

REDFLAG

**WHY MARXISM
IS RELEVANT**

Page 19

Newspaper of **Socialist Alternative**

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Rejecting people who come by boat is

A RACIST

DISGRACE

**The Labor government takes
refugee policy to a new low**

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WHEN THE PRESS WAS REVOLUTIONARY

Ben Hillier on the rise and decline of the capitalist media - Page 13

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WHAT IS RED FLAG ABOUT?

Telling the truth. The capitalist press is full of lies, distortions and right wing bias. We need an alternative press, free from corporate interests and government spin, to provide news and analysis of major developments in our world.

Supporting resistance. Those that own and control the corporate media are hostile to people fighting for their rights. They make money out of the exploitation and oppression of workers and the poor. Red Flag is a paper on the side of the oppressed, telling the story from our side and giving solidarity to those in struggle.

Fighting for socialism. Red Flag is about more than just highlighting problems with the system, or

supporting individual struggles. It campaigns to win people to socialism, to convince them that the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism is the solution to the problems of society.

Intervening in struggles. Red Flag’s socialist politics doesn’t just mean general arguments for socialism. Red Flag is an interventionist paper, bringing socialist arguments to the debates of today about how we can best mount a fightback, what tactics and strategies are needed to take on the right. And while Red Flag will fight for the views of Socialist Alternative, the paper is also a forum in which crucial questions on the left can be debated.

EDITORIAL

Let them in

Australia has a border protection problem. It is not that the border is too porous: fewer than 16,000 people have travelled here by boat this year. That’s a tiny fraction of the estimated 15 million refugees struggling to survive around the globe.

The problem is the pervasive idea that it needs ‘protecting’ at all. This isn’t just an Australian problem. Governments all around the world are placing greater restrictions on human movement, therefore on human rights. We’re told that restrictions are needed for security. Yet a cursory glance shows that those with the greatest freedoms pose the greatest threat to the majority of the population.

Banking and mining company executives with a record of environmental destruction and gross exploitation, heads and former heads of government who are guilty of war crimes – parasites who live off the back of human suffering – have welcome mats laid out for them because they have the resources to buy their way into almost any country. Our world is their oyster.

One example of how the system works is Australia’s subclass 188 visa – open to anyone with at least \$5

million. There are just over 1 million people in the world – 1.4 percent of the total population – with that amount of money. Their fortunes are built through exploitation.

Similar provisions exist in almost every country, allowing the ruling class free movement. And not just of ruling class individuals. Companies that have an interest only in exploiting natural resources or cheap labour get free rein.

For workers and the poor, however, the borders are generally shut. We have fewer freedoms than multinational companies. This isn’t done for the safety of the mass of the population; it is about controlling labour flows in the interests of the rich. When governments can control the movement of human beings and choose who is deserving of rights, it is easier for the wealthy to exploit workers everywhere.

So workers and the poor in all countries have an interest in fighting for refugee rights. We need fewer restrictions, not more. When workers and the poor come seeking a better life and when people want sanctuary from oppression, we say ‘Let them in.’

The ‘race to the bottom’ is driven from the top

Racism is a tool for dividing workers and the poor. It is being used to great effect by a so-called workers’ party.

Labor polling indicates that there is a section of swing voters who want asylum seekers kicked in the teeth, and who are more likely to vote for the party that kicks harder. That, apparently, is reason enough for the parliamentarians to put on the steel-caps.

Everything we hear about this constituency suggests that the anti-refugee vote is self-generating – as though people in particular areas have a natural fear or hatred of people in boats. That is rubbish. Anti-refugee sentiment in sections of the population is the product of years of anti-refugee racism that has come from politicians, the media and others at the top of society.

In part, anti-refugee rhetoric has been used to justify the increasing militarisation of borders and greater surveillance of the population as a whole. In an age when market forces penetrate every sphere of existence, when there are increasing levels of anxiety and general feelings of powerlessness, the audience for those promising security from ‘alien forces’ has no doubt increased.

The ALP, rather than fight for the rights of asylum seekers, has time and again attempted to make the big

parties’ refugee policies almost indistinguishable, so that the electorate is forced to differentiate between them on other issues.

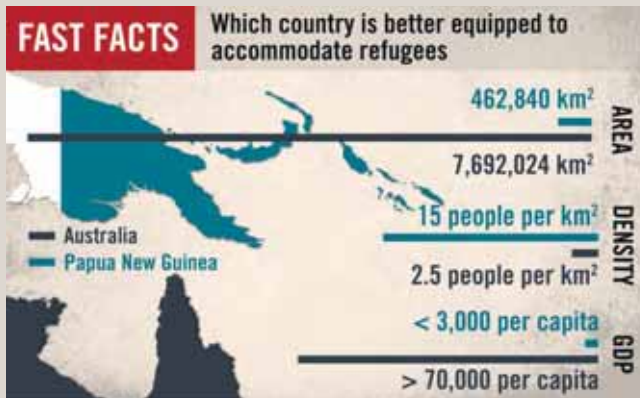
Previously – such as with the introduction of mandatory detention by the Keating government and Gillard’s attempted ‘Malaysian solution’ – Labor has even led the charge in demonising the vulnerable.

Yet by sinking to ever more disgraceful levels, the party never neutralised ‘refugees’ as a political issue. Instead it helped to legitimise and generate ever greater levels of racism, which in turn helped to keep the issue alive.

Apart from a two-year period immediately after Rudd’s election in 2007, border security and boat arrivals have been prominent in the ‘who do you trust’ rhetoric of the Coalition. The ALP’s PNG deal is an attempt to outflank the conservatives again.

Labor parliamentarians intend to preserve their own political lives by extinguishing the rights of others. Indeed, they look ready to send them to hell if it will neutralise the Coalition.

Whether or not they are successful is beside the point. That it is even being attempted proves that the short term electoral interests of the party are considered by ministers more important than human rights.



SNAP ACTIONS FOR REFUGEE RIGHTS



Brisbane

A racist disgrace

Andrew Martin

The ALP has succeeded in setting an international benchmark for cruelty. In a move that has outflanked to the right most of the Liberal Party, Kevin Rudd has completely trashed the UN convention on the rights of refugees.

Asylum seekers who come by boat will never be settled in Australia. The government plans to expand the existing detention centres on Nauru and Manus Island and build more in Papua New Guinea (PNG). It claims that it will find "appropriate accommodation" for refugees once their claims are assessed. "Appropriate" will resemble a hell hole.

As Greens Senator Scott Ludlum stated: "This is a proposal so offensive that even Scott Morrison and Tony Abbott hadn't thought of it." This new low for Labor is beyond anything the refugee rights movement could have imagined. It is worse even than Tony Abbott's idea of towing boats back to Indonesia.

The ALP has moved firmly into the realm of the reactionary right, harking back to when it was the party of the White Australia policy. The policy is intrinsically cruel. It targets those who have suffered the harshest of persecutions; those who have no option but to run and to keep running until they find protection.

Meanwhile Australia will still continue its bid to be on the UN Human Rights Council. Like war criminals such as Mahendra Rajapaksa, president of Sri Lanka responsible for the genocide of an estimated 80,000 Tamils, Rudd wants to be the respected statesman mouthing humanitarianism. Sending refugees to PNG is a continuation of the persecution they have already suffered.

A hell hole for refugees

PNG is one of the most impoverished countries in the world. It is unable to provide housing, healthcare or basic education for much of the population. Thirty-seven percent of its people live below the poverty line. It has a GDP per capita of less than \$3,000, compared with over \$70,000 in Australia. It is ranked 168 in the world in terms of life expectancy. Lethal water-borne parasites, malaria and diseases like cholera, tuberculo-

sis, typhoid and hepatitis are rife in PNG. Many strains of these diseases have become drug resistant.

The Australian government's own travel advice warns visitors to exercise extreme caution due to the high levels of violent crime such as "car jackings, armed robbery and sexual assaults including gang rape".

It also advises that "medical evacuation is the only option for serious illness or injury".

Conditions for refugees already transferred to PNG's Manus Island are appalling. The UNHCR released a damning report on the state of the detention centre after a monitoring visit in June. The agency noted that it is "deeply concerned by the ongoing deprivation of freedom of the asylum seekers in the Centre".

"The current PNG policy and practice of detaining all asylum-seekers...on a mandatory and indefinite basis without an assessment...and without being brought promptly before a judicial or other independent authority amounts to arbitrary detention that is inconsistent with international human rights law", it said.

The report also noted that "all asylum seekers on Manus Island displayed apparent signs of anxiety and depression".

PNG is one of the most unsuitable and harshest places on the planet to resettle people who have already experienced the worst traumas imaginable. But then that is the point.

We have to act

The government's actions have provoked anger. Immediately after the government's announcement snap rallies were held around the country. They showed that there is potential to rebuild the refugee campaign. With less than one day's notice, nearly 1,000 turned out in Sydney, up to 800 in Melbourne, and several hundred in Perth on 20 July. The following day over 200 protested in Brisbane and 500 in Adelaide.

More protests are now being organised for the coming weeks and days. Activists have to grab the opportunity to draw in new layers of people who are outraged and want to do something to challenge the government's racist agenda.



Sydney



Melbourne



Adelaide

Rudd's moral wasteland

Tom Bramble

From the moment Kevin Rudd started a push for ALP leadership in 2006 he assured the public of his moral rectitude. It was, he said, founded on a solid platform of Christian righteousness and brotherly love for the downtrodden.

Whether it was homilies to the media outside church services accompanied by his multi-millionaire wife or lengthy essays in serious journals, Labor's richest ever leader has again and again invoked some reference to what he briefly called his "Christian socialist" principles.

Rudd's most famous outing in this respect was his essay in *The Monthly* in 2006 titled "Faith in Politics". It was here that he laid out his beliefs to a public that outside Queensland had until this point only been dimly aware of this former diplomat and public service headkicker.

Rudd sought to identify himself in the public mind with Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a figure in the German resistance movement against Hitler. Pastor Bonhoeffer was an outcast from the Lutheran Church, whose religious leaders sold themselves to Hitler. They went so far as wearing swastikas on their vestments.

Bonhoeffer helped to garner opposition to Hitler and paid for this with his life. He was hanged on the Führer's orders just two weeks before the concentration camp to which he had been transferred was liberated.

Nothing in Bonhoeffer's life brings to mind Kevin Rudd, who has been a servant of power for more than two decades. Regardless, Rudd tried to paint himself in the colours of this brave man in his 2006 essay, calling him "without doubt, the man I admire most in the history of the twentieth century".

What was it about Bonhoeffer that elicited Rudd's admiration? To quote Rudd, Bonhoeffer was a "man of faith, a man of reason, a man of letters...never a nationalist, always an internationalist". Presumably Rudd believed that he was following in his hero's internationalist footsteps when he supported war on Iraq in 2003, doubled the troop deployment to Afghanistan as PM in 2008 and urged tough sanctions on Iran as Foreign Minister in 2011. However, it is highly unlikely that the anti-militarist Bonhoeffer would see it that way.

In his article, Rudd quoted Bonhoeffer's reflections on the deportation of Jews: "We have for once learned to see the great events of world history from below, from

You're far more likely to see Rudd taking the side of the powerful, the wealthy and the pampered.. and all those who wouldn't vote Labor in a fit.

the perspective of the outcast, the suspects, the maltreated, the powerless, the reviled – in short, from the perspective of those who suffer." This outlook, Rudd claimed, was at one with his own. He wrote that Christianity "must always take the side of the marginalised, the vulnerable and the oppressed".

But whose interests has Rudd really served? Outcasts such as Australia's Indigenous people with his empty apology to the Stolen Generations?

The reviled, such as the country's unemployed, who are expected to exist on \$240 a week? The powerless such as single parents who have seen their incomes slashed? You're far more likely to see Rudd taking the side of the powerful, the wealthy and the pampered – the denizens of the Melbourne Club, the Murdoch clan and all those who wouldn't vote Labor in a fit.

Before concluding his essay in *The Monthly*, Rudd turned directly to the

question of asylum seekers, which he called one of the "great challenges of our age". And here his hypocrisy is most egregious. He opined: "The biblical injunction to care for the stranger in our midst is clear." He slammed the Howard government proposal to excise the Australian mainland from the migration zone and defended the UN Convention on Refugees.

And yet in practice, Rudd has driven Labor policy further to the right than was generally believed possible. One can only recoil at his grotesque cant.

When Rudd calls on politicians to uphold "the values of decency, fairness and compassion that are still etched deep into our national soul", one can only recall Matthew, chapter 23, verse 27 from the Bible: "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness."

Refugees right to burn down Nauru



Tim Arnot, Refugee Action Collective (QLD) member

"Blazing fire lit the skies... Very loud. Shouts of 'freedom' along with sound of riot shields banging... Massive smoke rising from within the camp. Shouting and commotion. Baseball-sized rocks can be seen flying into the midst of the police." Local photographer Clint Deidenang had never seen anything like the mass revolt of more than 500 asylum seekers which destroyed the Nauru detention

centre.

The concentration camp, misnamed by the Australian government as a "regional processing centre", was burnt to the ground on 19 July. People who had been held behind its barbed wire, many since its opening in August last year, vented their frustration and anger at the Australian government's disgraceful refugee policy.

A hundred refugees on the island had already been protesting and holding hunger strikes for a week before the riot. But the protests escalated into a full-blown uprising. Given the dehumanising treatment they have

received, this comes as no surprise. Refugees on Nauru have faced all manner of inhumane conditions: deteriorating facilities, overcrowding, under-resourcing, and the fact that they had been forced to live in tents for almost a year.

One Palestinian detainee previously explained in an interview with *Red Flag*: "We are treated like animals. If I had an animal I would treat it so much better than they treat us. This is inhumane. Do they think we came here because we are bad people? We are not; we needed to escape the horrible life we are living.. In here every

day people are attempting suicide – every day!

"And every day there are people on hunger strike. No cameras or journalists are allowed in here. Being in prison would be better because at least I would know how long my sentence is. Here I know nothing."

In response to the protest, Nauru police deputised hundreds of locals with powers to detain and arrest any person attempting to break out. This led to the disastrous situation of locals assaulting refugees as they were boarding a bus to hospital. Emergency legislation was also passed, enabling the police force to hold prisoners for up to seven days without charge.

Of those 50 or so who have been charged, Immigration Minister Tony Burke said "Be in no doubt that the sort of crimes that appear to have been committed are crimes which carry serious prison sentences."

But the real crime here is the whole system of mandatory detention, offshore processing and the demonisation of refugees. Human beings who have committed no crime are being locked in cages.

The detainees were right to take action. They should be congratulated for standing up for their own rights when no one else will. Their riot was an assertion of humanity in the face of a barbarous system.

The damage to the buildings is nothing compared to the damage that is daily inflicted on thousands of refugees.



INTERVIEW: Christos Tsiolkas on “the toxicity of smugness”

Alyson Hose

“Both my parents were factory workers, migrants to this country. That history and that understanding is crucial to me and it’s crucial to the way I understand what I do as a writer.” Christos Tsiolkas, playwright, essayist, screenwriter and award-winning novelist, speaks quietly but emphatically. The audience, who’ve braved a chilly winter afternoon to hear Christos speak about class and culture at Trades Hall listen, rapt.

“I think the fact that I was fortunate, through the work of my parents, to have an education, to be able to read and write, is just something that I can never take for granted – and my parents never had that opportunity. So it feels to me that I would be shitting on that heritage if I didn’t keep class and the understanding of working class culture at the forefront of my thinking.

“At the same time, I feel it would be a lie to call myself working class. I work as a writer, I went to university, and I inhabit a bourgeois world. I think that’s the tension that I keep wanting to explore in my writing as well.”

It’s a tension always evident in Tsiolkas’s work – from the raw energy of *Loaded*, his first novel, which chronicles a sex and drug-fuelled day in the life of Ari, a 19-year-old gay man from a Greek migrant family, to the pressure cooker atmosphere of his latest novel *The Slap* – a panoramic view of a schism between a middle class group of family and friends after

an incident at a suburban barbecue. And it’s a tension that Tsiolkas has acknowledged and explored in his essay “The toxicity of smugness”, published in *Left turn: political essays for the new left*, where he decries the use of terms like “bogan”, “aspirational” and “redneck”, and argues that “The toxicity of progressive bourgeois smugness can be ascertained by how contemptuous is the language used to define the behaviour and expressions for working-class and welfare-class lives.”

The genesis of that essay came from Christos’s own experience. “I was just increasingly distressed by how people around me – and as I said, now I inhabit a really bourgeois world – were using the term ‘bogan’ as a shorthand to dismiss a whole class of people.”

But can class conscious writers and literature be an antidote to this toxicity? And what chance do we have of seeing a genuine revival of radical, working class culture?

These are the questions that preoccupy the audience of socialists, activists, students, teachers, unionists and young writers who’ve come to hear Christos speak.

Hearing more working class voices in literature is important, but Christos believes that “writing these characters is not enough – I think it’s also about involving yourself in debates, in culture, in an active political way.”

Christos talks about the issues that are important to him, “the questions of refuge and asylum, the question of the conditions for working people, the demonisation of Aboriginal people, of working mothers”, but he says that, thinking back to when he was

a teenager, it was always clear that writing, not activism, was his path.

“I was involved in the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament through Resistance, a socialist group, and I do remember this wonderful older woman turning to me at one point – because I’d come reeking of alcohol and high on speed – and she said ‘you’re too hedonistic to be a good activist!’”

Despite this, he later became a shop steward at the Australian Centre for the Moving Image (ACMI), and

Katherine Susannah Prichard’s *Coonardoo*, and Frank Hardy’s work.

Reading and talking about working class literature is, Christos believes, an antidote to the toxic smugness of middle class culture. And when a young teacher in the audience asks the final question about how overworked teachers and parents can instil a love of reading in school kids, Christos offers another strategy:

“Fight really hard to have an education system that is committed to educating working class youth... My

“Fight really hard to have an education system that is committed to educating working class youth”

experienced firsthand the difficulties of trying to organise arts workers who didn’t see themselves as workers at all.

His experiences as a worker and a unionist, as well as his earliest memories of childhood – “my Mum’s family were communists in Greece and that whole history of the left was part of my heritage as well” – fuel Christos’s commitment to promoting working class culture.

“There has been great working class literature produced in this country but I think there’s been a critical consensus that the literature we talk about in universities, the literature we talk about in *The Age* or *The Australian* is not that literature.”

He talks about the influence of modernism on his development as a writer, and about his Australian literary influences – particularly Rosa Cappiello’s *Oh lucky country*,

Dad had two years of primary school education... every Thursday he’d get paid and he would go to a bookshop down the road in Richmond and get me two books.

“Because he didn’t know how to read English, sometimes it would be Mills & Boon, sometimes it would be *Jaws*, sometimes it would be Henry Miller, and it didn’t matter – he just wanted me to read. So one thing I would also say is, I don’t give a fuck about censorship, if someone wants to read, read whatever they want, because that’s how you learn to read...”

“What is happening in education in this country is just abhorrent and that’s one of our political fights. That’s one of the things that, whatever arguments we have about what the left means, we can all agree on. That’s one of the battles.”

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REDFLAG

A new newspaper for the Australian left

In an age of corporate media and embedded journalism, voices of dissent have never been more important. I commend Socialist Alternative and salute its desire to get beyond the headlines to challenge the unjust nature of vulture capitalism in our society

Independent journalist and author Antony Loewenstein

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Sheryl Sandberg's CEO manifesto

Jade Eckhaus

Sheryl Sandberg's new book *LEAN IN: Women, Work and the Will to Lead* is being peddled as a "sorta feminist manifesto". It's closer to an updated version of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.

Sandberg is the Chief Operating Officer of Facebook, who last year took home \$26.2 million and in 2011 topped the list of high-paid executives earning \$40 million.

It is often argued that if more women were in positions of authority, equal with men, they would create a more humane culture because they would understand women's problems. It is this sentiment Sandberg is trying to tap into with her nod to feminism.

But her book clearly refutes this hope and shows that, just as Marxists have always argued, women who are part of the capitalist class are just as uncaring as their male counterparts, and concerned only with profit at the expense of workers, including women workers.

She is downright insulting, blaming women themselves for their unequal position in the business world: we "hold ourselves back in ways both big and small, by lacking self-confidence, by not raising our hands, and by pulling back when we should be leaning in".

In Sandberg's fantasyland the concrete barriers women face – unequal wages, discrimination against women on the job, the sexism which permeates the media, the education system and popular culture – are not the cause of the genuine lack of confidence felt by women in many aspects of their lives, but just a result

of women's shoddy decision-making, lack of self-actualisation and inability to value ourselves.

According to Sandberg, women need to spend more time "dismantling the hurdles in ourselves" (sounds painful), which is highly ironic coming from a woman who is in favour of putting even more hurdles in the way of women being able to have some control over their working lives.

At the World Economic Forum's 2013 annual meeting in Switzerland, Sandberg argued that employers should be able to quiz potential women employees about whether or not they plan to have children.

In her view, the fact that bosses in many countries are restricted from asking such questions leads to a general discrimination against all women of "childbearing age". So Sandberg's response to sexism in the workplace is not to argue that women and men combat it but rather that it should be made easier for companies to figure out who are the right people to discriminate against!

Handwringing by Sandberg and her Silicon Valley ilk about the difficulties faced by companies is grotesque. The poor dears who earn millions – and want to earn an extra million at the expense of everyone else – have nothing to say about the fight for genuine women's liberation.

This book is a timely reminder that women workers can expect nothing but exploitation and discrimination from their capitalist "sisters". In the fight to win women's rights in the workplace, the men we work beside are our potential allies, so arguing for workers' solidarity – and fighting the sexism which undermines it – remains the way forward.

Packer's playground for the rich

Dean Maloney

James Packer's Barangaroo casino project – 60 storeys of steel and glass stuffed full of exclusive penthouse suites, signature restaurants, swimming pools, luxury sundecks and VIP-only high-roller gambling – is set to cast a long shadow across an area that was once a Sydney working class heartland.

Barangaroo, the waterfront area where the development is to take place, has a history at odds with Packer's playground for the rich. The area is named after the proud Cammeragal woman who fought against the invasion of her land by the First Fleet marines.

Barangaroo is the site of the "Hungry Mile", the stretch of Hicksons Road where, in the words of wharfie poet Ernest Antony, workers tramped "in their legions on the mornings dark and cold, to beg the right to slave for bread from Sydney's lords of gold". It is also where many of the struggles that forged the powerful wharf unions were fought.

The waterside workers of Sydney had a reputation for political sophistication and militancy. They forged unions that would put fear in the hearts of the rich, and stood side by side with those campaigning against militarism, the Vietnam War and apartheid and for countless other causes.

Packer's power as Australia's third richest man and the political connections built up by his empire go a long way to explaining the enthusiasm his every move receives from both sides

of parliament. When "good will" like that doesn't work, there's always the more forceful approach: he is under investigation from the ACCC over a meeting on his private yacht with the head of rival casino operators Echo Entertainment. Packer reportedly told them that he'd trample on Echo's turf in Brisbane unless it "behaved" itself "vis-a-vis Sydney".

Lend Lease, the building company redeveloping the site where the casino will stand, has found that the fighting history of the area has not been forgotten. Workers have struck for and won improved conditions on the site, notably as part of a national campaign in 2012 that included determined picketing.

Alongside that struggle there have been repeated disputes over safety, with various hazards still buried in the ground from the area's years as a working port. Brian Parker, state secretary of the CFMEU, told the media that workers were finding asbestos "all over the place". The union has enforced safety precautions, and even had to warn the company that asbestos fibres could blow into the nearby Lend Lease childcare centre. The centre was later closed unexpectedly – though the company repeatedly claims it was "totally unrelated".

Try as they might to turn Sydney into a playground for the rich and powerful, Packer and his like can't totally erase the proud working class history written through decades of struggle and solidarity. It's a history still being written today, even in the shadow of VIP casinos and luxury penthouses.

AUSTRALIA'S LARGEST LEFT WING CONFERENCE

MARXISM 2014

IDEAS TO CHALLENGE THE SYSTEM

EASTER WEEKEND - THU 17 TO SUN 20 APRIL
UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE

The Marxism Conference website (www.marxismconference.org) contains over 300 audio recordings of talks and sessions from previous conferences.

Ranging from topics as diverse as radical Australian history to the nature of imperialism in the Middle East to the struggle for LGBTI rights: the Marxism Conference site is now a great resource for anyone interested in socialist politics.

Marxism 2014 will take place over the Easter Weekend of 2014, at the University of Melbourne. There were more than 70 sessions and one thousand participants at Marxism 2013. The 2014 conference is promising to be just as diverse and inspiring. Clear your diary now!

WWW.MARXISMCONFERENCE.ORG

Marxism Conference @Marx_Conference

The tools are down but the flame still burns



Steph Price

"When the pension was conceived they thought we'd knock off [work] at 65, die at 67 and good riddance. Instead, we're living until our 80s and 90s, standing on our feet with needs to fulfil and a desire to fight." – George Zangalis, former president of the ARU (Australian Railways Union) addresses an angry crowd gathered on the steps of Victoria's Parliament on 10 July.

The 200-strong rally was organised by the Fair Go For Pensioners Coalition (FGFP). FGFP wants immediate government action to improve the lives of pensioners and retired workers. "We don't want to be told that we can live on \$35 a day by politicians on hundreds of thousands" said Frank Cherry, National Secretary of the Retired Members Division of the AMWU (Amalgamated Manufacturing Workers Union).

Pat Warriner, a member of the FGFP Steering Committee, told the responsive crowd that "pensioners want to make a better life for themselves... [we want to] live with a bit of comfort".

To that end speakers called for a range of improvements, including better healthcare services for pensioners and shorter waiting times in hospitals. FGFP also wants increased funding for aged care

and services that are culturally appropriate. At a state level, they are demanding an increase in pensioners' concessions and free public transport.

Rejecting wholesale any suggestion that pensioners should be content with their lot, Frank Cherry argued that the massive payouts reserved for retiring parliamentarians and company executives "clearly shows the capacity of the country to

needs to have an interest after hours and eventually after retirement."

A majority of those now solely or primarily reliant on the age pension are from non-English speaking backgrounds. George locates the campaign's history in the Greek community.

Many of these workers "went straight into industry, often lower paid jobs" and many first-generation

We're living until our 80s and 90s, standing on our feet with needs to fulfil and a desire to fight.

increase pensions".

The mood of discontent was palpable throughout the crowd. Shirley described how she was moved to dig up her old payslips when she heard politicians declaring "the end of the age of entitlement". She says her payslips from the 1950s show that she had a "social security contribution" deduction taken from her wage as a nurse's assistant throughout her working life.

George spoke about the relationship between the campaign and the labour movement. "The union movement does not only have a responsibility towards its members between 8 and 5 o'clock," he said. "It

migrants finished without any superannuation.

George was as determined as he was upbeat about the prospects for the campaign: "We have had some victories but the fight is still on."

In his final address to the vocal crowd, George concluded the rally with an argument to keep up the fight. "To the extent that we're organised and mobilise more people, our voices will be heard.

"And if you think sometimes that the crowd's not tens of thousands it's important to remember that the big things in life have been initiated by convinced people with ideas who fight for them."

LIVING ON A PENSION



Steph Price

Val apologised for her fluffy pink nightgown as she opened the door. It was midday but, she explained, because of the cold she has to wear it over her clothes around the house.

Val Mullally is 70 years old and living on the age pension.

As we sat down in her lounge room she showed me the rent "adjustment" notice she'd just received from her landlord, the state government. Every time it goes up, Val says, "they send you this dirty letter". The latest increase is all about the state government getting their hands on the carbon tax compensation the federal government recently doled out to pensioners. All up Val's rent is up \$34 a fortnight on the same time last year. She doesn't know where the money to pay will come from.

Val's never been one for travel and mostly spends her time around the house and in her garden. A couple of years ago she was getting by. Then her power bills started going up and now she's cut out just about everything she can to keep up.

"The heater is off all the time... the phone'll be the next thing to go" she says. In winter, "the only place I'm warm is in the shower or in bed". In summer the house is "like a furnace" and Val can't cope unless she turns the air conditioner on – but only for a few hours a day. She puts what she can aside all year to budget for a summer power bill about \$40 or \$50 higher than the rest.

Val says she's always tried to stand up for her rights but is worried about her future. As a pensioner and public housing tenant she thinks that the government treats people like her "as a different class of person... There's gotta be a campaign because what's happening right now is affecting the people who can least afford it."

Private aged care cutting corners

Lauren Stevenson, Health Services Union member

A recent *Lateline* report revealed the horrors faced by many older people in Australia's aged care facilities: bed sores, residents left in their own excrement, malnutrition and abuse. Jacinta Collins, the Minister for Ageing, has dismissed the reported cases as aber-

rations. I've worked in both public and private nursing homes and I've seen worse.

What *Lateline* left out of the story was the trend towards privatisation in the aged care sector. In Victoria, the government just announced the sell-off of a further 1,000 beds. In pursuit of a higher profit margin, privately-owned nursing homes cut corners. They pay staff less than the

public sector and operate with fewer staff per resident. This means less time spent on basic care needs like showers, repositioning bedridden residents and feeding slow-eating residents, inevitably leaving residents neglected.

Staff are forced to operate at a pace that is unsafe, literally backbreaking, leaving them overwhelmed – which in turn can lead to elder abuse. Care staff are not undertrained as many suggest,

they just don't have time to do the job properly.

We need a fightback against the push towards privatisation. Staff need to organise through their unions, with the support of residents and their families. In addition, a pay rise for staff and setting ratios would go a long way towards protecting both the quality of aged care and working conditions in the sector.

Brisbane warehouse workers preparing to close wage gap

Mark Barclay, NUW delegate, Woolworths Brisbane Liquor Distribution Centre

National Union of Workers members at the Woolworths Brisbane Liquor Distribution Centre (BLDC) are getting organised as our first enterprise agreement nears expiry.

BLDC workers are currently employed on a greenfield (new) agreement that was negotiated by the Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees Association (SDA). This agreement is due to expire on 1 August.

The agreement allows Woolworths to pay BLDC workers anywhere between 5 and 15 percent less than comrades at its Regional Distribution Centre at Larapinta. An even larger pay gap exists when wages are compared with workers in distribution centres in Sydney and Melbourne.

The majority of BLDC workers are not experienced in struggle and unionism. Almost two years ago, around 20 to 30 workers decided to meet with

With the help of the union, delegates and activists, workers at the BLDC have ramped up this year's campaign.

the NUW off site, in our own time, to devise a plan to unionise and improve our wages and conditions.

Since then many workers have decided to join our union. They have been convinced that union density and activity are the best way to fight for fairer wages and conditions. With the help of the union, delegates and activists, workers at the BLDC have ramped up this year's campaign.

We have increased our membership to a strong majority in the warehouse. Getting to this point has been an important learning experience, with NUW delegate training and conferences being invaluable.

Given that we are coming off the wafer thin greenfield agreement negotiated by the SDA, there have been many ideas for what to include in our log of claims. The main demands are for: a two-year agreement with annual increases of 13 percent and

7 percent to address wage disparity; industry standard shift loading for every hour of the shift (currently paid only for hours worked after 6pm and before 5am); union rights; rights for casual workers including conversion to permanency and site rates of pay; and a fair performance clause (rather than the current unrealistic performance parameters).

As NUW delegate at Woolworths Hume Distribution Centre in Melbourne, Marcus Harrington, touched on in the last issue of *Red Flag*, the company has launched an aggressive campaign against penalty rates and shift loading, and is proposing to cut the training rate from \$22.55 an hour to an extremely low \$18 an hour.

In our case, it is proposing to roll over the current agreement with all existing conditions and offering a paltry 2 percent annual wage increase.

Woolworths' use of contract

labour to undercut conditions is also a real concern. During the Christmas period last year, it emerged that Woolworths had engaged labour hire staff and was paying them \$5 an hour less than directly employed staff.

We also learned that these workers were forced to pay for their own medical records, and some told us they were refused copies of their employment conditions.

The company has for now backed away from putting on labour hire staff, but there is concern about this practice being used to undermine conditions.

All this after Woolworths announced a half year profit of \$1.1 billion. Not to mention the massive disparity in the wages of workers performing the same work in other Woolworths distribution centres.

It is now up to the workers at the BLDC to decide if they're prepared to stand in solidarity with their brothers and sisters, join our union, fight for some decent advances in our pay and conditions and close the unfair gap in pay. Unity is strength.

NSW public servants under attack

Kate Doherty, member of PSA Central Council (elected on the Progressive PSA ticket)

The NSW government is on the warpath, and public servants are in the line of fire. You could be forgiven for having missed it, because the mainstream media have uttered barely a peep while more than 15,000 public servants are being sacked. Liberal Premier Barry O'Farrell has now ramped up the attack with the passage of the Government Sector Employment Act. The new law was quietly passed through the NSW parliament on 20 June and is likely to come into effect within months.

This legislation is draconian, offering absolute "flexibility" to the state government and none to employees. Grounds for termination are substantially expanded, and merit selection and appeal provisions are entirely removed. The change will facilitate a culture of nepotism in the public service.

Rather than having a secure "position", public servants will now have a "role", meaning they can potentially be moved to different locations or job types. The empty promise to "consult" shouldn't make us feel better about the insecurity this will cause. Also under attack are long service leave conditions and limitations on labour hire contracting.

Since his election in March 2011, O'Farrell has faced little organised resistance to his agenda. Unfortunately, an impressive rally of 40,000 workers (led by the teachers) in September 2011 was a one-off and not the start of a fighting campaign. To their credit, in June 2012 striking firefighters hosed down Parliament House, successfully resisting cuts to their workers compensation that other unions quietly accepted. But this was an exception.

The Public Service Association executive has been timid and focused on negotiating with O'Farrell rather than fighting him. In the last two years the PSA has failed to respond despite huge job cuts, directed primarily at the PSA membership, and a 2.5 percent wage cap.

The PSA is a large union with 42,000 members composed of public servants, school assistants and general staff in universities and TAFE. Our potential power is significant, but we have not seen any serious attempt to mobilise this. In October 2012 a (long overdue) half-day stop-work meeting was called, ostensibly in response to the government's attacks, but in fact as a last ditch attempt to secure votes for Labor-aligned factions in the union election.

Members' frustration opened the space for the Progressive PSA, an independent ticket of rank and file unionists, to have a major victory in that election. The Labor faction retained control of six of seven executive positions. However, the Progressive



PSA members on the picket line at the State Library on 12 June

PSA now controls the Central Council, officially the highest decision-making body in the union.

O'Farrell has repeatedly ignored the PSAs polite negotiation attempts. The Progressive PSA members are not uniform in political approach, but there is an urgent need for the Central Council to use its position to lead a fightback, to encourage the rebuilding of delegate networks and to call for coordinated actions with other unions.

The Liberal Party has a clear intention to smash the public service, privatise everything it can and drive down employment conditions. For this reason, a single strike or rally will not be enough to stop O'Farrell. But we have to start somewhere, and serious action can stop his momentum.

Last month PSA members at the

State Library of NSW went on strike in response to the announcement of job cuts and casualisation. The action was driven by ordinary union members and involved a lively picket at the first strike at the library in decades. This kind of activity can show we won't simply be walked over.

On 8 July the Central Council of the PSA voted unanimously for a public-sector-wide half-day stop work on 22 October. We intend to put O'Farrell on notice that his slashing of the public service must stop.

Public service unionists around the state need to be convincing their workmates to join the union, getting involved in the campaign and preparing to strike.

Public servants in NSW make this state run. Our futures depend on standing up to O'Farrell.

Community workers strike a blow

Lana Woolf, ASU delegate at Dousta Galla Community Health

Australian Services Union members at Mind Australia walked off the job for 24 hours at midnight on 10 July. Mind is one of Australia's largest non-government mental health organisations, with dozens of sites across Victoria. The strike was the biggest in the social and community sector for over a decade.

At midday, workers from around Melbourne met at its head office in Heidelberg to protest the appalling lack of good faith of management in bargaining for a new enterprise agreement. So far, the union and management have been at the negotiating table for a year and a half, with union members first imposing work bans in February this year. The protest was swelled by supporters and members of other unions who turned up in solidarity (Australian Education Union, Health Services Union and United Firefighters Union).

Workers across the community sector are at the tail end of the ASU's equal pay campaign. This campaign has had successes, including the notable "equal pay" legal victory in 2012. As part of this win, government and employers were forced to acknowledge that workers in the sector were among the worst paid in the country. Since then, the campaign has continued as workplace after workplace has had to fight on the ground to demand that their organisations pass on the wage increases mandated by the equal pay decision. Mind Australia workers have been leading the way



Mind Australia workers protest outside the company's headquarters on 10 July

in the fight to ensure that this important legal win is reflected in real gains for workers.

Striking workers talked about the irony of a company that is supposedly dedicated to supporting people with mental health issues ignoring the health of its own workers. They reported that management has threatened workers with the sack, understaffed programs and habitually used "performance management" as a threat.

And while Mind management says it can't afford to pay adequately and fairly the people who actually do the work, it has been creating new

executive positions.

Mind wants to discard existing entitlements like penalty rates for late shifts and rostered days off from the new agreement in the name of remaining competitive. Addressing the rally, ASU delegate Adam said, "Management says, 'Just in case someone else cuts these things, we'll cut them first.' What's the next thing that we should give up in order to be competitive? Sick leave? Time in lieu? We're saying no."

Other community workers are watching this dispute closely. We hope they continue to fight until Mind management gets the message.

Bus drivers reject pay offer

Jess Payne, member of the Rail, Tram and Bus Union

Campbell Newman and the LNP (Liberal National Party) state politicians have given themselves a 41 percent pay increase. Brisbane bus drivers are being offered 2 percent.

For the last few months the RTBU (Rail, Tram and Bus Union) has been in EBA negotiations with the LNP-run Brisbane City Council. Negotiations broke down when Council presented its final wage offer and pushed for the removal of important conditions, such as income protection.

In early July members were balloted to authorise industrial action, including strikes and a ban on collecting fares. The ballots came back overwhelmingly in favour of action.

The sentiment at the depots is that the LNP will stop at nothing to give workers a worse deal. This is the first time drivers have voted for industrial action in over 10 years.

The first action was to be a four-hour stop work and general meeting on 19 July. This was deferred by the union after the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission ordered the Council back to the negotiations.

In its place there was a rally of around 150 bus drivers in the city, where a motion was passed to endorse future industrial action if necessary.

It is a positive step that Brisbane bus drivers are ready for a fight with the LNP and the City Council. The strength of the union – with about 99 percent density – and the industrial power of public transport workers means that if strikes and stoppages were to happen we could dictate the terms of our EBA. This would also be a significant development in the fightback against the LNP.

Australia Post doesn't deliver for workers

Rob, member of the Communication Workers Union

Australia Post workers across the country voted on a proposed enterprise agreement after Australia Post terminated negotiations in early June.

The results declared on 5 July were that the agreement was approved by the national workforce. However, of Australia Post's 33,000 workers, fewer than two-thirds returned their ballots.

The national office of the union that covers most postal workers, the Communication Workers Union (a division of the Communication, Electrical and Plumbers Union), believed that the agreement wasn't good enough.

As an example of Australia Post's approach, it had proposed a clause

that gave it the option of freezing final annual salary amounts, a move that would affect the superannuation entitlements of workers upon retirement.

The plan was swiftly denounced by union members and was dropped without members having to take industrial action. This was surely a sign that a serious fight would have been worth it and might have won us more.

The revised agreement put to members was loudly endorsed by management and softer sections of the union, particularly the NSW and Queensland branches.

Part of the smoke and mirrors used by Australia Post to sell the deal was the claim that the new agreement would deliver a 10.5 percent pay rise.

This is a lie; part of this so-called 10.5 percent was already provided in the previous agreement. Much of the remaining or real part of the wage offer will not be paid until December

In 2012 Australia Post CEO Ahmed Fahour was paid \$2.78 million...an increase of 27 percent on the previous year.

in 2014 and 2015.

Even then the increases may hang on the achievement of "performance targets" that are not in the control of many workers. A "sweetener" one-off bonus of \$500 did not fool anyone who understood that this was before tax, paid only to full-time workers and not rolled into salary.

Some believe that Australia Post was keen to close the deal and avoid any disruption in the lead-up to a federal election. This would have been an opportune time for union members to flex some industrial muscle.

The leadership of the CWU in Victoria was strongly opposed to the agreement put to the vote by Australia Post. Some management

stooges in retail and delivery areas were quick to remove any union material espousing a "no" vote. Despite this, Victoria had the biggest turnout of voters and recorded a 48 percent "no" vote.

The NSW branch leadership was happier with the management offer. It called for a "yes" vote and recorded a "no" vote of only 9.7 percent. Nationally, the agreement was approved with a 75.2 percent overall "yes" vote.

In 2012 Australia Post CEO Ahmed Fahour was paid \$2.78 million. In the same year Australia Post workers' wages lagged behind inflation. For many of these workers, this agreement means that the chance of catching up has been lost for now.



The strategic importance of students for revolutionary organisation

Sandra Bloodworth

Socialist Alternative, the organisation behind *Red Flag*, argues that we need a workers' revolution to win human liberation. Yet we are very proud of our student clubs on university campuses. In fact, we would argue that students are of immense strategic importance for any revolutionary organisation, and especially critical while socialists do not have mass influence.

For one thing, youth will always be the most dynamic, energetic and creative force in any revolutionary movement. Eminent historian Eric Hobsbawm wrote that students in the 1960s, by their protests over cultural and political issues, "stimulated [workers who were more used to fighting around economic questions and less combustible] to discover that...they can ask for far more from the new society than they had imagined".

Any organisation which has not developed a young layer of members is on the road to irrelevance in any political radicalisation and upsurge of struggle. Revolutionary organisations can and should build among university students even in times when they are not engaged in radical struggles.

Firstly, there are always some students who can be won to revolutionary politics on the basis of ideas because they deal with often abstract theories in both social and physical sciences. In contrast, workers tend to be more practical. They seek an organisation that can organise and lead the struggles they need, making it difficult to establish roots in the working class until there is significant radicalism among wider layers and socialists have thousands of members able to play at least some of that organising role.

Secondly and very importantly, universities are spaces where revo-

lutionaries can organise in ways that are simply not an option in workplaces – regular information stalls, setting up clubs for both discussions and political agitation, making announcements at lectures, intervening in classes. While students work more today than previously, they still have more flexible time than most workers, so they can more easily meet to discuss politics. Just wander through any university cafe at almost any time of the day and you are struck by the different experience from that of workplaces, where time spent together for informal discussion is fleeting if it occurs at all.

A 3,000-strong student demonstration last semester in Melbourne illustrated the importance of students for socialists. More than 30 students who were not members of Socialist Alternative attended a meeting afterwards to discuss the politics of revolution. In the days after such a protest, you are likely to see students from the rally around campus if you sell a socialist paper or hold a meeting; you can meet up for coffee with those who become open to discussing Marxism.

The experience of workers' rallies is quite different. Often workers have to return to work immediately. By the next day they are dispersed across the city's workplaces. The volatile nature of students means that once they take action, it can quite quickly open up a larger minority to a discussion of revolutionary politics. Even in much bigger workers' rallies, that isn't the case.

There are other important considerations. Students as a whole constitute a sizeable social layer. If you can establish campus clubs and ongoing activity, it gives you some small social roots. And in spite of the Liberals' best efforts to destroy student unions, on most campuses there is a milieu of political people who interact in various ways. This creates some pressure

Any organisation which has not developed a young layer of members is on the road to irrelevance in any political radicalisation and upsurge in struggle.

on socialist groups against simply becoming abstract propagandists. The ideas you argue are likely to be contested; you have to show their relevance and correctness – unlike if, for instance, you rely on meeting individuals in the streets or at protest rallies.

Training young leaders

Student revolutionaries have to relate to Labor, Greens and independent activists. They gain experience in forming joint electoral tickets, deciding which compromises can be made within the framework of socialist principles, when to argue the point about any number of issues.

They can win student union positions that carry responsibilities not usually open to small groups of revolutionary workers in trade unions. Combined with serious study of Marxism, such regular activity can build a student cadre that can play a leading role and imbue the organisation with energy and enthusiasm.

A base on campuses provides a foundation from which a socialist organisation can begin to branch out. Because of their more flexible time (you don't fail an exam for missing a few lectures or lose money like workers do if they take a day or a shift off), students can intervene when workers do move into action. Even in the past, when students came overwhelmingly from privileged backgrounds, they were able to play important roles in mass workers' struggles and building socialist organisations.

In Russia in the 1880s and 1890s, students played a key role in developing the first Marxist circles, which

laid the basis to build the Bolsheviks, a workers' party capable of leading the 1917 revolution. In Italy in an industrial upsurge from 1969 until 1972, student-based revolutionary organisations became quite influential and swelled their ranks with thousands of newly radicalising workers. Students sparked workers' uprisings against the monstrous Stalinist states of Germany in 1953 and Hungary in 1956. In China in 1989 their rebellion drew hundreds of thousands of workers into the struggle for democracy.

Today there is much less of a division between the life of students and workers than in the 1960s. Socialist Alternative students have been able to mobilise and play a constructive role in several workers' struggles in the past three years. In this kind of experience they see concrete illustrations of the politics they have learnt mostly from books and discussion groups.

They have shown they are capable of convincing small numbers of workers of socialist politics. This lays the basis for a serious intervention in any sustained growth in workers' struggles in the future. In any case, many of them become worker militants after leaving university, capable of leading their workmates and convincing some of Marxism; and they play an important role in educating the next layer of new members.

Any revolutionary group which downplays the importance of building among students risks missing the opportunity to begin the process of building a mass revolutionary party when it arises.



Conference discusses action against education cuts

Sarah Garnham

This year's National Union of Students (NUS) Education Conference (EdCon), held in Adelaide on 10-12 July, took place in the wake of the most successful national student demonstrations in almost a decade.

The conference represented an excellent opportunity to talk about the future of the campaign against the government's \$2.3 billion cuts to university funding. In particular, it was a chance to start planning for the 20 August national day of action (NDA), the next major action in the campaign.

Seventy Socialist Alternative student members went to the conference; most of the remaining 250 participants came from the two major factions of Labor students.

The argument that Socialist Alternative took to the conference was that the success of 14 May "budget day" NDA showed that students are angry about the cuts and that when NUS gives a lead, they are willing to fight. Moreover, the rallies showed that when we fight, we can have an impact.

The government's initial confidence in implementing the cuts, with no apparent concern about resistance or backlash, has now wavered partly because of the campaign. Polls now show that the proposed cuts will be a political issue in the coming election. Both Rudd and newly appointed higher education minister Kim Carr have been pressured to announce that they will "reassess the cuts".

Students need to apply more public pressure to the Labor government to make good on this rhetoric, measly as it is. We need to demand that they reverse the cuts. In the lead-up to the federal election, we need to send a forceful message to both the major parties that students will not quietly tolerate their attacks on education. This means more mobilisations of students in the streets.

Unfortunately, students from the Labor Party, who control NUS and who had a majority at EdCon, strongly resisted having any serious discussions about the anti-cuts campaign. They didn't schedule any meaningful items on the campaign in the conference agenda. Instead, they attempted

to turn a huge portion of the conference to the launch of an alternative campaign to "unlock the vote" for the federal election.

On one level, this is about harnessing free student labour for the Australian Electoral Commission. On a more cynical level, it is an attempt to use the resources of NUS to "unlock the vote" for the very political party that is proposing the cuts to our education system.

Under the leadership of Labor students, NUS has often helped vibrant, successful campaigns to an early grave because of an unwillingness to vigorously oppose Labor Party policy.

EdCon 2013 was saved from becoming just another gravedigger conference by activists determined to continue the campaign with a focus on the 20 August NDA. The agenda was amended to reflect this, and in the end there were many hours devoted to discussing the campaign.

We workshopped and voted for a series of demands for the NDA including: no cuts to funding; more funding; no caps on places; raise student welfare; reinstate start-up scholarships; more Indigenous graduates; and concession cards for international students.

We also discussed and decided upon a whole range of strategies for building the NDA, including extending student solidarity to the university staff union (NTEU), having campus actions to build for the central rallies, using every other NUS event and campaign to build for the NDA, calling on student unions to close for the day and pressuring vice-chancellors to send emails to every student encouraging them to attend the demonstration.

Despite these concrete measures, political differences about strategy that sprang up at the conference were far from resolved. Overall though, it is clear coming out of EdCon that the emphasis for student activists in semester two must be on maintaining the anti-cuts campaign.

Questions of strategy should continue to be debated in the context of the joint work carried out by all student activists in the campus and state-wide education action groups. To make 20 August as successful as it can be will take all of our efforts.

Student poverty soars

Kat Henderson

A new study has found that students are more indebted, impoverished and financially stressed than ever before. Universities Australia's *University student finances* report notes that between 2006 and 2012, the average real debt for an undergraduate student rose by \$9,000 to \$38,000.

The proportion of students in financial stress rose by approximately 12 percent to two-thirds of all students. Financial stress is even more widespread among Indigenous and low socioeconomic background students (79 percent and 77 percent respectively).

The report also found that 20 percent of students are forced to skip meals or other necessities.

Most pressing for students are extremely low incomes, with around two-thirds of students earning less than \$20,000 a year compared to their average annual expenditure of \$37,000.

This is compounded by the fact that a majority of students can't access government income support payments. Only 33 percent of full-time domestic undergraduates received youth allowance, a meagre payment

of \$29 a day. It hasn't been increased in more than 10 years.

Students are increasingly forced to seek paid employment to survive, in a job market in which youth unemployment is nearly 12 percent.

Those students who managed to find a job worked an average 16 hours a week during semester. A third of these students said they regularly missed classes because of work.

In a context in which the Labor government has announced a further \$2.3 billion of cuts to tertiary education, the report paints a dire picture of student poverty.

These cuts include \$7 million stripped from Indigenous and low socioeconomic support funding, and an attack on student welfare payments.

Next year, students who receive youth allowance will have their payment cut by \$2,000 a year as the government converts the start-up scholarship into a loan.

The National Day of Action against the cuts to higher education provides an important opportunity for those who want a more equitable, accessible and fully funded education system to stand together and demand action.

**NDA 2013:
FIGHT FOR
OUR EDUCATION**

**TUESDAY 20
AUGUST 2013**

MELBOURNE
2PM STATE LIBRARY, call Sarah 0423742453

BRISBANE
2PM BRISBANE SQUARE, call Kat 0401261783

PERTH
1PM FORREST PLACE, call Jess 0416160605

CANBERRA
1PM UNION COURT ANU, call Chris 0429094208

SYDNEY
1PM UTS, call Omar 0421 185 037

ADELAIDE
3PM LIGERTWOOD COURT, NORTH
TERRACE, Call Grace 0431 844 890

**NO CUTS
MORE FUNDING
EDUCATION FOR ALL**

NUS

Chile: Neoliberal poster child on the edge of crisis

Jorge Jorquera

This year Chile marks 40 years since Pinochet's bloody coup of 11 September 1973. The coup brought the ideas of Milton Friedman and the "Chicago school" of economics into practice. After four decades of economic restructuring, Chile remains a model for neoliberalism.

On 1 July the World Bank changed the country's classification to high-income country. Most Chileans might not feel it, but they are now mixing with the First World. Chile is the poster child of neoliberalism, and the World Bank seemed keen to make some ceremony around the 1 July announcement, but the right wing government of Sebastián Piñera was careful not to make much fuss.

Only 10 days after the World Bank's announcement, Chile's Central Unitaria de Trabajadores union federation organised a general strike. Ninety percent of public sector workers participated, along with mining, maritime, transport, retail and other private sector workers.

Demonstrations dotted the length of the country. In the northern cities of Arica and Iquique services were paralysed, in Antofagasta streets were occupied, and in Calama and Rancagua entrances to major mines were blockaded.

In the capital Santiago, barricades were set up at multiple points, and clashes between police heavily armed with tear gas and water cannons and the *encapuchados* (hooded, masked youth) resulted in more than 20 arrests and an unknown number of people injured.

Student movement

That no one in Chile is keen on celebrating neoliberalism's success is due largely to the impact of a student movement that, since the secondary students' "penguin rebellion" of 2006, has progressively undermined the political consensus. The movement has exposed the impact of neoliberalism on Chilean workers and articulated a general critique of the market. It has revived the ideological battle, which the organised left had failed to do.

Through the privatisation of



That no one in Chile is keen on celebrating neoliberalism's success is due largely to the impact of the student movement.

the old economy and a new phase of "primitive accumulation" in the resources sector, neoliberalism has increased the size of the Chilean pie, but only to satisfy the gluttony of the capitalists.

Over the last decade, Chile's GDP growth has averaged 4-5 percent but the big corporations have grown at rates of over 20 percent. The neoliberal economy runs at multiple velocities, producing increasingly obscene concentrations of wealth and social polarisation.

Over this same period, the top 1 percent has secured around 33 percent of total national income, while the top 0.1 percent is getting nearly 20 percent of the whole pie, almost twice as much as their counterparts in the US.

More than 80 percent of the population have incomes one 40th of those of the richest 1 percent. Chile's "success" has moved it from among the 20 most unequal countries in the

world to one of the 10 most unequal.

An overwhelming majority live on less than \$US1,000 a month while paying First World prices for goods as basic as milk. Much of the working class lives closer to the minimum wage of \$US400 a month.

Entrenching inequality

Far from delivering promised social mobility, neoliberal education entrenches inequality. School and tertiary enrolments have significantly increased over the last three decades. But again, the winners are the capitalists and the richer middle class.

Since 1981, enrolments in the public education system have decreased from 78 percent of the total to less than 50 percent. This segregated education – more segregated than in any other OECD country – ensures that only about 20 percent of those enrolling in universities are from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Additionally, most working class and

lower middle class tertiary students are likely to have to pay to attend a second-rate private university.

Poor kids attend massively underfunded public schools, while many working and middle class families struggle to send their kids to private schools, paying for an education that comes with decreasing chances of success. Graduating young people enter a highly competitive labour market, where wages and conditions have been degraded by decades of anti-labour laws and productivity "reforms".

The student movement has forced this most "successful" neoliberalism onto the back foot. Even the UDI, one of the two main right wing parties of government, is going to the November presidential elections with the slogan "For a more just Chile".

Only a few weeks before the recent general strike, the federation of university student unions (CONFECU) organised a 100,000-strong mobilisation in Santiago. Along with the important student unions of the University of Chile and Catholic University, CONFECU also supported the general strike.

The president of the University of Chile student union, Diego Vela, said, "We support the general strike because we understand that the only way of building a different Chile is to start with this unity, and that today it is the majority of the country that lives with injustice in health, education and in the workplace and a minority that takes advantage of this."

Because of this looming crisis, the Socialist Party's Michelle Bachelet, heading the Concertación coalition of Christian Democracy and various centrist and social democratic parties, will likely win the coming presidential elections. This is neoliberalism's best card: to mimic Brazil, Uruguay and Argentina, where social democratic-style governments have implemented social policies to alleviate the worst poverty while leaving the neoliberal structures intact.

Whether this will succeed in Chile, and for how long, will depend on both the economic fortunes of the country and the ability of the movements and the left to build a fighting alternative.

Students should back striking staff at Sydney University

Ridah Hassan, Sydney University student

Students and staff are natural allies on university campuses. This has recently been demonstrated at Sydney University, where students have joined staff on union picket lines. On 6 and 7 August, Sydney University staff will, for a fifth time, be out on strike. Students again need to attend

the pickets in numbers to show our solidarity with staff in their industrial dispute.

The same people attacking staff wages and conditions are cutting our courses, cramming our tutorials full and lining up with the government's neoliberal agenda for universities. Students should support the staff strikes because the academic and general staff make the university what it is.

They deserve our backing against

a greedy management. Take a look at the campus on any strike day: lecture theatres and tutorial rooms are empty, phones and emails go unanswered, and libraries are closed. Without the staff, the university is a bunch of gaudy buildings and a mass of confused young people.

The NTEU has made some important gains, but the fight goes on. Join the picket lines on 6 and 7 August, from 7am at all university entrances.



Students on the picket line at Sydney University on 14 May

FEATURE



When the press was revolutionary

“Every editor, being assumed to be a criminally disposed person and naturally inclined to blasphemy and sedition, had to enter into sureties. Every person possessing a printing-press or types for printing and every type-founder was ordered to give notice to the Clerk of the Peace. Every person selling type was ordered to give an account of all persons to whom they were sold. Every person who printed anything also had to keep a copy of the matter printed and write on it the name and abode of the person who employed him to print it. The printer was treated as an enemy of the state, and compelled to become an informer.” – Chartist George Holyoake.

Ben Hillier, Red Flag editorial committee

George Holyoake’s description of the position of 18th and early 19th century newsprint staff in England couldn’t be more foreign to the situation today. The capitalist media are now controlled by the rich and powerful, pushing reactionary agendas of law and order and submission to authority. Why was there such a change?

The radical origins of the English press

When merchant William Caxton imported the Gutenberg press to London in the 1470s, sedition was not his intent. But the continental innovation, which dramatically increased printing speeds, posed a challenge to the English feudal establishment.

For centuries, monarchs claimed to be the “Lord’s anointed” – sovereign by divine right and guided by God’s hand.

Under the monarch stood the land-holding classes, owing allegiance to the sovereign in return for protection. These classes – gentry, barons, knights and others – held both economic and political power in their respective fiefdoms: their ability to extract tribute from peasants was given by the power to govern them. Rights were few for the labouring classes.

Free thought and expression were stifled. The clergy and courts decided what was true and what was false in most matters. They drew from the Bible, Aristotle, the Magna Carta and other texts that only a small minority of the largely illiterate population was sanctioned to interpret.

The introduction of the printing press didn’t immediately change any of this. But its existence foreshadowed mass popular production and consumption of the written word; it was democratic in character and therefore subversive. Because political and economic powers were fused, any movement for democratic rights under feudalism threatened the entire basis of the aristocracy’s economy.

Newspapers were dangerous because they could help forge a collective identity, organise opinion, articulate grievances and, impor-

tantly, give truthful explanations of human suffering, of which there was no shortage in England.

The establishment was successful for a long time in keeping the machines under their control. The first newspaper licence was not issued until the reign of James I (1603-25) and then only for reporting on international events. A decade after the first officially licensed newsheet appeared in 1622, all licences were cancelled.

The outbreak of revolution in 1640 and the upheaval associated with civil war for a period broke the censorship. Pamphlets and papers spread throughout London carrying reports from the frontlines of the war against King Charles I, along with arguments about atheism, humanism, democracy and wealth redistribution.

The Earl of Leicester complained about the content of one such partisan paper, the *Moderate*: “An author, that writes always for the Levellers [a movement that stood for equality and popular sovereignty]...endeavours to invite the people to overthrow all property, as the original cause of sin; and by that to destroy all government, magistracy, honesty, civility and humanity.”

Monarchs and the nobility had

regular disputes, but they were united in their hostility to the mass of the population intruding into political life. The revolution was short-lived. With the restoration of the monarchy in the 1660s, John Twyn was executed for high treason after “printing...a seditious, poisonous and scandalous book”. The treatise had contained a passage advocating the king be put to death and incited “the people ... to take the management of the government into their own hands”.

When John Tutchin, editor of the *Observer*, was indicted in 1704 for sedition and libel after accusing the government of corruption and incompetence, Lord Chief Justice Holt lectured: “[I]t is very necessary for all governments that the people should have a good opinion of it. And nothing can be worse to any government than to endeavour to procure animosities as to the management of it; this has always been looked upon as a crime, and no government can be safe without it be punished.”

Laws ultimately proved inadequate. Tutchin got off on a technicality, and juries showed reluctance to convict. When editors were charged, they often became celebrities and their paper’s circulation sometimes

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Capitalist newspapers were businesses... they shared a world view with the rest of the establishment and attempted to win their readership to it.



increased.

Through economic development and class struggle, feudalism was gradually undermined decade after decade. The authority of its rulers and their doctrines could not be maintained. Their network of largely self-contained fiefdoms was encroached upon by a new and independent public sphere occupied by some of the rising merchants and productive capitalists, who were rapidly gaining economic weight, yet remained politically impotent.

Newspapers played an important role in developing this sphere, made up of the totality of forums and institutions where political debate took place and in which information was shared. As historian Bob Harris writes, "the press was the vehicle by which the private reasonings of bourgeois [capitalist] individuals were rendered public. By encouraging public intervention in politics, the press acted to undermine traditional structures and forms of political life."

This process reached a high point on the continent with the French Revolution of 1789. "The great appear great because we are on our knees. Let us rise!", thundered the first page of each issue of *Révolutions de Paris*. The revolution insisted that to be legitimate, politics had to smash the secrecy associated with the old order. There had been only one Parisian daily in 1788, the *Journal de Paris*. By 1790 there were 335. Through the press, hundreds of thousands of Parisians and millions of French could "virtually be present at the sessions [of the Senate] as if they were attending in person", explained the editors of *Journal logographique*.

The French Revolution demolished feudalism and established a republic until the Bourbon restoration in 1814. Across the Channel, there had been a compromise: England retained a constitutional monarchy and the landed aristocracy still wielded

considerable power. Nevertheless, in both countries the capitalists were now clearly in the ruling class. This changed the character of their press.

From subversion to indoctrination

Paris Mayor Jean-Sylvain Bailly had asserted in 1789: "Publicity is the people's safeguard." As newspapers became institutions of the capitalist establishment, such phrases began to lose their revolutionary content. Unlike the aristocracy, the capitalist ruling classes didn't require direct political rule to exploit labour and accumulate wealth.

Secrecy in matters of state they kept, but democratic governance was possible without threatening capitalist control of industry – as long as democracy was limited to parliamentary squabbling (though even in this sphere there was long reluctance to extend the franchise).

Bourgeois supremacy meant that the newspaper (and mass press in general), as a *medium*, rather than being inherently radical, was standard fare. In fact the free press became, as the journalist J.F. Stephen commented in 1862, "one of the greatest safeguards of peace and order".

There existed a radical press committed to furthering the cause of the labouring classes, the lineage of which could be traced back to the *Moderate* and its peers. The establishment realised that attempts at state censorship were proving futile – by the 1830s the "unstamped press" (tax-evading printers) had a higher circulation than the legal newspapers. In true liberal spirit, the bourgeois press sought to compete.

Thomas Milner-Gibson, the leading advocate for removing crippling newspaper taxes and duties in the mid-1800s, reasoned that removing

state controls and interference would "give to men of capital and respectability the power of gaining access by newspapers, by faithful record of the facts, to the minds of the working classes". No doubt this had always been part of the capitalist media's intention. But in terms of its primary social role, it was transformed from being an instrument of agitation against the aristocracy to a tool for the indoctrination of workers.

And while the press gained independence in the narrow sense of "independent from government", there were important ways in which it was anything but free.

Improvements in technology had made cheap news (both figuratively and economically) a reality through the industrialisation of the production process. The precondition for the cheap output became increasingly large start-up costs, which only those of "capital and respectability" could generally manage.

The Chartists' *Northern Star*, a national radical weekly, required £670 to establish in 1837 and a circulation of just 6,000 to break even (circulation reached 50,000 within two years). Eighty years later, the *Sunday Express* had to outlay £2 million and reach a circulation of 250,000 before breaking even. Freedom of the press was increasingly restricted to a wealthy minority.

Capitalist newspapers were generally dependent on advertising as well as sales revenues. Economically they were tied, and in some ways beholden, to other sections of the establishment. As media academic James Curran relates: "In 1856 the principal advertising handbook detailed the political views of most London and local newspapers with the proud boast that 'till this directory was published, the advertiser had no means of accurately determining which journal might be best adapted to his views, and most likely to forward his interests'."

Corporate influence might not have been as direct as the handbook boasted. But capitalist newspapers were businesses. Even if they didn't bow to every dictate of advertisers, they shared a world view with the rest of the establishment and attempted to win their readership to it.

The capitalist press today

The role of the press today basically remains as it was in the late 19th century. The editors and lead journalists are required to develop connections with and make sources out of politicians, business executives, state bureaucrats, military officers, police chiefs and other establishment figures who have influence and can provide information for stories.

One result of this is that, as Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman wrote in their 1988 classic *Manufac-*

turing Consent, “the large bureaucracies of the powerful subsidize the mass media, and gain special access ...[through] their contribution to reducing the media’s costs of acquiring ... and producing, news. The large entities that provide this subsidy become ‘routine’ news sources ...”

This process is marked today. Classic print journalism is in crisis – it is simply cheaper and easier to print public relations spin than to pay for investigative work. Journalist Nick Davies found in 2008 that well over half of all material published in the five major British papers was sourced from public relations companies or wire services. Just 12 percent of stories were created by journalists. A study by Robert McChesney and John Nichols estimates that the ratio of public relations staff to journalists in the US grew from 1.2 to 1 in 1980 to 4 to 1 in 2010.

In an interview in *The Australian*, Davies noted that politics and crime coverage was dominated by PR as well, “not because they are trying to sell a product but because the government and the police select what stories we should cover and with what angle and what sources”.

Yet the main problem with the press is not the actual spin and disinformation contained within it. Most people are sceptical of the content of the stories they read. In Australia, the media are one of the least trusted capitalist institutions. Transparency International’s 2013 Global Corruption Barometer found that 58 percent of the population described the institution as either “corrupt” or “extremely corrupt”.

The more insidious ways in which the media operate stem not from their inability to be organisationally and financially independent of the establishment. Rather, their ideological dependence on ideas that protect the ruling class is arguably the greatest problem.

The capitalist press can be subversive at the margins when exposing corruption, mismanagement, lawlessness in government or conspiracy – such as the British *Guardian* releasing leaked classified information it received via WikiLeaks and Edward Snowden. Some outlets, with an eye to diversifying their readership and increasing sales, will even on occasion publish a radical article. The press as a whole and in general, however, is never subversive of the existing social order.

In this regard, it is not the reactionary Murdoch empire that provides the establishment with the greatest service, but those liberal outlets that present themselves as critical yet adhere to the same basic ideological outlook as the political right: that the maintenance of the rule of law is paramount; that social classes either don’t exist or, if they do, should be maintained; democracy narrowly conceived as parliamentary democracy; capitalism as a sometimes flawed but



Source for figures: Transparency International

a generally desirable system.

These ideas are sometimes promoted explicitly but are more generally the basis from which more liberal arguments are constructed. So the progressive wing of the establishment press will decry poverty level dole payments – but in showing itself sympathetic to human misery, it will also maintain that the unemployed need to earn the right to qualify for payments.

It will condemn the treatment of refugees, but concede that something has to be done to maintain the integrity of national borders. It might oppose vicious attacks on workers’ rights, but will lecture against unions causing industrial anarchy if the cause is not considered deserving. It will lament Indigenous deaths in custody but denounce the rioting that sometimes results from the brutal oppression Aboriginal people endure more generally.

An analogy for the role of the liberal media can be drawn from the contrasting roles played by former US Republican President George W. Bush and current Democratic President Barack Obama. Bush was rightly despised for his crimes against humanity. But if there was one service he did the world, it was cementing hatred of US imperialism and instilling a feeling that the rich and powerful need to be challenged and fought.

By contrast Obama, hero of the liberal establishment, has carried out the same agenda as his predecessor, yet managed to preach that the US war machine might be a force for good and that cooperation with oppressors might, with enough hope, pay dividends for the oppressed. Obama’s task was to subdue, not enrage. Such is also the role of the liberal media.

The revolutionary press

“In a time of universal deceit,” wrote George Orwell, “telling the truth is a revolutionary act.” Is this really

The media are one of the least trusted capitalist institutions... 58 percent of [Australians] described the institution as either “corrupt” or “extremely corrupt”.

true today?

Telling the truth is certainly heroic and immensely valuable. As Bradley Manning, Edward Snowden and Julian Assange today prove, governments cherish secrecy because the work they do is indefensible, at least in the eyes of a large minority and often a majority of citizens.

Capitalist power, however, doesn’t rest simply on the population being ignorant. It rests on the exploitation of workers, enabled by the concentration of industry in the hands of a tiny minority. This is not a question of truth and lies, although that is part of it.

The system is resilient because it is accepted. The ideological domination of pro-capitalist ideas in the press helps promote in the population a positive identification with the system, even when lies and propaganda are exposed and recognised. Even those outlets advertised as “independent media” often promote such identification.

For independent media to be truly subversive, the meaning of “independence” needs to be broadened from denoting “free from corporate or government funding or control”. Independence needs to be conceptualised ideologically: Is this media outlet part of a coherent attempt to provide an alternative world view? Does it challenge the basic assumptions of capitalist society?

Seen in this broader way, media are truly independent not simply when they expose the lies and conspiracies of those in power, but when they organise resistance to the existing order and argue for a system built on cooperation rather than competition.

That’s the philosophy behind *Red Flag*. Our paper, and other publications like it, attempt to unite revolutionary ideas with the actual struggles that emerge against the system. Our goal is to be part of building a larger movement for a classless society that operates according to the maxim “From each according to their ability, to each according to their need.”



NOTES AGAINST THE U.S. EMPIRE

BARRY SHEPPARD

Killed for being black

When the “not guilty” verdict in the trial of George Zimmerman for murdering Trayvon Martin was announced on 13 July, spontaneous protest demonstrations were held in cities and towns across the country. They have continued to this day. All black, civil liberties and civil rights organisations have denounced the verdict. The facts speak for themselves.

On 26 February, in the city of Stanford, Florida, in the deep south, Trayvon Martin, a 17-year-old African American, was walking home from a store where he bought some tea and a snack. He had no weapon of any sort, not even a penknife.

He was staying with his father in what is known in the US as a “gated community”, which means it has fences and gates to keep out “undesirables”.

Trayvon was not engaged in any unlawful activity or any activity other than walking and talking to his girlfriend on his cell phone.

George Zimmerman, a self-styled vigilante, saw Martin and decided he looked “suspicious.” What he saw was an African American teenage male wearing a “hoody”. That was enough for Zimmerman, who called in to his police buddies at the local station and reported his suspicions.

If it had been a white youth in a hoody that Zimmerman saw, he would have paid no attention. To “driving while black” and being pulled over or worse, must now be added “walking while black and young”, which might get you murdered.

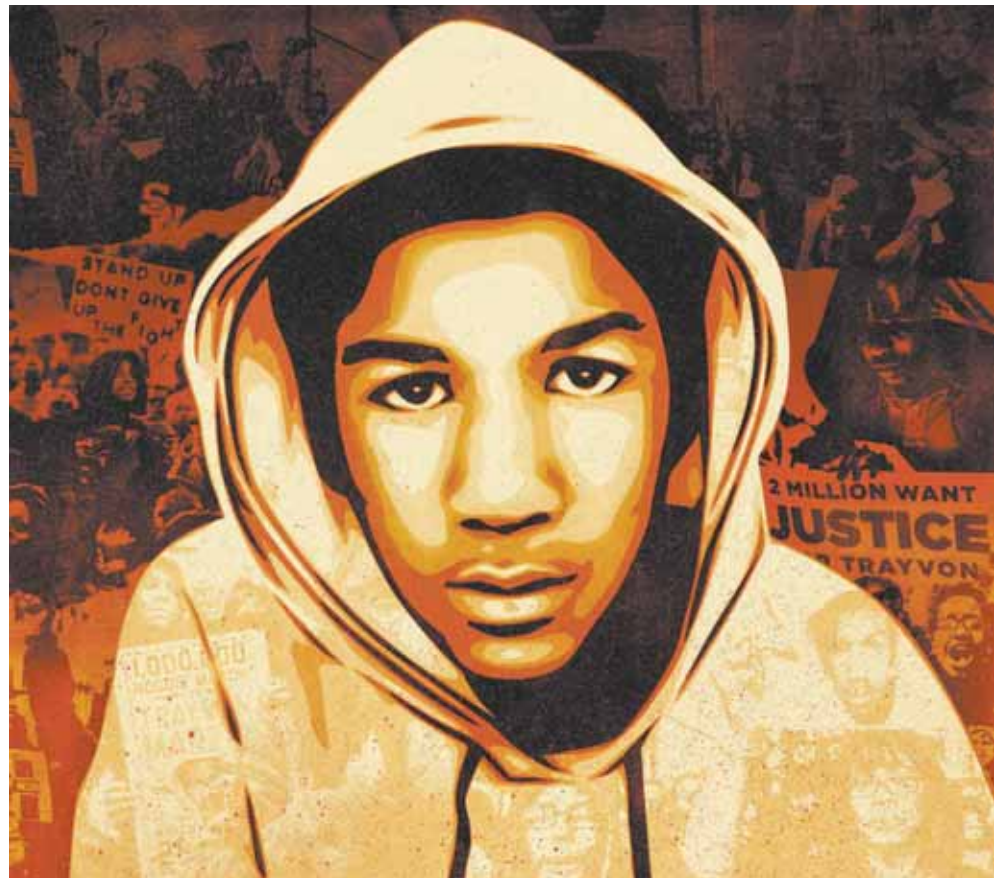
On his call to police, Zimmerman denounced “these people” as “fucking punks” and said, “These assholes. They always get away.” This time, he was not going to allow the “punk” to “get away”.

Zimmerman had a history of calling the station to report “suspicious” people. It turns out they were all black men.

Even the police dispatcher told Zimmerman to stay in his car and not to follow Trayvon, an instruction Zimmerman ignored. He got out and proceeded to stalk Martin, and started running at him. His puffing could be heard on the police tapes.

Martin noticed he was being followed and told his girlfriend over the phone that he was becoming concerned. She heard him being attacked, and his phone went dead.

There was an altercation, during which Zimmerman pulled his gun and shot Trayvon, killing him. When the police arrived a few minutes later, Zimmerman told them he killed Martin in self-defence. Zimmerman did have some minor cuts and bruises, and the police questioned him. They believed Zimmerman, and under Florida’s “stand your ground” law decided to release him without any charges.



There was an outcry in black communities across the country, with large marches and other forms of protest. In face of this uproar, finally, after a month and a half, charges were brought against Zimmerman by a special prosecutor who had to be brought in because of the police recalcitrance.

Farcical trial

The trial itself was a farce. A jury was chosen that did not have a single African American on it. The jurors were not identified, ostensibly for their “protection” from you know who if they acquitted. The jury was composed, we are told, of five white women and one Latina.

One of the jurors said before the trial that the earlier demonstrations demanding charges be brought were “riots”, and she was not disqualified.

Although this was an open-and-shut case of racial profiling, those words were never spoken by the prosecution. Police who testified for the prosecution somehow always got around to praising Zimmerman. The prosecution allowed the case to revolve around exactly what happened in the altercation between Zimmerman and Martin. It was Zimmerman’s version, of course, that the jury heard, not Martin’s, since he was dead.

The only witness who gave a partial version of what Martin saw was his girlfriend, who recounted the phone conversation with him. This young woman is from Haiti, and had a Santo Domingan father, so her first languages were Haitian Creole (based on French) and Spanish. English was her third language. The prosecution and judge stood by and allowed the defence attorney to browbeat and humiliate her on cross-examination – I had to turn off the TV coverage at that point, it was so disgusting.

After the verdict, one of the white women jurors went on TV incognito. Besides saying that she thought Zimmerman did the right thing in killing Martin, she said she discounted Trayvon’s girlfriend’s testimony because she had difficulty following it, since “they all talk like that”.

In any case, however vigorously Martin fought back against his attacker, the 17-year-old didn’t have a gun or knife or club or stick. Zimmerman had a gun, and had enough room between himself and Martin to pull it out and kill him with one shot.

That is not self-defence. That’s murder.

‘Stand your ground’ law

The case was compounded by

Florida’s “stand your ground” law, which expands the “self-defence” justification. Before that law, “self-defence” could not be claimed unless there was no way to flee the situation. More than two dozen states have ratified “stand your ground” laws.

These laws originated with the American Legislative Exchange Council, a gathering of business executives and right wing politicians founded by the fascist-minded Koch brother billionaires, which works to pass reactionary legislation.

In her instructions to the jury, the judge explicitly used the “stand your ground” law, telling them that Zimmerman “had no duty to retreat” and had a “right to stand his ground”.

Zimmerman didn’t “stand his ground”; he ran after Martin and shot and killed him. If anyone had the right to “stand his ground” it was Trayvon, who had only his hands to fight back with against his armed assailant.

Just a couple of weeks before the Zimmerman verdict, the US Supreme Court overturned the historic Voting Rights Act of 1965 on the grounds that racism is no longer a big deal in the US.

Tell that to Trayvon Martin’s family.

Reasons for outrage here too

Diane Fieldes

Protests against the acquittal of George Zimmerman, the murderer of 17-year-old Trayvon Martin, have reverberated across the US. But it is not only there that outrage has been felt.

The Zimmerman trial again highlighted the issue of racial profiling. Many people saw in the US case a reflection of the way Aboriginal people are treated by cops and courts here.

Racial profiling in Australia is worse than in the US. Figures released last year show that Aboriginal children are 23 times more likely to be jailed than non-Aboriginal children.

Aboriginal people as a whole are 14 times more likely to be jailed. And the figures are rising. In fact, Australia in this regard is more racist than apartheid South Africa. In the Northern Territory, Aboriginal people make up almost 90 percent of the prison population.

When we look at the racism of the US today, we see in many ways a mirror image of the racism here.

The police are a key part of the racist system that produces these figures – and the courts back them up. Once Aboriginal people are detained, their chances of being killed by the police are high.

Some, like Mulrunji Doomadgee on Palm Island in 2004 or John Pat in Western Australia in 1983, are killed directly by police violence. The cops have got away with it every time, thanks to the judiciary.

Some, like the 15-year-old boy in the Northern Territory who was jailed for 28 days in 2000 for stealing paint and textas, are driven to kill themselves.

And there's death by neglect. In 2008 two prisoner transport guards, their company and the WA Depart-

ment of Corrective Services were responsible for the death of Aboriginal elder Mr Ward, who in a 400 kilometre trip in 42 degree heat in the back of a security van without enough water, airconditioning or any attention, was literally baked to death with heat stroke.

Because of the shared history of oppression, Aboriginal people in Australia have a long history of solidarity with the struggle against racism in the US.

Veteran Aboriginal activist Gary Foley's Koori History website (kooiweb.org) is a goldmine of information on these links, which can be only briefly sketched here. When Fred Maynard and Tom Lacey set up the Australian Aboriginal Progress Asso-

ciation in 1925, they were influenced by Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association in the US.

They had also been associated with two visits to Sydney by world-renowned US black boxer Jack Johnson in the early 1900s.

In 1968 the Victorian Aborigines Advancement League under the leadership of Bruce McGuinness and Bob Maza invited a Caribbean activist and academic, Dr Roosevelt Brown, to give a talk on black power in Melbourne, and these ideas were subsequently taken up by younger activists in Brisbane and Sydney.

This was just after Charles Perkins' "freedom ride" in 1965 – itself modelled on the "freedom rides" to the US South undertaken by the civil rights movement.

The years have passed since those times, but when we look at the racism of the US today, we see in many ways a mirror image of the racism here.

The con of constitutional recognition

Cathy Lawless

Addressing Indigenous leaders in Yirrkala in the Northern Territory on 10 July, Kevin Rudd announced his intention to hold a referendum to recognise Indigenous people in the constitution. "I want us to agree on the question to be put to the Australian people", he said. "No more delays, no more excuses, no more buck passing. It is time that the nation got on with this business."

Few are being fooled by the new referendum agenda.

The annual NAIDOC (National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee) march on 12 July in Melbourne brought around 2,000 mostly Aboriginal people into the streets. *Red Flag* asked attendees about their thoughts on the proposed referendum, and the key issues facing Aboriginal people today.

"The referendum will not change anything, absolutely not. The Intervention in the Northern Territory needs to end, and those people who that racist policy is impacting on, they need to be listened to and given a voice, rather than those bureaucrats talking on their behalf."

Wendy Crabb, Wamba Wamba woman

"Things are no different from back in the days when the pastoralists took away our lands; actually things are getting worse. I honestly believe that it is getting worse. Standing up and fighting back is important. Fight and don't give up, don't let them win. This is our country, our land and it has been taken from us. Remember your identity, where you come from and never forget that you are Aboriginal and be proud. Stand up and be proud, all you Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders."

Ngarrri, from Western NSW, second generation stolen

"This land was illegally occupied in the first place. If the government isn't going to acknowledge that fact, then I don't expect that they are going to acknowledge anything else."

Aunty Rio, Bundjalong and Jinibara woman

"I think it's about the land at the end of the day, the land that they are mining on. What are [they] going to do about the destruction of our land? What are [they] going to do when it's all gone and destroyed, then are [they] going to give it back to us?"

Callum Brown, Yorta Yorta, Gunditjmarra and Wiradjuri man

"We are here to represent where we are from and to stand up for ourselves. It is important to stand up so that people know who we are and what our culture is and to get our rights. We are fighting for our land. The government is taking our land."

Amelia and Sherrie, Kamilaroi clan

"We need to start associating incarceration with genocide. We need to start associating the taking of our children with genocide. We need to start associating native title/stolen land with genocide. We need to start associating sovereignty with right and the only way to successfully coexist on this continent! Fuck 'constititutional inclusion of First Nations peoples!'"

Young Brisbane tent embassy member

"If within two years Rudd writes Aboriginal people into the constitution, I think that it will very much extinguish the rights of Aboriginal people in terms of sovereignty... We will become part of the Australian state, and therefore we would lose the basis for treaty and we would lose the basis for land rights – it's going to be the biggest theft in the history of Australia."

Sharon Firebrace, Yorta Yorta woman, long-term activist and member of the stolen generation



AMBER'S STORY



PHOTO: GISELLE NATASSIA
gisellenatassia.com

Amber Maxwell

As a young trans person living in Perth, my experience attempting to find housing illustrates the discrimination that transgender people face on a daily basis. I've been rejected from share-houses on the basis that the advert specified they were looking for a female and I don't "fit that criterion". Several times I was rejected on the basis that the house was looking for "real girls".

When I sought their assistance, Youth Futures, Western Australia's TINOCA (Teens In Need Of Crisis Accommodation) service, informed me that it is their policy to house young people with people of the same physical sex, regardless of gender identity. I was refused access to the service because I objected to this policy. A different service hung up on me after telling me that they only had spaces for females (evidently I didn't sound female enough).

Perth Inner City Youth Services is currently the only youth crisis accommodation service in Western Australia that has a specific LGBTI program. It currently has a waiting list of well over six months. This is little comfort to any young trans person with nowhere to go.

Until very recently in WA, there was only one psychiatrist who dealt specifically with transgender patients. There are now two in the entire state who accept referrals. Before beginning hormone therapy, it's a legal requirement that you have a referral from a psychiatrist. The dire lack of qualified professionals means that obtaining this referral can take many months or even years.

While initially attempting to access services to help me transition, I came across a "youth specialist"

who after three sessions informed me that he had only ever met one other person my age who identified as transgender. He then went on to explain that he had convinced this person that it was not in their best interests to transition and that consequently he neither could nor would help me.

In addition to this, my experiences with doctors from whom I've sought assistance for other issues made clear the serious lack of suitable health care for trans people. I was admitted to hospital in December last year with an admission document that, I later found out, described me as a "transitioning transvestite".

I was also told by another doctor that though the staff were aware of my status as a trans person and aware that I identified as female, I would have to constantly remind people and correct them if they misgendered me. This same doctor also asked me whether I planned to have genital surgery, regardless of the fact that this had no relevance to the issue I was hospitalised for.

Life as a transgender or gender diverse person is often characterised by difficulty and discrimination. Family rejection, homelessness, depression, attempted suicide - these are a regular part of our existence.

There are, however, rays of hope. The campaign for equal marriage rights provides both a source of inspiration and a platform from which other issues faced by LGBTI people can be addressed.

Let's use that platform and fight against the oppression that we face. The history of the LGBTI struggle has taught us that things change only when we stand up and make it happen. Let's organise and fight right now.

New LGBTI anti-discrimination laws finally passed

Roz Ward

In a major legal milestone, new protections against discrimination for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people are to be introduced. The new law broadens the basis for protection against discrimination to include "sexual orientation", "gender identity", "intersex status" and "marital or relationship status".

This is the first federal legal protection in Australia for LGBTI people. It also represents the first legal recognition and protection for intersex people, as a specific group, anywhere in the world. For transgender people, the changes set out a new definition of "gender identity" that addresses the gaps in state legislation. Where states or territories do currently have general anti-discrimination protections, it is transgender and intersex people who are the most likely to be left out of the law.

Morgan Carpenter, secretary of Organisation Intersex International (OII), welcomed the bill while reminding people of some of the reasons more work is needed. Morgan said, "Intersex people face discrimination because we have queer bodies. We face discrimination in access to healthcare, employment and schooling."

A Gender Agenda executive director Peter Hyndal added, "Ninety percent of transgender and intersex people experience discrimination, with almost 40 percent experiencing discrimination on at least a weekly basis... These experiences have a profoundly negative effect on the mental health outcomes for transgender and intersex people. This legislation will make a very real difference to the lives of so many transgender and intersex people within our community."

The changes have been the product of more than 17 years of

parliamentary debate and community lobbying, including at least five different inquiries. And while the new law is undoubtedly a step forward, significant areas of discrimination remain untouched. Most notably, the law allows faith-based organisations to continue to discriminate in a number of areas.

In a concession to bigotry, religious organisations and schools have the right to deny employment and services to LGBTI people in all areas except aged care. It remains entirely legal for a faith-based school, even if funded by the state, to expel students on the basis of their gender identity or to refuse to hire a gay teacher.

Hospitals connected to religious bodies can openly make employment decisions on the basis of gender identity or sexual orientation. A faith-based homeless shelter can evict or refuse to house a transgender resident.

The laws also fail to establish full equality in marriage, which is specifically exempted from anti-discrimination provisions. This enormously symbolic affront to LGBTI people, which enshrines the idea that only heterosexual relationships are legitimate or worthy of recognition, must also be scrapped for full legal equality to become a reality.

These changes are a welcome and overdue step. That the law no longer wholly legitimises bigoted attitudes is very important. But legal changes alone cannot change well-established attitudes, practices and cultural norms that in myriad subtle ways contribute to the oppression and marginalisation of LGBTI people.


We need ongoing action and struggle in workplaces, schools, universities in the streets to win real and meaningful social equality. These laws are welcome encouragement and a major milestone in that fight.



Rally at Parliament House May 2011

FAST FACTS

Priorities of the rich



Value of global luxury goods sales in 2012:

\$280 Billion

Cost to provide everyone in the world proper water and sanitation services, saving 700,000 lives annually:

\$35 Billion



Latest trend: luxury submarines

Sources for figures: World Bank, World Health Organization, Bain and Co.

Why Marxism is still relevant

Diane Fieldes and Josh Lees

Marxism has never lacked gravediggers, but it keeps rising from the dead. Italian philosopher Benedetto Croce pronounced in 1907, "Marx is definitely dead for humankind." Ten years later, the Russian revolution brought the working class to power (even if for an all too brief period).

More recently, BBC polls in 1999 and 2007 overwhelmingly chose Karl Marx as the "greatest thinker" and "greatest philosopher" respectively. Why is Marx still relevant in the 21st century?

Class

Marx and his collaborator Friedrich Engels argued that in order to understand any society, we need to begin by getting to the heart of what makes it tick – how things are produced.

Classes are those groups that occupy a common place in the production process, giving their members a common material interest in opposition to other classes. Mass production under capitalism is carried out primarily by the working class, the majority of the world's population. What defines them as a class is their lack of ownership or control of the "means of production" – machinery, office towers and factories, mines, land, telecommunications and transport infrastructure etc.

The big capitalists, by contrast, own or control the mass of this productive apparatus of society. Workers are compelled to sell their labour to the capitalists for a wage, or else face poverty or starvation.

You don't need to be a Marxist to recognise class divisions. A child labourer making sneakers in Indonesia for a dollar a day, should she find the energy to read after a 12-hour working day, can find in Marx's *Wage Labour and Capital* the economic laws that drive bosses to squeeze every drop of profit from her.

A coal miner in China, facing every day the prospect of death in the most unsafe industry in the world, would instantly recognise in Friedrich

Engels' *The Condition of the Working Class in England* the same wretched conditions that confront him.

The division of society into classes is an objective, material fact. Whether or not workers think of themselves as middle class does not change their relationship to the means of production.

Inequality

The unequal distribution of productive resources is the basis for the broader inequalities in society. Under capitalism, businesses produce things solely for profit, rather than producing things that are socially useful.

Those things that are socially useful are often, by their very nature, not particularly profitable – for example, public hospitals, housing, transport systems and educational facilities for working people, renewable energy development and goods made to last.

The most profitable things are generally those that can be produced cheaply and sold quickly. So we get a glut of things that are designed to fall apart only that we might get back to the shop to have them repaired or to buy another.

For products like health and education to be profitable, they have to be sold at a high price. That simply means that often it is only the rich, with their accumulated wealth, who get the "premium product", in the form of private hospitals and schools (which nevertheless receive billions of dollars in public funding) and the best quality foods.

The workers who produce the products are paid only a fraction of the value of the things they create – and the smaller the fraction, the greater the profit. Hence the propensity of firms to downsize, to make people work longer and always to push for "productivity gains".

The insanity of the system is that more and more things are produced, yet the mass of the population who do the producing often can't afford to purchase the products.

The United Nations Development Program annual report for 2006 noted: "Never before has the goal of abolishing poverty been within



Bangladeshi garment workers rally on May Day this year

our reach: there are no longer any insurmountable technical, resource or logistical obstacles to achieving it.

"Yet more than 800 million people suffer from hunger and malnutrition, 1.1 billion people do not have access to clean drinking water and, every hour, 1,200 children die from preventable diseases.

"Despite a growing world economy and significant advances in medicine and technology, many people...are not reaping the potential benefits of globalization."

How could it be otherwise when the wealthiest 1 percent control 40 percent of the world's wealth, when the richest 300 people on the planet have more than the poorest 3 billion?

Struggle

The capitalist class and the working class have material interests that are in complete opposition to one another. Capitalists want workers to be atomised and powerless. Workers can defend their living standards only through collective struggle, unity and solidarity.

These objective interests tend to express themselves, though unevenly, in a subjective class consciousness. While CEOs band together in organisations like the Business Council of Australia, workers band together in trade unions – the organisations that

attempt to improve workers' wages and conditions. While capitalists try to foster divisions amongst workers, pitting white against black, man against woman, white collar against blue collar, "Aussie" against "foreign", workers' struggles raise the slogans of solidarity: "The workers united will never be defeated!"

Marxism is not simply about understanding how capitalism works. It's about getting rid of it. As the bosses' magazine the *Economist* once sneered, "Marx was a scholar, but he was also a fanatic and a revolutionary." He saw workers' own struggles bringing an end to capitalism. Because our labour is still the source of the bosses' profits, we have the power to bring the system down.

Marx's ideas fit the world today in many ways more than they did in his own time. The world's working class, war and the economic crises are much more developed. The exploitation, crisis and war that are a necessary part of capitalism produce tensions in society that can burst out into open conflicts.

Past struggles, and the fact that even in low levels of strikes hundreds of thousands of workers every year take part in action against the bosses, confirm the potential for greater struggles in the future.

OBITUARIES

Doug Lorimer, 1953-2013

John Percy

The Australian left has lost one of its outstanding revolutionary comrades. Doug Lorimer, a committed socialist activist for 42 years and a remarkable writer and educator in the ideas of Marxism, died in Sydney on 21 July after a year of deteriorating health. Doug dedicated his whole life to the fight for socialism and the struggle to build a revolutionary party that will be needed to win it.

He was a rebel from his high school days, arrested at the Adelaide moratorium protest against the Vietnam War in September 1970. He joined the Socialist Youth Alliance (the youth organisation of the Socialist Workers League, which became the Democratic Socialist Party) in 1971 and the SWL soon after. He was elected as a full member of the National Committee at the SWL third national conference in January 1974.

Doug organised many branches of the DSP, worked in the party's national office, frequently editing the DSP paper *Direct Action*, then also *Green Left Weekly*. He served for two years in Paris at the Fourth International centre.

But the main role he excelled at was in education, writing and Marxist theory. He was the main DSP comrade conducting our full-time educational school, which ran from 1981-1992, at which groups of eight to 10 comrades

Doug dedicated his whole life to the fight for socialism and the struggle to build a revolutionary party.

studied Marxism for four months.

His most important book was *Fundamentals of Historical Materialism*. This was translated into Indonesian, and also published in India in English and Hindi. Other books included *Trotsky's Theory of Permanent Revolution – A Leninist Critique*. He was the comrade primarily responsible for drafting many of the DSP's programmatic documents, including the DSP program.

He wrote many important articles and reports, some of them published as pamphlets, including "The making of a sect" (analysing the degeneration of the US SWP) and "The Collapse of Communism in the USSR".

His books, pamphlets, reports to congresses and National Committee meetings, and the many analytical articles published in the internal discussion bulletins will be invaluable educational materials for new generations of socialist activists for many years to come.

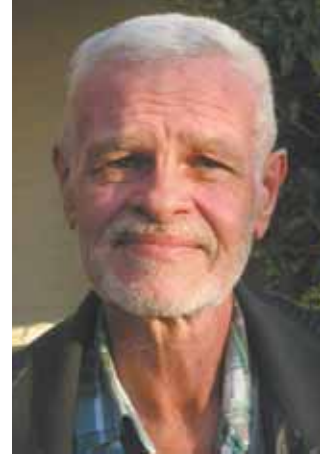
He was one of the first comrades to raise doubts about the wisdom and effectiveness of the DSP's broad left party strategy, which led to the formation of the Socialist Alliance

in 2001. In 2005, after the Socialist Alliance conference, he proposed that it was time for the DSP to pull back from burying itself in the Socialist Alliance. The main DSP proponents of the broad party strategy disagreed, and from then on a vigorous political debate developed in the DSP.

After the January 2006 DSP congress, Doug was a leader of the minority Leninist Party Faction, which waged a determined struggle to restore the DSP as the revolutionary party we build.

In May 2008 Doug, along with the rest of the LPF comrades, was expelled from the party he'd joined 36 years previously and spent his adult life building. With others we formed the Revolutionary Socialist Party, Doug becoming editor of our paper *Direct Action*.

Doug ran several schools on Marxism for comrades in Indonesia. In August 2012 he went to East Timor for seven weeks to conduct a school on Marxism for the Socialist Party of Timor. At the time he was probably already starting to suffer from the effects of the disease that killed him – Buerger's disease, a result of smoking



(he favored a particularly nasty little cigarillo).

Doug was very enthusiastic about the RSP uniting with Socialist Alternative. It is so sad that he became ill before the fusion was completed and was never able to participate properly in the vibrant united organisation and contribute his knowledge and experience.

We will be holding memorial meetings for Doug in Sydney, and possibly other cities, which will be announced in *Red Flag*.

Red salute, Doug, to a great comrade and friend.

Vale comrade Allen Little, with the struggle to the end

Tim Starr

Doggedly loyal to the struggle for socialism and a member of four different parties over his life, Allan Little departed our ranks in Brisbane on 12 July at the age of 81.

A person of incredibly modest means, he began his working life as a cane cutter in Queensland's north and finished as a unionist and manufacturing worker in the Brisbane suburb of Rocklea.

Ferociously independent and always reluctant to burden anyone with personal requests – even when bed bound and unable to cook or care for himself in his last months – Allan rarely talked about his life's experiences.

Instead he maintained his gaze on current debates, surrounding himself with a vast print library and happily committing to every possible political activity his revolutionary party was involved in.

Allan would never miss a forum, rally or Saturday campaign spot to sell the revolutionary press well into

his late 70s.

Ask any Brisbane radical and they will instantly remember Allan as the aged revolutionary with a red bag slung over his shoulder, paper and leaflets at the ready, at most political events. Even when he was too weak to actually join a march, he still attended to help in whatever capacity possible.

Allan first joined the revolutionary movement via the Communist Party, as a member of which he made his one and only overseas trip, to attend the Moscow-based International Party School in the early 1980s.

When the CPA split, he joined the pro-Moscow Socialist Party of Australia and later the Democratic Socialist Party in Brisbane. He was a founding member of the Revolutionary Socialist Party in 2008.

While never a central leader of any of these organisations, Allan was extremely well read, particularly in the areas of Marxist economics and socialist solutions to food and environmental problems. He always had an eye on the financial pages and relished debating the economic situation with comrades or people in the street.



Late in life he adopted an extremely spartan existence, choosing to live in a shed and continuing to keep his book collection well stocked and regularly offering titles to comrades.

But despite the problems of old age, he remained absolutely loyal to any collective activity and the class struggle. It is very rare indeed that a

comrade remains highly active in the often tedious, lifelong struggle for socialism, but Allan never wavered from the discipline or commitment required.

Vale comrade Allan Little, you were true to your class by maintaining your struggle to the very end. You will be missed, comrade.



WHEELING MY BARROW WITH ALLEN MYERS

Undocumented arrivals likely to be sent home

(*Eora Times*, 19 January 1788) Authorities yesterday reacted quickly to the unexpected arrival on our shores of a large number of people lacking visas or other valid travel documents.

To the surprise of immigration authorities, some 10 or 11 vessels, carrying more than 1,000 passengers, arrived unannounced in Botany Bay during the course of the day.

Immigration officers, led by their senior person Bennelong, soon boarded the intruding ships and arranged the transfer of their passengers and crew to shore.

Of course our authorities were prepared to welcome any of the arrivals who were refugees. However, questioning has so far found none who fit that category.

The overwhelming majority of the passengers declared that their journey here was not voluntary, that they had been forced onto the ships against their will and that they very much wished to return to their country of origin, which in nearly all cases is either Ireland or England.

All of these passengers have been housed temporarily in surrounding villages until Interpol or the English government can arrange their transportation back to their homes.

The commander of the vessels, who gave his name as Phillip, is being held on suspicion of people smuggling and/or kidnapping. The authorities intend to question him further as soon as he has obtained legal representation.

However, one of the officials

involved disclosed that Phillip had indicated some kind of connection with Cook, the captain of the vessel that intruded into our waters nearly 18 years ago and who was expelled when he could not provide a rational reason for his presence.

(Cook – like Phillip – was from England. He “explained” his arrival here by a desire to observe the motions of the stars. Our authorities were apparently expected to believe that England’s skies didn’t have enough stars to keep him busy at home; they concluded that spying was his real aim. The authorities in Hawaii apparently thought similarly, and Cook was killed there while resisting arrest.)

The authorities have not yet reached a conclusion as to how to regard the crew of the recently arrived vessels. In many respects, their situation appears to be little better than that of the smuggled/kidnapped passengers; they seem to be very poor, and it would not be surprising if they wished to seek a living here. However, all of those crew interviewed so far have indicated that they do not intend to remain here permanently.

A remaining question for the authorities is whether any of them should be regarded as accomplices in any people smuggling or kidnapping crimes charged against Phillip and his immediately subordinate officers. If they are not charged, these latter are expected to be deported.

WORLD OF STRUGGLE



RISARALDA, Colombia: Mining workers and their families march towards police lines during a two-day strike in the western Colombian state of Risaralda.

More than 200,000 small-scale miners from 18 different regions took part in the strike, demanding the repeal of laws allowing for the seizure and destruction of equipment used in what the government deems to be illegal mining.

As part of the strike, the miners blocked major roads throughout the region. In the clashes that followed, two people were killed by police and at least 40 children were hospitalised due to the effects of tear gas.

Developing nations such as Colombia are expected to play the role of providers of natural resources and other bulk commodities to the centres of world production. There is little room in this picture for the kind of small-scale producers that make

up a large part of the rural population in Colombia and elsewhere.

Colombia is among the world’s largest coal exporters. What matters to the government is not the ability of miners to provide for their families, but the competitiveness of the industry within the global market.

Inefficiencies, such as families and communities supporting themselves through small-scale mining operations, must be ironed out. Those not prepared to bend to the yoke of multinational capitalism will be cast as outlaws.

A similar dynamic is at work in other rural industries. In the past month, Colombian peasant farmers and coffee growers have also engaged in protests and strike action. The emergence of such resistance in the heart of one of Latin America’s bastions of neoliberalism is a hopeful sign for the future.



MADRID, Spain: Protesters gather outside the headquarters of the ruling Spanish People’s Party (PP), demanding the resignation of Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy.

Similar protests were held in cities across Spain, following the latest revelations in an ongoing corruption scandal that first engulfed the Spanish government earlier this year.

The PP, led by Rajoy, has stood at the forefront of European-wide efforts to make ordinary people pay for the economic crisis through savage cuts in areas such as health, education, and welfare.

Ever greater sacrifices have been demanded of workers and the poor, while billions have been spent on propping up the Spanish banking sector. At the same time, the economy has continued to contract, with the

unemployment rising to a record 26.9 percent in May.

Among the most ubiquitous slogans of the Spanish *Indignados* has been simply “They do not represent us!” The current scandal has illustrated the truth of this beyond all doubt.

Newspapers have published a personal ledger kept by former PP treasurer Luis Barcenas, which documents illegal payments made by big business into a party slush fund, and the distribution of the money to senior party leaders such as Rajoy, amounting to tens of millions of dollars over a period 20 years.

In the context of simmering anger among wide layers of Spanish society, further protests can be expected in the weeks and months ahead.



IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Dog bites man

“Australians rank political parties and the media as the most corrupt institutions in the country, according to the latest Global Corruption Barometer [of Transparency International].” – *Guardian*, 9 July.

Going concern

“The giving of ambassadorships to people who have raised a lot of money for the campaign has increased and that’s a concern to us...” – Susan Johnson, president of the association of US career diplomats, commenting on the fact that newly appointed ambassadors raised an average of US\$1.8 million for Barack Obama’s 2012 presidential campaign.

Speculating

“Purely speculative.” – Holden, which is sacking 400 workers and trying to cut the pay of those remaining, responding to reports that it is seeking a further government handout of \$265 million, in addition to the \$275 million already promised.

Good neighbours

The “most militarised border since the fall of the Berlin Wall”. – US Senator John McCain on what the Mexican-US border will be like if the new immigration “reform” bill becomes law.

So they’ll oppose it

“[I]nternational tax law could almost certainly benefit from reform.” – Eric Schmidt, the chairperson of Google, which has been in the news for arranging its finances so that it is taxed almost nowhere.



What Socialist Alternative stands for

1. SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE is a revolutionary Marxist organisation. We stand for the overthrow of capitalism and the construction of a world socialist system.

2. BY SOCIALISM we mean a system in which society is democratically controlled by the working class and the productive resources of society are channelled to abolishing class divisions. Only socialism can rid the world of poverty and inequality, stop imperialist wars, end oppression and exploitation, save the environment from destruction and provide the conditions for the full realisation of human creative potential. A system under the democratic control of the working class is the only basis for establishing a classless, prosperous, sustainable society based on the principle "from each according to their ability, to each according to their need".

3. STALINISM IS not socialism. We agree with Trotsky's characterisation of Stalin as the "gravedigger" of the Russian Revolution. The political character of the regime established by the Stalinist bureaucracy in Russia most closely resembled that placed in power in capitalist countries by victorious fascist movements – an atomised population ruled over by a ruthless bureaucratic dictatorship masquerading behind social demagogy. We stand in the tradition of the revolutionaries who resisted Stalinism, and we fight today to reclaim the democratic, revolutionary politics of Marx, Engels, Luxemburg, Lenin, Trotsky and others from Stalinist distortion.

4. SOCIALISM CANNOT be won by reform of the current system or by taking over the existing state. Only the revolutionary overthrow of the existing order and the smashing of the capitalist state apparatus can defeat the capitalist class and permanently end its rule. A successful revolution will involve workers taking control of their workplaces, dismantling existing state institutions (parliaments, courts, the armed forces and police) and replacing them with an entirely new state based on genuinely democratic control by the working class.

5. THE EMANCIPATION of the working class must be the act of the working class itself. Socialism cannot come about by the actions of a minority. The struggle for socialism is the struggle of the great mass of workers to control their lives and their society, what Marx called "a movement of the immense majority in the interests of the immense majority".

6. FOR WORKERS to be won to the need for revolution, and for the working class to be cohered organisationally and politically into a force capable of defeating the centralised might of the capitalist state, a revolutionary party is necessary. Such an organisation has to cohere in its ranks the decisive elements among the most class conscious and militant workers. Laying the basis for such a party is the key strategic task for socialists in Australia today.

7. IT IS NOT enough for a revolutionary party to organise the vanguard of the class. For capitalism to be overthrown, the majority of the working class must be won to revolutionary action and the socialist cause. It is not enough to simply denounce the non-revolutionary organisations and political currents in the workers' movement. Revolutionaries have to engage reformist organisations via the method of the united front in order to test the possi-



Who is behind Red Flag?

Socialist Alternative is the organisation behind Red Flag. We are a revolutionary socialist group that sees class struggle, not parliament, as the key to changing society. We are organised very differently to the main political parties like Labor and the Greens. Our members don't just hand out how to vote cards for candidates in elections. We are activists wherever we are, trying to organise others, build solidarity and encourage resistance – in workplaces, on campuses, in progressive campaigns, and on the street.

As well as being involved as unionists and activists, it is crucial that we build an organisation that can combat all the lies and justifications for capitalism that spew out of the media, the education system and from the government. That's why we also hold meetings to discuss political ideas, the history of the struggle, and the issues of the day (see our upcoming events on the next page).

The following are the principles of Socialist Alternative. They provide the foundation for the organisation's broader political positions and analyses, and guide our political practice.

bility for united action in practice and demonstrate to all workers in a non-sectarian way the superiority of revolutionary ideas and practice. We support all demands and movements that tend to improve the position and self confidence of workers and of other oppressed sections of the population.

8. SOCIALISTS SUPPORT trade unions as the basic defensive organisations of the working class. We stand for democratic, militant, class struggle unionism and reject class collaborationism. We also stand for political trade unionism – the union movement should champion every struggle against injustice.

9. CAPITALIST EXPLOITATION of the working class and the natural world has created a situation where the profit system threatens the habitability of the planet. We oppose attempts to halt climate change and environmental destruction through measures that place the burden on working class people and the poor. We demand instead fundamental social and political change that directly challenges the interests of the ruling class. The environmental crisis can only be solved under socialism, where the interests of people and the planet are not counterposed.

10. SOCIALISTS ARE internationalists. We reject Australian patriotism and nationalism and fight for international working class solidarity. The struggle against capitalism is an international struggle: socialism cannot be built in a single country.

11. THE IMPERIALIST phase of capitalism has ushered in an era of military conflict that has no precedent in human history. The core element of imperialism is the conflict between imperial powers, or blocks of capital, which attempt by military, diplomatic and commercial means to divide and redivide the world in their own interests. In the conflicts between imperial powers (open or by proxy), revolutionaries do not take sides, least of all with our own ruling classes. Nor do we call for the resolution of inter-imperialist conflict by the "peaceful" methods of international diplomacy. Instead we fight for international working class solidarity and unity, and embrace Lenin's revolutionary call to "turn the imperialist war between nations into a civil war between classes". In the case of wars waged or diplomatic pressure exerted by military threat by the imperial powers against colonies and non-imperialist nations, we oppose the imperial power and defend the right of national self-determination.

12. AUSTRALIA IS an imperialist power in its own right. Through its own economic and military strength, and in alliance with US imperialism, Australian capitalism seeks to politically and militarily dominate its region and project power more broadly. This gives revolutionaries in Australia a special obligation to stand in solidarity with struggles of workers and the oppressed in our region against Australian imperialist intervention and control.

13. WE RECOGNISE Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the first people of Australia. We acknowledge that sovereignty was never ceded and condemn the crimes of genocide and dispossession committed by European colonists and the Australian state. We support the struggle for land rights, sovereignty and economic and social justice for Indigenous people.

14. WE OPPOSE all immigration controls and support open borders. We fight to free all refugees from detention and for the right of asylum seekers to reach Australia. We oppose racism towards migrants. In particular we reject racism towards Muslims, whose right to religious and political freedom is routinely attacked on the spurious grounds of "fighting terrorism".

15. WE OPPOSE all oppression on the basis of sex, gender or sexuality. We oppose all forms of discrimination against women and all forms of social inequality between men and women. The struggle for freedom from exploitation and freedom from all forms of oppression includes the liberation of lesbians, gay men, bisexual, transgender and intersex people. We fight for an end to all legal and social discrimination against LGBTI people and all forms of sexist discrimination. We support full reproductive freedom for all women.

16. ALL THESE forms of oppression, and others like the oppression of the young, the disabled and the elderly, are used to divide the working class and to spare capital the expense of providing for the needs of all members of society. Combating them is an essential part of building a united working class struggle that can win a socialist society. Only a socialist revolution can bring about the genuine liberation of the oppressed and the ability of every human being to realise their full potential.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Socialist Alternative hosts regular public meetings across Australia on history, theory and the campaigns and struggles of today. Left wing and progressive people welcome.

Melbourne

All meetings are held in the Socialist Alternative Centre at Trades Hall, corner Victoria and Lygon Street, Carlton (enter via Victoria St)

Tuesday 30 July, 6:30pm

George Orwell's *1984* and the new surveillance state

Wednesday 31 July, 6:30pm

Trayvon Martin and the criminal injustice system

Saturday 10 July, 3pm

George Orwell's *1984* and the new surveillance state

Perth

Wednesday 14 August, 6.30pm

Rebel women in Australian working class history
Citiplace Community Centre (above Perth train station)

Adelaide

Tuesday 6 August, 6pm

Who's to blame for racism in Australia?
The Box Factory, 59 Regent Street South

Sydney

Tuesday 6 August, 7pm

A rebel's guide to the *Communist Manifesto*
Socialist Alternative Centre 246 King Street, Newtown

Brisbane

Tuesday 30 July, 6:30pm

The new surveillance state
Socialist Alternative Centre
136 Boundary Street, West End

Canberra

Thursday 8 August, 6pm

The struggle for Egypt's revolution
Room G052, Hayden-Allen bld, ANU

For more details on how you can get involved with Socialist Alternative, simply visit www.w.sa.org.au or contact us at: info@sa.org.au

MARXIST LEFT REVIEW
Number 6 - Winter 2013 - 125 www.marxistleftreview.org

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Introduction to Marxism discussion groups

Interested in left wing ideas? Want to know more about the fundamentals of Marxism and the politics of Socialist Alternative?

We host a series of discussions for left wing people to learn about the Marxist critique of capitalism, and about the socialist project to change the world. Every week we discuss topics including:

- What is capitalism?
- The working class and trade unions
- The capitalist state and how it works
- Revolution and socialism
- Imperialism
- Oppression
- The Russian Revolution
- Why we need a socialist organisation

You can join in any week. Each session begins with an introduction, followed by small group discussion. It is a great way to familiarise yourself with the revolutionary ideas of Marxism.

Melbourne:

6:30pm every Monday @ Socialist Alternative Centre, Trades Hall.

Sydney:

6pm every Thursday @ Socialist Alternative Centre, 246 King St (upstairs), Newtown.

Perth:

6:30pm every Tuesday @ Citiplace Community Centre, Perth train station.

Brisbane:

6:30pm every Monday @ 136 Boundary Street (upstairs), West End.

JOIN SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE

If you agree with what you read in "what Socialist Alternative stands for" on the opposite page, and want to get involved in helping to build a fighting socialist organisation, why not join us? Fill out the application form below and send to

SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE,
BOX 4013, MELBOURNE UNIVERSITY,
VIC 3052

You can also apply to join at www.sa.org.au

YES, I WANT TO JOIN SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE!

NAME

PHONE

EMAIL

ADDRESS

Someone from your nearest branch will be in touch soon.

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NO CUTS MORE FUNDING EDUCATION FOR ALL

After some of the largest student demonstrations in years, the National Union of Students Education Conference met in Adelaide on 10-12 July. Activists discussed how to continue the campaign against the federal government's \$2.3 billion in cuts to higher education. Report page 11.

Giving members a vote won't change the ALP

The Labor Party federal caucus endorsed a plan on 22 July allowing members to have a say over who leads the party.

Kevin Rudd told reporters that the decision was made to "democratise the party for the future. Each of our members now gets to have a say, a real say in the future leadership of our party. Decisions can no longer simply be made by a factional few."

Under changes to the party rules, the leader will be decided by both MPs and members, each with 50 percent of the vote.

The rule change has been hailed by advocates of party reform, who are desperately seeking to salvage the ALP. The Labor Party's branch structures have collapsed; its active membership is so low that it struggled to staff polling booths at the 2010 election.

Most of it, however, is smoke and

mirrors. While members themselves might like a greater say, the move by the cabinet will not hand any real control over the direction of the party to the rank and file.

Outside the caucus meeting Patrick Wright, a young ALP member, burnt his membership card in protest at Rudd's lurch to the right on refugee policy.

For those like Patrick, the issue is not about which individual leads the party and how they are elected. The issue is the party's ongoing shift to the right.

Rudd's reform is about cementing his own position as leader should he win the election. He, and others, view the rule change as part of an ongoing attempt to reduce trade union influence in the party in order that it be further transformed into a tool of the establishment.



PHOTO: PETER BOYLE