

Workers' Liberty

The emancipation of the working class must be the act of the working class itself
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Penalty rates cuts Who profits? Stand up to defend living standards!



Sydney 9 March 2017 – Construction unions rallying against ABCC, joined by protestors defending penalty rates.

FWC cuts penalty rates

Penalty rates included in the awards for Hospitality, Clubs, Restaurant, Fast Food, Retail, Pharmacy workers will be cut for Sundays and Public Holidays by between 25-50%. The larger cuts are to the pay of non-casual retail and pharmacy workers, from double-time to time and a half, chiefly benefiting the bottom line for the large

retail employers. Fast food workers remain the worst off, with Sunday penalty rates cut to Saturday level. The cuts are to Public Holidays are take effect from July 2017, with possible “transitional arrangements” for Sundays. The Fair Work Commission will hear this in May 2017. The Restaurants award was not cut to the same extent in this decision because Sunday loadings had already been cut from 175% to 150% in 2014. *(cont'd p2)*

Full and part time (non-casual) workers, in retail and restaurants, will feel the pressure to take on extra hours to make up for their lost pay, and employers will have an incentive to take those hours away from casuals who retain higher penalty rates. The SDA Victoria estimates “that every year more than \$1 billion dollars will be ripped from the pockets of Australia’s retail and fast food workers.”

While the cuts apply only to awards, not enterprise bargaining agreements, as the SDA Victoria acknowledges “employers will use these cuts in penalty rates in negotiations for new agreements.”

And the winners are...

The two top Australian companies by annual revenue in 2016 are Wesfarmers at \$66.2 billion and Woolworths at \$58.6 billion, ahead of 3 major banks next on the list (IBISWorld). <https://www.insideretail.com.au/blog/2017/03/10/retail-heavyweights-help-top-1000-hit-1-98-trillion-in-revenue/>

Whilst Wesfarmers and Woolworths are known for their retail brands, both have significant liquor and hospitality investments, including poker machines and gambling. The SDA had already made agreements with Coles and Woolworths that have cut penalty rates even further than the Fair Work Commission. The FWC penalty rates decision further strengthens Coles and Woolworths to continue the downward pressure on take home pay.

Wesfarmers claims to be the largest private sector employer in Australia, paying around 220,000 people who spend their time working for Wesfarmers, over \$8 billion a year, only 4 times the total of \$2 billion paid to shareholders. Employees are paid on averages less than \$36,400 a year. The 530,000 shareholders are paid on average almost \$3,800 a year each just for owning shares, (Wesfarmers Annual Report 2016) and we can be sure there are many shareholders with well above average holdings. Woolworths employs over 205,000 people, with 111,000 of these in “stores, distribution centres and support offices.” (<http://www.woolworthsgroup.com.au/page/about-us/our-brands/supermarkets/Woolworths>).

Woolworths took \$1.5 billion revenue from hotel investments in 2016. (Woolworths Annual Report)

According to newspaper reports, “Citi Research analysis shows cutting penalty rates would boost

shareholder earnings by 8 per cent for Myer and JB Hi-Fi and 5 per cent for Wesfarmers.” It also shows that in November 2016 “most of Australia’s ASX-listed retailers have expired enterprise agreements. Those with expired agreements included Big W, Bunnings, Coles Supermarkets, JB Hi-Fi, Just Group, Kmart, Myer and Target...” “The reason most retailers have expired EBAs in our view is the hope that wage reform will be implemented lowering penalty rates,” the Citigroup report says.”

Other large operators in retail are Harvey Norman and JB HiFi. Franchising in the fast food and hospitality industries makes it more difficult to identify the size of operations for companies such as Retail Food Group, Bakers Delight, Pizza Hut, Dominoes and McDonalds, all covered by the SDA. Casinos are the largest single site employers in the hospitality industry, and covered by United Voice.

The proportion of employees working weekends has grown since 2008 in hospitality from 58.6% to 60.8%, and in retail from 44.4% to 47.6%. This compares to the proportions across all employees growing from 25.9% to 27.5%. The penalty rates cut is targeted to benefit employers and penalise workers in the industries that pay the most in penalty rates.

The squeeze

In 2011 The Productivity Commission found a “long-term downward trend in the growth rate of retail sales” largely because of cheaper goods. The PC quotes research showing that larger retail firms in Australia have historically enjoyed relatively high returns on shareholders’ funds” and that labour productivity growth in retail is similar, on average, to that of the rest of the Australian economy. However retail grew more slowly than overall gross domestic product between 2003-2013. And the level of productivity in the retail industry remains lower “in terms of output per hours worked ...than most OECD countries.” Growth in all but 2 categories of retail ranged between 1.2% and minus 2.1% between 2003-2013. The higher growth was in clothing, footwear and personal accessory retailing at 2.5%, and in non-store retailing (mainly online) at 17.6%.

In January 2017 Fairfax Media reported on “confidential supermarket scan data” illustrating “how dire the outlook might be for the Australian grocery sector, and how aggressive discounting has

pushed Coles and Woolworths down a road of mutual profit destruction.”

This competition between companies in the retail industry is being taken out on both farmers, with intense downward pressure on prices, and on retail workers, with intense downward pressure on wages. You can be pretty sure that it is not the corner store that drove the Fair Work Commission decision to cut penalty rates.

The unions and penalty rates

The workers whose take home pay will be cut are covered by the unions that are parties to the relevant Awards, the SDA (Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees’ Association), United Voice, Meat Industry Employees Union, and Professionals Australia (representing employed pharmacists).

The most visible union campaigning against the penalty rates cuts has been petitioning and signing up to a “Save our weekend” campaign, driven by United Voice.

The 230,000 member SDA has been complicit in eroding penalty rates, despite officials claiming to defend them. In September 2013 its website announced a “massive defence of penalty rates and overtime.” But 4 months earlier in May 2013 the SDA had already struck a template enterprise agreement with Business SA which abolished Saturday penalty rates and reduced Sunday penalties. And in August 2016 “[Fairfax published an investigation](#) revealing that the SDA had cut deals with some of the country’s biggest retail and fast-food chains that left more than 250,000 workers being paid below what they’re worth.” Agreements with Woolworths, McDonald’s and Coles have since replicated the trade off of penalty rates. The SDA claimed that the deal offered higher base rates of pay, guaranteed annual pay rises and improved rostering and shift breaks, but it left many employees worse off.

After unsuccessful attempts to reform the SDA from inside, a group of dissatisfied members formed a new union the Retail and Fast Food Workers Union in November 2016. Josh Cullinan, Secretary of RAFFWU, reacted to the February 2017 penalty rates cut. “Workers at the major retail and fast-food outlets have already had these penalty rates cut. That’s half a million workers out of the fight. We don’t think the Commission could have cut rates today if those 500,000 workers were in the fight.”

Meanwhile the SDA and the trade union movement are calling on Malcolm Turnbull to “intervene[e] immediately to protect take home pay and then review... the laws that have led to this decision.”

Labour council and the ACTU officials are speaking out against the penalty rates cuts and organising public meetings. Daniel Andrews announced a parliamentary inquiry in Victoria into the changes to penalty rates, and said the Labor government will be looking at ways to protect “thousands of Victorians from these attacks on their living conditions.” Bill Shorten is proposing a private members bill to stop the FWC cuts being implemented. It won’t get through the House of Representatives. The Save Our Weekend lobbying campaign, a partnership between United Voice and peak union bodies, is aimed at the next election. Given Labor’s record on replacing Work Choices with Work Choices Lite aka the UnFair Work Commission, a political campaign will not be enough to win back penalty rates.

The driving force behind these cuts is the large corporations that benefit from them, and there is no way to win without taking on those employers, by demanding restoration of penalty rates in enterprise agreements. There are many EBAs that have already expired or expire shortly.

However, the SDA leadership is incapable of this, United Voice may not have the confidence, RAFFWU doesn’t have the membership base, and Professional Australia membership is less concentrated and perhaps less likely to have enterprise agreements. The Meatworkers have stood up in large meat processing plants in the past, but there is no obvious sign that they have been able to take on the retail giants.

The power to win back full penalty rates is industrial. The affected unions should organise for enterprise agreements that include the old level of penalty rates, and that withdraw previous clauses that traded off penalty rates. The leaders of peak union bodies, and all left trade unionists should be organising and looking for ways to make this happen, despite obstruction by individual union leaders. This includes exploring how to support the efforts of RAFFWU to overcome the SDA leadership and to organise workers on the job.

A new union: Retail and Fast Food Workers Union



Josh Cullinan

The Retail and Fast Food Workers Union (RAFFWU) was launched in November 2016, with a mission to win back pay and conditions for retail workers that have been traded off by the SDA, Shop Distributive and Allied Employees Association. Janet Burstall and Blair Vidakovich spoke to Josh Cullinan, Secretary for the RAFFWU.

Firstly we asked Josh what efforts had been made to reform the SDA, and how the SDA officials had obstructed them, because forming a new union, to compete with, and effectively split an existing union, is potentially divisive of workers who need unity against their employers.

Josh: There have been various attempted challenges. Some from within the SDA hierarchy, generally organisers or senior Catholics who have opposed the leadership, but we can discount them as not genuinely advocating any change. Other challenges have involved young retail workers. Some tried to work from within the SDA, by getting jobs there, thinking they could organise workers from within, but they would get shut down. There have been small tickets, running for state conference positions, but they never come close to winning any positions. This is due to a large number of issues, not least of which are the undemocratic first past the post ballot rules. Winner takes all. The most votes will elect an entire slate. We had a Shop Watch campaign which rank and file members joined in in the early noughties. Workers were agitating around the penalty rates that were being stolen by SDA deals. .

These campaigns lacked capacity because of numerous difficulties organising low paid, insecure, transient workforces against established political elites. Unite in Victoria chose to organise workers outside the SDA employers. Then in 2014-2015 there was the Coles case. It seemed such a conspiracy at the time that journalists would have laughed at us. But it came to a head at an interesting time. We analysed rosters and pay rates on the Coles agreement, and exposed how far behind the award they were.”

Duncan Hart was the part-time Coles worker who, with Josh Cullinan, took Coles to the Fair Work Commission and won. Josh had thought there was a possibility that the SDA might rethink at this point.

Josh: What was the SDA response? ...They fought Duncan’s appeal. When the Commission ruled in May 2016 that the SDA’s 2015 agreement failed the BOOT – Better Off Overall Test – and therefore was invalid, that should have been a watershed. They could have said ‘we’ve been caught, it’s time for a change’. But they didn’t. The combination of anti-worker rules such as its first past the post rules, and anti-communist rules are used to stop any challenge. They have immense resources to block change from within. The other difficulty is that even though the employers are such massive corporations, the workplaces themselves are not very big, around 100-150 with a high turnover. Individual workplaces are too small to have a big impact on the SDA. They continue to defend the Coles agreement, which made some workers better off, but so many more workers were left far behind. The SDA is so beholden to its keepers, the bosses. It will do whatever it has to for the right to have payroll deductions from the bosses. It pays cash directly to the bosses to have that right. All efforts to mobilise get washed away.”

Josh emphasised that RAFFWU did not ask retail workers to join if they could be represented by a genuine union. So drivers can join the Transport Workers Union, fast food restaurant workers (eg Grill’d) can join United Voice, head office staff can join the Australian Services Union and meatworkers can join the Meat Industry Employees Union. RAFFWU is not asking other unions to take a side between the SDA and RAFFWU. And neither does RAFFWU require members to resign from the SDA, though most members could not afford to pay

fees to both unions. RAFFWU's relationships with other unions are in early stages.

Josh: RAFFWU will be affiliating with local labour councils wherever possible and as members identify it as a priority. The SDA has not affiliated to many, but did apply to affiliate to Victorian Trades Hall Council 28 days after RAFFWU was launched, and a range of other regional labour councils in a remarkably overt attempt to shut RAFFWU out. The SDA brings money and power, so it has apologists in the union movement. We think that once the stories come out from our members about their suffering, and what the SDA has done, the SDA officials won't be able to escape criticism.

Janet: Does RAFFWU have plans to become party to agreements or awards?

Josh: Definitely yes. Our members appoint RAFFWU as their bargaining representative. But at the moment, employers are simply refusing to bargain. This means we can't take protected industrial action to bargain. The only way to use the law to force the employers to bargain is to win majority support of the workforce to terminate the agreement. To get a legal "majority support determination" would mean when Coles refuses to bargain, we would have to get over 38 000 workers to vote to support bargaining for a new agreement, in Woolworths over 50 000, and in McDonalds over 52 000. McDonald's has 105 000 employees. This Abbott-Turnbull change to the Fair Work Act from 2015 makes bargaining like it is in the USA, where you can't start until over 50% of the workforce votes for in favour of commencing negotiations. We will be bargaining with other employers.

We are an Incorporated Association in Victoria, and a registered body that can trade inter-state. We are an industrial association under the Fair Work Act. Almost all members appoint us as bargaining representative, which means we represent them as their union in bargaining and we can get a protected action ballot. We will be applying to terminate agreements, which would then bring the Award into effect. We don't anticipate that the employers will bargain. We will take cases to terminate agreements. With our members we can apply to terminate agreements which will return substantial wage increases for most retail and fast food workers."

(RAFFWU first applied to terminate an expired agreement in January 2017 covering

approximately 400 Bakers Delight staff across 15 or more stores in Victoria.)

We need to mobilise our members, the community has to be active and we don't want to be bureaucratic. We can't just engage in all of this legal action on its own. We want to mobilise a lot of workers to share their views, a group of workers across states. In smaller workplaces, eg IGA, workers in stores are electing delegates. They talk amongst their friends in stores about how to get back conditions. Penalty rates are the bread and butter, along with underpayments. The focus is on penalty rates, because workers will be better off, even with the recent penalty rate cuts, on the Award rather than on the EBAs. If we can terminate the agreements quickly enough, it could bring half a million workers to the fight to take back penalty rates, if they can be on the Award before the FWC cuts to the Award come into full effect.

We asked Josh for his view of the role for socialists in the union movement, and his opinion of the Workers' Liberty draft working class charter.

Josh: I'm for the emancipation of the working class, but we're not a red union. We need political education for our members, delegates training. Politics in unions is too often stifled by political party politics. Any radical debate, on anything important is stifled, suppressed. We want to encourage innovation, new ideas and ways of working.

We want to get back to the idea that the power of the union is on the shop floor. We hope that our members will become social activists. We need to focus on bringing the stories of exploitation to light. We need to give workers a voice, and that is how we will pursue socialist objectives. These corrupt officials will not be able to escape when these stories come to light. We are confident we will be able to terminate agreements and deliver wage increases. These IGA workers whose agreement we hope will be terminated within a week will see 25% average wage increases – some over 40%. Once workers realise that they're losing money they are awakened, and become willing to organise. The role of good unionists is to be sound on workplace issues. It takes dedicated resources and commitment over decades. I agree with pursuing socialist objectives, including the ones listed in this draft workers' charter."

A working class charter

Workers' Liberty propose these draft points for a union charter with demands on both government and employers:

- Union rights, the right to strike and take solidarity action, for organising the unorganised in workplaces and educating their delegates, to take on the employer and the government.
- Secure employment. For action against insecurity and casualisation. Transfer rights between employers, increase the dole, end work for the dole and renationalise employment services.
- Public ownership of banks and other financial institutions, and utilities.
- Union conditions and rates for all workers in Australia, whatever country they are from. Campaign to increase and enforce the minimum wage. Stop bosses blackmailing workers with temporary work visas. International solidarity.
- Rapid transition to renewable energy, and renewable energy jobs, via public ownership.

We would like to hear responses to this draft charter from labour movement activists. email wl@workersliberty.org

Workers' Liberty says retail and fast food workers need RAFFWU

A critical point emerged from the interview. The Fair Work Commission (FWC) cuts to Sunday and public holiday penalty rates from July 2017 would not take anything from most part-time and casual workers employed on SDA enterprise agreements, because those agreements are so far below the existing Award conditions. Although the SDA has been exposed in the 2016 ruling by the FWC in the case pursued by Duncan Hart, the SDA is continuing to defend its sell out agreements. But workers joining RAFFWU will be supported to demand the termination of the agreements, and restore the Award conditions. Any workers who achieve this prior to FWC cuts to Award penalty rates take effect, will directly experience the impact of those cuts. According to Josh, there could be up to 500,000 workers in this position.

Whilst these workers continue on the SDA agreements, they are far less likely to be mobilised against the cuts to penalty rates in the Award, because they get no benefit from them. This is a point of urgency for mobilising retail and fast food

workers, and building support for RAFFWU's case to terminate the SDA's sell-out agreements. There is also potential for SDA members and delegates to express their support for termination of the agreements. RAFFWU should encourage this.

Reform of the SDA is beyond the reach of rank and file members, and could only be seriously tackled by a well-funded political coalition, that would almost certainly get bogged down in legal proceedings, and in any case would lack a rank and file base. Josh Cullinan has a record in organising young workers, and in defending retail workers' penalty rates, based on thorough research into working conditions in the retail and fast food industry.

The overwhelming challenge is for retail workers to get sufficiently organised on the job, to be able to force their employers to agree to better wages and conditions. The SDA officials have found greater common interest with the employers, via delivering sub-standard enterprise agreements in exchange for employers collecting union dues for the SDA. RAFFWU provides an avenue for retail workers to organise on the job, that they have been denied by the SDA.

There is no sign that unionists who express reservations about RAFFWU and call for working for change from within the SDA, have put a tenth of the energy that Josh has already put into advocating for retail workers, identifying a basis for organising them against the employers, and challenging the SDA officials' partnership with the employers. If RAFFWU is not built, then there will be no effective union for retail and fast food workers.

If RAFFWU gains ground, the major retail and fast food employers will be concerned about having to deal with a more militant workforce. They are likely to encourage the SDA officials to shut down RAFFWU, and to look to the Fair Work Commission to reassert the lower standards of pay contained in the expired enterprise agreements. Equally the SDA officialdom will want to keep its power and influence, and could pitch to both the ACTU to broker a shut out of RAFFWU, and the employers to go to war with RAFFWU. The full-time permanent weekday sections of the retail workforce have fared best from the trade-offs in the agreements, and is the most likely base of member support for SDA incumbents.

In the name of unity, some sort of deal could be proposed, with mild democratic reforms to the

rules of the SDA, that might allow the appearance of an electoral challenge, but with the odds stacked against RAFFWU supporters. Josh said, it will be up to the RAFFWU members to convince other trade unionists that RAFFWU deserves support, and not the SDA.

Workers' Liberty anticipates there will be no smooth path for RAFFWU, and that ACTU and individual union leaders will be confronted with a choice between shoring up the SDA leadership (Dave Oliver, former Secretary of the ACTU obliged the SDA by defending their sell-out EBAs), or helping retail workers to build the industrial capacity to fight their employers.

We stand in solidarity with retail and fast food workers organising their workplaces for decent pay and conditions, and protecting penalty rates. We will be calling on all trade unionists to support RAFFWU's efforts to mobilise retail and fast food workers to terminate sell-out enterprise agreements, and at a minimum to restore the penalty rates contained in awards.

The legacy of Martin McGuinness

by Sean Matgamna

The young Martin McGuinness was a typical Catholic boy who grew up in the six north-east counties of Ireland, in the Protestant-sectarian backyard of the British state, the "Protestant sub-state for a Protestant people". The sub-state had a one-in-three Catholic minority.

In McGuinness's Derry, two miles from the border with the 26 Counties, it was the other way round: there was a Catholic majority of two-to-one. In the Protestant state for a Protestant people, inconveniences like that could be dealt with by a little judicious gerrymandering of election boundaries. The Protestant one-third could have a two-thirds majority on the city council, and they did. Young Martin McGuinness learned as he grew that, to the people who ran the world in which they lived, he and his were inferior beings: taigs, micks, Fenian bastards.

Jobs were scarce in an economy which, even as the rest of the UK economy boomed, was run down and decrepit. And who got most of the jobs, and the best jobs? Those who weren't taigs, micks, and Fenian bastards. Houses were scarce, and council houses brought local government votes. So who

got the council houses? Not the taigs, micks, and Fenian bastards. A single Protestant woman could get a house ahead of big Catholic families living in slums. When young Martin McGuinness, like other boys, played cowboys and Indians, he could look up at the great walls of the perfectly preserved 17th century Protestant fortress city, and imagine himself as an Amerindian playing among the teepees outside the walls of the cavalry fort. In times of "emergency" - and there were a lot of those - he would feel alarm if he encountered rifle-carrying patrols of the mobilised sectarian bully-boys of the Special Constabulary - the "B-men", the B Special constables.

But there were good things too. The British welfare state operated in Northern Ireland, and the Catholics like everyone else had social security benefits for the unemployed, better health care, better schools, and far better chances of going to university, than people like them in the 26 Counties. Vastly better. But second-class citizens they were. People kept down by the ever-present threat of force, and sometimes by the use of it. His people began to grow confident, and organised to win equal rights - as they sloganised it: "one man, one vote; one man, one house; one man, one job".

When Martin McGuinness was still in his teens, marches and agitation for civil rights gripped the Catholics of Derry. Fighting between the police and Derry's Catholic young people became a fact of everyday life. On 13 August 1969, a provocative march by Orange sectarians on the walls of the old fortress city - an annual event - sparked clashes with resentful Catholic youths. The Orange police, in a pogrom mood, tried to invade the Catholic Bogside, the slum outside the city walls. They had done that before. A few months earlier they had beaten an old man to death there. The people put up barricades to stop them, and fought them off for three days.

Fighting spread to Belfast. The British Labour government put the army on the streets to stop what was the beginning of a civil war, and quickly forced through every reform the civil rights movement had asked for. For the Catholic youth roused up, McGuinness one of them, that was now anti-climactic. The Republican movement split at the end of 1969. The left wing were Stalinists. The right wing were avid for an anti-British military campaign like the one they had been forced to abandon, defeated, in 1962. They reorganised, recruited, and trained the anti-imperialist, anti-

Crown youngsters. The political consciousness of those young people had been shaped by nationalist songs, stories, histories, myths, martyred heroes. It was a minority culture, easy for the Republicans to build on.

In March 1971 the Provisional IRA started shooting British soldiers. It was the start of a war that would go on for 23 years. The still very young McGuinness emerged as a leader in the armed conflict. Nothing better was on offer to him and many like him. Politics? The gun and the bomb. The enemy? The Crown forces and their Irish "collaborators". McGuinness had talent and he had guts.

What he didn't have was the glimmer of a world outlook besides the Republican one. Within a year, by March 1972, the Republicans had won all they would win in the long war. The Protestant-sectarian home-rule government was abolished, and Britain insisted that from now on, any government must be a coalition in which Catholics and Protestants would share power.

The Protestants had before the First World War won a veto over a united Ireland; now the Republicans won for the Catholics a veto over a Protestant-only government in the Protestant state for a Protestant people. That was institutionalised in the Sunningdale Agreement of November 1973. It stipulated compulsory power-sharing, in a more flexible version of the Good Friday Agreement accepted by the Provisionals a quarter of a century later, in 1998. The Protestants rejected Sunningdale. A Protestant general strike destroyed the power-sharing government in May 1974. It was made very plain that the block on a united Ireland was a section of the Irish people, not Britain.

After a year's ceasefire in 1975-6, the Provisionals resumed war. With what objective? A united Ireland. How would their war achieve that? Could they hope to persuade the Protestants to agree to a united Ireland by shooting and bombing them? No, but they could, they thought, compel Britain to become "persuaders" of the Protestants. Britain had not been able to "persuade" enough of the Protestants to agree even to share power with the Catholics within the Six Counties. In fact, by "persuade" the Provisionals meant "coerce", in every way open to the British government, including financial pressure. These Republicans fought a war, in which a big bulk of the casualties were Northern Ireland Protestant-Unionists, to compel Britain to force the Northern Ireland

Protestants into a united Ireland. Put plainly, it was a mad undertaking. Yet that is what they were trying to do.

McGuinness and his comrades slowly, all too slowly, realised that their war was unwinnable, and accepted defeat. They turned to politics. And Martin McGuinness, the young Derry Republican of 1971 and after, kissed the Queen's hand, became co-equal Deputy First Minister in the Northern Ireland government. The Queen sent condolences to his widow. Thousands on both sides were killed and maimed in a war that after 1972-3 achieved nothing and could achieve nothing greater than to raise Sinn Fein, the militarists of yesteryear, the one-time devotees of physical force on principle, to its present eminence in bourgeois Irish politics.

They fought for a British solution - Britain to "persuade" the Protestant Unionists. They got a British solution, but not the one they wanted. And it was McGuinness and his comrades who were "persuaded". The pattern of Irish politics, again and again - Cumann na nGaedheal, Fine Gael, Fianna Fail, Clann na Poblachta, the Workers' Party - is one of physical-force revolutionaries becoming bourgeois politicians as anything but revolutionaries. The tragedy of McGuinness and others in his generation is that they repeated that pattern, that they could not break out of it. McGuinness's surviving comrades are still caught in the pattern.

Postscript: Green Left Weekly and Red Flag both carry obituaries of Martin McGuinness that praise his stand against the British, as if that is enough for socialists to support McGuinness, even if critically. But it is not socialist to go along with anti-imperialist nationalist politics. Independent working class politics that recognise the rights of all communities are the basis for breaking out of the political impasse in Ireland.

MUA Occupation of Rio Tinto Brisbane

by Bob Carnegie

On Tuesday 28 March 2017, the Queensland Branch of the MUA held a successful rally and occupation of Rio Tinto's building in Brisbane. Some 80 MUA members and supporters from other unions including the CFMEU, ETU, United Voice, ASU and the QCU came out in support of our battle against Rio Tinto and the right of Australian seafarers to work in their own nation.

We occupied the lobby of the Rio Tinto office and a delegation spoke to the Rio Tinto industrial relations team and said that we would not leave the building until the decision makers in Rio Tinto agreed to meet with us.

As a result, the head of Rio Tinto's world wide fleet agreed to meet an MUA delegation on the 10th of April. To the QCU and all unions who supported us, our heartfelt thanks. To members who are fighting for all MUA seafarers, the Branch thanks you. To all those sitting on their arse, whinging and doing nothing the Branch asks you to get active. Come to meetings, come to demonstrations and fight with us as union men and women who have decided we will FIGHT ON OUR FEET for our industry, for our families, for our birthright and NOT lay down at the feet of corporate Australia and meekly accept the destruction of our right to work! As our great CFMEU comrades say, STAND UP, SPEAK OUT, FIGHT BACK!!!

Spanish dockers win

Jordi Aragunde, coordinator of the International Dockworkers' Council, reported a victory, at least a temporary victory, for Spanish dockworkers. They have been fighting the Government's plan to abolish "pools" through which they are employed. "As of March 17, the Spanish Government was unable to pass the Royal Decree to reform the Spanish port system. The Spanish Parliament has rejected this Decree, therefore acting to protect Spanish dockworkers. "Action has been cancelled indefinitely. IDC will continue to watch over new developments closely. "IDC would like to express gratitude for the great show of support to Spanish dockworkers these past weeks, which is a point of pride for the international docker community — and one victory among many yet to be achieved."

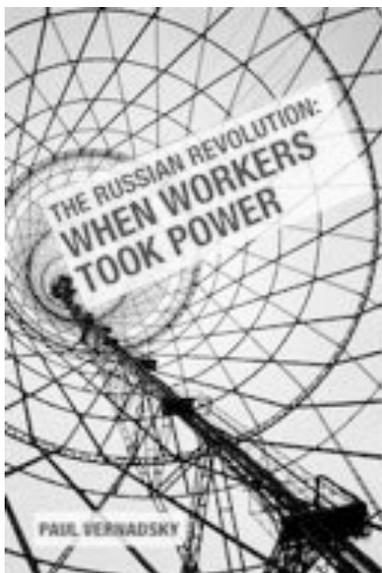
Workers' Liberty platform

Today one class, the working class, lives by selling its labour power to another, the capitalist class, which owns the means of production. The capitalists' control over the economy and their relentless drive to increase their wealth causes poverty, unemployment, the blighting of lives by overwork, imperialism, the destruction of the environment and much else. Against the accumulated wealth and power of the capitalists, the working class must unite to struggle against capitalist power in the workplace and in wider society. The Alliance for Workers' Liberty wants socialist revolution: collective ownership of industry and services, workers' control, and a democracy much fuller than the present system, with elected representatives recallable at any time and an end to bureaucrats' and managers' privileges. We fight for trade unions and Labor to break with "social partnership" with the bosses and to militantly assert working-class interests. In workplaces, and trade unions; among students; in local campaigns; on the left and in wider political alliances we stand for:

- Independent working-class representation in politics.
- A workers' government, based on and accountable to the labour movement.
- A workers' charter of trade union rights — to organise, to strike, to picket effectively, and to take solidarity action.
- Taxation of the rich to fund decent public services, homes, education and jobs for all.
- A workers' movement that fights all forms of oppression. Full equality for women, and social provision to free women from domestic labour. For reproductive justice: free abortion on demand; the right to choose when and whether to have children. Full equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. Black and white workers' unity against racism.
- Open borders.
- Global solidarity against global capital — workers everywhere have more in common with each other than with their capitalist or Stalinist rulers.
- Democracy at every level of society, from the smallest workplace or community to global social organisation.
- Equal rights for all nations, against imperialists and predators big and small.
- Maximum left unity in action, and openness in debate.

Books from Workers Liberty

The Russian Revolution



The 1917 Russian revolution was the greatest event in political history so far – the first time working class people took political power and held it for a decade. Yet the real history is buried under myths. Many Western academic accounts portray 1917 as a mutiny of peasant soldiers leading ultimately to a coup

d'état, led by a small group of fanatics who established a Stalinist totalitarian state.

Worse, the mirror image of 1917 became the foundation myth of the Stalinist state: the 1917 revolution was used both in Russia and across the world by 'Communist' parties to glorify the terrible Stalinist regime that endured after workers' self-rule was extinguished in the twenties. The original, liberatory working class essence of the original revolution was lost.

Since the 1960s – and especially since the opening of archives in Russia from the 1990s, much more is known about the Russian revolution. This book aims to bring original Marxist perspectives together with a wide range of scholarship. It is written from what Lenin and Trotsky called the 'third camp' independent working class socialist perspective.

This book explains some irreplaceable ideas developed a century ago – uneven and combined development, permanent revolution, democratic centralism, soviets (councils), workers' control, consistent democracy, socialist feminism, transitional demands, the united front and the workers' government. These ideas are highly relevant to students and activists in today's struggles..

Contact wl@workersliberty.org to order a copy.
\$20.00 including postage in Australia.

Can socialism make sense?



This book makes the case for socialism. In a time when socialism is the most searched word on the Merriam-Webster dictionary website, more and more people call themselves socialists, and a self-confessed socialist is leader of the British Labour Party, this book

explores what socialism means, whether it can rise again, how, and why.

The need for socialism has never been greater and yet a credible socialism is absent. Where is the compellingly-made case for the democratic control of the economy and society? Authentic socialism is still buried under the ruins of Stalinism, the fraudulent, counterfeit, anti-socialist "socialism" of the 20th century. Socialism is eclipsed, everywhere.

This book, *Can Socialism Make Sense?* edited and introduced by Sean Matgamna for the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, is an essential contribution to making the case for twenty-first century working class revolutionary socialism. It sets out some of the most fundamental objections to this conception of socialism and provides evocative answers to questions such as: What about Stalin? Are revolutions democratic? How can we have a planned economy? and is socialism still relevant?

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Villawood Occupation

(cont'd from back page)

He was sedated and force-fed through a tube in a Melbourne hospital, before being handcuffed, kidnapped and driven through the night with no notice given to him or his lawyer, to Villawood in Sydney where he was told he would be deported.

The collective organising the occupation has held vigils, concerts, had discussions and teach-ins, painted banners, held a concert and protested outside the detention centre.

The most exciting thing about this action has been the new activists emerging out of the ether and coming along to attend the occupation. Numerous radical left activists that I have spoken to reported that their expectations for attendance at the occupation have been exceeded. There is talk of the “next generation of radical leftists” being formed as a result of this action. New, young people have come along to attend and have been party to discussions on many radical left topics. I myself sat in on a discussion with new activists on the role of the state under capitalism and in the revolution.

Spontaneous actions like this, that then crystallise and generate support from the radical left can generate a community feeling that one is participating in a “festival of the oppressed”. Organising thus far has been democratic. The morale of the activists taking shifts has become tense and frustrated at times, but new corners have been turned at every such stage of negativity.

Mandatory detention of asylum seekers and refugees started in 1992 under the Keating Labor government. Ever since then, asylum seekers and refugees have been demonised in the media and in official political party election campaigns of both the conservative Liberal and neoliberal Labor parties. Asylum seekers who come by boat to Australia are especially vilified in the media. All sorts of lies about “cue jumping”, “job taking”, “terrorism-mongering” have been reported in the press over the last 25 years. While in power, the Federal Labor government published an incredibly expensive full page advertisements demonising asylum seekers using taxpayer money. The level of vitriol levelled at people seeking protection from persecution overseas has been dizzying. That is why actions like this occupation to protect Saeed represent such a wonderful outpouring of

community resistance against the Immigration Department, and its continuing abuse and demonising of asylum seekers and refugees.

Actions to defend Saeed and galvanise support against Australia’s immigration policies have not just occurred in Sydney down at Villawood. At the same time that the occupation started here in Sydney, there was another action in Victoria at the Broadmeadows Immigration Detention Centre. There have been protests and occupations of Parliamentary Members’ offices across every major city in Australia. I myself came across an attempt by some activists to occupy the Department of Immigration Sydney office as I made my way to work. That occupation attempt was unsuccessful, but in Canberra activists were successful. In fact it was probably the news of Canberra that tipped off the police and had them lock the doors in Sydney.

The pressure that has built up as a result of the combined efforts across the country saw several Federal Members of the House of Representatives make speeches in parliament about Saeed. Of note is Member for Melbourne Adam Bandt’s speech.

He said “This is what happens when an immigration system is set up to punish people seeking asylum rather than welcoming them. ... I call on [Immigration] Minister Dutton to stop this deportation and allow Saeed’s case to be reassessed.”

A petition to call on major airlines to refuse to deport Saeed had in excess of 22 500 signatures at the time of writing.

Saeed’s threatened deportation was an electric moment when something finally *happened* as yet more awful news about the Australian government’s abuse of asylum seekers came to light. I sat in at a meeting of tired, frustrated activists, as the first week of the occupation was coming to an end. Despite everything, the lack of sleep, the cold and the wet, even the most negative activists declared that *much* more good had come out of the occupation than bad.

If you are in Sydney, I implore you to take a shift down at Villawood and get to know your fellow comrades. The occupation is ongoing, and we need as much help as is humanly possible. Saeed has not been deported yet. With your help, we may just have a chance at saving his life.

Villawood Occupation

#FreeSaeed #StopDeportations #CloseTheCamps



by Blair Vidakovich

There has been a continuous occupation by activists outside the Villawood Immigration Detention Centre in Sydney since the 24th of March.

Activists have camped outside the three operating exits of the detention centre, checking cars and vans to make sure Saeed (a pseudonym), is not deported. It was the information that this man, who is in his sixties, is in imminent threat of being deported, that spurred on this wonderful act of solidarity. Up to seven to ten activists at a time can be found at any hour of the day or night, checking vehicles leaving the detention centre, to make sure Saeed does not get deported.

Saeed is yet another human being fleeing persecution overseas, who has been manhandled and abused by the Australian Immigration Department. A Facebook Event page organised by the activists involved in the occupation explains what has happened to Saeed, and why so many on the radical left here in Sydney were incensed when they found out that the Australian government planned to cruelly deport him:

Saeed (pseudonym) is a stateless asylum seeker currently being held in the Villawood Immigration Detention Centre. His asylum claim was rejected based on a bureaucratic technicality, despite his brother gaining refugee status in Australia with a

near-identical claim. Saeed was refused the right to appeal in the Federal Court due to missing a deadline that he was not made aware of due to not speaking English. Saeed now faces imminent deportation to danger and potential torture and death in his country of origin. Saeed is just one case of a legitimate asylum seeker being lost in the legal system, and let down by the Australian state that has an international duty to protect him. Saeed has shown immense strength in the face of an unjust and torturous system, having fought for weeks via a hunger strike to protest his unfair treatment.

(continued over)

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