

# MUTINY!

A MONTHLY NEWSLETTER FROM BLACK FLAG SYDNEY

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Transition Leave  
page 03

The Uluru Statement  
page 10

Blockade Australia  
page 09

## PUBLIC SECTOR STRIKE WAVE

## REPORTS

### 03 Federal election wrap-up

*A brief summary of the political circus*

### 03 Transition leave

*Queer rights are a union fight*

## FEATURE

### 05 Public sector strike wave: New life in the union movement

*On the possibility of united strike action across the NSW public sector*

## ANALYSIS

### 08 Inflation

*The profit-price spiral driving up costs*

### 09 Blockade Australia

*Our perspective on the movement*

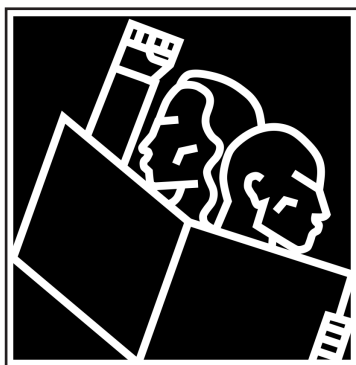
### 10 The Uluru Statement: No sovereignty under the Crown

*Unpacking the left-wing opposition to constitutional recognition*

***We would like to acknowledge that the land on which we live, work, and organise is unceded Aboriginal land.***

***We pay our respects to the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, on whose lands Black Flag Sydney is based. We offer our absolute and unequivocal solidarity to all First Nations peoples fighting for liberation, here and overseas.***

***We stand together now and always.***



## Editorial

Despite the recent rout of the Coalition at the federal election, we workers still face the same issues under Labor: rising cost of living, climate change-induced natural disasters, laws and culture wars attacking queer people.

At best, Labor will put a small bandaid over these open wounds. To combat inflation they raised the minimum wage, but they will not repeal the anti-strike laws which prevent us winning wage increases across the board, and so workers will suffer as inflation continues to rise beyond five and possibly seven percent. Their climate policy is well behind what's required to fight climate change, leaving workers in the lurch as energy bosses make a slow switch from fossil fuels to renewables in the name of profit. In the campaign, Labor showed itself all too ready to engage in petty culture wars to (unsuccessfully) win votes, throwing trans people under the bus in particular.

There is still a fight on our hands, and this issue of Mutiny will focus on these fights. Our feature article addresses the inspiring wave of public sector strikes this year, and we have analyses of inflation, the Uluru Statement from the Heart, and Blockade Australia, to make sense of all these campaigns and how we can engage with them as workers.

With a new government, the workers' fight for a better world continues with just as much vigour as before.

## REPORT

## Federal election wrap-up

The recent federal election saw an embarrassing end to nine years of Coalition rule – the party of austerity, bigotry, climate devastation, and union busting which has been met with grassroots resistance (with no help from Labor) at every step. It was the Liberals' worst electoral results in their history.

But this is no coronation for Albanese and the Labor party. Though the major parties have some policy distinctions, Labor made itself more like the Liberals this election by pandering to racism and transphobia and supporting fossil fuels. This right wing strategy gave them their lowest vote since the Great Depression. There has never been an elected government since the introduction of suffrage with such weak support from working-class voters.

The Greens ran a clear campaign to kick out the Liberals, platforming climate action, better Medicare, and affordable housing, winning

their highest ever vote, a large factor in Labor's "success." They picked up new seats in both houses and enjoyed swings in Lismore, Melbourne, Newcastle, Wollongong, Adelaide, and some fossil fuel communities. This result is an encouragement for the left in its push against the jobs vs. climate wedge. However, it was not enough to grant the Greens the balance of power, so their legislative influence will remain minor.

The independents were also massive winners of the election as they devoured the Liberals' middle-class base. Climate 200 Independents succeeded in 9 lower house seats and in the ACT Senate on a platform of milquetoast climate action, anti-corruption, women's inclusion, and opposing the religious freedoms bill.

The far right have also been shown as losers in this election, with a general swing against One Nation despite running in an increased number of seats. Liberal defector

Craig Kelly came fourth in his seat, and despite a Senate seat for Clive Palmer's United Australia Party in Victoria due to the crash in the Liberal vote, support has otherwise failed to truly grow in contrast to the slightly more progressive splits in the Liberals' base.

On paper, this is the most progressive parliament in most people's living memory, with a Prime Minister in the so-called Socialist Left faction, a strong Greens result, and a weakened Liberal party. But Labor is no friend to the worker. The ALP takes money from the bosses, votes with the Liberals 87% of the time, and has stated that it wishes to keep its distance from the unions, climate action, and queer issues. The only way we can truly take advantage of these shake-ups in parliament is through struggle on the streets and at our workplaces, as we take the fight to Albanese with as much determination as we did Morrison.

## REPORT

## Transition leave: Why queer rights are a union fight

The recent struggle at the University of Sydney between staff and management has involved something with little precedent in Australian working-class history: a popular demand for 'transition leave'. This refers to time off work for gender diverse staff to undergo the various surgeries, therapies, and treatments necessary to affirm their identity and for their general well-being. This demand took a real fight to implement and we think it's important to present the details of how it happened to inspire people in other industries to take similar steps and push for it in their workplaces. It's a pretty unique intersection between class and queer issues – an intersection we in Black Flag Sydney emphasise in our work.

USyd, like most employers, is pretty transphobic. In the case of USyd, it's not a deliberate, conscious bigotry, but rather one based on neglect, or structural discrimination. The

University is perfectly happy to present itself as a trans-inclusive, queer-friendly place, selling itself to potential queer students (customers!) as a happy place to be. However, there is little sympathy for trans staff from the various layers of management. Even something as basic as printing an updated staff identification card can be frustrating. One person we spoke to said the uni only really developed protocols on this when they were forced by the threat of public opposition.

The general transition leave demand arose nationally as a "recommended claim" for the 2021 National Tertiary Education Union bargaining round some time ago. However, it was only through mostly transgender rank-and-file unionists pushing the claim at the workplace level that the demand grew in prominence and also in clarity, increasing at most workplaces from twenty to thirty days per year.

Union militants pushing for transition leave at both the branch and the national level had to contend with two primary but linked forms of opposition: general union conservatism and more specific transphobia – both open and discreet. The value of the transition leave demand shows itself here, as something that pushes for change on both the "economic" and the "political" level.

At USyd, the NTEU originally wanted the proposed log of claims to go up without a discussion. This didn't just incense union activists interested in queer issues, but also other groups, like casuals organised as part of the Casuals Network, who wanted a say in how their conditions were determined. They successfully fought for open discussion of the log of claims at the branch level, among the membership.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4...

It was here that they were able to really campaign for adequate demands for casuals and for transition leave.

Within the NTEU nationally, the demand for transition leave was galvanised by a more general debate over bigotry against transgender people. In late 2021, a resolution against transphobia written by the union's national queer caucus was amended by the NTEU's general secretary to remove criticism of "hate speech that is masquerading as academic work" and "gender critical ideology." The backlash from the queer caucus against this hostile amendment is what led directly to the national campaign on transition leave. The left wing of the NTEU leadership only really accepted the gender affirmation leave campaign after trans unionists fought for it, and many of them are still yet to accept reversing the transphobic amendments.

**“ Within the NTEU nationally, the demand for transition leave was galvanised by a more general debate over bigotry against transgender people. ”**

The campaign has involved a number of politically important fights. Transition leave quickly became one of the most prominent demands in the USyd dispute, at times overshadowing wage demands, galvanising union members and activists. Within the branch, some conservative members were quite critical of the transition leave campaigners for allegedly leaving other socially important demands like domestic violence and menstrual leave to the side. For the transition leave campaigners, this was a moment to politically challenge the separation and opposition between “women’s issues” and “transgender issues”; indeed, the prominent campaigners for transition leave regularly promoted the other demands and stressed them in their speeches.

Underscoring the hostility to

trans activism within the branch was the general divide between “second wave”-inspired feminists, some of whom are TERFs, and more contemporary feminists who are open and enthusiastic towards transgender issues. The opposition was not just based on different conceptions of feminism, though, but also different conceptions of union activity. The former group didn't see much value in public campaigns at all, and would have preferred the union to work through private negotiations behind closed doors. The latter group, however, saw public campaigning as an important part of the rank-and-file militancy essential for serious working-class activity.

The demand for transition leave has demonstrated the power organised workers have in pushing for more general social demands. This is already having an impact on general queer activism, leading some to embrace a politics based on class rather than just identity. However, the proponents of transition leave have no illusions that the demand is a hole-in-one solution. Indeed, one activist speculated that the reason the NTEU leadership conceded to the gender affirmation leave campaign is because it was easier for them to stomach than a targeted campaign around transphobic management, bathrooms, and identity documentation, as well as a more general one around public funding for trans healthcare.

This is why activists have been valuing the way the transition leave campaign has facilitated more general queer campaigning, providing an “in” for people to start thinking about how queer and union activism can intersect. A queer rank and file network will likely develop out of the campaign even after this dispute ends.

Presently, things are moving fairly slowly. At USyd, management has accepted a one-off period of thirty days transition leave, plus access to up to fifty days per year from general personal leave for transition purposes and an option to apply for more if this is exhausted. Activists have made it a point to fight for transition leave as an annual, not one-off entitlement. This is firstly to cover the people whose treatments are multi-year, but also to stress the

political point that transitioning is an ongoing process, and that the issues surrounding it will necessitate leave being taken over a longer period of time. Trans people shouldn't have to use personal leave for this purpose – being trans is not an illness and nor should it be pathologised by requiring it to come from the same pool as sick leave.

The demand has been fought for at other campuses. A campaign around it developed at the University of Tasmania, though the union recently suffered a set-back. Management offered twenty days leave, the union countered with a demand for thirty, and management then countered with ten days of general “special leave”, take it or

**“ For the transition leave campaigners, this was a moment to politically challenge the separation and opposition between “women’s issues” and “transgender issues” ”**

leave it. Nevertheless, the campaign is ongoing, and we encourage people to sign their petition online.

The campaign has also resonated with workers in other industries. One prominent NTEU activist has been contacted so many times by other unionists keen to raise transition leave that they have assembled a shareable pack of research and suggested strategies (link on our website).

The fight has also revealed the importance of being organised in a political sense. The pressures of activism are immense – the aforementioned prominent activist, who is a member of a Trotskyist organisation, said it was vitally important for them to have a network of experienced people backing them up, offering advice and sympathy where necessary.

Without that, in the face of constant and often incoherent opposition, “it would have been very easy to lose your mind” •

# Public sector strike wave

*Breathing new life into the union movement*

**A** AS THE DUST SETTLES ON THE FEDERAL election and the rout of the Coalition, very little has changed for workers in this country.

The cost of living continues to rise, while the climate crisis beckons perhaps another La Nina to drench the barely-recovered communities of Australia's East. Queer workers are waiting to see if they'll be the subject of another culture war sparked by the Religious Freedoms Bill and asylum seekers are still getting locked up in overseas detention camps as a cheap ploy to keep Australian workers pitted against their overseas colleagues rather than against their bosses and owners.

So where do workers go now that the so-called "labour" party is in power? The answer can be found in the powerful slate of union campaigns that have emerged over the past year, and the possibility of widespread, united strike action.

This year has seen a huge increase in industrial action in NSW compared to previous years, and it has been driven largely by workers in the public sector: nurses, midwives, teachers, transport staff, paramedics, and other workers have all walked off the job at some point this year, often in huge numbers. To understand why these strikes are significant, we must look to the recent history of industrial disputes in the Australian public sector.

## A SLOW DEATH SPIRAL

The long decline of union density and industrial struggle in this country has its origins in the infamous 1983 Accords, which saw the ALP and union officials sell out workers' ability to organise and take militant industrial action. These laws, and their later versions in 1996 and 2008 (including Gillard's Fair Work Act), are the reason why it is illegal for workers to strike in solidarity with other workplaces or outside of dates specified by industrial relations bureaucrats. This system is enforced by harsh fines, which the government is now trying to increase to \$55 000 for a single day of "illegal" strike action. It is also the reason why workers cannot win pay and conditions across an industry, but only at a specific workplace.

The Accords 'deal' was specifically intended to co-opt the bureaucracy of the union movement and undercut the demands of rank-and-file workers, who were carrying out unprecedented levels of strike action during the 1970s and early 80s. The Accords gave union officials a seat at the legislative table, and in return, workers were told to discontinue industrial action and accept broader reforms like Medicare and compulsory superannuation rather than wage increases at the industry level.

In practice, these restrictions have made it incredibly difficult for genuinely impactful strikes to occur, and made unions much less successful at winning better pay and conditions. Industries have fragmented, thus fragmenting their unions, and workers in general have lost sight of the power a union card can hold. This has led to a slow death spiral, with low density enabling a shift towards an insurance model of unionism, which in turn drives density lower as it is unable to deliver genuine material improvements for union members. In the public sector, density has dropped significantly, with industries like teaching, health, transport and public administration falling from over 50% in 1994 to between 20-30% in 2016 (ABS data).

This density collapse has seriously affected the strength of the union movement. In 1985, there were 605 industrial disputes across Australia, compared to a mere 30 in 2022. In 1987, 1311 working days were lost to industrial action, while in 2020 only 33 days were lost. If industrial disputes are the practical schools of socialism, where workers learn who their class enemies are and how to beat them, then this decrease in strike frequency and intensity is resulting in a generation of workers who are increasingly less familiar with the benefits of class struggle and the methods of winning it. As a result, Australian workers are producing about 50% more value than 30 years ago, without a commensurate rise in wages (or welfare). More money has been going to the bosses, while we have been getting nothing.



This historical context is what makes this year's surge in industrial action so impressive. The NSW nurses and midwives strikes, for example, saw thousands walk off the job across the state earlier this year, with a subsequent mass meeting backing up the strike with a vote to increase the NSWNMA's pay claim from 3% to 7%. Not only was this strike significant in scale, it was significant in its open defiance of the Industrial Relations Commission's (IRC) order to stop the strike. While certainly not yet at the scale of the 1985-6 Victorian nurses strikes, which were fought over similar issues such as pay and ratios and which saw the state government nearly collapse, these NSW strikes are a positive revival of mass, defiant industrial action.

The bus and train actions undertaken by the RTBU this year are significant and ongoing, causing major disruption to Sydney Trains in the first week of July. The Teachers Federation and Independent Education Union have also been taking serious industrial action over the last few months, culminating recently in an historic joint strike, with both unions marching on Macquarie Street together for the first time since 1996. These disputes are so intense because these huge, public industries have retained a relatively high level of union density, to the extent that the public sector represents a disproportionately large section of unionised labour in Australia. So, with teachers, transport workers, ambos, and nurses, with various other workers in the Public Service Association joining the growing strike wave, we are now in a scenario where, at least in NSW, a huge section of all unionised labour is taking industrial action this year.

### **TOUCH ONE, TOUCH ALL**

A pessimist may look at this year's disputes and see nothing more than a small blip, an anomaly in the trend of lower union density and class struggle in Australia. To be sure, since the sharp decline in the 80s, there have been spikes and momentary resurgences like this that have failed to revitalise unionism and class struggle in the long term. However, it would be wrong to see these strikes as coincidental.

In the last few years, public sector wage cuts, cuts to public services, and privatisation in general have mixed with extraordinary social conditions like the COVID-19 pandemic to create a perfect storm of attacks against the working class. Understaffed and under-resourced nurses and ambos, whose wage growth was frozen at 2% by the NSW Liberal government, worked in highly dangerous pandemic conditions for nearly two years before these strikes. The same can be said for public transport workers and teachers.

These strikes aren't just isolated fights for better pay, but a broader fight against the capitalist logic that says workers (rather than bosses) ought to pay for these health and climate crises that they didn't create. They are also focused on overcoming the largest single employer in NSW – the state government – and if successful, could set the standard for workers rights and pay expectations across the economy, perhaps beginning to reverse the downward spiral that workers have suffered over the last few decades. This moment is a huge opportunity, with the potential to topple a government, revitalise the public sector, and re-energise the rank-and-file union movement in Australia. To succeed, workers must be able to break through

both the legal restrictions on industrial action and the political limitations of a long-crippled union movement, something which can only be achieved through a mass, coordinated, united public sector strike campaign.

The fact that these strikes are a united defence against attempts to diminish public services makes them particularly relevant to workers all over the state. The public sector is the best example of work that is necessary for its social value, not for profit. This is what makes it important: it is the seed of a socialist economy that the state cannot fully stamp out, despite its best efforts.


This becomes all the more true when we consider the largest issues facing the working class right now. If we are to halt climate change, we will need so much free and accessible public transport that using a car in most places is unnecessary. We'll need more nurses and hospital staff to combat the increasing health threats brought about by capitalism's ecological disasters. We will require a fully funded emergency service, including full-time firefighters and SES workers, most of whom are currently unpaid despite being tasked with increasingly demanding disaster responses. Public education and well-paid, properly resourced teachers are also essential to a sustainable society, from early childhood education through to tertiary and vocational education. These jobs are the "green jobs" which we so often talk about in demanding action on climate change.

We should not just defend the public service from cuts and privatisation, but work to transform the economy so that as many jobs as possible are publicly funded and fully resourced. Not because we want a bloated state bureaucracy, but because these are the jobs that need to be filled, even though they don't turn a profit. In fighting for a fair deal, public sector workers in NSW are demanding the state recognise the social value of their labour, advancing the position of the working class as a whole. As socialists we must make this point clear and encourage all workers to recognise the significance of this fight.

### **PRACTICAL STEPS**

These disputes will only become more significant over the next eight months, as the new state budget comes into effect, and pre-campaigning for the 2023 state election begins. This budget has done little for the workers currently on strike, still giving them a huge real wage cut. More nurses will supposedly be hired, but not enough to fulfil the staff-patient ratios the nurses and midwives are currently demanding. Teachers' pay has been frozen to pre-budget levels, locking in an even more egregious pay cut. Meanwhile, Perottet's government has dedicated huge funding to hire more police officers for an already overstaffed and over-resourced paramilitary police force.

In response to this obscene misdirection of public funds, nurses have voted to increase their demand for wages to a 7% increase, public and Catholic school teachers have marched on Macquarie Street in a powerful display of solidarity, and Sydney rail workers have drastically slowed down the city for almost a week. Over the next eight months, Perottet's austerity measures will continue to be directly confronted by mass worker power. When these workers withdraw their labour in a strike, the state has no option but to concede to their demands.



**“ Unionists must begin calling for more unified mass rallies and coordinated strike actions... A mass general strike of hospital staff, ambos, transport workers, and teachers would give the government no choice but to cave to worker demands. ”**

This is not the strategy favoured by most current union officials, however, especially those with close ties to the leaders of the Labor Party. The union movement since the Accords has been one of negotiation, not a fighting movement which demands change through escalating and committed industrial action. There is a real possibility that union leaders will seek to “wind down” the current strikes once the state election is called, to campaign for and then work cooperatively with an incoming Labor government. This may be led by officials of the more conservative public sector unions, like the FBEU and the HSU, which have previously spent upwards of one million dollars on ALP campaigning despite having thousands fewer members than unions not affiliated with the party, like the NSW Teachers Federation.

Even the Federation’s leader, though, has indicated that campaigning may stop before the election, with President Angelo Gavrielatos declaring at the most recent rally that: “We will keep campaigning until election day next March if we have to. Too much is at stake for us not to continue.” This is alarmingly short-sighted, and may mean that this year’s militancy could soon drift into the malaise of ALP-governed states like Queensland and Victoria, where public sector unions have been silent despite facing lower wage caps than NSW.

Ultimately, when we rely on opposition politicians and bureaucratic negotiations, we are only as strong as those individuals and their willingness to stand up for our demands. Their power is written on paper and can be distorted, abused, or simply revoked by backroom deals. It is extremely dangerous and contrary to our interests to put energy into election campaigns that might see one or two demands won at best, but at worst will see industrial actions completely sapped of energy and resources without any guarantee of success – in other words, crushed.

This is all the more true for the current industrial disputes in NSW, since the state Labor Party has clearly shown itself to be against the striking workers. While saying they supported the pay demands of the nurses and midwives, NSW Labor took a stand against staff-patient ratios because they did not want to seem “beholden to the union movement.” Just last week, NSW Labor voted with the government in the Upper House against hearing a bill that would repeal the public sector wage freeze (which, though implemented by a Coalition government, was actually devised in 2008 by NSW Labor). This, despite leader Chris Minns claiming online that a Labor government would “abolish” the wage cap, evidently only after unions agree to call off their strikes and campaign for his election.

For this reason, the ongoing industrial actions must maintain the mass participation of workers, and

unionists must begin calling for more unified mass rallies and coordinated strike actions. The large rallies of nurses and midwives and teachers not only allowed the rank and file to physically experience solidarity on the streets, but gave other members of the working class an opportunity to join these demonstrations in solidarity. This mass involvement of the rank-and-file is also essential to combat any attempts by union officials to dilute their demands through backroom deals with the government, or to divert these industrial actions towards electoralism or lobbying individual politicians.

It is also important that these actions link themselves more closely to each other, and this can only truly happen from below. The state budget is a coordinated attack on the public sector, and so workers in the public sector must have a coordinated defence. A mass general strike of hospital staff, ambos, transport workers, and teachers would give the government no choice but to cave to worker demands. While an ambitious hope, already we are seeing teachers from two different unions striking together. With a union movement that is generally beholden to our draconian industrial relations laws, it is difficult for other workers to take mass industrial action in solidarity with our public sector comrades. However, it is not impossible, and even small solidarity contingents of other unionists or activist groups can help support more and greater mobilisations of workers across industries, sectors, and workplaces.

Finally, in order for these and other workers to win meaningful gains, industrial relations laws will have to be defied on mass. The NSW government has recently moved to increase penalties for unions who take “illegal” industrial action. Since the Industrial Relations Commission is effectively run by the government (the bosses), any industrial actions which actually threaten profits (i.e. any meaningful industrial action) will most likely be deemed illegal. This means that, if workers are to take strike action that will win them their demands, they will have to be prepared to break the law. The nurses’ union has already done this, as has the RTBU, but as fines are imposed, workers will have to resist any calls to limit their industrial action in order to placate the IRC. Again, this will require all the unions to be unified in resisting these fines and bans on strike action, as only through unity do we have the strength to break these laws and win.

We all have an interest in a world where workers’ needs are not sacrificed for the profits of bosses. We can only win this by fighting as a united working class, not by asking politicians or officials to do the fighting for us.

# Inflation: The profit-price spiral driving up costs

## Why profits, not wages, are making everything more expensive

**I**NFLATION IS ON EVERYONE'S lips: petrol, meat, and vegetables are ludicrously expensive, and rents will likely increase as interest rates put pressure on mortgages. The money we get from our wages is worth less and less. It's generally not a problem for capital that workers struggle to survive. However, when things get so out of hand that they threaten to disrupt the usual money-making patterns, then it becomes a "financial crisis". For that reason, it's important for socialists to bring some clarity to the issue and present a clear path forward out of this crisis for workers globally.

There are many immediate causes to the current devaluation of money. The two most significant are the shocks delivered to the supply-chain by the COVID-19 pandemic, and the war in Ukraine. In February we released a joint statement that included some detail on what it would mean for the supply and price of wheat specifically:

*Lebanon [...] already in the throes of an economic crisis, imports 50% of its wheat from Ukraine. Libya imports 43%. By value, 86% of Egypt's wheat imports come from Ukraine and Russia.*

In addition to the wheat destabilisation, there has also been a wild fluctuation in the price of oil – at present, oil is around USD\$110 a barrel, compared to \$62 a barrel this time last year.

**“Far from being a ‘wage-price spiral,’ a myth which has festered since the 1970s, this is a ‘profit-price spiral,’ caused by the ever increasing inequality of the capitalist market.”**

The Governor of the Reserve Bank of Australia Philip Lowe has mentioned these issues in his recent press releases, but has also mentioned the problem of the “tight labour market,” a hint at how the ruling class deals with crises: by attacking the working class. On 21 June, Lowe stated that pay rises should not

“mechanically” match the inflation rate, arguing that a wage increase of around 3.5% is around the maximum of what is “sustainable” (i.e. will keep profits increasing). Since the RBA is predicting an inflation rate of 7% by the end of the year, this amounts to a pretty serious wage cut. The government is on the RBA's side on this point, with Treasurer Jim Chalmers stating, “We don't believe that there should be an automatic, mechanical minimum wage rise on every occasion that perfectly matches the headline inflation rate.”

For us, unconcerned with getting capitalists' profits back up, our response is simple: workers must fight to drag profits away from bosses and shareholders. Far from being a “wage-price spiral,” a myth which has festered since the 1970s, this is a “profit-price spiral,” caused by the ever increasing inequality of the capitalist market. Workers must ignore the pleading from politicians and capitalists to be “responsible” in their wage demands, and instead push for the wages and conditions they deserve. There have been impressive actions by teachers, rail workers, nurses, and others in the public sector that not only demonstrate a will to fight, but a will to break our strict industrial relations laws.

This confidence is essential to fighting back, particularly in the private sector which is much more restrictive. There has been much discussion on the left about regaining the “right to strike,” but the truth is we have always had it – we just need to develop the confidence and organisational capacity to use it as a working class united across workplaces and industries.

Wage increases are not the only solution, though. Indeed, such a crisis obliges us to fight exploitation at home as well as at work. In past crises, renters' unions undertook serious struggles against exploitative landlords who sought to raise rents and evict tenants. In this sense, the increasing activity of tenants' organisations like the South East Queensland Union of Renters or the Renters and Housing Union in Victoria are inspiring.

There is also the prospect of greater direct action to secure reductions in the price of essential goods and services. In the crisis in Italy during

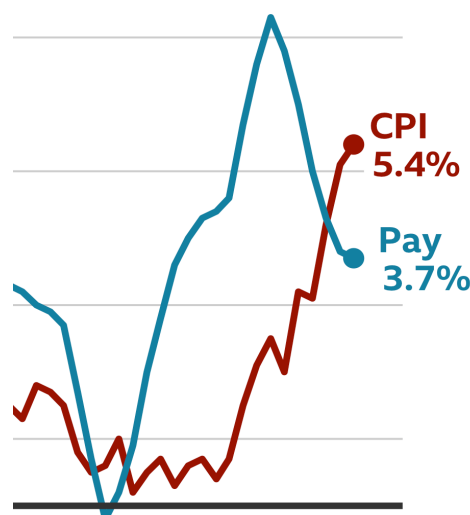
the 1970s, campaigns of non-payment of electricity bills coincided with joint actions with bus workers to fight fare increases. In a number of instances, the mass appropriation of groceries from supermarkets was organised, implementing a mass “self-reduction” of prices.

Capitalism is an inherently crisis-ridden system; it cannot be anything else. It's for this reason that the communist movement has historically sought to go beyond the demand of a fair wage for a fair day's work and instead fight for the abolition of the wages system altogether.

**“Workers must ignore the pleading from politicians and capitalists to be “responsible” in their wage demands, and instead push for the wages and conditions they deserve.”**

The workers' unions, housing groups, activist networks, and socialist organisations that drive working-class struggle lay the groundwork for the creation of a totally new system: one where life's basics are not commodities, but things guaranteed to us, freely given and freely taken based on need.

The current system is based on the needs of profit above all. What we need instead is one based on the needs of human society, libertarian communism •



# Blockade Australia

## Our perspective on the movement

**B**LOCKADE AUSTRALIA IS A climate activist group whose primary strategy is to shut down activity at fossil fuel sites and disrupt the economy as a form of protest. So far, they have coordinated two major blockades in NSW: in November 2021, they disrupted \$60 million worth of coal exports for eleven days in the Port of Newcastle; in March 2022, activists blockaded terminals for five days at Port Botany; at the end of June, they attempted a six-day blockade of Sydney's economic centre.

Their activism has been met with alarming state violence. Earlier this month, around one hundred police raided a BA camp of activists and made several arrests. The Port Botany blockade earlier this year triggered the bipartisan enactment of new laws in NSW Parliament, increasing the penalty for protesting without police or state approval to up to \$22,000 in fines and/or two years' imprisonment. These laws will affect all protests which are unapproved by police, and should be fiercely opposed.

BA doesn't formally adhere to a specific political ideology, although their social media activity suggests anti-capitalist and anti-electoral leanings. They aim to create a "consistent and strategic" disruption "that cannot be ignored," to temporarily shut down the fossil fuel industry's operation and force a "political response," though BA does not define what this would look like concretely.

Overall, BA's strategy relies on small affinity groups rather than a political organisation to coordinate individual non-violent disruptive stunts, a strategy which places them outside of the mass movement for working class liberation. It's important to note here that we condemn in the strongest terms the state violence against BA activists. We express our solidarity to activists who, like us, are interested in building "power. . . opposing the colonial and extractive systems of Australia." We argue, though, that BA cannot build this power with isolated actions and sporadic disruption alone.

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Climate change has been created by the capitalist class and governments who

profit from the expansion of extractive and destructive industries. Meanwhile, the international working class shoulder the costs of rebuilding their homes after floods and fires, while working and living through hazardous bushfire smoke and record-breaking heat waves, and becoming refugees once rising sea levels have made their homes uninhabitable.

With one hundred Australian fossil fuel developments in the pipeline, we need an immediate transition to renewables. But we also need a just transition: universal and accessible social welfare and education so that all workers are guaranteed a livelihood and retraining as the economy changes, and publicly owned renewable energy instead of a fragmented grid of corporate solar farms. These urgent demands can only be won through class struggle: a climate movement with clear, ambitious demands that is rooted in the united mass struggle of workers, students, and First Nations people. This is where popular power lies, and it is this power which can threaten capital and the state and achieve climate justice.

**“ Yes, we want a suspension of coal exports, but this must be won by dockworkers themselves going on strike, demanding an investment in sustainable employment and infrastructure. ”**

Unfortunately, an organisation of mostly working-class people and an open invitation to join a blockade does not make a mass working-class movement. The mainstream climate movement's demands for 100% renewable energy by 2030, or an immediate just transition for fossil fuel workers, are nowhere to be found in the BA purpose statement. For many people, the decentralised and disorganised movement is also difficult to join, especially for those unable to risk arrest or police violence.

This raises the inherent limitation of entirely "arrestable" protest actions. For security reasons, organisation is limited to people within an affinity group, so it is nearly impossible to keep these groups politically accountable to a broader movement. As demonstrated by the recent deportation and imprisonment

of several protestors, the small scale of such actions result in significant penalties for individuals, something which can only be resisted by mass participation by workers.

Critically, BA's actions happen outside of the working class' struggle against capital. Yes, we want a suspension of coal exports, but this must be won by dockworkers themselves going on strike, demanding an investment in sustainable employment and infrastructure. We want "direct action," but this is a principle, not just a tactic, referring to the need for workers to exercise their economic and political power without the mediation of elected representatives and bureaucrats. We admire the spirit of disruption, but we know that only a general strike with coherent demands and the economic and political power to enforce them, can truly disrupt the system which has created this crisis.

As anarchist communists, a just transition isn't our end-goal, but the starting point for something more – the social revolution. This is why we must prioritise building mass industrial action as workers, rather than individual blockades as isolated and disorganised citizens. Even though the direct effect of both is stopping production, it's the former that brings us a step closer to socialism.

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We vehemently oppose the state's repression of BA activists. We share an opposition to Australia's ruling class and know the urgency of the climate crisis, and genuinely wish to organise with BA where possible to build mass climate mobilisations.

However, we believe that climate organising needs to be firmly situated within our universities, unions, and workplaces. We are looking to achieve disruption which lasts not for five or eleven days, but which is permanent, and that is only to be found in mass strike action •

# The Uluru Statement: No sovereignty under the Crown

## Unpacking the left-wing opposition to constitutional recognition

**A**FTER WINNING THE FEDERAL election, Anthony Albanese opened his victory speech with a commitment to the Uluru Statement from the Heart. The Labor Party has supported the Uluru Statement since it was passed in 2017 and have argued that it is the best way to rectify the wrongs of Australia's colonial past. While a similar position has been taken up by many community organisations, unions, and other political figures, left-wing grassroots opposition to it has also been growing. The statement is heavily opposed by segments of the Indigenous community, particularly in NSW and Victoria. The Aboriginal Tent Embassy, a collective of activists who have militantly campaigned for land rights, sovereignty, and Indigenous justice for over 50 years, are also strongly opposed. To these people, the statement represents a non-consensual agreement with a government and constitution that has oppressed them for centuries.

The statement's main demand is for constitutional recognition, something both major parties have supported in some form since at least 2007. Morrison committed to a referendum on constitutional recognition in 2019, the Gillard government funded the group Reconciliation Australia to promote the need for constitutional recognition, and - perhaps most egregiously - John Howard committed to supporting constitutional recognition after announcing the draconian and immensely destructive Northern Territory Intervention in 2007. All these governments saw support for constitutional recognition as an easy way to maintain a tokenistic commitment to Indigenous rights while continuing real attacks on Indigenous communities through their policies and laws. This is because, at its core, recognition within the constitution is a symbolic act which will enact little to no real change for Indigenous people.

The latest iteration of 'constitutional recognition' within the Uluru Statement calls for an Indigenous voice to parliament. This voice would be made up of delegates from across the country with a range of political beliefs. Crucially, the suggested voice would have no binding powers over parliament and would exist in an entirely advisory capacity. This means it has no ability to materially change policy that may be harmful to Indigenous communities. Moreover,

the voice was designed by self-described radical centrist and advocate for the Northern Territory intervention Noel Pearson, who was aiming to win support from the right-wing of parliament and the business sector for a constitutionally enshrined voice. Simply put, a non-binding voice to parliament has no ability to achieve the systemic change required to alleviate the continued oppression of Indigenous people, which is caused directly by the Australian government and the capitalists it protects.

**“ It's not a dialogue... Every time we try and raise an issue our voices are silenced... I've asked the question in there, how does our sovereignty remain intact when we go into the white man's constitution? ”**

**Auntie Jenny Munro**

The idea of a committee advising government on matters relating to constitutional recognition is not new, with both major parties latching on to the idea in the mid 2010's as an easy way out of having to fundamentally change government policy. This "Referendum Council" consisted of 16 Indigenous and non-indigenous people appointed by both parties, including representatives from a parliamentary background like Pat Dodson, Kristina Keneally, and former Howard government minister Amanda Vanstone, along with a host of other right wing figures like conservative and Zionist Mark Leibler. To garner support from the Indigenous community for their proposal, the Council began a series of regional dialogues across the nation. Only 12 of these sessions occurred and they were capped in attendance at 100, casting doubts as to whether it was the most consultative process possible, especially considering the vast resources available to the Referendum Council. The sessions revealed vocal opposition to constitutional reform in favor of treaties between Indigenous nations, with some people arguing that constitutional recognition would actively hinder true sovereignty, the central demand of the massive land rights campaign of the 1970s and 80s. Being a demand born out of grassroots struggle and mass protests, the call for sovereignty is largely antithetical to Pearson's proposed constitutional amendment, meaning this sentiment was ignored by the Referendum Council. However, the demand is alive and well

in grassroots protests, with the majority of Invasion Day rallies uniting under the banner of sovereignty.

Indigenous sovereignty is not just a tokenistic phrase, either. As a demand, it focuses on the need for Indigenous people to be able to genuinely self-determine their futures. This means defunding the police, ending deaths in custody and child removals, and funding Indigenous-led land management programs, schools, and community

services. The ultimate ask of many of these rallies is to dismantle the colonial systems of governance that have oppressed Indigenous people for centuries, rather than ask to be included within them.

### THE ULURU CONFERENCE

The work of the Referendum Council culminated in the 2017 Uluru Conference. On the first day, Pearson unveiled his roadmap to constitutional recognition in his capacity as a Referendum Council member. The roadmap was meant to reflect the pro-constitutional recognition perspective at the conference, but it was quickly made apparent to conference attendees that the roadmap was being pushed as the only option, ignoring the dissent heard in the preceding Council sessions, and despite the event being described as an open forum for democratic debate amongst the Indigenous community.

This led to a bloc of delegates from the south-east of the country walking out in protest. Auntie Jenny Munro, one of the delegates who walked out, told the Guardian in 2017:

"It's not a dialogue. . . Every time we try and raise an issue our voices are silenced. . . I've asked the question in there, how does our sovereignty remain intact when we go into the white man's constitution? . . . We have chosen to walk away from this debate and this dialogue today because it is not a debate, they are

not looking at any alternative options other than the Noel Pearson roadmap. And, like native title, that will prove to be an abject failure.”

Munro is a militant activist who has campaigned for sovereignty for decades. In 1988 she helped organise the titanic Invasion Day convergence protest, and in 2015 she led the Redfern Tent Embassy campaign to save The Block. Her statements encapsulate the two major grievances of the bloc that walked out: the undemocratic nature of the conference and the lack of consensus among Indigenous communities on constitutional recognition as the best way forward.

#### **MORE TOKENISM AND EMPTY PROMISES**

The Uluru Statement is a neatly packaged example of the empty promises the imperialist class have given Indigenous people for decades. Native Title, the recognition by Australian law of Indigenous traditional land rights, is in reality a farcical process that sees many land claims rejected. Ones that are accepted give the relevant communities little to no power to autonomously

Similarly, the Uluru statement calls for a Makarrata commission to oversee the process of a national treaty between Indigenous people and the federal government. Similar processes are being attempted at the state level, however, examples in the Northern Territory and Queensland show that a potential treaty with colonial governments would not result in any tangible change. The NT government recently committed 510 million dollars to police funding despite elders in Yuendumu publicly calling for police funding to be immediately diverted into community alternatives to police and prisons during treaty negotiations. In Queensland, Wangan and Jagalingou people have militantly opposed the Adani coal mine while the state government has strongly supported the project. These examples demonstrate that working toward a treaty between Indigenous communities and the government will simply allow the government to claim a commitment to Indigenous rights, to the detriment of emancipatory justice and self-determination. The Uluru statement will be no different, and it will allow the newly elected Labor government to “blak-wash” its policy platform. Much like how Aboriginal Land Councils have

Gorge that were of high significance to Puutu Kunti Kurrama and Binigura people, released a statement in 2019 advocating for the statement in collaboration with a range of other corporations including BHP and Woodside, both of which have proceeded with mining and gas projects despite opposition from local Indigenous communities. Once again, commitment to the statement from this section of society only serves to show who will benefit from its enactment.

**“ The Uluru Statement is a neatly packaged example of the empty promises the imperialist class have given Indigenous people for decades. ”**

#### **WHAT DOES THIS MEAN TODAY?**

After falling to the wayside for a few years, the election of the Labor party has seen a resurgence in calls to make the Uluru Statement a reality. Considering the grassroots opposition to the Statement from radical Indigenous activists, the path forward for anyone who wants to build a truly emancipated society is clear: we must fight this colonial system of government rather than collaborate with it. If the Uluru Statement remains as it is, this may necessitate a left-wing ‘No to Constitutional Recognition’ campaign, and regardless, we must prioritise winning the material demands of the grassroots Indigenous justice movement through militant mass protest.

The same people who walked out of the Uluru Conference have led some of the most well-attended and politically radical Invasion Day rallies in recent years, and organised the ground-breaking 2020 Black Lives Matter protests. Only by standing in solidarity with these organisers can we force the systemic change needed to achieve sovereignty and self-determined justice for Indigenous people •

**“ Indigenous sovereignty is not just a tokenistic phrase, either. As a demand, it focuses on the need for Indigenous people to be able to genuinely self-determine their futures. This means defunding the police, ending deaths in custody and child removals, and funding Indigenous-led land management programs, schools, and community services. The ultimate ask of many of these rallies is to dismantle the colonial systems of governance that have oppressed Indigenous people for centuries, rather than ask to be included within them. ”**

manage their land or veto projects such as mines. The Gomeroi people have a successful native title claim over the Pilliga region in north-western NSW but are currently being forced to campaign against the energy corporation Santos, who want to open 650 gas wells in the region. The native title tribunal regularly sides with mining companies in instances like this despite Indigenous community opposition, meaning the Gomeroi Native Title claim is under a very real threat. Much like the powerless voice to parliament that the Uluru Statement calls for, native title is a largely toothless scheme that can only be understood as tokenism.

a tendency to at times lend their support to government projects that are opposed by the communities they represent (most notably a nuclear dump in Muckatay, NT), the voice to parliament will be employed as cover for any policies that may be opposed by grassroots Indigenous community groups.

This tokenism and commitment to symbolic action extends to Australia’s business sector. The Uluru Statement is also supported by some of the most anti-Indigenous and climate destructive businesses in Australia. Fossil fuel corporation Rio Tinto, who in 2020 destroyed rock shelters in the Juukan



### **What is Black Flag Sydney?**

Black Flag Sydney is a collective of anarchist-communist workers who organise mainly on unceded Gadigal land.

Our ultimate goal is to build a society free of states, classes and currency, in order to achieve collective self-emancipation and universal freedom for all. Direct action is our method and worker self-management is our vision for today and the future.

We aim not only to dismantle systems of capitalist exploitation, but to build the capacity for people to freely and truly self-manage their workplaces, communities, and lives.

# ***MUTINY!***