

The background of the entire cover is a photograph of a large, intense fire. The flames are bright orange and yellow, with dark smoke rising from the top. The fire appears to be burning through a pile of dry sticks and branches. The overall atmosphere is one of heat and intensity.

Solidarity

Issue No. 52 / January 2013

\$3/\$5

CLIMATE CHANGE, JOBS, SINGLE PARENTS

**PUT THE HEAT
ON GILLARD**

GET IN TOUCH WITH SOLIDARITY

Sydney

7pm Thursday January 24
Palestine, Zionism and the roots of Israel's violence
Sydney Solidarity meets 7pm every Thursday at Brown St Hall (above Newtown Library), Brown St, Newtown
For more information contact:
Jean on 0449 646 593
sydney@solidarity.net.au

Melbourne

Melbourne Solidarity meets 6.30pm every Tuesday New International Book Shop at Trades Hall corner Lygon & Victoria Sts Carlton (enter via Victoria St)
For more information contact:
Chris on 0403 103 183
melbourne@solidarity.net.au

Perth

For more information contact:
Phil on 0423 696 312
solidarity@solidarity.net.au

Brisbane

For more information contact:
Mark on 07 3123 8585 or
brisbane@solidarity.net.au

Canberra

For more information contact:
Geraldine on 0458 039 596
solidarity@solidarity.net.au

ONLINE

Web site:
solidarity.net.au

Facebook:
[facebook.com/solidaritymagazineaustralia](https://www.facebook.com/solidaritymagazineaustralia)

Solidarity No.52
January 2013
ISSN 1835-6834
Responsibility for election comment is taken by James Supple, 410 Elizabeth St, Surry Hills NSW 2010.
Printed by El Faro, Newtown NSW.

Protests in India take on sexism and rape

By Amy Thomas

THE HORRIFIC gang rape of a woman by six men on a public bus in Punjab, India, sparked angry protests across the country in December.

In New Delhi, thousands defied an official ban on protests to come out onto the streets, where they were met with water cannons, batons, and tear gas. Much of the anger has been directed at corrupt politicians and the legal system. Figures released by a respected Indian thinktank show hundreds of men accused of sexual violence and rape have been candidates for the major parties in the past five years. Many bribe their way out of court in a country where politics is riven with nepotism and inherited wealth.

Institutional sexism

Rape and sexual assault is common in India. A woman is raped in Delhi every 14 minutes, according to official figures. Yet while the statistics indicate a sharp rise in the number of rapes committed, the conviction rate has dropped from 41 per cent in 1971 to 27 per cent in 2010.

The approach of state institutions is to blame the victim. It took police 45 minutes to respond to the rape in Punjab. Later they released the victim's name and declared that she was "mentally ill". Many commentators held her to blame because she was out late at night with her partner. Recently, officers in New Delhi stated publicly that, "male aggression is a natural instinct of sexual attraction." One of the lawyers representing the accused claimed he had never heard of a "respected lady" being raped in India. Politicians from across the political spectrum have made similar comments.

The protests have stridently rejected this attitude, opposing restrictions on women through curfews or dress codes. Women at the demonstrations held placards with slogans like, "Don't tell me how to dress, tell them not to rape" and "Don't teach me how not to get raped, teach him not to rape".

Some protesters have been demanding the death penalty or castration for the rapists. But this is not going to improve the situation for women. Indian activists have spoken out during the protests about how the police and army are guilty of rape

themselves and cannot be entrusted with providing real justice for women.

Jaskiran Chohan wrote in *Socialist Worker* that the, "army and police use rape to try and destroy movements that threaten the Indian state, such as those of the Naxalite peasants and nationalists in Kashmir." The rape of two young women in Shopian, Kashmir, in 2009, was covered up by the Indian state.

The sexism in society that makes rape and sexual assault so widespread is a product of state discrimination. Indian law does not recognise rape in marriage. There is no equality of opportunity for women—in fact, on average they make 62 per cent of what men make for the same work. Conservative attitudes about women's role in the family reinforce this inequality.

The focus on the death penalty has not gone unchallenged. Nearly 50 women's collectives and human rights groups and over 100 social and political activists from across the country released a statement opposing the death penalty, saying it is "neither a deterrent nor an effective or ethical response to these acts of sexual violence." Protests have been called to demand the removal of the Delhi police commissioner, and to demand safe, affordable and accessible public transport—unlike the private bus route in Punjab with closed curtains where the gang rape occurred.

Global problem

Western media coverage has often labelled India as "the worst place in the world for women". Yet the problem is just as real in Australia. The most reliable survey on rape and sexual assault, by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, reveals that one in five women will experience sexual violence in their lifetime.

What is striking about the Indian protests is some similarities they have with the Slut Walk rallies that swept the world in 2010. The first Slut Walk protest in Toronto, Canada, was a response to exactly the same kind of attitude from police there was in the Punjab case. Many of the slogans have crossed borders. And according to Kavita Krishnan, Secretary of the All India Progressive Women's Association, the legal bias against women in rape cases, including exams of rape victims to establish if they have had regular sex, is a Western invention: one of the legacies of British colonialism.

.....
The approach of state institutions is to blame the victim

EDITORIAL

Climate, jobs, single parents: put the heat on Gillard

FIRES and record heat waves have once again driven the reality of climate change back into focus. The record temperatures across Australia have made headlines around the world. Any idea that Labor's carbon tax was an effective measure against climate change has gone up in smoke.

Rather than cut emissions and build solar and wind power stations, the carbon tax scheme has boosted the profits of some of the dirtiest coal fired power stations in the country. Two of Victoria's dirtiest power stations, Hazelwood and Yallourn, actually received payouts of \$266 and \$257 million respectively in the middle of 2012.

Direct government investment in renewable power is going to be needed to do anything substantial about climate change—but Gillard is as far from taking action as ever. A modern-day Nero, she praises the firefighters and sympathises with those who have lost houses, but simply watches as Australia burns.

Just before Christmas, economic reality finally forced the Labor government to abandon its neo-liberal commitment to a budget surplus. Yet it has quickly become obvious that it has not abandoned its determination to drive through spending cuts. Treasurer Wayne Swan insists he won't be "loosening the purse strings". Worse, he, "wrote to ministers after Christmas asking them to find spending cuts in order to fund new priorities", according to economist Peter Martin. The government is demanding even positive measures like increasing education funding and the National Disability Insurance Scheme must be funded through cuts.

1 January marked the day that 84,000 single parents were pushed onto the dole, cutting their benefits by up to \$110 a week. To add insult to injury, the government didn't notice for weeks that Centrelink had wrongly ordered single parents to destroy their concession cards, meaning many have missed out on weeks of concessions just as their income was chopped back.

Minister Jenny Macklin arrogantly defended the cut, claiming she could live on the pathetic \$35 a day of the NewStart allowance. As if! Just the cost of renting a one-bedroom flat in her upmarket Melbourne suburb of Ivanhoe is \$270 a week.

In the face of outrage at the absurdity of her claim and growing demands that the dole be increased by \$50 a week, Macklin apologised a week later. But not before the full meanness of



Above: Gillard can't find a dollar for single parents or effective climate policies

the federal Labor government was publicly displayed.

Rightly, The Greens have called for the government to fund an increase to Newstart by raising the mining tax. Iron ore prices are on the way up, but according to *The Australian*, the big mining companies BHP Billiton, Rio Tinto and Xstrata haven't had to pay a single cent under the tax in its first six months.

Rather than tax the rich and the super profits of the mining companies or the banks, Labor would rather make the poor pay. They have given us a version of the austerity policies that are wreaking havoc across Europe and the US. Labor cut 5400 jobs in the public sector last year, according to the federal public sector union.

Hard times

Unemployment crept up in December and 1200 job cuts were announced in just a few days in January at BlueScope Steel, Boral, and Vodafone. Job vacancies in the public sector are at their lowest level since 2004.

The slowdown in mining investment means there are fewer jobs in construction and engineering. As Allan Mitchell wrote in the *Financial Review*, "The Lucky Country is about to get a tiny taste of how the other rich countries now live."

We'll also need a taste of the resistance that is sweeping countries across Europe. Gillard blamed Queensland's Liberal premier Campbell Newman's job cuts for increasing

the national unemployment figures, but Newman has only got away with it because neither Labor nor the trade union leaders have been prepared to call the strike action that can stop him.

But workers in Portugal, Spain, Italy and Greece walked out together on a coordinated general strike for the first time ever last November. In Spain and Greece workers have occupied and struck against privatisation in hospitals, the railways, local government and the postal service.

Occupations have stopped 500 housing evictions in Spain since the beginning of the economic crisis, and locksmiths in northern Spain are boycotting evictions for people behind on their mortgages.

As the election approaches this year, the horrifying threat of a Tony Abbott government will be used to try to convince people to go quiet on fighting Labor. But going quiet would be a disaster. It's Labor's own right-wing policies that have put Abbott in an election winning position.

A fight back is needed here too, a fight for jobs and services, for real action on climate change, and a fight to stop Labor's pro-business austerity measures. Increasing corporate tax could find all the money needed to fund the National Disability Insurance Scheme, boost education funding, a national dental scheme and a serious move to renewable energy. It means a fight against business as usual and the priorities of a system that is run for profit not for human need.

.....
A modern day Nero, Gillard simply watches as Australia burns

All out to support Sydney Uni strike

STAFF ARE preparing to strike in the first week of classes at the University of Sydney. They're taking this industrial action to defend their wages and conditions in the National Tertiary Education Union's (NTEU) new Enterprise Agreement.

University management are on the offensive. After students and staff mounted a campaign against job cuts last year (see left), management wants to make it even easier to get away with sacking staff.

The NTEU wants to strengthen job security and reduce casualisation in the new agreement. Management, however, wants to attack sick leave, job security, superannuation, academic workload provisions, limits on casualisation, wages and intellectual freedom. Their offer of a 2 per cent pay rise is a real pay cut when inflation and the rising cost of living are taken into account, and well below previous pay rises.

The belligerent attitude of management and their tactic of delaying negotiations, is intended to intimidate the union into submission. The University is crying poor, but it sits on a cash surplus of \$93 million, is funding a \$385 million research centre, and recently received its biggest ever donation of \$20 million to fund a senior executive training program! The money is clearly there.

The issue of job security has hit a raw nerve amongst staff. Michael Thomson, President of the Sydney NTEU branch, said "Staff are still bruised from last year's job cuts and are angry at the lack of progress with the enterprise bargaining negotiations. Enough is enough." Staff have good reason to be angry. They also have good reason to feel confident, after last year's successes.

Students are organising to build support for the strike through orientation week with support from the Student Representative Council (SRC) with a speak-out at the Vice-Chancellor's welcome address, and are mobilising for the picket lines.

This is part of a bigger fight against the corporate model of education. Cuts to staff and conditions go hand in hand with course cuts, overflowing tutorials, growing student debt and student poverty. Staff and students deserve a better deal.

Erima Dall

Uni cuts: they say cut back, we say



By Danny Hardiman

WITH UNIVERSITY education under attack through course cuts and sackings, last year's campaign against cuts at Sydney Uni showed how to fight for our education—and win.

Last year was a disastrous year for higher education, with cuts to staff and courses in most major universities across Australia. At Sydney Uni, students returning from holidays were greeted with the announcement that the University would be cutting 340 staff—half academics and half in general administrative positions. The consultation period, we were told, would be over by the time classes started for the semester. Most of the redundancies had already been approved by management.

This decision to sack the equivalent of 7.5 per cent of the university's staff was done with no consultation with students, minimal contact with staff, and deliberately timed over the holiday break to minimise dissent.

What was even more absurd was the decision came at a time when Sydney Uni was making the third largest university surplus in Australia; announcing million-dollar investments in a new swimming pool, a new business college and the Tex Perkins Diabetes Research Centre. Why was the University cutting staff while continuing to make a fortune? Why cut staff when student numbers were increasing by thousands every year?

Above: Thousands of students march through Sydney Uni campus against the cuts

Corporate mind set

Our universities are now run like corporations, with management less concerned about students' education than with financial targets and scaling the giddy heights of the University ranking system. Millions are splurged on superficial PR drives, fancy buildings and advertisements to attract more students. They see education as just another market, and one of Australia's leading exports, as universities compete with each other to attract fee-paying international students.

This translates into larger tutorials, more academics pushed onto casualised teaching-only roles, and cuts to courses deemed "unprofitable" for not attracting enough students. The criteria management at Sydney Uni used to decide which staff should be cut—based on the number of research publications in the previous three years—is evidence of a management obsessed with quantifying education into figures and data rather than valuing the quality of academics' work.

This is happening across the country, with cuts at other universities last year including Australian National University, La Trobe and recently University of Western Sydney.

Despite promises of an Education Revolution, higher education remains underfunded under Federal Labor, despite their own Bradley review calling for a 10 per cent increase in base funding. This gap in federal funding has opened the door for a clique of tight-fisted managers whose job is

fight back!

only to get as many students in, and as many students out, as possible—running universities like degree factories.

Fight back

But it doesn't have to be like this. Though cuts have been announced at other universities, Sydney has had the most success fighting against the cuts. This is due to the efforts of activists on campus to pull students together into a campaign prepared to take the fight directly to management.

Such a campaign must go beyond symbolic discontent and recognise that management will only start to back down when it is beginning to affect them directly.

Thus in first semester last year the Education Action Group engaged in a series of vocal and disruptive protests, ranging from organising seven lecture halls to walk out; blockading and shutting down a Senate meeting of University management; passing motions in lecture halls that encouraged students to stand up and be heard; and pulling together a mass rally of 1500 staff and students, the largest campus rally since John Howard left office.

At this rally we convinced students of the need to take further action and occupied the Deans of Arts office for the entire afternoon, the only time anyone from management would ever have the guts to talk to students directly about their decisions. With this tremendous fight back we achieved a sizeable victory, saving 47 out of 100 academic jobs that face being cut.

For students at Sydney Uni this semester there's still plenty of work to be done. Cuts are still hanging over general staff and there are rumours of cuts to Architecture, Education, Social Work and Medieval Studies.

What last year showed was that students can stop these cuts, but only if we're organised and united. It showed that unless we challenge the neo-liberal logic behind the running of universities, these cuts will only keep reappearing elsewhere. Finally, what last year showed was that students are not all apathetic, but capable of working with staff members to fight for a better university.

Join the Education Action Group:
phone Danny on 0429 960 521

Join Solidarity at Sydney Uni:
phone Erima on 0432 221 516

Gillard fiddles while Australia burns



By Jasmine Ali

WITH A new record-breaking heat wave producing catastrophic fires across the country, why is there so little discussion about climate change?

The severity of the heat wave has set off alarm bells. The Bureau of Meteorology had to add a new colour to its chart, deep purple, to extend it over 50 degrees. A record national average temperature of 40.33 was recorded on 7 January, one of a string of seven consecutive days over 39 degrees. This almost doubled the previous record of four days in 1973.

The panic that this will be the “new normal” suggests that many recognise climate change as a contributing cause. But there has been remarkably little discussion of this in the media.

The extreme heat is not limited to Australia. In the US, 2012 was not only the year of Hurricane Sandy, but the second worst year on record for extreme weather including wildfires, hurricanes and droughts and recorded the warmest weather since 1895 in 48 of the 50 US states. The Global Carbon Project predicts that global average temperatures will rise a further four to six degrees by the end of the

Above: The dried out Hume Basin, another victim of our changing climate

century.

Julia Gillard has tried to avoid the issue of climate change, anxious to avoid drawing attention to the government's unpopular climate policies. The best she has mustered so far is, “while you would not put any one event down to climate change ... we do know that over time as a result of climate change we are going to see more extreme weather events”. Instead her focus has been on congratulating the firefighters and talking up disaster relief.

Gillard has refused to recognise either the severity of the climate crisis or the scale of the action needed to avert it. Worse, her carbon tax has undermined the public support that existed for climate action when Labor was first elected. Not only is it completely useless, ordinary people are paying for it with cuts to their living standards. Meanwhile, Liberal state governments in Victoria and NSW are trying to stop new wind power developments.

What we need is a program for the mass rollout of solar and wind power to replace coal and gas power stations along with big spending on new public transport. As the climate crisis becomes more extreme, forcing the government to tax the rich and big polluters to pay for this becomes all the more important.

Support Jake Lynch: it's right to boycott Israel

By Adam Adelpour

DR JAKE LYNCH and other academics at Sydney University's Centre of Peace and Conflict Studies (CPACS) came under attack in *The Australian* newspaper recently for supporting the boycott campaign against Israel. There is every reason for students and staff to support them in the fight for Palestinian rights.

Israel's assault on Gaza last November, Operation Pillar of Cloud, killed 157 Palestinians including dozens of children. Israel's indiscriminate bombing of civilians was described as a "war crime" by Human Rights Watch. It was immediately followed by Israel announcing plans to build 1500 new settlement homes on illegally occupied Palestinian land.

Despite the fact it was Israel that broke the latest cease fire and Palestinians suffered, as usual, the disproportionate amount of casualties (six Israelis were killed), the leaders of the world's most powerful states presented it as a balanced conflict and backed Israel's "right to defend itself". Gillard urged "both Hamas and Israel to exercise restraint".

Israel was founded on the dispossession and ethnic cleansing of 750,000 Palestinians in 1948. It is a racist apartheid state where Palestinians in the occupied territories are subject to daily humiliation, with their movement restricted via checkpoints controlled by the Israeli military. It has built an apartheid wall to seal off further lands for Israeli settlers. Israel is armed to the teeth with US-supplied state of the art weaponry to enable it to dominate the region and maintain the oppression of the Palestinians.

In 2005 Palestine's civil society called for supporters of human rights the world over to launch broad boycotts, implement divestment initiatives, and to demand sanctions against Israel until it complies with international law. Their Boycott Divestment Sanctions (BDS) call is inspired by the successful boycott movement against South African apartheid. It has received widespread international support, including the backing of South African anti-apartheid leader Archbishop Desmond Tutu and artists and musicians including Elvis Costello, Carlos



Santana and Arundahti Roy.

In December New Zealand's national Super Fund cut three Israeli companies from its investment portfolio due to their involvement in constructing illegal settlements and the apartheid wall in the West Bank.

The Australian's attack

Throughout December last year Murdoch's newspaper *The Australian* dedicated no less than ten consecutive articles, an editorial and two front-pages to denouncing Dr Jake Lynch and (CPACS) over its support for the boycott of institutional links with Israeli universities. Rightly, CPACS refused to support Hebrew University academic Dan Avnon's proposed fellowship with the university under an academic exchange program between the institutions.

The Australian argued that since Avnon has been involved in developing "Israel's only state program in civics written for Jewish and Arab students" boycotting him hurts the chances of peace, and is an attack on academic freedom. University management backed them.

The Sydney University Vice Chancellor Michael Spence was quoted as saying that the Australian Government's diplomatic relations with Israel make the university boycott "inappropriate".

But Israel's universities play a key role in materially supporting and the illegal actions of an apartheid state. The target of the CPACS boycott, the Hebrew University, is clearly implicated in the illegal occupation of internationally recognised Palestinian land stolen for its Mount Scopus campus. Israeli universities also work

closely with the military and arms manufacturers. The Technion, which also has links with Sydney Uni and many other Australian universities, has helped develop bulldozers used to demolish Palestinian homes and does research for a company helping to build the apartheid wall.

The boycott targets institutional links, not individuals' political views. It is about denying lucrative international partnerships, resources and grants to Israeli universities. Israel's hi-tech war machine depends upon access to international research and training. Denying this access helps ensure that Israel's disregard for international law comes with a price. Students, staff and the University of Sydney as an institution should support BDS—and demand an end to Israel's brutal and illegal policies.

Above: Jake Lynch, targeted over BDS, speaking in defense of Julian Assange

Sign on statement

Students for Justice in Palestine Sydney Uni and Solidarity have initiated a statement in defence of Jake Lynch and demanding Sydney University break their collaboration with the Technion Israel Institute of Technology. Send your signature to Ailin: ailinnaderbegi1@hotmail.com and/or Adam: aade5585@uni.sydney.edu.au Share the online petition: bit.ly/UuRyDR

Signatories include:

Antony Loewenstein, independent journalist and author
Mary Kostakidis, Convener of the Peace Prize jury
Jake Lynch, Associate Professor and Director, Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies
Dr Nick Riemer, Senior Lecturer, English and Linguistics departments, University of Sydney
Dr Tim Anderson, Senior Lecturer in Political Economy, University of Sydney
Emeritus Professor Stuart Rees AM, Chair, Sydney Peace Foundation
Honorary Professor John Docker, School of Philosophical and Historical Inquiry
Frank Stilwell, Professor Emeritus in Political Economy, University of Sydney
Dr Evan Jones, Honorary Associate in Political Economy, University of Sydney
Dr Ken Macnab, President, Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Sydney
Cathy Peters, ex-councillor for Marrickville
Fiona Byrne, ex-mayor of Marrickville
University of Sydney Greens on Campus Society
Dr Michael Grewcock, Lecturer, UNSW
Jocelyn Chey, Visiting Professor, School of Languages and Cultures
Dr Barbara Bloch, The Social Inquiry program, Faculty of Arts and Sciences, UTS
Dr Damien Cahill, Senior Lecturer, Political Economy, University of Sydney
New Yorkers Against the Cornell-Technion Partnership
Peter Slezak, Associate Professor of Philosophy, UNSW
Avigail Abarbanel, Editor of *Beyond Tribal Loyalties*

By Paddy Gibson

NT Liberals betray Aboriginal communities with cuts and more cops

THE COUNTRY Liberal Party (CLP) government in the Northern Territory (NT) have launched a series of devastating cuts to public services and Aboriginal organisations in their first mini-budget, handed down in December.

Six hundred public servants will lose their jobs. The Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) say they will be joined by “hundreds of temporary contract staff already gone and more to follow”. And price rises of between 25-40 per cent are being introduced for power, water and sewage.

Working conditions are being stripped back. For example, social workers in child protection will now have to pay rent on their government accommodation, while members of a “Renewal Management Board”, old CLP cronies to mapping out cuts and restructures, are living rent free in \$1 million apartments in Darwin on \$7500 per week.

Lockdown

For Aboriginal people in the NT, the cuts have a particularly bitter edge. The CLP swept to power in August 2012, on the back of Aboriginal anger at the incumbent Labor government who had worked hand-in-glove with the racist NT Intervention to cut community councils and funding for homelands.

The CLP leader Terry Mills promised to end paternalistic policies, address the “underlying causes” of disadvantage and put Aboriginal people in control of their communities.

But even in the election campaign you could see the seeds of a “divide and rule” strategy on Aboriginal issues. A call for Aboriginal empowerment in bush electorates came alongside promises for “boot camps” and more police to “deal with the problems” in town centres. Aboriginal people deserved support—as long as they stayed out of sight.

Of course, the promises to bush communities have not been kept. Minister for local government Adam Giles has now categorically ruled out reinstating the Aboriginal councils which used to provide representation and services.

He has however found money in the mini-budget to fund 100 new police positions, despite the fact that spending on police is already at



Above: Although it won't fund Aboriginal communities, the NT government has found money for another 100 police

three times the rate of the rest of Australia.

Aboriginal incarceration has skyrocketed more than 70 per cent since the NT Intervention began in 2007. But the NT government is building a massive new prison in Darwin, along with promising to criminalise public drunkenness and build internment camps for “mandatory rehabilitation”.

All funding has been cut from Larrakia Nations in Darwin for Aboriginal controlled “night patrols” that try to resolve community conflicts and minimise contact between homeless people and the police.

The CLP also axed Larrakia’s “return to country” funding, which provides loans for residents of remote communities to get transport home.

Mass arrests by police over summer filled the Berimah prison and juvenile justice facilities so far beyond capacity that they have stopped accepting new people. Alice Springs police set up outside every bottle shop in town, using Intervention laws to confiscate alcohol from any black person and breaking up groups with or without grog.

SMART courts, which provided diversionary options for people facing charges who are drug or alcohol dependant, have been abolished. So has Balanu, a successful diversionary program for Aboriginal youth facing time inside.

New Aboriginal CLP MLA Bess Price is promoted by *The Australian* as a campaigner against domestic violence. But her mini-budget cut all positions for domestic violence workers in NT hospitals.

Strong Aboriginal Families Together, a new Aboriginal controlled organisation set up to address the horrific rates of child removal, has also been cut by 50 per cent.

Despite their posturing for the election, the Liberals have only intensified the racism of Labor’s continuing NT Intervention. Any real alternative will have to come from resistance on the streets.

Justice for Briscoe

The North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency, who provide legal aid to Aboriginal clients, have said the CLP cuts “fly in the face” of the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody.

An important spark of opposition to the new CLP government has come from the family of Kwementyaye Briscoe, an Aboriginal man who died in the Alice Springs police station in January 2012.

A petition calling on the CLP government to force the Department of Public Prosecutions (DPP) to lay charges against the police who killed Kwementyaye has attracted more than 30,000 signatures online. Hundreds of people from remote communities have also signed the petition.

One hundred people attended a rally in Alice Springs on December 10 to push the demand for charges. Greg Barnes, a prominent barrister and president of the Australian Lawyers Alliance has written a legal opinion, outlining the possibility of charges for manslaughter and failure to rescue.

But just weeks before the anniversary of Kwementyaye’s death, the DPP wrote to the families’ lawyers saying no charges would be laid and the issues raised by Barnes would not be investigated.

REFUGEES AND THE PACIFIC SOLUTION

MANUS ISLAND CAMP IN STATE OF CHAOS

By Ian Rintoul

ALMOST SINCE it opened in November last year, the Manus Island detention camp has been in a state of chaos, with hunger strikes and letters of protest. (The latest letter can be seen at <http://x.co/sI6z>)

On Saturday 12 January, the Australian government transferred another 40 single male asylum seekers (Iranians, Iraqis and Afghans) to Manus Island, taking the numbers to around 220 including 30 children between the ages of 7 and 18 years-old.

The chaos has reached a new level since the most recent transfer, with most of the new arrivals maintaining a hunger strike since they arrived.

In the two days following their arrival, there were also at least four attempts at suicide—two attempted hangings and three attempted drownings when Iraqi asylum seekers jumped the fence and ran into the sea. The Immigration Department has passed this off as an escape attempt, when almost 400 kilometres of ocean separates Manus from PNG's main island!

At least five asylum seekers self-harmed, including serious injuries when one put his hand into an industrial fan.

Two days later, another ten also jumped the fence and ran to the sea. "This place is a mess. You can't believe it at all," an Iranian asylum seeker wrote from inside the camp.

Fuelling the protests and despair is the stark reality of detention on Manus Island. Like Nauru, Manus Island was meant to be a deterrent to asylum seekers travelling by boat to Australia. But since the beginning of the Pacific Solution 2.0 on 13 August 2012, around 9000 asylum seekers have come seeking protection.

Of those, the government has selected 220 to imprison on Manus Island and 400 on Nauru. Meanwhile, asylum seekers in Australia are being released into the community to live



Above: Asylum seeker on Manus Island tries to get some respite from the heat by sleeping outside—but at the risk of no protection from malarial mosquitoes. See <http://x.co/sI6t> for more photos of conditions on Manus

PNG opposition mounts legal challenge

ON FRIDAY January 18, the PNG Opposition leader, Belden Namah, launched a constitutional challenge to the Manus Island detention centre with documents lodged in the National Court of Justice in Port Moresby.

The challenge asks the court to declare that the Memorandum of Understanding between Australian and Papua New Guinea is unlawful as it allows Australia to force asylum seekers to enter Papua New Guinea and allows the PNG government to deprive those asylum seekers of their liberty as soon as they enter Papua New Guinea.

The challenge also asks the court to immediately prevent any further transfers from Australia to Manus Island until the constitutional challenge is resolved.

while their claims are being processed. There are problems with the bridging visa release arrangements, not least that there is no right to work, but this is nothing compared to the misery inflicted on those sent to the island detention camps.

One 19 year-old recently transferred to Manus Island wrote, "This is the end of my life. I had lots of dreams but now all hope is gone. I am suffering from this situation and I have become crazy. There is no justice and fairness. If there is a law it should be for all, not only 220 unlucky people."

At 19, a five-year sentence is a life-time. More than a week later, as *Solidarity* goes to press, they are living in tents (just like on Nauru) and have not been allowed to use the internet or to call home.

Repression and censorship

Indeed internet access has been a particularly sore point with the Department of Immigration since early January, when asylum seekers used computer tablets to take pictures of life in detention on Manus Island in early January and send them to refugee advocates in Australia. (You can see the photos at <http://x.co/sI6t>)

Internet and phone access was cut off. The tablets were seized and the cameras disabled.

Phone and internet access was restored a few days later, but now with technology to allow monitoring of internet use and phone calls. Access to the internet for each asylum seeker was cut by from one hour a day to one hour three times a week.

Challenging Labor's Pacific Solution will be central to the refugee campaign in 2013. It is clear that Abbott is going to try to use refugee bashing and stopping the boats to win the election. But every bit of struggle to force the Gillard government to back down on asylum seekers will be a step towards welcoming the boats and stopping Tony Abbott ever setting foot in the Lodge.