

Solidarity

Issue No. 186 / August 2024

\$3/\$5

GAZA, WEST BANK, LEBANON

STOP ISRAEL'S

BLOODY WAR



PALESTINE

Victorian teachers
win union's support

CFMEU

Lessons from the
BLF's deregistration

SETTLER-COLONIALISM

Workers and the state in
Israel and Australia

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

Sydney

Meeting 6.30pm every Thursday
Brown St Hall, 8-10 Brown St
Newtown
For more information contact:
Adam on 0400 351 694
sydney@solidarity.net.au

Melbourne

Meeting 6.30pm every Thursday
Kathleen Syme library and community
centre, 251 Faraday St, Carlton
For more information contact:
Jason on 0456 624 661
melbourne@solidarity.net.au

Brisbane

Contact Mark on 0439 561 196 or
brisbane@solidarity.net.au

Perth

Contact perth@solidarity.net.au

Canberra

Contact canberra@solidarity.net.au

Adelaide

Contact Robert on 0447 362 417 or
adelaide@solidarity.net.au

Or check fb.com/soliaus/events

CONTACT US

Magazine office

Phone 02 8964 7116
Fax 02 9012 0814

Email

solidarity@solidarity.net.au

Website

www.solidarity.net.au

Facebook

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

Twitter

@soli_au
twitter.com/soli_au

Solidarity No. 186

August 2024

ISSN 1835-6834

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

Printed by El Faro, Newtown
NSW.

SUBSCRIBE TO SOLIDARITY MAGAZINE

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

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

Name Phone

E-mail Address

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

Things they say

Your invitation to be fertiliser.

Former Liberal MP Tim Wilson in an email to potential donors in Sydney as he tries to fund his campaign to unseat Teal MP Zoe Daniels.

Anthony Albanese has given up fighting Tories and turned on trade unionists as he embarks on one of the biggest union-busting campaigns ever seen in Australia

CFMEU Queensland Secretary Michael Ravbar

I am a fundamental believer in capitalism.

Chris Bowen, Minister for Climate Change and Energy, expresses his faith in the market at the National Press Club

How can mediation succeed when one party assassinates the negotiator on other side?

Qatari Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani on Israel's murder of Hamas political bureau chief Ismail Haniyeh

I heard feedback like 'you need to go on a crash diet', 'people think you're kind but not strong enough' and 'don't bother speaking to that bloke – he doesn't believe women should be in positions of leadership'

Jemma Tribe, now running as independent for Shoalhaven council, in a complaint to the Liberal Party state director about her treatment inside the party

I think the print journalists at Nine have made an unwise decision... If, as a company, you've made a major investment in something like the Olympics, you expect everyone to toe the line, quite frankly.

Ita Buttrose, until recently chair of the ABC, clearly doesn't understand the concept of a strike

CONTENTS

ISSUE 186 AUGUST 2024



Spreading the support for Palestine

- 5 Israel threatens wider war as 5 Mass student meeting at Sydney Uni votes to support Palestinian resistance
- 9 Victorian teachers win union backing for Palestine



Defend the CFMEU

- 6 Cross River Rail strike no crime
- 6 Resisting the attack on the CFMEU
- 7 The truth on the claims against the union
- 14 Lessons from the BLF's deregistration
- 20 No to Labor's union busting

Australia

- 8 NSW nurses fight for 15 per cent pay rise
- 10 Assange is free but Albanese still backing war
- 11 Nuked: The Submarine Fiasco that Sunk Australia's Sovereignty by Andrew Fowler reviewed



International

- 12 Imane Khelif row exposes sexism and transphobia in sport
- 12 Mass protests topple Bangladesh's dictator
- 13 Kamala Harris's record to differ to Biden's



Features

- 16 Settler-colonialism and the working class in Israel and Australia
- 18 Is racism to blame for genocide and war?

New oil and gas emissions highest since 2018

NEW OIL and gas project approvals have surged globally this year, and are set to put more new emissions into the atmosphere than in any year since 2018.

They would add a total of 11.9 billion tonnes of new emissions over their lifetimes, equal to China's total emissions for one year.

The figures, revealed by *The Guardian*, are based on new licences already granted, as well as oil and gas projects open for bidding, under evaluation or planned.

The oil boom is being led by the world's wealthiest countries, including the US, UK, Australia, Canada and Norway. The new licences they have issued in the last ten years have produced five times more carbon emissions than all other countries combined, Rystad data shows.

Under the Biden administration, the US has issued 1453 new oil and gas licences, half of to global total.

US oil production is at its highest ever level. Since 2021, oil companies operating in the US's lower 48 states took in \$485 billion in "free cash flow" or income after spending on existing operations and new projects.

Global demand for oil is still rising, up 2.2 per cent since 2022. And there is no end in sight. Exxon is planning to increase oil and gas production in the US's southern oil fields by 50 per cent by the end of 2027.

Billions of dollars more for new warships

AUSTRALIA'S NEW frigates will cost \$4 billion each, not including the cost of weapons systems. This makes them the most expensive warship the Australian government has ever purchased.

The figure comes from newly-published tender documents for the first three of the six ships, reported in the *Financial Review*. BAE Systems will get \$14.6 billion to build them, with the first due by 2034.

The government is still refusing to reveal the bill for the other three ships.

Israelis demand impunity for soldiers to torture



Palestinians captured in Gaza Photo: IDF

THE ARREST of a group of Israeli soldiers over the rape of a Palestinian prisoner was met inside Israel with outrage, rioting, and an emergency session of parliament held to defend the soldiers.

Nine soldiers face charges over the abuse of a prisoner in the Sde Teiman detention centre. Reports said the prisoner has been hospitalised and cannot walk due to "a serious wound in his rectum area".

Dozens of Israelis including far-right members of the Knesset, Israel's parliament, apparently including Heritage Minister Amichai Eliyahu, tried to storm the detention centre to prevent the arrest of the soldiers. "I came to Sde Teiman to tell our fighters that we are with you, we will protect you," Jewish Power Knesset members Limor Son Har-Melech said on social media.

This was followed by protests that night all across the country demanding impunity for the soldiers.

Another 1200 people staged a riot outside the Beit Lid military base where the soldiers were being held for questioning. They included masked soldiers from Force 100, an Israeli Defence Forces unit that oversees Palestinian prisoners and deals with prison uprisings, some of them carrying arms. Even after dozens of people broke in and had to be cleared out by police, there were no arrests made.

Many of the protesters are from the parties currently running Israel's government. Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich called the soldiers "heroic warriors" while National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir said they were the "best heroes" and called their arrest "shameful".

Israel has swept up over 20,000 Palestinians for interrogation and torture in prison camps like Sde Teiman since the beginning of the latest war. They can be held without charge or trial for 45 days.

The scenes are a further indication of the kind of violent militaristic society that Israel has become.

Melbourne homes lying empty despite housing crisis

MELBOURNE HAS over 100,000 homes that are sitting empty—around 5 per cent of the total. It's enough to cover the waiting list for social housing twice over. This is the finding of a new study reported in *The Age* based on an analysis of household water usage. It that 27,408 houses are permanently empty and another 70,453 are barely used.

The highest rates of empty housing are near the city centre—including 12.4 per cent or 4000 houses in the CBD, 12.7 per cent in Brunswick East and 12.1 per cent in South Melbourne.

The total is more than the target of 80,000 homes each year the Victorian government aims to build to meet the pace of population growth.

NSW cops shrug as Indigenous prisoners skyrocket

FIVE YEARS after the NSW police launched a "blueprint" aimed at reducing Indigenous imprisonment, the number of Indigenous people in prison on remand is up 47 per cent. The non-Indigenous figure went up just 2 per cent. This means Indigenous people are 32 per cent of those in prison on remand, despite making up 3 per cent of the population.

The figures for young Indigenous people aged 10-17 have also climbed 26 per cent.

NSW police are refusing to take any responsibility for addressing this, despite it being part of the Closing the Gap targets it supposedly supports. NSW Police Commissioner Karen Webb wrote in a letter last year that, "suggesting NSWPF is responsible for achieving Closing the Gap outcomes 10 and 11 would lead to competing duties", the *Sydney Morning Herald* reported.

But the shocking numbers of Indigenous people in prison is the result of police decisions to charge them, instead of using their discretion to issue cautions instead. This is because racism remains entrenched in the police force.

Young Indigenous people are far less likely to be let off with a caution than non-Indigenous people, data from the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research shows.

Nationally the picture is even worse, the latest Closing the Gap report shows. Indigenous people are now almost 50 per cent more likely to be in prison than when the first report was delivered in 2009, and 15 times more likely to be in prison than non-Indigenous people.

The number of Indigenous children in out of home care is also at its highest level on record. Only five of the 19 targets are on track after 15 years.

EDITORIAL

Israeli aggression threatens wider war as support for Gaza spreads

ISRAEL'S ESCALATING aggression is again risking a war across the Middle East.

Iran was expected to retaliate as *Solidarity* went to press, after Israel assassinated Hamas's political leader Ismail Haniyeh on Iranian soil. The strike was a humiliation for Iran, which had guaranteed the Hamas leader's safety.

It followed Israel's assassination of senior Hezbollah commander Fuad Shukur in Beirut, after it blamed Hezbollah for a rocket attack in the occupied Golan Heights that killed 12 Druze children and young adults. Hezbollah denied responsibility for the strike, blaming an Israeli interceptor missile.

All-out war between Hezbollah and Israel is possible. In June the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) said it had approved a plan for a ground assault into Lebanon, after trading missile strikes across the border since October.

Israel still refuses to accept ceasefire proposals in Gaza, bombing and massacring Palestinians every day in schools, hospital courtyards and refugee camps.

Its appalling war crimes against civilians continue. Lack of sanitation, water and food are breeding epidemics. Terrifyingly, polio has appeared. Starvation is spreading with Israel blocking aid deliveries through the Rafah crossing for more than two months.

At the end of July Israeli soldiers deliberately blew up the main drinking water reservoir in Rafah, as Palestinians face a severe water shortage.

All this is facilitated by the West. The visit of the architect of genocide, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, to the epicentre of global power in the US Congress last month was sickening. He received sycophantic handshakes and dozens of standing ovations as he lied to justify his war crimes.

But worldwide outrage at Israel is building. The new ruling from the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on Israel's actions in the occupied territories delivered another damning blow.

It declared the occupation of Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem illegal, calling for it to end. And it said Israel was breaching international laws on racial discrimination and apartheid through its "near-complete separation" of Palestinians from Israeli settlers.

It also strengthened the case for sanctions against Israel, saying that all states, including Australia, have an obligation to end any trade with Israel that entrenches its occupation.

The Albanese government continues to give Israel political cover and



Above: Protest for Palestine in Melbourne Photo: Matt Hrkac

support for its genocide.

In response to the ICJ ruling it mouthed opposition to Israel expanding settlements in the Occupied Territories but said nothing about ending its apartheid policies and the occupation as a whole.

Albanese continues to allow the export of parts for F-35 fighter jets that Israel is using to bomb Gaza, and the use of the Pine Gap spy base to send intelligence.

Further evidence of Australian military exports to Israel has surfaced, unearthed by Greens Senator David Shoebridge, in photos of the Sydney-manufactured DroneGun being used by the IDF.

Build the pressure

The pressure on the Albanese government is producing small shifts. For nine months it has imposed appalling restrictions on refugees from Gaza getting to Australia.

About 65 per cent of the 7000

Palestinians who have applied to come here have been rejected, with many told the government did not want them to claim asylum here.

Now arrivals from Gaza will given a new humanitarian visa, after being forced to survive on tourist visas without work rights.

But the government still refuses to condemn Israel's breaches of international law or to impose sanctions pressuring it to end the killing in Gaza.

After ten months of horror, and weekly rallies, civil disobedience actions and other protests, some feel that all we can do is keep expressing our outrage.

But the movement needs to keep reaching out and engaging wider layers of people in discussion. Systematic organising within unions is one important way to spread the arguments for Palestine—as the success in the Victorian teachers' union shows (see page 9).

Student general meetings at universities are another way to deepen the political understanding about Palestine—as well as about the ties with Israel on campuses.

Support for Palestine is still spreading. As thousands rallied for Gaza outside last month's NSW Labor conference, the conference itself passed a motion calling on Albanese to recognise Palestine as a state "as a priority"—the very issue over which Senator Fatima Payman crossed the floor to vote against the party.

Albanese was embarrassed during his speech as several attendees held up Palestinian flags and signs. This shows the potential to draw unionists and Labor Party supporters into the movement.

More union backing and broader support in the working class is needed to build the kind of action that can force Albanese to end his backing for Israel and the US.

Mass meeting at Sydney Uni votes to cut ties with Israel and back Palestine's right to resist

OVER 600 students at Sydney Uni have voted overwhelmingly not just to cut the uni's ties with Israel, but affirming the right of Palestinians to armed resistance and endorsing one, secular, democratic state in Palestine from the River to the sea.

The historic Student General Meeting, attended by 800 people with 600 students registering, spilled over into three different lecture halls, with the venue overflowing.

Two Zionist students spoke against the motion to cut ties, moving an amendment to label Hamas a terrorist organisation. This was ridiculed from the floor and near-unanimously rejected.

The meeting fizzled with radicalism and rage against Israel's genocide. When SRC officers tried to close the meeting, saying the room booking was finished, students shouted them down to demand a vote on a second motion.

The meeting also voted to scrap the new Campus Access Policy introduced in an attempt to silence the Palestine movement. As it ended, students chanted with megaphones inside the building in defiance of the policy and marched on the administration building.

The huge success shows the growing support for Palestine and the potential to keep broadening the movement.

CFMEU's fight for workers' rights at Brisbane's Cross River Rail is no crime



Resisting the attack on the CFMEU

THE CFMEU is facing a major attack that could leave the union seriously weakened and strip back safety, conditions and wages across the industry.

But the union's initial move has been to place its hope in legal action against administration. Albanese, however, is deadly serious and has already made it clear he will impose administration by legislation if it fails in court.

There should be mass delegates meetings happening across the industry for CFMEU members to discuss the threat. Instead the union has played it down by telling its members that everything is business as usual for now.

In Queensland, the regular CFMEU delegates meeting in July passed a motion rejecting the appointment of an administrator to their branch. But state secretary Michael Ravbar opposed the suggestion of a stopwork rally.

One workplace in Brisbane has passed a motion pledging to strike and picket the union office if an administrator is installed to stop them gaining entry.

Elliot, who moved the motion, told *Solidarity*, "It was the feeling from the floor. A few other people spoke to say that's how everyone feels.

"It was raised that the union doesn't want to strike because they think that's what the government wants us to do. But it's not what they want—they don't want us to have safety and well paid jobs."

Motions like this pledging strike action to defend the union should go

up at every construction site.

Shamefully, most union leaders voted to support the attack on the CFMEU at the ACTU executive meeting. Only the ETU, the MUA and the plumbers' union opposed it.

At the NSW Labor conference on 27 July, ETU delegates shouted "shame" and walked out when Albanese began his speech, protesting the CFMEU's treatment.

Rank-and-file members in other unions have also begun to pledge their support. MUA members at Hutchison ports in Sydney carried a motion supporting the CFMEU.

The NTEU branch at Sydney University has passed a support motion, as has the Teachers Federation Canterbury-Bankstown Association and the Geelong Trades and Labour Council.

Trade Unionists for Palestine in Sydney, Melbourne, Newcastle and South Australia also released statements of support.

Every union member should put a motion to their branch meeting or council opposing administration and supporting the CFMEU. If the government can do this to the CFMEU, they can do it to any union.

We need protests and strikes to demand that the Albanese government backs off. Action defending the union now will also help limit the damage if administration does go ahead.

The strength of rank-and-file organisation is going to be critical to holding the union together.

Above: CFMEU members on Solidarity Island, where the Cross River Rail picketline has relocated after a court ban

AS *SOLIDARITY* goes to press industrial action at Queensland's biggest infrastructure project, Brisbane's Cross River Rail, continues.

CFMEU members began another round of protected industrial action for a new Enterprise Bargaining Agreement (EBA) on 15 July with picket lines at all 16 site entrances.

This is a legitimate and lawful dispute, but the main contractor, CPB, and the right-wing media are trying to use it to embroil the union in allegations of criminality, to strengthen the case for administration of the Queensland branch of the CFMEU.

Shamefully the state Labor government has joined the smear campaign. The latest allegation is that the CFMEU are responsible for a pre-dawn assault with a metal bar on a strike breaker. The union denied all involvement and welcomed a police investigation, but even before police finished investigating, Premier Steven Miles was using this incident to reinforce his case for imposing administrators.

Their previous EBA, negotiated in 2019 before workers were on site by the Australian Workers Union (AWU), had no subcontractors clause, meaning work could be outsourced to subcontractors paying below union rates.

As a result, on a site of 2500 workers, only about 170 work for the principal contractor. Some traffic controllers were being paid a miserable \$26.81 an hour while others were even paid below the Award rate.

An effective heat policy is another significant issue. Just this year, more than 32 workers have been hospitalised because of heat stress. Last year one worker tragically died. The CFMEU want their standard industry heat policy to apply.

CPB have attempted to stifle strike action by alleging "unlawful tactics" in the Federal Court, winning a disgraceful ban on CFMEU members going within 15 metres of entrances to all Cross River Rail sites. CFMEU members are also banned from photographing or recording any person or vehicle entering or exiting sites.

Not to be outdone, the CFMEU has set up picket lines 15 metres from the exclusion zones. Opposite the Roma St entrance the workers have moved to a small park surrounded by three streets and christened it "Solidarity Island".

Construction workers across Brisbane are contributing \$100 a week to support members on strike. Defiant strike action is not corruption or criminality—it's exactly what's needed to fight for wages and workers' rights.

Mark Gillespie

CPB have attempted to stifle strike action by alleging "unlawful tactics" in the Federal Court

The truth about the claims against the CFMEU



Solidarity looks at the justifications for attacking the union and what it will mean

Is the CFMEU linked to criminals? There has been a media frenzy following reports by *A Current Affair*, *The Age* and the *Sydney Morning Herald* about CFMEU corruption and links to organised crime. But the evidence is thin.

Most of the allegations are focused on the Victorian CFMEU. The media found four current or former members of bikie gangs who were CFMEU delegates. But the union has hundreds of delegates across building sites in Melbourne defending workers' rights.

Another story featured self-described "CFMEU fixer" Harry Korras, who asked for bribes to set up a meeting with the union. But the meeting never happened and the papers had no evidence Korras had any real influence with the union.

They also claim the CFMEU has given construction companies linked to organised crime work on construction projects—but the only evidence was anonymously-sourced quotes.

CFMEU control of projects is not something sinister—it means that CFMEU-standard wages and conditions apply, protecting workers' rights the union has won.

Other claims allege unlawful "intimidation" against building companies. This usually means the union is defying anti-union laws that make basic strike action illegal.

Picket lines at the Cross River Rail strike in Brisbane have been declared unlawful intimidation because they attempted to stop scab labour entering the site. But picketing is a

Above: CFMEU members in Sydney on this year's May Day rally

necessary part of any serious strike. It is the anti-union laws criminalising it that are the problem, not the CFMEU.

Has anyone been charged with a criminal offence?

Serious evidence of corruption would lead to criminal charges. But the only criminal charges to date are old news. NSW Secretary Darren Greenfield and his son were charged in September 2021 over accepting bribes but are yet to face trial almost three years later. Greenfield and the NSW branch say they are innocent.

Senior Victorian official Derek Christopher allegedly received free labour and materials on his home renovation from construction companies in 2017. He was questioned by police but has never been charged.

What about corrupt bosses?

Criminals among construction bosses are nothing new. The Nahas family, owners of multi-billion-dollar residential property developer Coronation Property in Sydney, are known for suspected links to the Alameddine crime family. YouTube satirist Jordan Shanks had his house firebombed after launching a video attacking them in 2022.

In an industry where many small companies compete for short-term contracts, bankruptcies and shonky bosses are common. Workers are constantly paid late or not paid at all, with about \$320 million in underpayments each year, a PwC study estimated in 2019.

This environment attracts organised crime. But mafia figures typically want unions to make sweetheart deals allowing underpayment of workers. The accusation against the CFMEU is

the opposite—that it delivered safety, wages and conditions that bosses considered too good.

How has the union responded?

The CFMEU national office has stepped in to take control of the union's Victorian branch and investigate. National secretary Zach Smith argued, "The union movement is more than capable of dealing with allegations in their own ranks and responding appropriately."

Unions are democratic organisations and should be allowed to manage their own affairs without court or government interference. Fair Work Australia has a history of anti-union bias and usually sides with the rich and powerful.

The union has already appointed Geoffrey Watson SC, formerly with the NSW Independent Commission Against Corruption, to run an independent investigation. But the Albanese government has brushed this aside and insisted on taking over the union.

What will administration mean?

Administration will leave the union paralysed, giving bosses a free hand to force it off worksites and tear up enterprise bargaining agreements (EBAs). It is a radical measure that will take away control of the union and suspend union democracy.

The Albanese government wants a court-appointed administrator installed in branches in Victoria-Tasmania, South Australia, NSW and Queensland. If there is any delay in the Federal Court approving this, it will use legislation.

Elected officials are likely to be sacked. Union organisers and other staff would initially remain in place but the administrator would be able to sack them.

The administrators will have complete control of the union and will focus on reviewing existing EBAs and investigating union organisers and delegates. They will be able to dictate whether the union tries to enforce EBAs on sites or pursue bosses over safety problems.

The construction industry bosses want to use this as an opportunity to weaken the CFMEU and undermine union militancy.

Administrators would remain in place "for two years or more" according to the *Nine Papers*, reviewing existing EBAs and investigating union organisers and delegates.

One of the strongest unions in the country faces a government attack that could leave it drastically weakened—it needs every unionist's support.

.....
The construction industry bosses want to use this as an opportunity to weaken the CFMEU

NSW nurses rally to fight for 15 per cent pay claim

By Paul Kaletsis

THOUSANDS OF nurses and midwives across NSW held protests outside hospitals in late July as part of their campaign for an immediate 15 per cent pay rise.

Dave, a nurses' union delegate at Westmead hospital told the crowd there, "NSW nurses are the second lowest paid in the country. NSW also has the highest cost of living in the country."

Wages for a full-time nurse on average are 8 per cent below those in Queensland and Victoria.

"What does this mean? That NSW Health lost last year 13 per cent of all of its nursing staff. It means there's not enough staff. A 15 per cent pay rise will give NSW nurses a reason to stay."

Healthcare workers were hailed as heroes for their essential work during the pandemic. Yet nurses have suffered for over a decade because of the public sector wage cap. Last year the Minns Labor government increased pay 4 per cent, after a pay freeze during COVID and several years of below inflation pay rises.

The Minns government's paltry pay offer of 10.5 per cent per over three years now is no incentive to stay in the profession, nor are the unmet nurse-to-patient ratios on the wards.

NSWNMA president O'Bray Smith addressed the crowd at RPA Hospital, saying that, "Our wages today should be at a 2024 rate—they're not. They're at a 2010 rate.

"Third year nurses and midwives, on average, your base wage is about \$77,000 a year. Furies earn about \$90,000 a year, and bus and train drivers \$120,000 a year.

"It is shocking. So it is no wonder that nurses are leaving to work in interstate hospitals or are changing careers to survive the exploding cost of living."

Louise, a midwife at RPA Hospital, told *Solidarity*, "We're going to lose staff, but birthing people and babies are going to suffer at the hands of the government. They think that we will just keep doing our job, but it is disrespectful and it's just completely unfair."

The nurses' one-year 15 per cent pay claim also includes a 30 per cent penalty rate for night shifts, increasing sick days to 20 and funding to meet nurse-to-patient ratios.

"If it comes to it, we are willing to



Above: Nurses rallying outside Westmead Hospital

strike", Louisa said. "We're not asking for something unreasonable, we're asking for what is fair. We're ask-

ing for you to respect us and respect our profession, nurses and midwives deserve better and deserve more."

Nurses must call a strike now and prepare for sustained action

THE MINNS government has shown no sign of backing down from their paltry pay offer of 10.5 per cent over three years for all nurses and midwives.

At the start of July, the government went on the attack, lodging an application in the Industrial Relations Commission. This indicates they are willing to end negotiations and use the commission to try to enforce their insulting pay offer.

There have now been six meetings between Association representatives and the government that have gone nowhere.

With an IRC application lodged, the clock is ticking. We need the Association to call a major strike now, with adequate lead time so we can mobilise in big numbers.

Mobilising for a strike will show the government we mean business but it will also help active nurses and midwives put the campaign on the map in our hospitals and start to involve our colleagues in a more serious way.

Our annual conference on 7-9 August is the perfect opportunity to prepare a major strike. If no date has been set by then, we need a resolution on the conference floor calling a date for action.

Some members have expressed scepticism about industrial action, pointing to the failure of our strikes during the last campaign to seriously shift the government, and dwindling numbers for the later actions.

But the last strike campaign was not consistently built and escalated to the action that could win. Because of that, later protest actions were smaller as the campaign lost momentum.

Delegates and other workplace activists were not seriously involved in the development of a proper timetable for industrial action and broader discussions about strategy for the campaign.

Getting a text message announcing a strike with only a few weeks' notice gives no time to properly prepare.

If we want to win a 15 per cent wage increase, we have no alternative but to prepare for a campaign of far more serious and sustained industrial action.

We need to create major disruption, forcing the issue onto the front pages of the papers and into conversations right across the community.

We need to set a date now for the first strike that will mark the beginning of this sustained campaign.

Victorian teachers win union to stand with Palestine

By Lucy Honan

MEMBERS OF Teachers and School Staff for Palestine (TSS4P) made a big impact as the Australian Education Union conference in Melbourne last month took significant steps in solidarity with Palestine.

More than 30 TSS4P members, backed by many other delegates who strongly supported Palestine, helped turn the AEU conference into a Palestine conference.

Two resolutions were passed with overwhelming support; one proposed by TSS4P and the other by AEU officials.

The officials' motion demanded, "An end to the occupation of Palestine and a just and sustainable peace in accordance with UN Security Council resolutions. Ending the occupation must include the removal of illegal settlements, the withdrawal of Israel from all Palestinian lands along with the dismantling of the separation wall."

Delegates amended the officials' resolution to commit the AEU to mobilising for a Palestine solidarity rally in the city once a month.

Delegates and officials used material from TSS4P's "Weapons out of classrooms" material when speaking to the motions, which condemned the militarisation of schools and the AUKUS security pact.

One issue that generated debate was the call for a "two state solution", which TSS4P members argued should be deleted from the official motion.

The amendment lost but the debate was useful, drawing out questions about Israeli apartheid, the fundamentally discriminatory and exclusive nature of Israel and the extent of global struggle for Palestine that makes a one state solution possible.

The TSS4P motion condemned Federal and Victorian government ties with Israel and called on the Victorian Government to break the 2022 Memorandum of Understanding with the Israeli Defence Force, demanding that it end co-operation and investments with Israeli weapons companies.

It raised concerns with the use of the IHRA definition of antisemitism and the "unnecessary and unlawful" scrutiny of staff and students "who elevate Palestinian human rights by wearing keffiyeh and Palestinian symbols at school, or who advance views



Above: Teachers and School Staff for Palestine at a Melbourne rally for Gaza

to support those Palestinian rights with students".

One TSS4P activist told *Solidarity*, "Our motion passed unanimously, with a lot of enthusiasm for people going back to schools and regions, feeling very confident about being a visible part of the movement.

"There was a big buzz, and delegates felt genuinely proud to be part of such an important global struggle.

"It was a real successful culmination of a huge collective struggle—both ourselves and across the movement. It was a feat of non-sectarian collaboration of activists from across the left."

A feat of rank-and-file activism

Teachers and School Staff for Palestine did not wait for Australian Education Union official endorsement to take action.

From organising and defending workers wearing keffiyehs at school, to creating and defending radical teaching material such as *Teaching for Palestine: Challenging ANZAC Day*, to confrontations with Ben Carroll, the Minister of Education and key facilitator of Israeli war companies setting up factories in the state, rank-and-file members have organised relentlessly without any official AEU Victoria Branch support.

But recognising that our capacity to escalate action and broaden the movement would depend on our ability to reach more people and build greater participation in defiant action, TSS4P worked at building up union support for Palestine action in sub

branches and union regions.

Many TSS4P members set up or revived school sub branches or became union representatives so that they could build Palestine solidarity at work. By the end of Term 1, at least eight regions representing thousands of members had passed pro-Palestine motions, often with union officials as the single vote in the room against.

TSS4P developed a booklet explaining and arguing for our motion which we took to our regional meetings and sent to every conference delegate and union official. We also held a pre-conference forum with speakers from APAN, Labor Friends of Palestine, and the Jewish Council of Australia to build the case for our motion, and the campaigning that must follow.

We created a contagious atmosphere on the day of the conference, preparing interventions collectively, and coming armed with ma'amoul, zaatar, keffiyeh, and stickers inviting others to "ask me about my keffiyeh".

We put all of our teaching and organising resources on display and talked to as many other delegates as possible about our campaign. We wanted to make sure every delegate felt strong, clear and united in our resolution to end the Victorian and Federal government's support for Israel's violence.

TSS4P members will now use the official support from the conference to increase the mobilisations and build pressure on the Victorian and Federal governments to cut their ties with Israel.

.....
Many members set up school sub branches or became union reps so that they could build Palestine solidarity at work

Former WA Labor member speaks out on Gaza: ‘There’s a lot of members resigning or expressing discontent’

FATIMA PAYMAN’S resignation from the Labor Party shone a light on the level of discontent with Anthony Albanese and his support for the Gaza genocide. Adam Demir was vice-president of the WA party’s Multicultural branch until he too resigned from Labor.

He told *Solidarity*, “I joined the Labor Party because I thought it aligned with my values. I thought the Labour Party was there to advocate for people who are marginalized or disenfranchised. But obviously I was wrong.

“Albanese had a good history as far as the Palestinian issue was concerned. When he was young, he was pro-Palestinian. And when he came to power, he revoked the decision of recognizing Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. But after 7 October, he changed his stance 180 degrees. We feel like we’ve been cheated.

“There is big resentment, not just only within communities, but big discontent even in Labor branches within Albanese’s electorate, and here in WA, in the Multicultural Labor branch and other branches as well. There’s a lot of rank-and-file members either resigning or expressing their discontent.”

“I have visited the university



Above: Adam Demir, former WA Labor Party member

campus for Palestine. I went to rallies. There’s big support here not just from Muslim and Arab communities, from

mainstream society as well.

“If anyone thought Israel was going to accept peace, they’ve now realised that wasn’t their intention. I think recently that was proven when the Israeli Knesset rejected a Palestinian state 68 to 9 votes. That showed that they weren’t interested in a peace process or anything like that.”

Efforts to criticise Albanese’s stance and build support for Palestine inside the party have been shut down, he explained.

“The response is either they try to silence you, or they try to undermine what you have to say. If you try to bring a motion, for instance, they try to either attack it or water it down.

“I actually resigned right after Fatima Payman in protest of Fatima’s treatment. It’s total hypocrisy because Fatima was in line with Labor policy as per the 2021 National Conference decision to recognise Palestine as a state. Albanese himself, for whatever reason, decided to go other direction and bullied and ostracised Fatima.

“We were shocked and appalled for the treatment that she went through. That opened our eyes and we felt we were cheated all along. Albanese is not going to get our support anymore.”

Julian Assange’s freedom a blow against the warmongers

By James Supple

JULIAN ASSANGE is finally free, returning to Australia in June after accepting a plea deal following five years in London’s Belmarsh prison. The US demanded he plead guilty to “conspiracy to obtain and disclose defence information” under the Espionage Act, sentencing him to time already served.

This is a victory against the supporters of imperialism who wanted him imprisoned for life. He was facing up to 175 years in prison in the US.

The US wanted revenge over Assange’s role in the release by WikiLeaks of hundreds of thousands of military documents and diplomatic cables exposing US war crimes in Afghanistan and Iraq, leaked by former US army intelligence analyst Chelsea Manning.

They included the shocking “Col-

Albanese celebrated Assange’s release but is complicit in Israel’s genocide and is spending billions on a military buildup

lateral Murder” video that exposed the killing of a group of innocent civilians, including two Reuters journalists, from a US helicopter in Iraq in 2007.

Anthony Albanese celebrated Assange’s release, and Assange’s family have praised him for helping secure his freedom. But Albanese is complicit in Israel’s genocide and is spending billions on a military buildup as part of the US march to war against China, supporting the sickening imperialism Assange revealed.

And Albanese is also backing laws that protect evidence of Australian war crimes in overseas imperialist adventures from going public. These have seen former military lawyer David McBride sentenced to five years and eight months in prison for a similar act exposing military secrets. McBride leaked material to the ABC that formed the basis of The Afghan Files, revealing brutal unlawful kill-

ings by SAS soldiers in Afghanistan.

In January the government quietly dropped its election promise to hold an inquiry into the prosecution of Witness K and his lawyer Bernard Collaery, over their role in the release of evidence of an Australian spying operation on East Timor during Timor Sea oil and gas negotiations in 2004.

Tax office whistleblower Richard Boyle is also facing trial in September over his actions in gathering documents to prove his claims, later upheld, of abuses of power by tax debt collectors.

WikiLeaks said Assange’s freedom was the, “result of a global campaign that spanned grassroots organisers, press freedom campaigners, legislators and leaders”.

It is a product of years of campaigning and pressure for his release—and it shows that it’s possible to stand up to US imperialism and win.

New details on how Australia pushed the US for nuclear subs

Nuked: The Submarine Fiasco that Sunk Australia's Sovereignty
 By Andrew Fowler,
 Melbourne University Press, 2024, \$35

THERE'S A persistent belief on the left that the Australian government was bulldozed into accepting the AUKUS nuclear submarine agreement in September 2021 by the White House and the Pentagon. According to this argument, Australia is little more than a puppet of the United States.

Nuked, a new book by former ABC reporter Andrew Fowler, blows this view out of the water. Fowler documents in meticulous detail the way in which Scott Morrison's government campaigned to win US support for the project.

On 30 April 2021, there was a meeting in Washington DC between Australian spook-in-chief Andrew Shearer, Director-General of the Office of National Intelligence and a former National Security Adviser to two prime ministers, and Joe Biden's US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan and his off-sider Kurt Campbell.

The Americans were told only that Shearer, who had to be operating with Morrison's knowledge and support, wanted to discuss a matter "of the utmost sensitivity".

At the meeting in the West Wing of the White House, Shearer, backed by Australian ambassador Arthur Sinodinos, former chief of staff with John Howard, asked the US for nuclear submarine technology.

Participants at the meeting say Shearer told Campbell, "As China's capability advances, we need to have submarines



capable of meeting it. We need to be able to operate without the risk of easy detection by the Chinese."

The request didn't come out of the blue. Fowler writes that the idea of obtaining nuclear subs had been kicked around between 2012 and 2015 but abandoned because Australia lacked nuclear skills.

In May 2020 Morrison ordered a feasibility study into how Australia could get nuclear submarines without an Australian nuclear industry to support them. He was told it was possible only with the cooperation of the US or Britain, or both.

Mixed response

The pitch to the White House received a mixed response. According to Nine newspapers' Peter Hartcher, Biden was cautious, even sceptical. But Campbell later summed up the US position, saying, "What most countries do when grappling with relevance, when risks and costs are enormous, is they just opt out. Australia chose relevance."

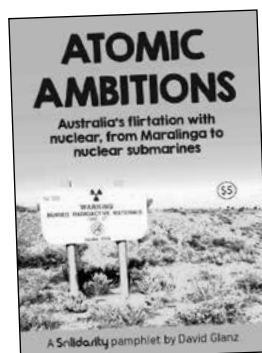
Why did the Morrison government chase nuclear subs? Fowler briefly al-

Above: US Virginia-class nuclear submarine USS North Carolina arrives at Fleet Base West in Rockingham, Western Australia in August Photo: Department of Defence

ludes to what has been called Australia's "fear of abandonment" but doesn't flesh out the argument.

Australia is a sub-imperialist power—one that can dominate the immediate region but that has needed the support of first Britain and then the US to back it against more powerful rivals.

That support is not automatic. Three times, the US refused to support the Australian ruling class in disputes involving Indonesia.



Atomic Ambitions pamphlet \$5 from Solidarity at shop. solidarity.net.au

Between 1964 and 1966, Australian troops fought to defend the newly independent state of Malaysia from Indonesia. But historian Hugh White wrote that the US, "would not assure Australia of military support against a disruptive and increasingly well-armed Indonesia".

In 1969, the US supported Indonesia's takeover of West Papua, which Australia had hoped to grab, given its shared border with PNG, then an Australian colony.

The pattern was repeated in 1999, when President Bill Clinton refused an Australian request for military support against Indonesia in East Timor/Timor Leste. Howard admitted to being "disappointed" and "stunned".

US bombers

So successive governments, Liberal and Labor, have sought ways to bind the US tighter to Australia—volunteering to go to war in Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan, offering a base for US marines in Darwin and US bombers at RAAF Tindal, and allowing the US to run satellite stations in outback

Australia.

Fowler provides a useful rundown of the role of these bases: Pine Gap near Alice Springs, the naval station at North West Cape and a third US base, the little known USAF-operated Joint Geological and Geophysical Research Station, which measures seismic activity to detect the use of nuclear weapons.

The book also includes a section on how the Liberals pushed for nuclear weapons and nuclear power in the years following the Second World War—long before Peter Dutton's current proposal.

I certainly didn't know, for example, that a private company, Silex, had been allowed to rent space at the Lucas Heights nuclear plant in Sydney to operate a uranium enrichment program using a revolutionary laser process, which led to a technology transfer agreement in 1999 with the US.

Ironically, however, despite having provided ample evidence that the Australian government prosecuted the argument for nuclear subs, Fowler falls back into the argument that Australia is surrendering its sovereignty to the US.

It's a flawed position that opens the way for the likes of researchers Hugh White and Sam Roggeveen to argue that the answer is a more independent policy where Australia prioritises its own military build-up and sovereign weapons manufacturing capability.

Workers have no interest in the drive to war and we need to hold the warmongers in Canberra to account. Read carefully, Fowler's book can give us some of the ammunition we need for the job.

David Glanz

Imane Khelif row exposes sexism and transphobia in sport

By Erima Dall

A TOXIC wave of sexism, racial stereotypes and transphobic hate was unleashed after Algerian boxer Imane Khelif beat her opponent Angela Carini in just 46 seconds in the Paris Olympics.

False accusations that Khelif was a “biological male” began to circulate, alongside a disgusting cartoon of a “beast” squaring off with a “beauty” under the Olympic symbol.

The media let falsehood fester. Carini was quoted repeatedly saying, “I’ve never been hit so hard in my life.”

Imane Khelif is not trans, was born a woman and has always competed in women’s sports. But this attack on her right to participate, because she does not fit into a rigid gender stereotype, has become a rallying point for the transphobic right.

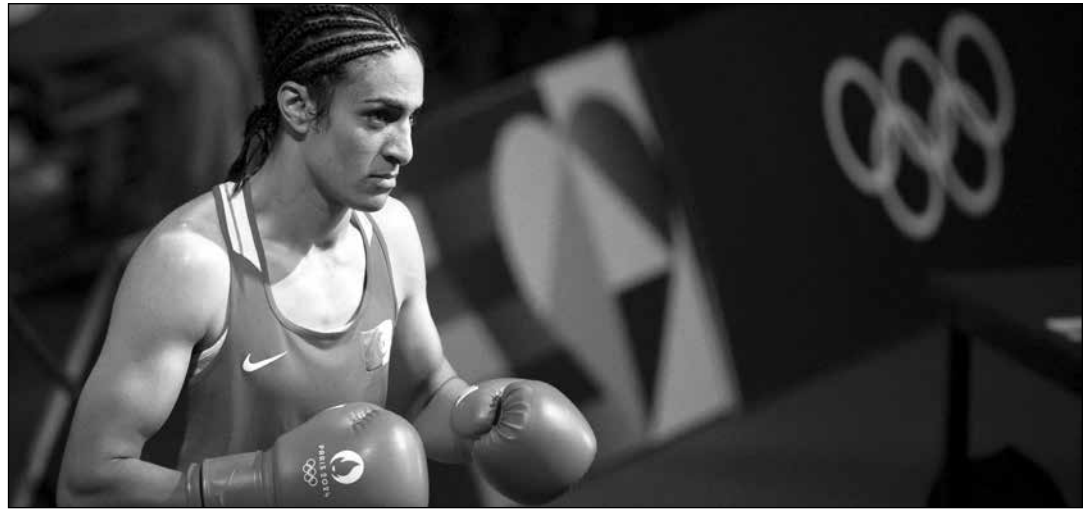
Khelif, along with Taiwanese boxer Lin Yu-ting, was disqualified from the 2023 World Boxing championship for failing an International Boxing Association (IBA) gender eligibility test.

The International Olympic Committee has criticised the tests as rushed and lacking any oversight or clear procedures. The IBA no longer oversees Olympic boxing after it lost its status as the sport’s world governing body due to corruption.

But the idea that you can test biologically for gender is absurd. Gender is a social construct. Nor is there a reliable test sex, as the idea that sex differences are consistent, binary and profound is also a myth. This is why sports associations have not been able to settle on a single sex test—chromosomes, testosterone levels, visual inspections, or identity documents have each been the benchmark at different times.

The details of the test have been kept confidential, but the IBA says it was based on analysing chromosomes. It is possible for women to have XY chromosomes and exhibit stereotypically female characteristics due to having intersex traits or Differences in Sexual Development (DSD).

Powerful female athletes, very often women of colour, have frequently been accused of using performance enhancing drugs, or being men, when they excel at sports—including tennis star Serena Williams, WNBA star Brittney Griner and South African runner Caster Semenya.



Imane Khelif during a fight at the Paris Olympics Photo: Abaca Press / Alamy Stock Photo

At the root of transphobia lies old school misogyny, and an obsession with policing gender.

Attacking trans people has become a common tactic for the right. We must fight back. This toxic

moment in the gender wars starkly reveals that we all have a stake in pushing back against sexist and transphobic attitudes, which seek to enforce the narrow straitjacket of gender norms on all of us, no matter the cost.

Mass protests topple Bangladesh’s dictator

BANGLADESH’S LEADER Sheikh Hasina has resigned and fled the country following weeks of mass student demonstrations.

A government crackdown resulting in at least 300 killed and the arrest of more than 10,000 people failed to crush the movement.

In January, Sheikh Hasina was elected for her fourth consecutive term as prime minister in an election widely condemned for corruption and fraud.

Official figures put voter turnout at 40 per cent, half the turnout at the last elections. This reflected widespread frustration with her Awami League’s authoritarianism, inflation and staggering rates of unemployment. In 2022, 40 per cent of Bangladeshis aged between 15-24 were out of work.

In June, this frustration was ignited over the allocation of jobs in the public service. Every year, 400,000 students compete for just 3000 jobs in the public service exam.

Since 1972, positions have been appointed through a quota system, which allocates 30 per cent of jobs to the descendants of veterans of the 1971 war of independence. This benefits supporters of the Awami League, which led the independence movement.

In 2018, mass student protests forced the government to halt the quota system. However, on 5 June,

the High Court reinstated it, prompting students to take to the streets.

The government responded with force. On 15 July, police allowed the Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL), the student wing of the Awami League, to attack student protesters at Dhaka University. The BCL operate as a paramilitary force, prepared to torture and kill opponents.

The next day, the government demanded that universities across Bangladesh close. The students responded by announcing that they would attempt the total shutdown of the country, blocking major roads and railways.

The government imposed a nationwide curfew and shut the country’s internet. Armoured personnel carriers were deployed in the streets and orders were given to shoot on sight.

Days later the country’s Supreme Court scrapped most of the quotas, leaving only 7 per cent of jobs reserved for war veterans’ families.

What started as protests against the allocation of government jobs has now toppled the government.

The army has installed an interim government and promised new elections. But in exchange it has called on student and opposition leaders to end the protests. Staying on the streets will be key to ensuring the end of authoritarian rule and addressing the poverty and inequality in Bangladesh.

Jacob Starling

.....
The idea that sex differences are consistent, binary and profound is also a myth

Kamala Harris' record is no different to Joe Biden's

By Thomas Foster and Tomáš Tengely-Evans

THE DEMOCRATIC Party establishment is piling in behind vice president Kamala Harris after Joe Biden was forced to bow out of the United States presidential race.

Harris presents herself as a progressive choice to take on Donald Trump. But she's backed up all of Biden's corporate handouts, defended Israel's genocide and enforced anti-migrant laws. She stands for all the failed policies that boosted Trump.

Biden quickly endorsed Harris as the Democrats' presidential candidate, and endorsements from the rest of the Democratic establishment rolled in, including former president Bill Clinton and failed presidential candidate Hillary Clinton, and Senator Elizabeth Warren.

Some of the wealthiest donors to the Democrats have also swung behind Harris, with donors giving \$200 million in her first week in the race.

Harris will try and drum up support by painting herself as a defender of abortion rights. Yet the overturning of *Roe v Wade* in 2022, which recognised the constitutional right to abortion, happened under Biden and Harris' watch.

It was the Biden-Harris administration that failed to pass a nationwide law protecting *Roe v Wade*—something they promised in their 2020 election campaign. As vice president, Harris has attacked migrants coming across the US-Mexico border, saying, "Do not come. Do not come."

And she's enforced a number of anti-migrant laws such as strengthening border police.

Harris has tried to express empathy for the suffering in Gaza in the hope of appealing to Democratic Party supporters disgusted with Biden's embrace of Israel. But she remains complicit with Israel's genocide, unwaveringly defending Israel's "right to defend itself". Previously Harris went as far as likening the creation of Israel "as the same commitment to justice" as those who marched in the US civil rights movement.

Harris presents herself as a "progressive prosecutor" after her time as attorney general of California. But in office she opposed criminal justice reforms and fought tooth and nail to uphold wrongful convictions secured through official misconduct.



Above: Kamala Harris has been swiftly embraced by the Democratic Party establishment
Photo: Gage Skidmore/Flickr

.....
She remains complicit with Israel's genocide, unwaveringly defending Israel's 'right to defend itself'

She blocked payouts to the wrongfully-convicted and argued for keeping non-violent offenders in jail as a source of cheap labour. And she denied gender reassignment surgery to trans+ prisoners.

Biden's presidency has failed to improve the lives of ordinary people. Harris is simply a continuation of Biden's politics.

She will do all she can to channel social movements away from the streets and into boosting her election campaign.

Left's failures

Millions of people have in recent years taken part in mass movements that have rocked the US state, and the left ought to be at its strongest in a generation.

Israel's genocide—and Joe Biden's and the Democrats' support for it—has seen thousands of people take part in university encampments across the country.

And many activists targeted "Genocide Joe" by campaigning for "uncommitted votes" in Democratic primaries that chose the party's presidential candidate.

The Palestine movement comes in the wake of Black Lives Matter, the abortion rights movement and opposition under Trump's presidency.

And we've seen the beginnings of a revival in the working class movement. In 2023, unions staged the highest number of strikes in 23 years, albeit from a low base.

The likes of Bernie Sanders, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (AOC)

and the "squad", who call themselves "democratic socialists", found a much wider echo in the US working class.

But it is Trump and the right who have capitalised on the discontent in the US, and recovered in the polls for November's presidential election.

Why? Because the left's figureheads—Sanders and the squad—have worked to pull the radical mood into the Democrats' business as usual politics.

As Biden floundered Sanders and AOC did all they could to keep him in the race. Sanders took to the *New York Times* to write that Biden had, "been the most effective president in the modern history of our country and is the strongest candidate to defeat Mr Trump".

He even pointed to the recent French election, arguing, "It's time to learn a lesson from the progressive and centrist forces in France". He wrote that "despite profound political differences" the left and centrists "came together... to soundly defeat right wing extremism" in the form of the fascist National Rally.

But the left backing centrist, neoliberal politics in an attempt to defeat the far right weakens our side. It sees the left line up behind politicians who back assaults on workers and migrants—as the left-wing *New Popular Front* did in France in urging a vote for them—and gives the far right an opportunity to pose as the "anti-establishment" force.

The real solution lies in more struggle, breaking with the Democrats and building a socialist politics based on resistance.

THE 1986 DEREGISTRATION HOW LABOR'S UNION BUSTING BROKE THE BLF

There are lessons for the CFMEU today from the way Labor succeeded in breaking the Builders Labourers' Federation in 1986, argues **Tom Orsag**

THE OFFENSIVE against the militant Construction Division of the CFMEU is backed by an unholy alliance of the mainstream media, the Labor Government and the ACTU.

This is far from the first time the construction union has faced such a concerted attack.

Recent Liberal governments have launched two costly Royal Commissions into the union, in 2001 and 2014. The second of them, explicitly tasked with investigating union corruption at a cost of \$46 million, uncovered just two instances of possible corruption by CFMEU officials.

The Liberals also set up the Australian Building and Construction Commission to investigate and harass construction workers. But the main aim has always been to frustrate legitimate union activity and do the bidding of the construction company bosses.

The Albanese government's orders to the anti-union Fair Work Commissioner to have administrators take over four state branches of the union is far more sweeping—and could do far more damage.

There is a clear parallel with Labor Prime Minister Bob Hawke's deregistration of the Builders' Labourers Federation in 1986—a ruthless effort at union busting that broke the union.

Hawke and the BLF

Hawke's offensive against the BLF showed that Labor was prepared to stage a ruthless attack on the unions.

The BLF had been too successful for its members, winning wage rises, shorter hours and safer working conditions.

The union also had a proud record of support for Aboriginal rights and the environment, made famous through its Green Bans in NSW in the 1970s.

BLF organisers were also willing to risk arrest for defying the courts and anti-union laws, and BLF members

willing to strike until they were released.

The targeting of the BLF began with a Royal Commission under Malcolm Fraser's Liberal government in 1981. It finally discovered that BLF Secretary Norm Gallagher had accepted \$100,000 in building materials for his beach house. The evidence against him was flimsy, but Gallagher eventually went to jail for corruption.

It was the BLF's opposition to the Hawke Government's "Prices and Incomes Accord" which finally led to its deregistration, the use of anti-union laws and police violence to shut it down.

The Accord was an agreement between the peak union body, the ACTU, and the Labor Party implemented after Labor came to office in March 1983.

The union movement agreed to accept a cap on wage rises in return for supposed increases in "the social wage"—increased funding for education, health and welfare.

In reality, it was a plan designed to cut wages and curb union power in order to restore profits for the bosses after the recessions of 1974 and 1982. The Accord imposed wage cuts of about 7.5 per cent in the first five years of the Labor government.

The Accord was endorsed at the 1983 ACTU Conference with only the NSW nurses union voting against. The BLF's leader, Norm Gallagher, had doubts but refused to raise them publicly.

When the economy began to recover from recession in 1984-85, the BLF began a series of industrial campaigns for pay rises above the Accord limits.

This was too much for the Labor government. The Accord was central to its plan for the health of Australian capitalism.

Long-term media commentator, Max Walsh, noted, "Hawke and com-

The BLF did not appreciate how far the ACTU and the Labor Party were willing to go

pany know that they're going to have to crush the BLF...for the preservation of the Hawke government [they] decided the BLF has to go."

In July 1985, Hawke told Cabinet unabashedly, "We're gonna smash those bastards. We're going to deregister the BLF."

The *Financial Review* gloated that, "The Hawke government has become a jailer for unions which dare to buck the Accord consensus, and the ACTU has become an industrial police force."

The Federal Government and the two state Labor governments drew up Codes of Conduct for building companies to stop them dealing with the BLF or paying above Award wages in so-called "sweetheart deals."

Building companies who refused to sign the Codes faced the loss of Federal and state government work.

In Victoria, Premier John Cain threatened to hold up planning permits and cut off gas, electricity and water to building sites in order to enforce the state Code.

To eliminate any doubt it was an orchestrated plan, Clive Bubb, CEO of Master Builders Australia said, "This is a fully coordinated, carefully structured, national campaign dedicated to ridding our \$15 billion a year industry of the BLF blight."

But the BLF did not appreciate how far the ACTU and the Labor Party were willing to go. Even as deregistration took effect Norm Gallagher was playing down the threat, saying, "We will look after ourselves, just wait and see".

Smashing the union

In 1986, the BLF was deregistered federally and in NSW, Victoria and the ACT, then its areas of largest membership.

This meant it was banned from striking agreements with employers and lost the right to appear in industrial courts to represent its members. Prime Minister Bob Hawke

passed laws against it in the Federal Parliament. Simultaneous laws were introduced by State Premiers in NSW and Victoria.

The government used the full force of the law, the courts and the police to break the union.

Key BLF organisers like Victoria's John Cummins were banned from building sites and then arrested and jailed for six nights for "trespassing" when they tried to enter.

Steve Crabb, then Victorian Minister for Industrial Relations, set in motion police raids on the BLF offices to confiscate its membership list and the union funds.

The union had been deregistered before between 1974 and 1976 and had survived, even increasing its membership during the period.

This happened under a Liberal government, so the ACTU supported the union and the wider union movement refused to poach BLF members.

In 1986, with the ACTU backing the Accord, the logic of protecting the Labor government meant it instead joined the assault on the BLF. The ACTU's support was the key to smashing the BLF.

Rival unions the Building Workers' Industrial Union (BWIU) and FEDFA, the crane drivers' union, agreed to poach the BLF's membership.

Large contingents of police moved onto building sites around Sydney, Melbourne and Canberra to help employers and union organisers intimidate rank-and-file BLF members into joining the BWIU.

Workers were told to either quit the BLF or lose their jobs. Some were even locked in sheds on sites until they agreed.

This was all the more appalling as the BWIU had a reputation as a left-wing union, led in NSW by former Communist Party members Tom McDonald and Pat Clancy and in the National Office by Stan Sharkey.

With the ACTU shamefully approving the efforts to break the union, and even left-wing unions doing nothing to defend it, the BLF was smashed.

Many BLF supporters in Victoria continued to maintain BLF membership alongside that of other unions and held out as long as they could on some stalwart sites, like 417 St Kilda Rd.

In 1993 what was left of the BLF amalgamated with the BWIU into the new super union, the CFMEU. Former BLF organisers like John Cummins and John Setka and stalwarts like



Above: BLF members at an International Women's Day rally in 1975

Ralph Edwards would go on to play important roles in the new CFMEU.

Disgracefully, the ACTU is again supporting the Labor government's attack on the CFMEU today.

This time the government has decided to appoint administrators to take over CFMEU branches instead of deregistering the union completely.

But this is no sign that it intends to go easy on it. Elected officials are facing the sack. The talk of cancelling some CFMEU Enterprise Bargaining Agreements could be used to push the union out of government-funded construction projects. The AWU already has coverage of some government projects in Queensland, and would be happy to poach CFMEU members.

A long process of administration could also set the stage for installing new, more conservative officials to run the union after fresh union elections.

Labor then and now

The Labor Party was founded by unions to represent their interests in parliament. Yet it was Labor Prime Minister Bob Hawke who set out to break the BLF. This was a lesson in how far Labor is prepared to go to defend capitalism and serve the interests of the bosses—and should be a warning for the CFMEU today.

Victorian Labor Premier John Cain even boasted that in regards to the BLF, "I have always said only a Labor government can do what we are doing."

Labor was able to convince the

ACTU and other unions to join the attack on the union, when Liberal governments could not.

The attack on the BLF in 1986 was central to Hawke's plan for managing capitalism through the wage-capping of the Accord. Any union that succeeded in winning wage rises that went beyond the Accord framework threatened to undermine the whole project.

In 2024, the threat the CFMEU poses for the Labor government may not be as drastic. But the union's willingness to defy Labor and its continued industrial militancy and maintenance of strong wages and conditions mean it continues to be a target.

Albanese and Labor still want to deliver for the ruling class and make it clear that Labor will reliably serve their interests.

Big business would not have tolerated a failure to use the opportunity that the media scandal over "corruption" has presented to act against the CFMEU.

Like the BLF the CFMEU isolated from most of the union movement and the Labor Party—although this time a handful of other unions such as the ETU and the MUA have opposed the attack.

How much damage the current attack on the union does depends on what kind of fight the CFMEU puts up and how much support it gets from other unionists.

The BLF was isolated and broken. We can't let this happen again.

SETTLER-COLONIALISM AND THE WORKING CLASS IN ISRAEL AND AUSTRALIA

Although Australia and Israel share a history of settler colonialism, workers here have history of fighting for Indigenous rights while those in Israel cannot, writes **Paddy Gibson**

AN INSPIRING feature of the movement against the genocide in Gaza has been the solidarity between Palestinians and Aboriginal people, who share a common history of oppression by—and resistance to—settler-colonialism.

Both Australia and Israel are nations founded through genocide. Both are outposts of Western imperialist power in Asia and the Middle East. These are two classic features of settler-colonial states.

There are, however, serious differences between these societies. One of the most fundamental is the difference in the relationship of the non-Indigenous working class to both the state and the colonised population.

Marxists understand the working class to be the most important agent in driving progressive social change under capitalism, due to its structural position within the capitalist system.

Capitalism relies on bringing workers together and exploiting them to make profit. This creates an antagonistic and potentially explosive situation, driving workers to organise and fight.

Strike action can stop the flow of profits, winning improvements in wages and conditions and broader political demands.

Ultimately, Marxists aim to deepen these struggles, organise workers to seize control of production and create a socialist society, where production is for human need and our planet.

But different settler-colonial societies differ in the relationship between the colonising power, the settlers, the domination of the Indigenous population and the emergence of a working class.

As in South Africa, where the white working class was co-opted by the state and played no role in the toppling of Apartheid, in Israel today almost the entire Jewish Israeli population supports the genocide in Gaza.

In Israel, unions are a fundamental pillar of the Zionist project. They have

never mobilised for Palestinian rights and the Israeli working class cannot play any central role in the struggle for Palestinian liberation.

In contrast, unions have been an important part of the struggle for Aboriginal rights in Australia. The fight for Indigenous liberation on this continent needs an orientation to mobilising working-class power.

These differences can be understood with reference to the historical development of settler-colonialism, capitalism and the working class in both societies.

Colonisation, capitalism and the working class in Australia

The establishment of settler-colonies was part of the division of the world by European imperialist powers, an important feature of the emergence of capitalism as a global system.

In most colonial situations, the colonising population remained a small minority, involved in administration or military occupation, facilitating the hyper-exploitation of native labour and resources. In contrast, settler-colonies were established through mass migration from the imperial core to the new colony, often but not always to act as the main source of labour.

The main dynamic driving colonisation across Australia was the expansionist needs of pastoral capitalism.

In every Australian colony, pastoral capitalists controlled the new settler-states. They seized Aboriginal land and flooded it with sheep or cattle. State troopers, or supported settler-militia, annihilated any Aboriginal people who got in their way.

However, as a distinctly Australian capitalism developed through the late 19th century, an increasingly urban working class developed, exploited by the same capitalist class that dispossessed Aboriginal people.

Vicious anti-Aboriginal racism formed a key part of Australian

Unions have been an important part of the struggle for Aboriginal rights in Australia

nationalism and a system of formal Apartheid operated across the continent for much of the 20th century. But white workers in Australia had no material interest in the exploitation and dispossession of the Aboriginal population.

Everywhere, there were Aboriginal families who became part of the broader working class and joined unions. This helped create conditions for the workers movement to begin to recognise there was a common struggle with Aboriginal people against the bosses and the state.

Some of the earliest Aboriginal political leaders were unionists, including Fred Maynard, founder of the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association in 1924, a lifetime member of the Waterside Workers Federation, and Bill Ferguson, founder of the Aborigines Progressive Association in 1936, an Australian Workers Union organiser in the shearing industry.

In 1931, the Communist Party of Australia (CPA) published a manifesto for Aboriginal liberation, based on the experiences of Black and white workers fighting alongside each other against the hardships of the Depression.

This program argued that the racism perpetrated against Aboriginal people was driven by the need of the Australian ruling class to dehumanise Aboriginal people and justify the genocide that lay at the foundation of their system.

Just as it was in the interests of all Australian workers to oppose imperialist wars being waged overseas, the CPA argued it was also in workers' interests to fight against the brutal "protection" system controlling Aboriginal people—and to stand for Land Rights and self-determination. Over following years, white communists and Aboriginal activists won this as formal policy across the union movement.

Unions provided an important source of support for campaigns for equality and justice—from the Cum-

meragunja strike against a brutal reserve manager in 1939 to the 1979-80 Noonkanbah dispute, when the entire union movement banned drilling for oil on sacred Aboriginal land.

Of course, many non-Indigenous workers continued to hold racist and at times violent attitudes towards Aboriginal people.

Anti-Aboriginal racism is intrinsic to the operations of Australian capitalism, which is premised on dispossession. These dominant ideas are reinforced by all the ideological institutions at the disposal of the ruling class.

However, there is a material basis to successfully challenge these ideas because the working class are not settlers who benefit from Aboriginal dispossession. The more anti-racist, unified and organised the working class, the greater the gains that can be won both for Aboriginal people and the entire class.

Zionism, imperialism and economic development

Zionist colonisation of Palestine took place in very different circumstances, pitting Jewish workers in an unending military conflict with Palestinian people and the broader Arab world and over-riding class tensions within that settler-society.

The Zionist movement that emerged in the late 19th century was based on the idea of establishing a Jewish homeland as a settler-colony that would be a spearhead for European imperialism.

It was the support of British imperialism that allowed Zionist settlers to establish a foothold in Palestine after the First World War, increasing the Jewish population from 56,000 in 1918 to almost half a million by 1939.

Organisations based on Jewish workers in Palestine played a fundamental role in colonisation. Israel's first Prime Minister, David Ben-Gurion, said that without the Zionist union federation, the Histadrut, "I doubt whether we would have had a state."

From its foundation, the Histadrut operated as settlement agency. It also excluded Palestinian workers and ran businesses that exclusively provided jobs for Jewish settlers.

While a small number of Jewish communists, part of the same international movement that led pro-Aboriginal campaigns in Australia, argued for the unity of Arab and Jewish workers against the employers and British administration, they never gained a hearing.

The Histadrut ran vicious campaigns to boycott Arab labour and



Above: Israeli settlers near the village of Burin in the West Bank

Photo: ISM Palestine

produce. It founded a paramilitary organisation, the Haganah, that helped the British military put down a Palestinian uprising from 1936-38, led the genocidal dispossession of Palestinians in the 1948 Nakba and then formed the core of the new IDF.

After the establishment of Israel, the Histadrut controlled 80 per cent of the Israeli economy.

The economic development of Israel would have been impossible without the subsidies provided through the Western powers determined to maintain Israel as a settler-colony that served Western imperialist interests.

These capital flows and military support underpinned the state and provided Israeli workers with subsidised social services and guaranteed their employment, tying them materially and ideologically to the Apartheid state.

As Israeli socialists Machover and Orr argued in their important 1969 essay, *The Class Character of Israel*, "Israel is a unique case in the Middle East, financed by imperialism without being exploited by it."

They also argued that "the permanent conflict between the settler society and the indigenous, displaced Palestinian Arabs" was the defining factor shaping the Israeli economy, its institutions and psychology.

This reality intensified after Israel's victory in the 1967 war, the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza and the construction of a comprehensive system of apartheid laws, settlement expansion and military dictatorship over Palestinian life.

Israel became central to US imperialist strategy for dominating the Middle East. This led to significant financial support from the US government, increasingly in the form of military aid.

Israel developed a serious capitalist class and the Histadrut and state-based industries decreased in importance. But Israel's economy is now based on a high-tech sector connected to military production and massively subsidised by the US.

Israel is a garrison society where all Jewish citizens complete compulsory military service and the Israeli Defence Force (IDF) is the most influential social institution, tying the population to mobilisation for permanent war.

Opinion polls have consistently shown that more than 85 per cent of the Jewish Israeli population support the genocidal campaign in Gaza.

A socialist strategy to liberate Palestine cannot be based on the Israeli working class. Instead it looks to the revolutionary potential of the working class in the Arab states across the Middle East and North Africa.

US imperialism also relies on the support of Arab regimes, particularly Egypt, that repress their own population, driving periodic struggles such as the revolutions of 2011.

The deepening of such revolts into the overthrow of the existing order could cripple the Zionist regime. It will require the dismantling of the Apartheid state to break the chains that subjugate Palestinians and tie Jewish Israelis to Zionism, opening horizons for a socialist future.

Australian capitalism plays a key role in upholding the US-led imperialist order while exploiting workers and inflicting grinding oppression on Aboriginal people.

The Australian working class has a common interest to struggle with Indigenous people against racism, for return of stolen lands and against the imperialist system crushing the Palestinians.

IS RACISM THE CAUSE OF GENOCIDE AND WAR?

Racism accompanies every major war, and while it can serve as a justification the fundamental cause of war is imperialism and capitalist competition, argues **Jack Stuble**

RACISM IS deeply embedded in our society. It is frequently used to dehumanise enemies in war. Most recently we have the example of the shameful Islamophobia and racism directed towards Palestinians by the Western media and governments.

The scale of Israeli racism against Palestinians means there is overwhelming support inside Israel for its genocidal violence in Gaza. Zionist groups in Australia and other Western countries are also campaigned relentlessly to support Israel's violence.

This has led some to see this racism itself as the reason for the war.

But racism is not the cause of war. Rather it is a key part of the way ruling classes legitimise the atrocities committed in wars. This is true of practically every war in modern history.

The colonisation of Australia relied on racism to justify the massacres against Aboriginal people and theft of their land.

This was a war aimed at the dispossession and extermination of Indigenous people. But the driving force behind this was not racism itself but the desire to accumulate wealth through using the land to raise sheep and agricultural commodities for sale on the capitalist markets of Europe.

The Islamophobia after 9/11 served to justify the US invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq as part of a "war on terrorism", through hysteria about the threat from "Islamic terrorism".

Former Prime Minister John Howard accused Muslim communities in Australia of failing to integrate, with an accompanying so-called "extremism" problem that was unique from other immigrant communities.

When this rhetoric led to the Cronulla race riots in 2005 where Lebanese-Australians were attacked by drunken mobs, Howard shamefully claimed there was no "underlying racism" in Australia.

Similarly, subsequent Liberal Prime Ministers Tony Abbott and

Scott Morrison have made noises about radicalisation and the uniquely violent nature of "extremist Islam", accompanied by heavily publicised police anti-terror raids.

But the wars in the Middle East were motivated by imperialism, with the US's aim clearly laid out in George W Bush's National Security Strategy documents, which promoted the unilateral use of US military power to cement its global dominance. Control of Iraq's oil was supposed to boost the US's position against rivals like China and Europe.

Israel's racism

Israeli racism against Palestinians, too, has been on clear display throughout its war in Gaza.

Israeli officials have resorted to blunt dehumanisation, with Defence Minister Yoav Gallant labelling Palestinians "human animals". Other Ministers argued for "erasing the Gaza Strip from the face of this earth" because there are "no uninvolved civilians".

Israel has presented their opponents as savages, with manufactured stories of Hamas beheading babies, a trope of colonialist rhetoric since Irish rebellion of 1641, and unsubstantiated claims they carried out systemic mass rape during the 7 October attack.

The mainstream media here has reported these claims almost uncritically, and shown the usual bias. Israeli atrocities are described in the passive voice as if they were unintentional or responsibility for them is unclear. Palestinian resistance fighters are routinely labelled "terrorists".

But it is not Israel's racism or the role of individual Zionists that are the cause of the genocide in Gaza, and the ongoing war against the Palestinians since at least 1948.

This is a result of imperialist support for Israel to as a "watchdog state" for Western interests in the Middle East.

Zionism has always relied on

Israeli racism against Palestinians has been on clear display throughout its war in Gaza

Western imperialist patrons. Initially, Britain, as the colonial ruler of Palestine after 1917, sponsored a surge in Zionist migration. Israel later had assistance from France before today's support from the US.

In recent decades US support has been vital to arming Israel and ensuring its economic survival.

After the Second World War oil became of immense importance. This meant that the competition for influence in the Middle East became fundamental to maintaining global economic clout, allowing Israel to play an important role for the US as it sought to control the region.

Israel was founded on the forcible expulsion of the Indigenous Palestinian population, the seizure of Palestinian land, and the attempted eradication of any resistance to this process. But the drive to establish and maintain the Israeli settler-state, the genocidal offensive against Palestinian resistance, and the racism and Islamophobia used to justify it, are all products of imperialism.

Israel suffered a severe humiliation as a result of the Hamas attack on 7 October.

It took Israel four days of fighting to recapture the military bases and communities taken over, and it suffered a civilian death toll greater than in any war since 1948.

The genocide it has unleashed against Gaza's population is not simply a product of racist fury, but an effort to crush Palestinian resistance and reassert Israel's military dominance in the region. Maintaining this military clout is vital to ensuring it maintains imperialist support, as an asset in the region capable of enforcing Western interests.

Imperialism

Racism forms a key part of the ideological onslaught by the ruling class to justify wars. But war is ultimately a product of capitalism and the competition for profit that drives the system.

Powerful states use their military

might to compete with other powers for control of resources, cheap labour, trade routes and markets in a process of imperialist competition.

This is an extension of the economic competition that is central to capitalism.

As the system has developed, most industries have come to be dominated by only a handful of large firms, a process called monopolisation.

Subsequently, these increasingly influential companies rely on the state to enforce their international and domestic interests while the strength of these firms becomes more important than ever to the state's national economic interests.

Therefore, it becomes necessary for the state to secure the natural resources, the markets with favourable trade conditions, and security of trade routes to make their industries as competitive, powerful and profitable as possible.

Economic competition no longer operates on purely market grounds, instead monopolisation of each branch of industry has meant the "utilisation of 'connections' for profitable deals takes the place of competition in the open market" as the Russian revolutionary Lenin put it.

This process directly led to the imperialist colonial expansion of the 19th century including the scramble for Africa and the two world wars immediately following it.

After all the world was divided up among the major European powers, the persistent need to economically expand and compete meant that the only option left to was to try to seize the holdings of other imperialist powers, leading to military conflict between them.

The economic struggle between rival companies therefore directly became the military struggle between rival states.

The First World War was the result of a whole host of imperialist powers—Britain Germany, Austria-Hungary, the US, Japan, Russia, Italy and France—all competing for dominance. The imperialist interests of states competing to control and profit from the world market spilled over into war, and the same industrial development that had created that competition also made it the deadliest war the world had yet seen.

Despite the devastation, the underlying imperialist tensions were not resolved. The outcome of the war simply meant that the spoils of colonial holdings were redivided to the benefit



Above: The shocking scale of the destruction and genocide unleashed on civilians in Gaza is a product of Israel's role as an imperialist watchdog

Photo: UNRWA

of the victorious nations.

The losers, who lost secure access to the raw materials and markets necessary to grow their industries and economies, resorted to military expansion again to seek to rectify this.

This led to the horrors of the Second World War.

Racism does not explain the continued wars that threaten us today. The return of war to mainland Europe in Ukraine, for instance, is clearly a product of imperialist competition.

Ukraine is the site of a proxy war between NATO and the US against their rival Russia.

There the Western powers are trying to maintain a geo-political bulwark against Russian imperialism and continue expanding their influence into Eastern Europe, while Russia tries to prove it can still exert military power and influence into mainland Europe.

Ukraine has been subject to political meddling from the West for decades. During the US-backed 2004 colour revolution and Euromaidan revolution in 2014, millions of dollars were poured into campaigns promoting closer alignment with the European Union, in open antagonism to Russia.

Since then, the US has spent billions arming Ukraine, with staunchly pro-US Ukrainian President Zelensky expressing a desire to be a "big Israel", as a heavily militarised Western-backed watchdog state in the local area.

Russia's attempt to reassert the control it once wielded over Ukrainian industry, ports, and natural resources such as oil and gas, has been seized on by NATO as an opportunity to bleed Russia and weaken its geo-political influence.

When there was a real possibility of peace on the condition of Ukrainian neutrality, then British Prime Minister Boris Johnson encouraged Zelensky to "make war".

Since then, hundreds of thousands of people have been sent to their deaths, with scenes of trench warfare reminiscent of the First World War.

But imperialism is not all-powerful. Palestine has been a lightning rod for resistance in the Middle East, frequently exposing the hypocrisy of the Arab ruling classes as their words and their actions become increasingly misaligned, acting as a constant reminder of Western imperialist influence in the region and their collaboration with it.

The issue of Palestine was deeply embedded within the revolts during the Arab Spring of 2011.

Here at home the same racist treatment of Palestinians has exposed the hypocrisy of the media and the craven loyalty to imperialist interests of Anthony Albanese's government.

We need to oppose both the genocide and the racism that is accompanying it, but also understand the underlying forces of capitalism and imperialism that are responsible both for racism and the ongoing wars and genocide in Palestine.

DEFEND THE CFMEU— STOP LABOR'S UNION BUSTING



Above: CFMEU members on the march in Sydney

A RABID media campaign about criminality and corruption in the CFMEU has become an all out attack on the union, with the federal Labor government moving to install administrators to take it over.

CFMEU branches in Victoria, NSW, Queensland and South Australia are immediately threatened.

Administration will see the union's elected officials sacked, union democracy suspended and the union paralysed. The NSW government has asked for the administrator to have control for as long as five years.

The union will have its hands tied as construction bosses work to kick it off building sites and undermine safety, pay and conditions.

The corruption allegations are largely a media beat up that do not justify this attack.

Construction bosses and both state and federal Labor governments have seized on the allegations to launch a full-on attack on the CFMEU because it is one of the strongest unions in the country.

CFMEU Enterprise Bargaining Agreements (EBAs) on Victorian government Big Build projects are being reviewed for cancellation if Fair Work decides bosses did not legally agree. The NSW Master Builders Association says the review could make it easier for companies in NSW to reject the latest CFMEU agreement.

Construction bosses have called on the police, the ACCC and the Fair Work Ombudsman to investigate recent EBAs. Hard-won conditions are under threat.

Unionists everywhere should defend the CFMEU against these attacks and oppose government-imposed administration of the union.

The CFMEU national office has already set up an independently-run investigation into the allegations.

CFMEU national secretary Zach Smith has made it very clear that, "External administration and further interference of the government isn't necessary," and that, "If there is any wrongdoing found, people will be removed from our ranks."

It is shameful that the peak union body the ACTU has suspended the NSW, Victorian, South Australian and Tasmanian branches of the CFMEU. The ACTU should be standing up to the blatant union bashing.

Winning wages and safety

The media's claims of CFMEU criminality are weak (see page 7).

The CFMEU is an effective, fighting union, delivering on wages and conditions for its members. It has long been a thorn in the side of the big building companies, demanding workers share in their multi-million dollar profits.

In June, the Victorian branch sealed a new deal that will see wage rises of 5 per cent every year for the next four years, an above-inflation pay rise.

The CFMEU only controls construction sites through maintaining close to 100 per cent union membership. The Nine Papers have complained that this means, "The CFMEU has the power to keep out companies

with non-union agreements or to favour companies it prefers."

This is not a crime—it is evidence of the union strength needed on the job to ensure all companies and sub-contractors on site deliver union rates and conditions. In an industry where shonky fly-by-night operators are rife and dozens of sub-contracting companies are constantly moving on and off sites, this is a major achievement.

There are reasons to criticise John Setka's reign as Victorian CFMEU secretary. He should have stepped down in 2019 when he pled guilty to domestic violence charges. His vendettas against some rival union officials have been a substitute for struggle and rank-and-file mobilisation.

But Labor's real concern with Setka and the CFMEU is that it is one of the few unions willing to defy the anti-strike laws and to demand that Labor removes the restrictions on workers' right to strike. Setka finally resigned as the union's Victorian secretary when the recent allegations hit the media.

Any union official involved in corruption who uses their union position to make money for themselves should go. Corruption weakens the union movement and opens it up to attack from the government and the bosses.

But there is nothing wrong with union support for companies that pay EBA rates and respect safety and workers' rights.

Every union needs to stand with the CFMEU and oppose the Labor government's intervention in the union. An attack on one, is an attack on all.

The CFMEU is one of the strongest unions in the country, delivering on wages and conditions for its members

Solidarity