driven, in part, by a rejection of the Morrison government's sexism and disdain for women. In its final year in power the Coalition was plagued by sexual harassment and assault scandals, including a historical allegation against Minister Christian Porter and Brittany Higgins' claim that she was raped by a fellow Liberal staffer in MP Linda Reynolds' office.

Scott Morrison's inability to empathise with or understand the plight of women and girls, for whom sexism is a daily reality, alongside his open transphobia and homophobia, saw voters turn away from the Coalition.

Labor promised to increase pay for low-paid women workers, boost childcare subsidies and implement all 55 recommendations of the Respect@Work report.

The Albanese government has introduced some positive, but very limited changes for women.

From July this year, the government will increase childcare subsidies to cover up to 90 per cent of the cost. The is designed to allow women to work more hours and will mean savings of \$119 a fortnight for the average family.

Payments for single parents, 90 per cent of whom are women, will now continue until their youngest child is 14 rather than seven, partially reversing the Gillard Labor government's cut to the payments that originally lasted until they were 16. The punishing ParentsNext program has been abolished.

A draft Family Law Amendment Bill is designed to reduce the likelihood of children ending up in the care of abusive parents. And the government has pledged \$590 million towards ending violence against women, though this falls well short of



the \$1 billion annually that the sector says is needed to make a real difference.

Entrenched inequality

Much has been made of its decision to fund a 15 per cent pay rise for aged care workers, as well as changes to IR laws that allow multi-employer bargaining in the feminised sectors of aged, disability and early childhood care.

But these changes barely scratch the surface of the entrenched inequality and economic pain that women face.

Childcare costs in Australia are some of the highest in the developed world, at around 24 per cent of parents' earnings, compared with 1 per cent in Germany and 16 per cent in Canada.

Increased subsidies often trigger a rise in fees and some centres have already hiked fees since the announcement.

And around nine million people live in "childcare deserts", with over 3.3 children for every spot at a childcare centre.

The Labor government is not about to take the necessary step of nationalising childcare centres or nursing homes to increase places and decrease costs.

Years of stagnant, poverty-level wages have seen workers leaving both aged care and childcare in droves.

Albanese's IR reforms will allow unions covering the care sector to bargain with multiple employers, rather

Above: Early childhood educators protesting the appalling wages and lack of staff in the childcare sector last year

than individual companies. Unions can strike but the Fair Work Commission still has tight control over the process, and can impose all the usual restrictions on union action including ruling strikes illegal.

The 25 per cent pay increase that childcare unions want should be the minimum in an industry that has underpaid and undervalued its workers for decades. Childcare centres get most of their funding from the government, but there is still no commitment to boost funding to allow workers a wage rise.

Cuts and cost of living

The cost of renting across Australia has gone up by around 14 per cent in the past year, with units up 24 per cent in Sydney and 23 per cent in Melbourne. This will more than consume Labor's increases to rent assistance for those on welfare.

Labor is continuing to back the Stage Three tax cuts worth \$15.7 billion annually that will overwhelmingly benefit high-income men.

This is money that could be spent funding domestic violence services, on better and free aged care and childcare facilities and closing the 13 per cent gender pay gap.

It is clear that Labor is not going to deliver the changes that women need in the midst of a cost of living crisis or to confront the persistent consequences of sexism in our society. Instead we will need strikes and protests, and to push beyond restrictive IR laws.

.....
Around nine million people live in 'childcare deserts', with over 3.3 children for every spot at a childcare centre

Sexist backlash against Brittany Higgins and Australia's #MeToo movement

By James Supple

SELECTIVE LEAKING of text messages and other evidence has been used to try to discredit Brittany Higgins, as part of a backlash against demands for action on sexism. But the debate in Canberra has revealed how toxic sexism remains a problem—with Liberal Senator David Van now facing multiple sexual assault allegations.

Higgins helped spark the “March for justice” rallies nationwide, and a reckoning about sexism within Parliament House. This brought changes for parliamentary staff, and helped discredit the Liberals.

But without the power of an ongoing protest movement the sexist institutions of the police and the court systems have savaged Higgins, and are playing host to a backlash against Australia's #MeToo moment.

Bruce Lehrmann used an interview with Channel 7 to accuse Brittany Higgins of lying about her alleged rape in Parliament House. He claimed she told “a white lie to save a job” in the Minister's office, after they were both investigated for breaching security by entering the building at 1.40am.

Private text messages from Higgins' phone and a five hour recording made by Channel Ten were also leaked to the media. The evidence was collected under court orders but never used in any trial. The leak has caused outrage as an example of the way sexual assault survivors face public humiliation if they press charges in court—and the chilling effect on other women facing that decision.

Lehrmann faced trial but the case never returned a verdict, ending in a mistrial due to jury misconduct. He still maintains his innocence.

A retrial was abandoned after the ACT's Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP), Shane Drumgold, said it would mean “ongoing trauma” and create an “unacceptable risk to the life” of Brittany Higgins, amid concerns for her mental health.

Lehrmann is currently suing Channel Ten and journalist Lisa Wilkinson for defamation over their interview with Brittany Higgins that broke the story.

Sexist police

Further evidence of the police failure on sexual assault has surfaced at



Above: Brittany Higgins after the criminal trial collapsed

an inquiry into how the case was handled.

Police in the ACT were the worst in Australia at bringing sexual assault charges, it heard.

Their specialist sexual assault team charged someone in only 5 per cent of cases brought to them in 2020, with previous years even worse.

Police everywhere are notorious for their appalling handling of sexual assault. They frequently dismiss women who report rape and are unwilling to take action. Nationwide, out of 140,000 reports to police in the ten years to 2017, just 30 per cent led to an arrest, charges or a formal caution.

And 87 per cent of sexual assaults are not even reported, according to a 2016 survey.

Superintendent Scott Moller, who led the investigation of Brittany Higgins's assault, admitted that the ACT police sexual assault team was filled with “very young, inexperienced officers” who were “learning on the job”. Why this was the case in such an area is hard to understand.

The inquiry was launched following explosive allegations from Drumgold that police never wanted Lehrmann prosecuted, resulting in “a campaign of pressure from police” not to proceed.

Drumgold initially raised the possibility there was political pressure being applied to stop the case.

He conceded at the inquiry that a police “skills deficit”, or “atomic level stupidity” as he put it in a text

message to a colleague, was actually to blame. But this does nothing to diminish the police failures.

Drumgold described a brief of the evidence prepared by police as showing “stereotypical beliefs that there is a standard way a sexual assault victim would behave”.

Senior police were also seen huddled around Lehrmann's defence team in conversation on at least three occasions during the trial. Drumgold said this made him concerned they would “feed” the defence inaccurate information in an effort to derail the case.

Drumgold has accused ACT police of “potentially failing sexual assault complainants generally”.

Police have been using a more demanding test than was necessary, instead of referring cases to the DPP for a decision, Drumgold said. This meant they were potentially closing investigations prematurely.

The failure over sexual assault is a product of the sexism that is ingrained in the police.

Last year an inquiry concluded racism, sexism and misogyny were a “significant problem” within the Queensland police. Police were found to frequently ignore women reporting domestic violence, with numerous police officers abusers themselves.

It shows why we need an ongoing protest movement against the sexist institutions that fail women over sexual assault—and to beat back the wider sexism that means it is so widespread in the first place.

.....
The ACT police sexual assault team charged someone in only 5 per cent of cases brought to them in 2020

Dutton scapegoats migrants for housing crisis, but Labor has no answers

By Chris Breen

LIBERAL LEADER Peter Dutton used his budget reply speech to drum up racist scaremongering in a desperate bid to try and boost the Coalition's plummeting support.

He played up the fact that net migration was projected to increase "massively by 1.5 million people over five years". He linked the "migration surge" to the "housing and rental crisis", arguing immigration levels "will make a bad situation worse".

Dutton has form when it comes to racist scapegoating. In 2018 he blamed immigration for "gridlocked traffic", the state of hospital services and "overcrowded" cities. In 2016 he claimed refugees "steal Aussie jobs" and use up welfare spending.

The migration scare campaign won't be enough to revive the Coalition's flagging political fortunes, but it will encourage the far right and other racists. Open Nazis mobilised in Melbourne off the back of his comments.

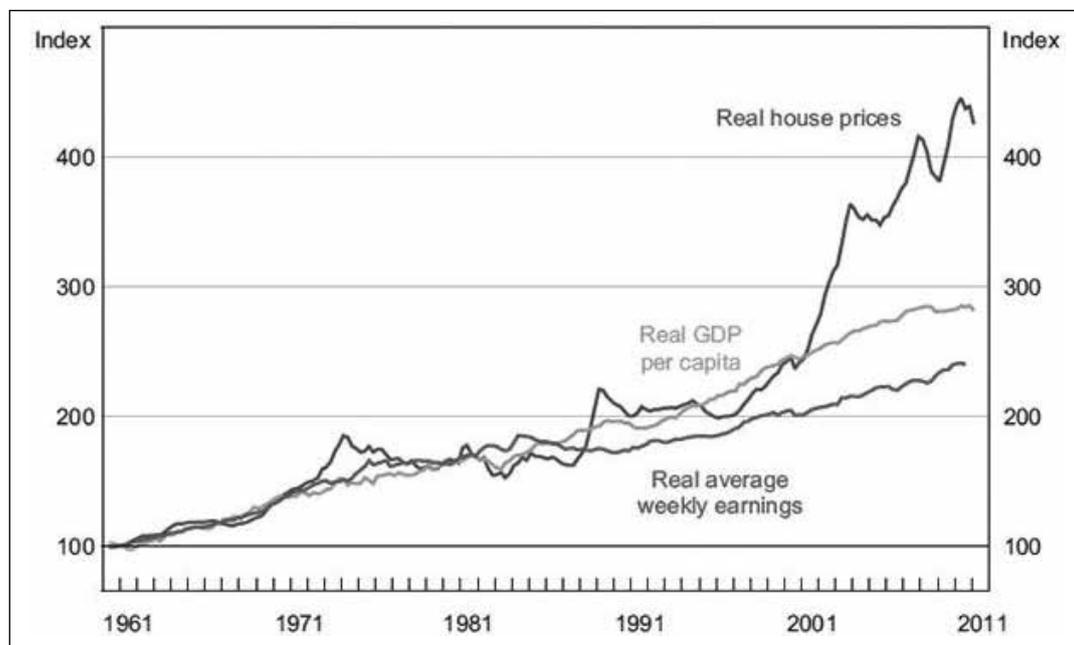
Prime Minister Anthony Albanese argued that it was important not to be sucked into a scare campaign over migration levels. But more than what Labor says, what matters is what it does. Dutton has a chance to get a hearing because Labor has no answers to the cost of living and housing crisis.

The projected higher migration figures reflect in part the re-opening of borders after the pandemic. By 2024 there will still be 215,000 fewer migrants than projected by the Coalition's budget in 2019—making Dutton a hypocrite and opportunist.

According to Brendan Coates from the Grattan Institute, 400,000 of the projected 1.5 million migrants over five years have already arrived. The migration level will fall to 315,000 next year and 260,000 the year after that.

As Coates comments, "Migration certainly means we need more homes. But how does a smaller population than was expected just four years ago lead to a rental crisis?"

The are several factors. First, there has been a long-term trend to smaller household size, which means more homes are needed. This is a result of more single households, fewer children per person and an aging population.



Above: Real house prices compared to real average weekly earnings and overall economic growth. There was a huge increase in house prices after John Howard's tax breaks for investors in 1999

It was accelerated by COVID, because people demanded more space, for instance an extra bedroom for an office, or moved out.

Average household size fell from 2.55 in 2020 to 2.45 in 2022. That might not sound like much, but it means an extra 275,000 houses are needed.

The National Housing Finance and Investment Corporation says single households are the fastest-growing type, with an additional 533,300 expected by 2033.

It said in March that migration and a slump in new housing construction would widen the shortfall of homes by only 40,000 over five years. Clearly household size has a bigger impact than migration.

Rich investors

A second factor is that already obscenely high house prices were boosted again by low interest rates during the pandemic. Increasing interest rates then put pressure on investors, who easily passed on the pressure as rent increases because of the shortage of housing supply.

Efforts by the Liberals to blame housing prices on migrants are particularly gross hypocrisy. It is rich investors who have driven prices to obscene levels. The real boom for investors came when Coalition Prime Minister John Howard removed limitations on negative gearing and halved capital

gains tax (CGT) in 1999.

Before the changes, about half of investors claimed a rental loss, compared to 70 per cent now. Negative gearing and capital gains concessions cost around \$25 billion per year, with 56 per cent of benefits going to the top 10 per cent of taxpayers.

Above all the housing crisis is a failure of government planning to build enough houses. Government knows the number of houses needed well in advance. Public housing has dropped from around 7 per cent of stock in 1991, to 4 per cent today.

Labor plans to build up to 39,000 social housing units over five years, with \$2 billion delivered to the states and a housing fund spending \$500 million per year. But there is already a social housing shortfall of 524,000 homes.

Labor will spend around \$30 million a day on nuclear submarines and about twice that on the Stage Three tax cuts. There is no lack of money.

The Greens are right to call for \$5 billion per year to be spent on social and affordable housing, a cap on rents, to phase out negative gearing and scrap the CGT discount. But it will take a fight to win this—uniting migrant and local workers.

The interests of local and migrant workers are exactly the same—for quality, affordable housing, union rights and a living wage.

.....
It is rich investors who have driven prices to obscene levels

PwC profiteering scandal exposes outsourcing obsession

By Tom Orsag

THE SCANDAL over PwC's attempt to profit from confidential government information has shone a light on the scale of government outsourcing.

Nine PwC partners have been stood down pending an internal investigation.

The accountancy/consultancy firm faces an effective ban from new contracts with federal and state governments and their agencies.

Senate hearings have revealed the federal government's reliance on the firm. *The Guardian* estimates that PwC had more than \$500 million in total contracts with the federal government last year.

The Reserve Bank has said it will not sign any new contracts with PwC "until it can demonstrate complete transparency". But it will allow PwC to continue to audit it, under an existing contract.

The Defence Department revealed that it has more than \$223 million of contracts with PwC.

The Home Affairs department has six active contracts worth \$8.13 million. Secretary Mike Pezzullo told the Senate Committee that he had "lost confidence in PwC" but would give the company "a chance to prove itself under its new leadership".

The Treasury Department has now referred PwC to the Federal Police (AFP) for criminal investigation, but only after 144 pages of incriminating PwC emails were tabled at a senate inquiry.

It turns out the AFP uses PwC for most of its auditing too, with \$20 million worth of contracts since 2021. AFP Commissioner Reece Kershaw said he saw no perceived "conflict of interest" in this, despite his old friend, former NSW Police Commissioner Mick Fuller, being a PwC partner.

Outsourcing

The public sector is now totally reliant on private consulting firms after 40 years of neoliberalism.

This has seen deliberate cutbacks of government services for workers and the poor to line the pockets of the rich. Private consultants like PwC and the other big three accounting firms—Deloitte, EY, KPMG—have profited handsomely.

All manner of service providers, from job placement firms, private law firms to the managers of offshore



detention centres, have been gorging at the public trough for years.

Total government spending—whether under Labor or Liberal governments—has risen slightly relative to the size of the economy over the past 20 years.

In 1999-2000, under John Howard's Liberal government, federal expenditure was 23.2 per cent of GDP and, pre-COVID, in 2018-2019 expenditure was 24.9 per cent. The Liberals have never lived up to their rhetoric about "reining in government spending".

However, government jobs and services have declined, with annual "efficiency dividend" cuts imposed on each and every department. So where is all the government money going?

In 2021-22, Scott Morrison's Liberal government spent a total of \$20.8 billion on consultants and service providers, the equivalent of 40 per cent of the cost of the 144,000 employees of the Australian Public Service.

As UNSW Associate Professor in Law, Scott Donald said, outsourcing has meant "parts of the public service have clearly been hollowed out".

This has meant the loss of both practical experience and technical knowledge.

Outsourcing was meant to be cheaper than doing the work in-house. But as the PwC scandal shows, private companies put their own interests above those of governments or the public. There is an inbuilt conflict of interest—with consulting firms' desire for more contracts and greater profits coming ahead of anything else.

Sometimes the public service doesn't have the knowledge to evalu-

ate the quality of the services contractors provide.

But often, consultants like PwC are deliberately hired to savage the workforce, offering management "strategies" to restructure, cut costs, and substitute marketing as an empty alternative to real services.

Criminal charges

The Australian Tax Office (ATO) became suspicious as long ago as 2016 that tax changes by well-known tax avoiders were due to insider information.

In 2018 the ATO and AFP decided there was not enough evidence for criminal charges against PwC.

Treasury officials told a senate inquiry they were first told of the possible breach of confidentiality in September 2018.

Treasury then quietly passed on information to the little-known Tax Practitioners Board.

It followed up and took the unusual step of banning a tax agent, Peter Collins, who was the key PwC partner with confidential information on planned tax avoidance changes, publishing the ban in December 2022.

PwC, from the start, tried to blame a lone partner. But dozens of staff received the inside information.

Greens Senator Barbara Pocock wants the more than 70 partners who were sent the original group email about the tax dodge PwC was going to sell companies to be named.

PwC is on the outer, with its business in tatters. But Labor is showing no desire to wind back the wider outsourcing and dismantling of the public sector.

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The public sector is now totally reliant on private consulting firms after 40 years of neoliberalism

Syriza and Podemos collapse as parliamentary focus fails

By Adam Adelpour

SPANISH AND Greek elections have seen the collapse of the once radical parties Podemos and Syriza. The results shows that the parliamentary road to change is a dead end for the radical left.

Podemos in Spain was decimated at regional and municipal elections in May. It lost all its councillors in Madrid, Valencia, Zaragoza, Tenerife, Burgos, Valladolid, Vigo and Coruna. Podemos' senior coalition partner, the Labor party-type PSOE, also suffered heavy losses. PSOE has called a snap general election in July to try and hold on to power.

In Greece, the left reformist party Syriza suffered humiliation, reduced to 20 per cent of the vote in May's national election. The right-wing New Democracy party has consolidated control of government.

The failure of Syriza

Syriza won the 2015 Greek election on an anti-austerity platform, sending shock-waves around Europe and the world.

It seemed a new radical left party had pushed aside PASOK, the equivalent of the Labor Party. PASOK was decimated after supporting austerity programs mandated by the "Troika"—the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund. The Troika had lent Greece money to bail out its banks when they faced collapse as a result of the global financial crisis—but workers had to foot the bill.

Syriza was carried into power by an immense wave of anti-austerity struggle between 2009 and 2014 which included 32 general strikes.

Its leader Alexis Tsipras told celebrating supporters on election night:

"You are an example of history which is changing... Your mandate is undoubtedly cancelling the bailouts of austerity and destruction."

But these hopes have been shattered. Within months, Syriza was implementing its own austerity measures, attacks on workers and racist border controls.

Syriza tried to re-negotiate with the Troika. But it found they had no interest in allowing it to abandon austerity and were determined to punish Syriza to send a message to all those hoping to end austerity measures. Syriza announced a referendum on



their demand for more cuts and 61 per cent voted "Oxi", no to austerity.

But instead of using this mandate to defy the Troika Syriza accepted further austerity. They increased the retirement age and health charges and cut public services like schools. Four years later in 2019 they lost government.

This allowed the right-wing New Democracy to take power. They look set to win outright majority government in the next round of voting on 25 June.

Podemos collapses

Podemos has its origins in the massive rebellion of the 15M movement in Spain in 2011 and 2012. Anger at austerity and evictions erupted into a powerful protest movement of the "indignant" that occupied public squares.

Podemos (meaning "We Can") was launched in 2014. Its aim was to channel the anger on the streets into parliament, promising to "Turn indignation into political change".

Initially it hoped to replace the mainstream Spanish social democratic party, PSOE. Podemos won control of many important local administrations including Madrid and Barcelona. But when its vote faltered and hopes of power in its own right faded, it joined a coalition government as junior partner to the PSOE in 2019.

The results have been catastrophic. Spain's coalition government is pouring money into the military while ordinary people suffer from a cost of living crisis.

In June 2022 Spain hosted the NATO summit and agreed to massive-

Above: An enormous strike in Greece following the train disaster earlier this year shows the prospects for struggle remain

ly increase its defence budget. Spain has sent military aid to the bloodbath in Ukraine and increased troop deployments in Eastern Europe.

The left's failures are opening the door to the far right. The fascist Vox party doubled its votes compared to the 2019 municipal elections and is now represented in all of Spain's regional parliaments.

The failure of Syriza and Podemos shows it is not possible to win serious change through parliament. The inspiring struggles in the streets and workplaces that followed the global financial crisis show the way to build the power that can win—by fighting outside parliament, not by sitting inside it.

These struggles continue. Immediately before the recent election in Greece there was enormous anger at the right-wing government following a huge train crash caused by privatisation. "Almost 30 per cent of the Greek population was involved in strikes," Petros Constantinou from the Greek SEK, Solidarity's sister organisation, said.

"This led to a general strike on 8 March. But Syriza didn't escalate the struggle, it tried to stop it. It opposed demands to renationalise the railway. All these people are still angry, but there is no visible alternative to them."

It is strike movements and working class resistance that hold the hope for change. We need socialist organisation that focuses on building struggle to confront the economic devastation, war and climate crisis spawned by the system. If the radical left doesn't give a lead it will be the far right that makes the political running.

The failure of Syriza and Podemos shows it is not possible to win serious change through parliament

Ukraine counter-offensive will deliver months of bloodshed

By Luke Ottavi

UKRAINIAN PRESIDENT Volodymyr Zelensky has confirmed that his country's long-awaited counter-offensive is under way.

Mainstream Western analysts are cheering on Ukrainian attempts to take back territory lost since Russia's brutal invasion. But there will be a huge human cost, with only a slim likelihood that Ukraine will actually succeed.

Ukraine's total dependence on Western arms and training shows the proxy-war nature of the conflict.

In the lead up to the counter-offensive whole Ukrainian units have been sent to Germany, the UK, and other NATO countries to be trained and equipped with NATO weapons and advanced warfare tactics.

Ukrainian Defence Minister Oleksii Reznikov has said Ukrainian soldiers have been taught "how to operate simultaneously together... among the different units" for offensive operation so tanks, fighting vehicles, artillery and infantry can work together. Australian troops have also been helping train Ukrainian soldiers in the UK.

In March Zelensky said that the counter-offensive relied on the West delivering support saying, "We are waiting for ammunition to arrive from our partners" as well as "tanks, artillery and long-range rockets".

Ukrainian divisions have been supplied with German-made Leopard 1 and Leopard 2 tanks from Poland, Spain, Norway, Sweden, Finland and Germany itself, German Marder Infantry Fighting Vehicles, British Challenger-2 tanks and US Bradley fighting vehicles.

The main thrust of the counter-offensive was still to begin at the time of writing, with Ukrainian forces yet to force Russia back to its main defensive lines.

We can expect an absolute bloodbath through the deaths of Ukrainian and Russian soldiers, adding to more than 100,000 already killed.

Russia's defensive lines are highly fortified with extensive anti-tank and anti-infantry minefields, anti-tank trenches, and infantry trenches crisscrossing hundreds of kilometres of contested territory.

Doubts

A stated objective of the counter-offensive is to cut off Russia's "land



bridge" that connects Russia to Crimea—an area annexed by Russia in 2014 which is crucial to the Russian Navy. But there are serious doubts about Ukraine's ability to retake significant areas of territory.

The *Financial Times* reported that "behind closed doors, some top officials in Kiev have struck what one of them described as a 'very realistic and very pragmatic' tone, conceding that it is unlikely Ukraine will be able to retake all occupied land from Russia."

In the first weeks of the counter-offensive Ukraine quickly lost a number of Bradleys and Leopard 2 tanks.

Western officials told *The Guardian* there would be "grinding costly warfare likely for many months to come". The war has become a war of attrition between two armies dug into trenches that resemble the First World War.

And even if Ukraine were to threaten to take Crimea, there are fears Russia would use "tactical" nuclear weapons to avoid outright defeat—some of which are being positioned in Belarus.

Along with the death toll, the environment has suffered enormously, with the Kakhovka Dam, one of the largest dams in Europe, being blown up and wreaking havoc for hundreds of thousands affected by the flood waters.

Whilst Russia is likely responsible, Ukraine's own propensity for environmental destruction in the name of military gains should not be forgotten.

The *Washington Post* published evidence from US intelligence docu-

Above: Ukraine quickly lost a number of tanks and Bradley fighting vehicles in the first weeks of fighting

ments released as part of the Discord leaks that show the US knew Ukraine was planning the sabotage of the Nord Stream gas pipelines, which may be the largest ever methane leak into the atmosphere in a single event.

The West's concerns are not with the lives of ordinary Ukrainians, but rather to secure their own power in an increasingly contested world.

The US wants to see Russia weakened militarily, economically, and geo-politically, and to see NATO allies further wedded to US foreign policy.

It is also hoping to send a message to China about the costs of challenging US power. In early June US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said explicitly, "we believe that Beijing is taking notice that, far from being intimidated by a forceful violation of the UN Charter, the world has rallied to defend it."

The Australian government is likely to announce further weapons deliveries to Ukraine at the NATO summit in July, on top of over \$500 million in military aid so far.

Instead of sending more weapons to continue the slaughter and fuel the war, Australia should be pushing the US, Russia, and Ukraine to negotiate an end to the conflict.

We need to build an anti-war movement to oppose Australia's support for the war as well as the more than \$368 billion dollars going towards AUKUS and nuclear submarines—which are part of preparing a possible war with China.

Western officials told *The Guardian* there would be 'grinding costly warfare likely for many months to come'

TRANSPHOBIA RUNS DEEPER THAN ANTI-TRANS BIGOTS

Transphobic mobilisations must be opposed, writes **Sophie Cotton**, but this should be linked to a fight against the broader institutional transphobia in the political mainstream

A RECENT spike in transphobia has seen drag show readings, a prominent queer comedy show and protests cancelled or postponed due to safety concerns or police advice.

While it's understandable that individual councils faced with the vitriol of the transphobic right for the first time may have these reactions, the fact remains that the LGBTIQ movement and supporters need to stand up and defend the right of trans and gender diverse people to exist.

Happily, we're already beginning to see community organisers standing up to the bigotry, loud and proud.

But to really win change will need further-reaching struggle. Far from accepting the idea that queer events can now only be safe online, we need a militant movement for trans rights against the bigots but which also mobilises to fight the structural roots of transphobia.

When Yarra Plenty Regional Council in Melbourne moved a drag story time online, they cited the "safety of our rainbow families and staff" after threats of far-right protests. Reuben Kaye postponed his comedy show in Sydney due to "the audience's safety, the other comedians' safety, my safety, my band's safety and the safety of the businesses on Enmore Road", after threats of protest from so-called "Christian Lives Matter".

These threats are a concerning political trend of right-wing intimidation that must be addressed.

We can't allow the fear of bigots' protests to become disabling and deliver the right-wing what they wanted in the first place: queer events getting shut down.

The old union saying is: if you don't fight you lose. You can only win if you are prepared to stand up to bigotry.

"Timberlina", a First Nations drag

queen, admitted to *Mamamia* to being afraid after protesters announced they would target her monthly drag story time event. But she decided to go ahead with the event, or in her words "absolutely turning up" in the face of "hate and outdated views".

In response, hundreds of locals showed up outside Newcastle library in a celebration and demonstration of support for the LGBTIQ community, wearing glitter and face paint, rainbow and trans flags. The handful of anti-gay protesters left early to avoid the celebratory scene.

There have been similar mobilisations around the country. After anti-gay activists destroyed hundreds of copies of the queer edition of the student newspaper, the Sydney University Queer Action Collective not only organised a reprint, but also a protest on campus to demonstrate support for the LGBTIQ community.

And in Melbourne a group of "Rainbow Angels" have donned giant angel wings to visually protect kids and families from the isolated and dwindling number of bigots who come to protest these events.

Every example of queer culture that stands up to these bigots shows the deep vein of support that exists for LGBTIQ people. Not only can we continue in a tradition of out and proud queer community and culture, we can turn around the right-wing attacks, so that it is the bigots who are afraid and skulking away, not gay and trans people!

Why counter-protests aren't enough

It can be tempting to see the bigots from the far right or transphobic feminists as the main villains responsible for transphobia, and therefore as the main transphobic threat.

But counter-protests alone won't

Trans people face discrimination across all facets of society

dismantle the structural and institutional transphobia that breeds the individual instances of bigotry.

These latest spikes in transphobia haven't come from nowhere. They come directly from the political mainstream—primarily the new obsession of the Republican right in the US, which has introduced a record-breaking 558 anti-trans bills across the country so far this year alone. And it's this onslaught of anti-trans politics that has fed the confidence of bigots here in Australia.

Australia's political elite are not so different. Former Prime Minister Scott Morrison experimented several times with the same brand of activist transphobia, from his gender whisperer comments in 2018 and his "Religious Discrimination Bill" to his parachuting of outspoken anti-trans feminist Katherine Deves into the seat of Warringah.

Until recently, the "Gender" section of *The Australian* newspaper was dedicated to anti-trans articles. As recently as June, it published a shocking article claiming that the two 15-year-olds who killed transgender woman Brianna Ghey in the UK had been "ignored" as victims, and that the "trans lobby" and "extreme trans activism" had "destroyed" their lives.

The fact that each attempt saw Morrison and the Liberals fall flat on their faces was thanks to the level of social support for LGBTIQ rights built over years of campaigning, and particularly the strength of the social movements and unions that won us marriage equality.

But even with the Liberals kicked out of federal and all mainland state governments, there are deeper roots of transphobia to contend with.

Structural transphobia

Trans people face discrimination across all facets of society. This is an

extension of the sexism and homophobia that permeates capitalism. Our entire society is organised around sex segregation; at work, in families, schools and sports, and this is reinforced in laws and by the media. Rigid sex roles and stereotypes are everywhere, and closely policed.

There are huge obstacles to being trans, from barriers to transition, barriers to the workplace, and barriers to public life altogether.

This includes the disgraceful NSW law forcing transgender people to undergo a “surgical procedure involving the alteration of a person’s reproductive organs” and to have this examined by two doctors in order to legally change their gender.

Queensland introduced changes in June to remove a similar requirement, allowing people to change their gender by providing a supporting statement from someone they have known for more than 12 months.

Forcing trans people to undergo surgery to be legally recognised is a barbaric practice that encourages misgendering across society.

For those transgender people who may choose to “medically transition”, by undergoing surgery, hormonal treatments or other procedures, the costs are often prohibitively expensive. Many gender affirming procedures are classed as “cosmetic” and are not covered by Medicare.

On top of that, most workplaces do not provide sufficient gender affirmation leave to allow you to affordably access medical care. Surgeries can cost tens of thousands of dollars and can require six or more weeks of leave, during which time people often lose employment and are forced to request Centrelink payments.

As if that wasn’t enough, religious institutions including schools and other services still have the right to fire staff and expel students for their gender identity, sexuality or even pregnancy and marital status.

The federal Labor government has delayed any changes to this, with a law reform inquiry not even due to report until the end of this year.

Discriminatory attitudes can make getting a job while being openly trans extremely difficult. A survey of 1000 employers in the UK by Crossland Solicitors found transphobic attitudes are rife among bosses.

One in three admitted to being “less likely” to hire a trans person, with just 24 per cent suggesting they would (the remainder were “unsure”). This was even higher in service facing jobs, with almost half of retail



Above: The crowd supporting drag story time performer Tiberlina outside Newcastle library after she was targeted by anti-trans bigots

employers admitting it was unlikely they’d hire a trans person.

It’s unsurprising then that trans people are overwhelmingly excluded from the formal economy. A 2020 survey of trans and gender diverse people in Australia found that just 52 per cent were formally employed. Trans people were more likely than the population at large to rely financially on government support, partners or friends, or sex work.

This officially mandated transphobia trickles down throughout society, encouraging transphobic policies across institutions and individuals. And the realities of trans oppression are used by transphobic politicians to push bigotry that is parroted across the mainstream press and by the people consuming it.

All of this fans the flames of the everyday transphobia trans people face, from being misgendered by family or coworkers, being harassed on the street, or cisnormative comments and assumptions from friends.

Labor plays both sides

Just because Labor by and large avoids the kind of brazen anti-trans nonsense of Scott Morrison and the Liberals, we cannot lose sight of the fact that they are presiding over a transphobic system, and that “neutrality” is not possible.

Albanese’s strategy has been to attempt to avoid the trans question as much as possible, trying to walk an impossible line between being neither “too pro-trans” nor “too anti-trans”. He was the first Prime Minister to march in the highly corporatised Mardi Gras, but courts right-wing praise by refusing to confront leading questions that tacitly suggest that trans people don’t exist.

In his recent interview with British

journalist Piers Morgan, he dodged a leading question as to the definition of a woman, a far right talking point aiming to show that transgender women should not be considered women, calling women “adult human females”.

With Labor now in power federally and in every mainland state, they have the power to repeal every transphobic law on the books, provide free Medicare for trans healthcare, and to make efforts to stamp out transphobia, including through restoring the Safe Schools program.

As long as transphobic laws are sitting on the books, and systemic transphobia proliferates unabated, the spikes in transphobia from the far right and the Liberal Party are inevitable. The only way to squash the hardcore bigots is to turn our eyes on the transphobic mainstream and attack the problem from its root.

We simply cannot afford to let Anthony Albanese and state premiers including NSW’s Chris Minns off the hook on trans rights—and there should certainly not be a place for transphobic “debate” in The Greens.

Trans people need more than platitudes and statements about inclusivity. They need action on structural transphobia, which has far worse consequences for trans people than the idiotic tweets of the most vicious transphobic feminist.

The right-wing always complains about “radical” trans activists. But what the word “radical” actually means is to grasp something by its roots.

This is exactly the radicalism we need right now: one that connects the fight against the most explicit bigotry to the fight against the mainstream politicians, bosses, and media moguls who plant the seeds of transphobia.

BANNING THE BOMBS AT MARALINGA IN THE COLD WAR'S SHADOW

As Australia became the test site for nuclear weapons in the 1950s, opposition developed through the unions and a new peace movement, writes **Lucy Honan**

THE FIRST nuclear bomb detonated at Maralinga in South Australia had as much explosive strength as the bomb the US dropped on Hiroshima. From 1952 to 1963 the Australian government welcomed the UK's Atomic Weapons Researchers' testing program, which poisoned people, land and water, rendering some places uninhabitable for a quarter of a million years.

But the weapons testing program met resistance even before it went nuclear. Despite the repressive and confusing fog of Cold War, the peace movement had success derailing much of the testing program in the 1960s.

As the Australian government looks to the same Aboriginal lands in the South Australian desert to dump nuclear waste from the AUKUS submarines, we can draw on the traditions this movement developed to pick up the fight for nuclear disarmament today.

Weapons frenzy

Britain emerged from the Second World War in a rearmament frenzy. Despite a war traumatised population, with infrastructure destroyed and bread rationing in place, the Atlee Labour government's priority was spending any amount necessary to develop terrifying weapons to maintain its waning position as world power.

In 1946, the USA excluded Britain from its nuclear technology secrets, blaming British scientists for spy rings and leaks to Russia, and consolidating its own exceptional power.

The Australian Labor government had its own fantasies that hosting the development of Britain's weapons would give Australia access to nuclear technology and potentially even nuclear weapons, conferring more power to throw around in the region. So Britain and Australia began their collaboration testing weapons in the

Central Australian desert in 1946.

Working-class organisations were the first to respond, enraged by the obvious threat to Aboriginal people, the waste of resources and fears of yet another global war.

The South Australian Trades and Labour Council passed a resolution calling for abandonment of the program as did the Waterside Workers Federation, Building Workers Industrial Union, Hotel Club and Restaurant Employees, Sheet Metal Workers, Boiler Makers and NSW Nurses.

Labor Prime Minister Chifley admitted that there was plenty of opposition to the weapons program from within the Labor Party.

Unionists, Quakers, the Women's Christian Temperance Union, the Howard Reform League, Aborigines "Friends" Societies, the Council of Churches, the Socialist League, the Federation of Scientific Workers, the Communist Party of Australia (CPA) and others came together to form campaign committees against the rocket range across the country.

Some 1300 attendees at the Melbourne Rocket Range Protest Committee meeting in March 1947 almost unanimously endorsed a call "to abandon the rocket project in the interests of the aborigines [sic] and world peace".

Cold War

The CPA's membership was in free fall after the war but it still had more than 12,000 members in 1947 who looked with hope to the rotten example of Stalin and the Soviet Union.

The CPA opposed the British testing program and any bombs designed to threaten Russia.

But it was also committed to the politics of "national self-defence" following the USSR's example, so it supported Australia's acquisition of weapons technology.

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The South Australian Trades and Labour Council passed a resolution calling for abandonment of the program

These twisted politics meant the CPA organised working class resistance into action, only to discredit and misdirect it.

Having urged its members to agitate against the testing program, unions where CPA members had influence began to declare bans on building the rocket range; in March 1947 the federal council of the Operative Painters and Decorators Union called on its branches to enforce a ban on Woomera (the site chosen for the testing base).

By early May the Victorian Building Trades Federation called for a total union ban on Woomera, and this was endorsed by the South Australian building unions.

But given the prevailing atmosphere of red-baiting, these unions were too easy to discredit as tools of the Soviet Union. The ACTU stomped on the proposal and the ALP and right-wing unions claimed the ban was imposed at the behest of the Soviet Union.

Isolated, the CPA's central committee issued a statement that the party was not opposed to the defence of Australia and the Victorian state CPA conference now declared opposition to the ban.

Metal workers' union leader and leading CPA member Tom Wright put the conservative position bluntly: "Left wing union leaders must support proper measures for the defence of Australia, including knowledge and possession of rocket weapons."

This retreat into nationalism did not prevent the ALP government from rushing through the Approved Defence Projects Protection Bill in June 1947—a gag that made it illegal for people or organisations to critically comment on the nation's defence policy.

Despite objections from the rocket range protest committees, civil liberties groups and the ACTU, the gag legislation was effective for a time

at muting opposition to the testing program.

Labor went on to menace the left with its new spy agency ASIO. In 1951 the Liberals were elected. Menzies generated a hurricane of anti-communist hysteria and Labor underwent a paralysing anti-communist civil war of its own.

Politically compromised and subject to permanent hostility though it was, the CPA continued to carve out a space for anti-war activity.

In 1950, the Australian Peace Council (APC), the party's next project, held a Peace Congress at the Exhibition Centre in Melbourne with thousands of attendees.

Retreating from direct critique of Australia's testing program, it launched the Stockholm Appeal, initiated by Eastern Bloc communists, which called for a global ban on atomic weapons.

Activists went door to door with the petition, handed out placards and, when these were deemed illegal, wore aprons with Ban the Bomb slogans. Some 200,000 Australians signed the petition and 500 million people signed it worldwide before nuclear testing had begun in Australia.

Nuclear announcement

The APC lost credibility by defending Russian nuclear tests as a defensive response to testing in the West, and lost relevance when it failed to respond to Menzies' announcement in February 1952 that Britain would test atomic weapons in Australia.

But the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) was willing to confront the Australian ruling class squarely, and immediately called a public meeting which expressed "its emphatic disapproval of the use of the atomic bomb anywhere and particularly an atom bomb in Australia."

Margaret Tucker, an Indigenous speaker at the protest meeting, said, "The government has said the tests won't hurt a living thing, but my people are the last who would believe government promises."

As the nuclear testing continued on the Montebello islands in Western Australia and in Emu Field and Maralinga in South Australia, public opposition built, from 52 per cent approving of Australia hosting the tests in 1952 to 58 per cent disapproving of them in 1956.

Peace congresses, conventions and conferences continued attracting thousands of participants.

A sense of personal danger



Above: A British army officer at Maralinga during nuclear bomb tests in 1956

informed public opinion as 9000 scientists across the world and 350 scientists in Australia called for a ban in view of "the threat facing humanity through the development of nuclear weapons".

Government lies that "no Aboriginal people will be harmed" were exposed when the public saw footage of British service personnel discovering Anangu woman Edie Milpuddie and her family camped on the edge of the Marcoo bomb crater.

The family were roughly showered, their dogs were shot in front of them and then they were driven off to a mission in the south. Edie was pregnant and later lost her child.

A Western Australian investigation in the Warburton ranges exposed the brutal impact of land theft for weapons testing.

Activists screened films across the country showing the devastating malnutrition, exploitation, lack of hunting grounds, and inadequate water supplies, all caused by the loss of Aboriginal land at the Maralinga test ground and the associated Giles weather station.

Breaking open Labor

A breakthrough in the ALP and the unions came in 1958. The ACTU, trades and labour councils and unions became active in the anti-nuclear protests, supporting not just the call to "ban the bomb", but also now calling to ban British bomb tests in Australia.

The ALP encouraged members to join national demonstrations against the British tests and the Victorian ALP journal, *Tocsin*, launched "La-

bor's Atomic Week" of educational activities leading up to a protest.

The "New Left" emerged as many CPA members left the party in the wake of Russia's invasion of Hungary in 1956.

More groups formed, like the UK-inspired Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament or CND, which called for unilateral disarmament rather than negotiations between the superpowers, putting the finger more firmly on our own government. They organised vibrant street protests and defiant stunts, and breathed new life into the anti-nuclear campaign.

The Cuban missile crisis in 1962, which saw the US and the Soviet Union confront each other over Russian nuclear missiles in Cuba, vindicated the movement, proving how close to nuclear destruction the two superpowers could bring the planet.

In the face of global opposition to the nuclear arms race and testing, Britain, the United States and the Soviet Union signed the *Partial Nuclear Test Ban Treaty* on 6 August 1963, banning all atmospheric testing.

This was effectively the end of the nuclear testing program at Maralinga, though the devastating contamination and effects of dispossession are as live as ever today.

Australia's reckless investment in the AUKUS pact as part of a cold war-style arms race against China delivers us into tragically familiar terrain.

But the fight to end nuclear weapons testing at Maralinga shows that working class organisations have the power to fight our government's nuclear ambitions to a standstill.

CRISIS, CAPITALISM AND CATASTROPHE

Maeve Larkins reviews a new book by Marxist writer Alex Callinicos that analyses the succession of crises facing the world—and the prospects for catastrophe and revolt

HUMANITY FACES several intersecting crises: Worsening global warming, pandemic, superpower rivalry between the US and China, an increasingly fragile global economy, and the return of the far right.

These crises each exacerbate the others. Alex Callinicos's new book *The new age of catastrophe* sets out to show how capitalism as an economic and social system is responsible for this new age of catastrophe.

Despite this bleak picture, he points to the recent eruptions of mass movements like Black Lives Matter as a source of hope. As Callinicos writes, "The age of catastrophe is also an age of revolt, and therein lies our hope for the future."

It is a valuable book for anyone seeking to understand the current state of the world, and what can be done to avoid disaster.

The prospect of catastrophe is nowhere more clear than with climate change, which is already causing more frequent fires, floods and other disasters. Accelerating, runaway climate change poses a real threat of worldwide "starvation, destruction, migration, disease and war".

As Callinicos writes, it is crucial that we understand the climate crisis as a product of capitalism. Competition between firms means there is a "pressure to minimize costs... encourag[ing] firms to focus on whatever measures will bring profitability".

Any business that takes on higher costs to safeguard nature won't be able to compete. A complete transition away from fossil fuels would also force companies to write off trillions of dollars of fossil fuel investments—threatening vast wealth.

Increasingly, states have begun to encourage a transition to renewable energy.

However imperialist rivalries prevent a transition on the scale and speed necessary, because any state that imposes the costs involved on its

economy "will be disadvantaged in comparison to their rivals elsewhere."

Imperialism

In recent years there has been a global military buildup unlike anything since the Second World War. The war in Ukraine has led to an estimated 100,000 deaths. The US has committed around \$75 billion aid to Ukraine, the vast bulk of it for Ukraine's military.

But the bigger contest is between the US and China, which are increasingly locked in both economic and military competition. There is a real prospect of war over Taiwan. China hopes to eventually push the US military back from the Indo-Pacific, which has become "the main hub of global capitalism, representing about 40 per cent of global GDP."

Callinicos argues that the war in Ukraine must be understood in this context. The US bankrolling of the Ukrainian military, in a proxy war against Russia, is a warning to China that any invasion of Taiwan would come at an enormous cost—both militarily and in financial sanctions such as those used against Russia.

The war has also served to shore up US military alliances, particularly with the EU.

Germany, for instance, has pledged \$100 billion to upgrade its military. All the across the EU, and other US allies like Japan, the war in Ukraine has led to substantial increases in military spending.

On the other hand, only the US's core allies have supported economic sanctions against Russia. Significant economies including India, South Africa and Brazil, along with China and most of the Global South, have refused. The shows how the world threatens to divide into rival economic blocs.

Among the advantages the US has over China its dominance of technology industries. The US has sought

Economic stagnation is causing widespread disillusionment in the establishment parties of capitalism

to protect this technological edge by denying China access to advanced semiconductor chips made with US equipment, and "to block Beijing's plans to upgrade its industries from low-wage manufacturing final assembly to hi-tech".

These industries also include "the new products crucial to a capitalism that adapts to climate change."

Economic crisis

Underlying the imperialist tensions is China's economic growth in the face of the US stagnation.

Since the 1980s, there has been a succession of economic crises including the 1997 Asian financial crisis, the 2001 dotcom bubble, the 2007 Global Financial Crisis, and the crisis caused by the pandemic in 2020.

Underlying this is the decline in profit rates since the end of the post-war boom in the 1970s.

The neoliberal economic policies implemented globally were a response to this, "forcing up the rate of exploitation through an offensive against organized labour".

In Australia, this involved the Hawke-Keating Labor governments of the 1980s restraining strikes and eroding trade union organisation, culminating in the system of enterprise bargaining which has enormously constrained strike action.

But this has failed to completely restore capitalist profitability.

More recently the US economy has relied on a series of financial bubbles which, Callinicos writes, "acted, in the absence of a robust recovery of the rate of profit, as a mechanism for stimulating effective demand." Debt and credit have become crucial to driving economic growth.

But the problem with financial bubbles is that they inevitably burst.

This has led to a fragile global economy, where a major shock to the system threatens to collapse the enormous mountains of debt. Callini-

cos discusses how one major effect of this has been for states to increasingly rely on central banks and direct state intervention for crisis management.

Protecting “too-big-to-fail” mega-corporations and banks from collapsing has also created immense dead-weights in the global economy. This is also a problem for China, as the Evergrande crisis of 2021 shows.

The far right

Callinicos also discusses how economic stagnation is causing widespread disillusionment in the establishment parties of capitalism. Worsening inequality and austerity has produced discontent that has been exploited by far-right populists like Donald Trump in the US and Georgia Meloni in Italy. The figures scapegoat refugees, migrants, and LGBTIQ people for the crises facing the working class.

However, Callinicos draws a distinction between parties or leaders such as Meloni who enjoy mainstream electoral success today and classical fascist organizations.

Today’s far right do not possess mass paramilitary organisations that could be mobilised against trade unions, refugees or other minorities. Nor do capitalists face the existential threat of workers’ revolution as they did in the 1920s and 1930s that made them willing to hand state control to violent fascist parties.

But the success of far-right populism has led to what Callinicos calls a “blurring” of “the boundaries between mainstream conservative, populist-racist, and outright fascist formations” which has led to “populist radical right (and even some extreme right) ideas [being] openly debated in mainstream circles”.

As a consequence, harder far right and fascist organisations have a chance to grow.

The pandemic provided an indication of the way the far right could seek to capitalise on catastrophe. In Australia as elsewhere, the far right sought to organise within the anti-lockdown “freedom movement”.

This was bolstered by the majority of the left giving uncritical support to punitive lockdown measures, such as curfews or workplace vaccine mandates. These were particularly weaponised against migrant communities, in an effort to use racist scapegoating to distract from the government’s mismanagement of the pandemic and under-funded hospitals and health infrastructure unfit for an adequate health response.

The result was that the far right



Above: Rapidly accelerating climate change is just one of the potential catastrophes facing human society

was able to capitalise on the discontent about lockdowns unchallenged. While there is little evidence that fascist organisations grew substantially as a result, far right activists have flowed into recent actions against trans rights and Drag Queen story events in Melbourne.

As the intersecting crises worsen and intensify, there is a danger the far right will become a more serious threat.

Social movements

Callinicos counterposes the rise of the right with the simultaneous emergence of mass movements against social oppressions like racism in the Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests of 2020.

At its highest point, BLM produced thousands of protests across the US against police violence and racism.

The BLM uprising of 2020 was the largest protest movement in US history and inspired anti-racist struggles across the world.

Callinicos argues that a major backdrop to BLM was the disproportionate devastation that the pandemic had on Black communities, alongside the growing dominance of insecure employment. As a consequence, BLM took on a wider political significance, with the potential to target not only police brutality, but issues of precarious labour and housing insecurity.

Callinicos argues that there is therefore a potential for movements like BLM to link with labour movements, and in doing so, push trade

unions into broader political action. Workers’ strike action would also provide these social movements with much greater power, through the ability to shut down the flow of capitalist profits.

A major factor behind the far right’s ability to benefit from rising discontent has been, Callinicos writes, “The large-scale failure of mainstream social-democratic parties and trade unions to resist austerity.”

The withering of the strength of working class organisation and militancy as a product of the neoliberal assault has led to an increase in bureaucratisation, and to union leaders becoming further integrated into establishment parties.

The uptick of workers’ strikes we have seen following the pandemic in France, the UK and the US shows that workers are still capable of mass resistance. A revival in working class militancy will be vital to ensueing the polycrisis facing the world does not end in disaster.

The effect of worsening climate crises, deepening austerity, and widening inequality is creating a situation where “Growing numbers of people are confronted with drastic deterioration in their material conditions... at the same time the dominant elites are discredited both as a result of their mismanagement of the situation and because they give priority to protecting and enriching themselves.”

The crises that threaten to devastate us also provide the possibility of mass resistance and revolution.

The new age of catastrophe
By Alex Callinicos
Polity, \$38

LAST REFUGEES LEAVE BUT LABOR WON'T CLOSE NAURU

By Ian Rintoul

AS *SOLIDARITY* goes to press there are just seven refugees left on Nauru, with the final few expected to be transferred to Australia by the end of June. For the last several months, Labor has been transferring the remaining refugees and asylum seekers off the island.

Like everything associated with offshore detention, it has been an opaque and torturous process. Some refugees staged protests, and even sewed their lips shut, when it seemed not everyone was going to be transferred.

More recently those transferred have been held in hotel detention for a few weeks (but sometimes inexplicably for months!) in the Meriton hotel in Brisbane before their release, usually forced to support themselves, on bridging visas.

Despite almost ten years in offshore detention, refugees are told they will never be allowed to permanently resettle in Australia.

But Labor is not closing Nauru. While it is expected that no refugees will be on Nauru after 30 June, the Labor government is paying US private prison company, Management and Training Corporation (MTC) more than \$422 million to keep Nauru “open” until September 2025.

And Labor is doing nothing to get the remaining 82 refugees out of PNG, despite their mental and physical health being worse than those on Nauru. Albanese is leaving them to rot.

Too sick to be a refugee

Of the 82 still in PNG, 33 have no pathway to permanent resettlement. Another 21 are in the increasingly uncertain pathway to the US or Canada. No one has been resettled in the US for several years and three who had been accepted to Canada were recently rejected at the final stage of processing.

Labor, following the Morrison government, insists that it has no duty-of-care for refugees in PNG. There is a formal agreement to allow Australian refugees in PNG to be referred to New Zealand by the UNHCR, but there is a Catch-22. Those who are too unwell to



Above: Refugees have been tortured on Nauru for ten years since arriving in 2013

engage with the UNHCR are arguably the ones who need resettlement most urgently. But their inability to engage renders them ineligible.

One refugee who recently attempted to self-immolate had been considered too unwell to be interviewed. Yet the UNHCR did call him after his suicide attempt. Will he be referred to New Zealand? No one knows.

What we do know is that it was Labor’s offshore policy that held him in detention, killed his hope and destroyed his health. Labor has a particular responsibility to bring the refugees from PNG to Australia.

Labor’s legacy

It was the Rudd Labor government that negotiated the Pacific Solution II in 2013 that banned refugees sent offshore from ever settling in Australia.

Instead of dismantling mandatory, offshore and indefinite detention, the Albanese government has enshrined them as the centrepiece of Labor’s policy.

Labor is still enforcing boat turn-backs. It scaremongers about boat arrivals but does nothing to ensure there are safe pathways to get protection in Australia. Despite announcing that all 19,000 refugees on Temporary Protection Visas or SHEVs will be granted permanent visas, the process is excruciatingly slow. And the law has

not been changed, meaning any new asylum seekers who arrive by boat are not eligible for a permanent visa.

Around 12,000 asylum seekers rejected by Morrison’s fast track processing system remain on bridging visas as a permanent underclass. There are still almost 170 boat arrivals in immigration detention on the mainland, and 142 in community detention.

Fourteen thousand refugees are stranded in Indonesia by a ban imposed by the Morrison government in 2014. Yet Labor won’t end the ban.

A year ago, the Albanese government granted permanent visas to the Biloela Murugappan family. But that gesture can’t hide that Labor has become the gatekeeper of Fortress Australia.

Consecutive governments, Liberal and Labor, insisted that refugees sent to Manus and Nauru would never come to Australia. Yet protests and demonstrations have finally emptied Nauru and seen many brought from Manus to Australia under the Medevac laws.

It will take more protests to force Labor to end the border protection and mandatory and indefinite detention policies that they cling to. “Ten Years Too Bloody Long” rallies are being organised around Australia in July to call for an end to offshore detention and for permanent visas for all.

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It was the Rudd Labor government’s Pacific Solution II that banned refugees from ever settling in Australia