

Workers' Liberty

The emancipation of the working class must be the act of the working class itself
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Weekend penalty rates, \$100k degrees: Unions win a battle, yet to win a Better Future

The Australian Unions not-so-secret army in the Build a Better Future campaign has scored temporary wins against cuts to Sunday penalty rates and \$100k degrees. Malcolm Turnbull's ministers have withdrawn both but they'll be part of the Coalition's 2016 election platform.

Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) Congress in May launched the Build a Better Future campaign to "step up their fight back for fairness by building the ACTU into a campaigning machine to defeat the anti-worker agenda of conservative governments Australia-wide." The campaign platform is an umbrella for uniting support behind specific union demands and campaigns.

Conservative governments appear as the frontline to the anti-worker agenda that Build a Better Future aims to defeat. But our opponents are far bigger than that. The conservative agenda is backed by and comes from corporations and businesses, media, and the lobby groups, right-wing think tanks that they fund.

Build a Better Future can build on the successes of Your Rights at Work which energised the union movement and brought together people from across the community, workers and their families, retirees and students.

The Your Rights at Work groups dissipated after Labor was elected in 2007 (and union density has continued to decline). These energised groups of people committed to union rights could have continued, if they had:

- a democratic, networked structure for local and central Your Rights at Work campaign groups
- mobilised solidarity with workers in industrial disputes

- organised supporters to demand that Labor in government make specific changes to restore full industrial rights.

The Build a Better Future campaign is implicitly a campaign to change government, to get Labor elected by targeting marginal conservative seats. The campaign could future proof itself, and continue to build on the precious new energy and networks that it is creating by recognising early that we need more than getting Labor elected. Activists know that Labor is not committed to delivering on the demands of Build a Better Future. We need to fight hard for fairness, for working class living standards and rights at work when Labor is in government too. And unions should make Labor Party affiliation work for members (rather than for career prospects of officials) by organising union membership to back a Labor platform and Labor candidates that can deliver on Build a Better Future.

If the conservatives win the 2016 election, Build a Better Future will be in better shape to continue the



fight if it is already clearly more than a marginal seats campaign. Despite NSW Not For Sale, Baird won the March 2015 NSW State Election with electricity privatisation in his platform. Build a Better Future may not stop Turnbull winning an election on a platform for cutting weekend penalty rates and deregulating university fees.

Questions for the campaign

Will Australian Unions commit to keeping the Build a Better Future campaign going regardless of who wins the election?

Will it work towards adopting more specific demands to place on a Labor government?

Will it involve supporters in discussing what unionists should do in the event of a Coalition victory in 2016?

Union activists and socialist should get involved in Build a Better Future, take the opportunity to talk about politics at door-knocks and street stalls, discuss with fellow activists how to win the Better Future, and advocate ongoing organisation.

Penalty rates: organising against the power behind the politicians

by Janet Burstall

Unions need to restore their position as enforcers of workplace rights, by organising against employers.

Fairfax Media and the ABC that have exposed extensive law-breaking by employers underpaying workers in 7-11, fruit and vegetable harvesting, and retail and hospitality. Defending penalty rates in awards and agreements is not enough to make sure that employers actually pay them, particularly to workers in insecure employment.

To stand up to the employer is to risk losing your job,

and for non-Australians is to risk deportation. Very few insecure workers have the support and strength to do this.

The most successful challenge to an underpaying employer came from United Voice member and Socialist Alternative activist Kahlani Pyrah. Grill'd burger chain was caught out when it sacked her in July 2015 after she challenged non-payment of penalty rates, and other underpayment in Fair Work Australia. Then with the support of United Voice and over 20,000 signatures on an online petition she won reinstatement and a commitment from Grill'd management to comply with award conditions. Kahlani said "I guess I wouldn't have been brave enough to do any of this if I didn't have the politics of being a socialist. Those politics are working class politics, saying that the workers can actually change the world."

The Build a Better Future Campaign could be a platform to tackle employers and provide the community support needed by workers who fear losing their jobs.

What made Your Rights at Work a success?

Sally McManus, Vice-President & Campaign Director at the ACTU, wrote in [Cosmopolitan Civil Societies Journal, Vol.1, No.2, 2009](#). Her comments on three critical factors are reproduced here.

Mass mobilisations were also very important in my view. They provided a real interim goal to organise around for union activists, a tangible thing that people could do in terms of showing opposition, and it gave activists a clear role in their workplaces or in their communities in terms of mobilising people. It built the sense of solidarity that we are in this together as a movement. That is something that you can't put a price on. Also it builds hope, because through that solidarity and seeing that there are all these other people who are mobilised on the issue, it creates a feeling that we can really change things. And it also really developed the activists that became the local 'Your Rights at Work' groups...

We got relatively small **employers** like the Cowra Meatworks and Spotlight [when no large employers were implementing WorkChoices]. By targeting these employers we educated our members, and scared other employers. They thought, 'Well, I've got to add up the risks now, of starting to implement this. It may attract a national campaign and it

Build a Better Future campaign statement

Join the Fight for our Living Standards

Our living standards are under significant attack. The Government's Productivity Commission inquiry into workplace relations has called for **cutting penalty rates** and the **minimum wage**, making it **easier to sack people** and giving employers even more power over our lives.

This is exactly what the Government would do if re-elected. But with your help that's not going to happen.

Join the fight for our living standards and demand our governments support:

Workers rights and jobs: Defended and extended with secure jobs.

Medicare: Universal healthcare for all Australians.

Education: The highest quality for all Australians.

Public services: Owned by everyone for the benefit of everyone.

A secure retirement: Decent pensions and superannuation.

A fair go for all: Everyone supported and everyone contributes their fair share of tax.

may attract action in our communities. Maybe we don't want to be the first to do this, let's let some other people do it first.' So that helped as well. Then of course what we did when the laws affected real workers, we publicised it in a big way on the TV and in every meeting and in every possible way that we could. Soon we had muddied the Work Choices brand, and employers were afraid to be seen to be embracing it.

Grassroots Mobilisation

I wanted to talk a little bit about the bottom-up aspects of the campaign, as sometimes they get lost. Most of the work in this campaign was done by grassroots activists in workplaces and in their communities talking to people and organising around the issue. Most of the hard work was done at the workplace level, building union membership in workplaces, demanding that employers not implement Work Choices. There would have been thousands of union members that were doing that in their own workplaces. And the decisions about how they were going to organise were made by the workers themselves. The 'Your Rights at Work' groups are a good example of this bottom-up organising.

Workers' interests or national interest? Labor policy on refugees and China Free Trade Agreement

by Martin Thomas

Michele O'Neill of the Textile, Footwear, and Clothing Union told the Australian Labor Party conference on 24-16 July 2015 that the Abbott government's policy of turning back boats of asylum seekers "is a turnback of desperate people seeking refuge...

"When you turn a boat around, you are turning a boat around into a risky, unsafe, perilous journey.

"You are sending people back often into unsafe circumstances. They will in some cases face torture. They will in some cases face death".

Labor leader Bill Shorten successfully pushed for Labor to support the turnbacks, softening it by promising to increase the (small) number of asylum seekers accepted, but mostly arguing that Labor opposition to turnbacks would open a door for Abbott to regain support.

"Let's learn the lessons of history", said O'Neill. "Capitulation doesn't work".

But most of the unions supported Shorten, whose policy passed on a show of hands. They seem to have done so as an "exchange" for Shorten opposing, or at least criticising, the Chinese Australian Free Trade Agreement, ChAFTA, signed by the Abbott government on 17 June 2015 after being negotiated from 2005, and now due for ratification by parliament.

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On infrastructure projects in food and agribusiness, resources and energy, transport, telecommunications, power supply and generation, environment or tourism in which a Chinese firm has a "substantial interest", under the agreement the Chinese firm can bring in a workforce from China, and the minimum wage to be paid to imported Chinese workers is to be negotiated between the project company and the immigration department rather than being the Australian minimum.

Under the agreement, also Chinese companies can bring legal proceedings against Australian governments if they reckon government measures damage their business. The tobacco giant Philip Morris is using a similar clause in an Australia-Hong Kong agreement to sue Australia over its plain packaging laws for cigarettes.

The criteria that could be used for such lawsuits are to be determined by a review after three years.

These are good reasons to oppose the agreement. Chinese workers coming to Australia should have the same terms and rights as local workers.

But much of the union campaign against ChAFTA is argued in terms of Australia's "national interest". Our criterion should be the common interests of workers, Australian, Chinese, and worldwide.

Stop Turkish government's war on the Kurds!

by Riki Lane

Since the Turkish government resumed its war on the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and Kurdish citizens in Turkey on 27 July 97 civilians have died, including 21 children. These attacks continue now. In some regions, Kurdish democratic political parties have held meetings to declare self-government – the Turkish government responds with attacks in those areas. There are thousands of arrests of activists and officials in Kurdish areas, most released, a few jailed.

Activists at the October meeting in Melbourne of Australians for Kurdistan discussed related developments.

After the relisting of the PKK as a terrorist organisation by the Australian government on 11 August, Kurdish representatives addressed a Senate security committee. Although they were received with some sympathy to the self-defence of Kurds in Rojava, there was little confidence that there would be a reconsideration of the decision. However, the department website entry has been changed –removing ridiculous allegations such as of drug running, and the previous list of violent actions including allegations of kidnapping of 300 children in 2014. This is likely a response to activities of Kurdish solidarity activists in exposing the falseness of such claims. Now the vast

majority of violent attacks cited for the PKK are since 27 July 2015.

The Turkish president Erdogan has called a snap election for 1 November, hoping the war on the Kurds will increase his party's support. This aims to resolve the deadlock where no coalition government could be formed, after the pro-Kurdish, leftist Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) broke through the 10% barrier for representation and gained 80 or so seats. However, the HDP fears that Erdogan may cancel the election or organise a fraud. Electoral polls (even those run by the ruling Justice and Development Party - AKP) show that the HDP is not losing votes and would retain its seats. The AKP is losing support: partially in response to dismay as over 500 government forces – soldiers, police, special forces – have died since fighting re-started against the PKK. The government are saying they are going to centralise electoral offices, which could facilitate massive vote-rigging, and may cause the HDP to withdraw from the election and concentrate on organising self-governing regions.

So the lead up to 1 November is uncertain. Kurdish activists are focussed on canvassing support for the HDP amongst Australian residents who can vote – between 14-25 October. This work is very difficult as Turkish Consulate officials try to intimidate their canvassers. However, there is likely to be a need for rapid solidarity mobilisation if the war is escalated, the election is cancelled, or the HDP withdraws from the election. Looking forward, there are plans to organise an Australian tour by Saleh Muslim, a central leader of the Syrian Kurdish YPD.

Hutchison ports – MUA fighting to save jobs

by Martin Thomas

Mark Jack, Hutchison Ports worldwide Executive Director and Managing Director for South East Asia and Australia, came to Sydney on 26 August. The 97 wharfies sacked in Brisbane and Sydney still didn't get straight answers from Hutchison, but the union made progress.

The 97 - 41 in Brisbane out of an operations and maintenance workforce of 84, and 56 in Sydney out of 122 - were sacked by text messages and emails at 11:30pm on 6 August telling them never to turn up to work again.

The talks between the MUA negotiating team (which included two rank-and-file delegates) and Hutchison got an undertaking that the 97 are to be kept on wages up to 14 October, and that the issues will be conciliated or if necessary arbitrated through the Fair Work Commission. The MUA is awaiting these results as we go to print.

The union asked for business plans to be supplied from Hutchison in Hong Kong.

Mark Jack admits that mismanagement at the top has been central to Hutchison's problems in Australia. Queensland MUA state secretary Bob Carnegie says: "With him leading the Hutchison negotiations, we are talking with a person who understand the industry and understands the problems both sides are facing. We may bitterly disagree; but it is infinitely better than trying to work things through with the current Hutchison Australia HR team, who have tried to drive an extreme right-wing ideological attack upon employees and the MUA".

Union negotiators made it clear that the MUA has the strength to ensure that Hutchison cannot even think of running a non-union operation in Australia. Hutchison's talk of mothballing the terminals receded.

Influential in making Hutchison think again were the Vodafone protests on 26 August. MUA members, with tremendous support from CFMEU construction members from city centre sites, protested and leafleted outside outlets for Vodafone, which in Australia is 50% owned by Hutchison since they folded their own "3" mobile phone franchise.

Jack agreed to a Memorandum only slightly amended from what he had backed out from only at the last minute in earlier talks on 20 August.

The case in the Federal Court which was to open from 1 September was adjourned.

Hutchison had already subcontracted-out all their customers for six weeks, before declaring the redundancies, and in the negotiations they threaten to mothball the entire operation. In late August they started to bring a few containers for export into the terminals.

From the morning of 7 August, a crowd often of hundreds and in daytime rarely of fewer than a couple of dozen sustained 24/7 community assemblies at the terminal gates in Brisbane and Sydney. There have been large contingents from other unions - the ETU, CFMEU construction and mining divisions, AMWU, United Voice - students, and left-wing activists.

The not-quite-what-was-first-reported Federal Court decision on 13 August, and pressure from the national union leadership to avoid "unprotected" industrial action which could lead to fines and claims for damages, have damped down the assemblies since then, but dozens of wharfies continue to protest at the terminal gates 24/7.

In Brisbane, the wharfies rostered on for each shift have gone to work, but marched in to the terminal cheered by the other workers and supporters and carrying union flags, or left the terminal for their

morning meal break to eat with their workmates on the protest line.

In work, they have monitored the refrigerated containers, but insisted on full observance of safety requirements where previously corners were cut. The first day, management returned every couple of hours to try to instruct the workers, but then the local managers, who seem not in the loop of the Hutchison top bosses' discussions, retreated to their office.

Renewed pressure on Hutchison will require remobilising big broad turnouts for the terminal-gates assemblies, and organising protests at other Hutchison businesses like Vodafone Australia.

The Brisbane wharfies have met regularly at the terminal gates. They have elected a committee, though in practice that hasn't get much further than being a list of people responsible for



different jobs. Their new union state secretary, Bob Carnegie, has provided unusually astute and democratically-minded leadership.

Just as remarkable has been an unusually united workforce. Almost all the Hutchison operations and maintenance workers are members of the union, the MUA, Maritime Union of Australia. That high union density is not unusual on the waterfront. Unusual is the solidarity which has enabled the action to be "carried" by small groups of workers who hadn't been sacked going into work and defying management pressure.

World container traffic is growing much more slowly than it did up to 2008, and with China's economic downturn that trend is unlikely to reverse soon. Hutchison's ports operations are still profitable overall, but Hutchison's Australian management wanted to break union organisation and beat down conditions in order to cut costs.

Hutchison's \$750 million investments in the two terminals, opened in 2013, provide the workers with their point of pressure to defend their organisation.

From Hutchison workers in Brisbane

Damien McGarry, MUA delegate

To be honest, the dispute is not about my job. It's about getting everyone else back in the gates, and everyone treated with some respect.

I'm pretty confident about the dispute. I think Hutchison know they made a lot of mistakes, and they're coming to light.

I went through the 1998 Patricks dispute. Do I see this as on the same level? Yes, I do. Being sent SMSs with instructions just not to turn up again is the same approach. Hutchison just didn't lock the gates, that's the only difference.

In 1998 I was new to the workforce. I was led through the dispute by the senior members there. This dispute is more personal for me. I am leading newer members through it.

When I took on the delegate's role in the terminal, I knew what I was letting myself in for. The delegate is always the first head on the chopping block.

But I knew that. I was prepared for that. What I wasn't prepared for was seeing the reactions when workers heard about the redundancies, seeing everyone go through their different emotions.

Everyone has a different emotional reaction, everyone has a different problem. I had members who were worried about losing money the first day, and others who seem not to worry about that at all. I had a member who didn't like the rainbow flag at the community assembly brought by the university Queer Collective because he is a strict Catholic, and I had to explain to him that we had to be open to all those coming to support us.

As a delegate, I've had to deal with a lot of different emotional reactions, and keep the workforce united.

Yes, I think we went into this as a united workforce because of work I'd done before as a delegate. I set out to put everyone on an equal playing field, and establish that no-one was better than anyone else.

My work ethic is very high, and I wanted the worksite to work well. I was a shift manager, and when someone did something wrong, I made sure he knew it.

But I made sure we worked for each other and respected each other.

Only eight months ago we were going for a Christmas party with the management. Now we don't respect them. We don't even want them in our lunch room.

Hannah Matthewson, MUA member.

At first, for me, this dispute was about my job. Now it's about the broader issue of job security in an Australian industry.

We are gaining momentum. We are going in the right direction. We want everyone reinstated. If not, we'll have the blue.

If Hutchison moves on their threat to mothball the terminals, then personally I think we should then be going in stronger. I honestly don't think they can do it financially, mothballing the terminals.

This is the first industrial dispute I've been through. What's different from what I expected? The support. I was expecting there'd be maybe 20 of us at the terminal gates. I never expected all the support we've got from the trade unions and the publicly generally.

And I never thought we would win. We've come a lot further than I had thought possible.

UK Labour – remaking the party after Corbyn's win

by Sean Matgamna

The trade unions and the working class have re-taken the Labour Party! An enormous beginning has been made to regain the working-class representation in Parliament that in the years since the Blairite coup in 1994 has been more or less absent.

That is the fundamental meaning of Jeremy Corbyn's election as Labour Party leader on 12 September. The influx of 180,000 new members — including individual members politically activated by the trade unions — has the same meaning, as well as being a tremendous expression of the hunger for a radical alternative to both the Tories and the Blairite Labour Party.

This is the second time since Labour's general election defeat in 2010 that the unions have asserted themselves inside the Labour Party. Essentially it was the unions who elevated Ed Miliband, the former Blair minister, to the leadership of the Labour Party. Miliband made occasional timid half-strangled noises that were more "old Labour" than Blairite.

There is nothing timid, half-hearted, or half-strangled about Jeremy Corbyn and his politics, or about John McDonnell, whom he has appointed as Labour's shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer. To an enormous degree this is a new political party.

The immediate big problem for those driving to restore a real Labour Party is the Parliamentary Labour Party. The hard-core Blairites are boycotting Corbyn. A majority of the MPs are hostile to this new Labour Party.

The size of Corbyn's majority inhibits them, limits their options, and may hold them in check for a while. They have a raucous press, TV, and radio to back them and express their opinion and feeling.

The Labour Party now taking shape can't win an election, they say. Thus they exert pressure on the party to stay within the broad neo-Thatcherite framework that

has monopolised British politics, including the Labour Party, for more than a quarter of a century.

A Labour Party publicly discussing and disputing its politics cannot win the electoral support Labour needs, they insist. Here they exert pressure against the democratic discussion and policy formation in which the Labour Party must now engage.

British politics has been an arid wasteland for so long because the political parties, and more and more so up to the eruption of politics in the Labour Party now, have eschewed internal discussion and debate, that is democracy within the parties. The parties have been seen, and rightly, as only machines by way of which gangs of careerist scoundrels fight each other for office.

Breaking out of that framework is a precondition for reversing the widespread mass numbness, indifference, or hostility to politics.

It is also the way to restore something like democracy in the country itself. What is democracy when all the main scene-dominating parties have, essentially, identical politics?

Who says a democratic, politically alive, Labour Party can't win a majority of the electorate? Who says winning elections is, or should be, the primary consideration, before principles?

One consequence of the Blairite experience has been to demonstrate the futility of politics that is only depoliticised gang warfare. "What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" That's true for parties as well as for individuals.

Getting rid of the Tory government is properly of great concern to the labour movement. Turning them out to put in a bunch of pale pink Tories (and that is what the Blairites and most of the MPs are) is a labour for fools.

The unions are showing that they are ceasing to be political fools and bag-carriers for self-serving politicians. As someone almost asphyxiated needs oxygen, so the labour movement desperately needs the period of political discussion and reorientation that is now opening up.

The tremendous influx of new members — another 30,000 joined in three days after Corbyn's election — shows that the Corbyn Labour Party can reach out to people, and therefore that it can win a general election.

It can educate the electorate, instead of accommodating to the establishment and press political consensus. It can be productive, transforming and building opinion -- instead of being parasitic on bourgeois-manufactured "public opinion", private polls, triangulation, and all the rest of it.

There was a time when political parties did that. Labour did it in the 1930s and 40s, and out of that came the welfare state and the NHS. Gladstone's Liberals did

it on Home Rule for Ireland: in 1865-6 Gladstone set out to educate public opinion, losing office because of that and winning it again, now with a mandate for Home Rule, six years later.

The Tory-Unionists did it at the beginning of the 20th century when they launched a "crusade" to replace the entrenched common wisdom for free trade by what they called "tariff reform".

A democratic system where that sort of exercise is not done, where political parties do nothing but pander to the entrenched dogmas and myths of "public opinion" — that is a democracy that is atrophying.

The neo-Thatcherite conventional wisdom of Tories, Lib-Dems, and Blairites needs to be challenged, and it can be beaten.

An invigorated opposition to the new Tory anti-strike legislation is the urgent immediate need now. So is a powerful campaign to defend the NHS and against the life-robbing bandits of the pharmaceutical companies.

There is probably a mass movement for sorting out the railway system there for the focusing and organising.

The deeper involvement of new members and supporters of Labour in the party is probably best achieved by mobilising them in action on these and other such issues.

The new Labour Party should join with the unions in unionisation campaigns in, for example, the fast food industry. There are other areas where unionisation is long overdue. Picket McDonalds!

The opening up of democratic discussion in and around the Labour Party on issues such as the European Union and the Middle East, now unavoidable, is good as well as being necessary.

Even before the current round of new anti-union legislation, Britain has the worst, the most restrictive and illiberal, union legislation in the European Union. Working-class support for a campaign against Britain's anti-union laws is there for the asking, across the EU.

The alternative to campaigning within the EU to change and democratise the EU is a regression to the old Europe of nation-states that triggered two world wars in the first half of the 20th century. Sane labour movement people will not choose such a regression: instead, together with workers across the EU, they will campaign and fight to transform the EU.

The Arab-Muslim-Israeli conflict is politically and morally an issue of tremendous importance for the labour movement. A campaign is necessary to advocate and fight for the only just, and the only practicable, solution, by way of two states, a Palestinian Arab state side by side with Israel, both of them fully independent. It is the absence of such a mainstream campaign that allows the "revolutionary" pseudo-left to infect young

people, whose good instinct makes them back the Palestinians against Israel, with an "anti-Zionism" so absolute that it becomes support for the destruction of the Jewish state, and is a form of anti-semitism.

If that is to be discussed now in the broad labour movement, as it will have to be given the past involvement of Jeremy Corbyn — who says he is for "two states" — with some of the "absolute anti-Zionist" organisations.

The new members of the Labour Party are a new "left", politically amorphous and in many respects inchoate. They offer the serious left great opportunities for discussion and political-educational work.

Most important in integrating the new draft of members will be the Labour youth organisation. At present it is small and feeble. Socialists should urge the Corbyn leadership immediately to relaunch a proper youth movement.

Compare the present left influx into the Labour Party with the Bennite left that erupted after Labour lost the 1979 general election to Thatcher. One importance difference is that in 1979 there was a strong activist network in the local Labour Parties. The body of the Labour Party had been vocally opposed to the Labour government for years before 1979.

That provided a frame into which newcomers — and there were many of them, though not as many as today — could be integrated. Today's pre-influx Labour Party is pretty much a withered shell, and many of its activists are people with political jobs in the Blair machine. It will be harder to integrate newcomers, though a campaigning Labour Party can do it: campaigning local Labour Parties can do it.

Politically, things are much better now. To the Bennite left, it was a basic article of faith to advocate British withdrawal from the European Union. The dominant model they had of socialism was the "Alternative Economic Strategy", a combination of the sort of semi-planning done in the Stalinist states and nostalgia for Britain's World War Two economic controls. Large swathes of the left were Stalinist, with a big or a little "s". It was very hard to convince people then that a lot of what passed for "left" was pernicious nonsense.

For instance, the Russian invasion of Afghanistan at Christmas 1979, and the colonial war Russia waged for a decade, called forth a strong current of vocal USSR-loyalists in the Labour Party, including among MPs. That was a measure of the political left then. Tony Benn's Chesterfield constituency Labour Party, with Benn's support, wrote a friendly letter to the Russian dictator Brezhnev on the premise that he was for peace.

Today all that old left has, politically, more or less vanished.

UK Labour – remaking the party after Corbyn’s win *(cont’d)*

On the other hand, the old left had a strong working-class and labour-movement culture that has now receded into the past.

At that time the official Labour youth movement was a lot bigger than the current Young Labour, but it had been for a decade, with the connivance of the Labour Party leadership, under the control of the “Militant” sect (today the Socialist Party and Socialist Appeal), which educated young people into a synthetic ideology that identified socialism with the nationalisation of the big monopolies by the British bourgeois state and preached the idea that the Stalinist states were a sort of “first installment” of working-class socialism. They backed the Russians in Afghanistan all through the 1980s.

Their ideas amounted to a strange non-Marxist, even non-working-class, idea of socialism, and a non-socialist idea of “Marxism”. (They always proclaimed themselves “the Marxists”).

It will be much easier to talk serious working-class politics with the newcomers now than it was to clear away the political debris of the 1970s.

Abbott axed: celebrate & organise

by Riki Lane

In a swift and relatively clean execution by the Liberal Party parliamentary caucus, Malcolm Turnbull replaced Tony Abbott. The working class and the left have every reason to cheer at the fall of this reactionary, who has led attacks on unions, the poor, refugees and asylum seekers, and stood in the way of gay marriage.

Abbott is a right wing conservative Catholic with a reactionary agenda, pro-coal, anti-renewables, climate change denier, anti-gay marriage, monarchist. He has been a leader of the right wing, conservative wing of the Liberal Party, and panders to the racism of the far right.

Turnbull is a liberal merchant banker – pro-gay marriage, for action on climate change, republican. He is the eminent leader of the “moderates”, and distrusted by the right wing Liberals. But Turnbull is merely another sort of class warrior – socially progressive, intelligent, witty and a good communicator, but just as committed to attacks on working class organisation and living standards. If anything he may be more effective for the ruling class than Abbott.

Abbott was dumped purely due to electoral concerns – the governing coalition (Liberal-National) has been behind in the last 30 Murdoch press News polls. He spoke in “three word slogans” and the government has

been attacked in the (non-Murdoch) press for being dysfunctional and having no coherent message. Their “achievements” have all been negative ones: repealing various pieces of Labour legislation (mining tax, carbon tax), ruthlessly attacking refugees and asylum seekers to “stop the boats” and establishing a Royal Commission to witch hunt trade unions.

Their first budget was a vicious attack on the working class, based on a so-called budget emergency, but they were unable to get most of it through the Senate.

On policy, Turnbull immediately appeased the right wing, saying that he would not change the stance on issues where he clearly differs, such as gay marriage (plebiscite after the next election) or climate change. He is in lock step on the racist approach to asylum seekers.

Turnbull’s main point of policy distinction is on economics; that the Liberals need to “explain” to the public why hard reforms are needed. Central in this is likely to be tax reforms: most likely regressive changes to GST, increasing the rate and including health and education. Turnbull may try to soften the anti-working class agenda by including things that Abbott had ruled out, such as changes to rorts for the well off, like superannuation concessions (soon to cost more than the age pension), negative gearing, and capital gains tax. Business lobbies are calling for some of these measures to get the budget back to balance.

Many people – not just Labor Party members – have said they are worried that it will be harder for ALP to win next election now, as all Shorten had to do was not be Abbott. Turnbull is a harder target, as Shorten and the ALP right don’t actually disagree with him on much. The soft left of Anthony Albanese and Victorian State Premier Daniel Andrews may have better practical policies that benefit working class people, but they stay entirely within the neo-liberal consensus.

But that misses the point – we need to use the Liberals desperate move to dump Abbott to reinvigorate the labour movement to organise and fight, whether it is right wing ALP or moderate Liberals in government.

Join the fight for socialism
Contact Workers Liberty today

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Sydney 0419 493 421

Melbourne 0400 877 819

Canberra 0428 957 704

Brisbane: 07 3102 4681

<http://australia.workersliberty.org>

wl@workersliberty.org

