

# Workers' Liberty

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*The emancipation of the working class must be the act of the working class itself*

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## For a truly independent Palestinian state, alongside Israel!

On 27 August a ceasefire deal between Israel and the Palestinians was announced. It promises to ease the blockade of Gaza. On the record, it would be foolish to rely on delivery of the promises, or even on the ceasefire lasting long. For peace and justice in Israel and Palestine much, much more is needed than such easing.

**By Sean Matgamna**

What Israel has been doing to the Palestinians in recent weeks is a political, moral, and military obscenity!

Israel has a right to defend itself. Hamas had refused to stop lobbing missiles designed to kill Israeli civilians. So that justified Israel? It was merely exercising its right to self-defence?

No claims to legitimate self defence could justify what Israel has been doing now. On every level they outmatch the Palestinians – massively and overwhelmingly.

The Israelis can shoot down, not all, but many Palestinian rockets, before they do damage. It is surely nerve-racking for Israeli civilians to be under fire, as so many of them are. But the small number of Israeli casualties testifies to how little actual damage Hamas is able to do.

The large and increasing number of Palestinian civilian casualties testify to what deadly power Israel can deploy.

There is no justification in Israel's right to self defence for what it has been doing to the Palestinians.

Hamas deliberately placed its rocket launchers



in built-up civilian areas? So that justified Israel in striking at military targets when to do so meant indiscriminately to kill civilians – including children?

Israel cannot let its ability to strike at its enemies be hampered by such tactics by Hamas? Such an argument could convince reasonable people that Israel has a right to do anything like what it is doing only if Hamas rockets were killing many Israelis – or, if Israel were fighting for its life.

Nothing like that. Israel has been raining down death and destruction on a captive Palestinian population hemmed in on all sides, and militarily almost helpless against Israel. Even if Hamas claims to have acquitted itself well in the recent fighting, that could not change anything fundamental in the relationship between Israel

and the Palestinians. It is "shooting fish in a barrel". Except that they are not fish but human beings, many of them children.

This slaughter of Palestinian civilians has been done against a political backdrop in which Israel is slowly encroaching upon the Palestinian majority areas, trying by way of establishing "facts" - settlements - on the ground to stake a perpetual claim to the territory so taken from the people it is so shamefully mistreating.

The fundamental blame that attaches to Israel, no matter what it is doing to the Palestinians at

a given time, however, is political blame: it is immensely strong now, strong enough to impose a just settlement between Israelis and Palestinians, and Israelis and the rest of the Arab world. It does not do that. It chooses instead to shoot Palestinian "fish" in a barrel.

There is no just solution to the Israel-Palestinian conflict except two states: a fully independent Palestinian state, in contiguous territory, side-by-side with an Israel that has negotiated a just settlement with the Palestinians.

End the blockade! Two states for two peoples!

# Behind Mike Carlton's SMH exit

**By Martin Thomas**

Mike Carlton resigned from his long-time post as columnist on the Sydney Morning Herald on 5 August, after a row about a column of his on 26 July which denounced Israel's bombing of Gaza.

The content of the column would have been unexceptional in the leftish mainstream press in Europe, or even in Israel. In Australia, it led to Carlton's exit, and a vehement "good riddance" campaign in The Australian.

There are complications and sub-stories. Herald bosses wanted to suspend Carlton, not directly because of the column, but because of his rudeness on social media to hyped-up critics of it. ("Fuck off"). Carlton didn't fight the suspension, and his manner hints that at age 68 he was happy to take a chance to go out with a bang.

The hyped-up criticism was mixed up with anger against a cartoon accompanying the column, which legitimately expressed anger at the bombing but tainted itself by depicting a symbolic Israeli government figure with an exaggerated hooked nose.

But Carlton had nothing to do with the cartoon, and has refused to comment on it. A grouchy persona was what he was employed to express. Many right-wing columnists build careers on being ostentatiously cantankerous and offensive.

Carlton is on the left - he was previously suspended in 2008-9 by the SMH for refusing to write his column during a strike at the paper - but he has vented demonstrative bad temper against many targets. In a January 2011 SMH column, for example, he derided as "drama queens" "a gaggle of women playwrights bitching - if that's the word - that they couldn't get their stuff produced because theatre

companies were biased towards men".

Carlton went not because he was crabby, not because he was tired, not because of the cartoon's faults, and not because he was left-wing in general, but because of pro-Israeli-government pressure on the SMH.

Why? In Europe or even in Israel he would not have been pushed out. The same trend that pushed him out is also expressed in Australian government policy, and in the Australian press. The Australian is vehemently pro-Israeli-government in a way that Murdoch papers in Britain, for example, aren't.

In a batch of votes in the UN in November 2013, Australia was one of only eight states voting against a call on Israel to stop new settlements in the West Bank. It was one of only eleven voting against or abstaining on a call on Israel to abide by the Geneva Conventions.

Most of those other states voting with Israel in the UN are tiny and impoverished states in the Pacific, or sometimes in Latin America, ultra-dependent on the USA. Among relatively large states for whom "foreign policy" has a meaning other than looking for a rich benefactor, Australia stands alone with the USA and sometimes Canada on this issue.

In an article in Marxist Left Review of winter 2013, "Why the Australian state supports Israel so stridently", Vashti Kenway records that: "Under the Howard government, Australia's UN voting record was the most pro-Israel in the world, except only the US and three small Pacific Island countries".

Why? Kenway's article reviews three explanations and rejects all three. She is right to do so, I think, though more decisive arguments can be made than she gives.

One: Australia's alliance with the US? But Britain and many other states ally consistently

with the US without voting with the US in the UN on Israeli-Palestinian questions.

Two: "the Zionist lobby"? Kenway points out that historically Zionists had difficulty getting support in Australia. Most Australian Jews backed off for one of three disparate reasons. They were settled conservatives, hostile to those whom they saw as a raucous band of agitators who might spoil their standing in the British Empire. They were leftists rejecting Zionism as a diversion from class struggle in the countries where Jews lived as minorities. Or they just wanted to focus on integration into Australian society.

Most Australian Jews today identify themselves as concerned for Israel, and as "Zionist" (which, for Jews who stay in Australia, cannot mean anything other than the same thing: concerned for Israel). Kenway cites surveys on this, and reads them as demonstrating a right-wing shift among Australian Jews.

The reading is anachronistic. In the 1930s, Jews who could find a fairly safe refuge, as in Australia, were inclined to dismiss those who called for a Jewish state as crazy trouble-makers. Things changed with the Holocaust. Most Australian Jews today will have relatives in Israel, and other relatives who died in the Holocaust. Concern for Israel is an almost inescapable reflex among Jews, and does not necessarily rule out support for Palestinian rights or dislike of Israeli government policy.

In any case Jews are less than 0.5% of Australia's population (according to the Jewish Virtual Library), or only 0.3% if you count only those who ticked a box in the 2011 census to identify as Jewish. Arab-Australians are more numerous, about 1.3% to 1.4%.

On average Australian Jews are better off than Arab-Australians, and on average that will give them more clout. But only by exaggerating that factor in the style of anti-semitic myths about the mysteriously all-powerful rich Jew can you think that the Jewish 0.5%, or 0.3%, or actually a subsection even of the 0.3%, can sway the whole polity. The pro-Netanyahu types do not have the alliance with a strong pro-Israeli-government "Christian Zionist" contingent which the pro-Israeli-government group in US Jewry has.

In most countries outside Israel, Jews are much less than 0.5% today. There are four others besides Australia where Jews make about 0.5% - Hungary, Uruguay, Argentina, the UK - none of which has the same pro-Israeli "stridency" as Australia. There are three where the Jewish minority is a bit larger - France, 0.8%; Canada, 1.1%; the USA, 1.7%.

Pro-Israeli-government strands among Australian Jews are more mobilised than in

other countries where Jews are equally concerned for Israel in general. Pro-Netanyahu people were able to rally 10,000 on the streets of Sydney on 3 August. But that seems to be another component of what we are trying to explain, rather than an explanation.

Three: common roots in settler-pioneer culture? It is hard to see why vague historic parallels should have continuing grip. And if European settler states were bound to back Israeli government policy, why wouldn't that apply to New Zealand, Argentina, and Uruguay?

In any case, Kenway records that in 1939 the Australian government was lobbying London not to be "unduly favourable to the Jews" in Palestine. It was worried about the threat to "imperial communication" (the sea route for trade between Australia and Britain) if Britain provoked revolt among the Arabs.

Australian political parties' attitude towards Palestine has varied over the long term. In the 1940s, Australian conservatives backed Britain in its war against the Jewish community in Palestine, while ALP leader H V Evatt strongly backed the creation of Israel. The Whitlam Labor government in the 1970s was less pro-Israeli-government than the conservatives had been.

Only today are the big political parties more or less united on this. Julia Gillard, as Labor prime minister, wanted Australia to oppose the Palestinian Authority even having observer status at the UN, and accepted an abstention only after heavy pressure from Bob Carr.

These variations in attitudes to Israel argue against the thesis that the current attitude is a product of deep historic factors long embedded in the country's culture. And so do the available facts about Australian public opinion, as distinct from the attitude of government and some media.

Polls in November 2011 found that when asked "overall, do your sympathies lie more with the Israelis or the Palestinians?", people replied: Israelis 26%, Palestinians 27%, neither 21%, can't say 26%.

That is a slight majority for the Palestinians, though a different balance from in Britain, for example, where a similar poll by YouGov in 2014 had only 14% saying their sympathies were with Israel; twice as many (28%) saying they sympathised with the Palestinians; 40% neither; 17% don't know. (Younger people and Labour voters are more pro-Palestinian: pro-Israeli sentiment is concentrated among older people and Tories).

And in Australia as in Britain, many of those who say in general that they don't know, or take neither side, back the Palestinians on practical

questions. In the UK, only 17% think that this year's Israeli attacks on Gaza are justified. 54% say they are unjustified, and 29% "don't know". In Australia, when told in 2011 that Palestine was applying for UN membership and that Israel and the USA opposed it, 61% responded that they would back it.

Kenway's conclusion is to explain the Australian elite's stance as determined by the fact it "fits with Australian capitalism's material and geopolitical interests in the Middle East and across the world".

But she herself points out that Australian trade with Israel has "always been dwarfed by Australia's extensive trade with various Arab states".

The USA can be said to have a "geopolitical" dimension to its attitude to Israel-Palestine. Since 1967 it has, with good cause from its own point of view, regarded all the Arab regimes as unreliable allies. Israel is a more reliable ally, and militarily competent. The USA's backing for Israel enables it to do business in the Middle East through the vexatious but also rewarding trade of being the broker in all negotiations between Israel and the Arab states.

But the USA is the world superpower. Australia is not. No Arab regime thinks it has to deal with Australia in order to get terms with Israel.

As far as I can surmise, Kenway's vague talk of "Australia's geopolitical interests" is informed by the common, but obviously wrong, thesis that Israel is "the watchdog of imperialism in the Middle East".

Israel has military might, but politically and economically is unable even to get ordinary dealings with most of the Arab states, let alone to dominate them. It could from its current position of strength almost certainly get those ordinary dealings, and security, from a deal which allowed the Palestinians their own really independent state alongside Israel; and criminally it chooses not to; but that is another matter.

And when the US sends in troops or planes, as in Iraq in 1991 or 2003, the very last thing it wants is Israeli collaboration or support.

The watchdog of imperialism in the Middle East is the Arab regimes, not Israel. The idea that six million Israeli Jews dominate 300-plus million Arabs, seventy-plus million Iranians, and seventy-plus million Turks, is an internationalised version of the idea that Jews have demonic powers enabling a 0.3% minority of Jews within Australia secretly to dominate the whole polity.

Even if Israel did have a mysterious power to dominate its region which gave all the world's richer countries a "geopolitical" interest in

backing it, that would not explain why Australia would be more swayed by that "geopolitical" interest than many other states more invested in the Middle East.

Kenway's "material and geopolitical" explanation is no better than the others.

Our provisional conclusion has to be that there is no basic, fundamental, deep-rooted factor tying Australian politics to the pro-Israeli-right stance of John Howard, Tony Abbott, Julia Gillard, and Chris Mitchell (editor of *The Australian*).

Those people have attitudes picked up from the right wing of politics in the USA. On other questions they are restrained by Australian public attitudes and social structures. Why are they less restrained, and more able to dominate, on Israel? Partly because Australia (unlike the European Union) really has no "geopolitical" ability or aspiration to regulate the whole politics of the Middle East, i.e. for the opposite reason to that given by Vashti Kenway.

And partly because pro-Palestinian public opinion in Australia is overwhelmingly passive.

If this tentative conclusion is right, then there is real potential for changing things. The stance sadly favoured by some on the activist left, which demonises and wishes to "boycott" the whole of Israeli society, will leave the left striking attitudes on the margins and failing to solidarise with the struggles within Israel which are vital for progress.

A rational argument for Palestinian rights, denouncing Israeli government policy but admitting that Israeli Jews are now a settled nation and have rights of national self-determination alongside a really independent Palestinian state, can mobilise a majority to shift the current noxious bias of Australian policy.

## **Contact Workers'**

### **Liberty**

**Sydney: 0419 493 421**

**Melbourne: 0400 877 819**

**Brisbane: 07 3102 4681**

**[http://australia.](http://australia.workersliberty.org)**

**[workersliberty.org](http://workersliberty.org)**

**[wl@workersliberty.org](mailto:wl@workersliberty.org)**

**P O Box 313**

**Leichhardt**

**NSW 2040**



# Vocational education under attack

**By Torillio Urgan**

The publicly funded Technical and Further Education (TAFE) system is under threat from governments intent on introducing market forces. TAFE institutes are being increasingly forced to operate as commercial operations in competition with private providers and other TAFEs.

Competition policy and privatisations have gone hand in hand over recent years under both Labor and Coalition governments at state and federal levels. There have been some partial victories over the forces of privatisation such as in correctional services and the electricity industry. The Vocational Education and Training sector with its 1.8 million students across Australia (the vast majority currently study in public TAFEs) represents a great potential market ready for profit gouging.

The ACTU Submission in April 2013 to a Senate inquiry stated: "Over much of the past two decades, there has been a fundamental neglect of TAFE by successive state and federal Governments, despite the crucial role it plays in developing Australian industry, addressing skills shortages, building communities and social cohesion, and in providing innovative responses to the future needs of the Australian economy. This has seen recurrent funding per student contact hour decline by 25% since 1997.

"A competitive training market model has been pursued for some years now and has proved to not only have an adverse impact on TAFE but on the quality and reputation of VET in this country. Despite this, it has yet to be subject to serious scrutiny and questioning. In fact, the push to increase 'contestability' continues apace combined now with the impact of entitlement funding models."

In Queensland and Victoria, where market forces have collided with public TAFEs more than in New South Wales, it is the TAFE system which has greatly suffered. The cost to students has increased, colleges closed and arguably the quality of educational provision has reduced.

Private fully commercial training organisations have no responsibility to a full-time public workforce and are not required to serve rural areas, or the disadvantaged. The search for profit is the motivating force of these trainers so providing the more expensive resource

intensive courses are generally avoided. Student support services such as libraries, counselling and disability services are also nonexistent or minimal.

It was reported in the Campus Review, ("Blowing the whistle on dodgy providers" by John Mitchell 03/06/2013)

"...from July 1 2011 to March 30 2013, of the 1,150 RTOs applying for re-registration, we completed [processing] 64 per cent of them by the March 31 this year. 736 of those applications have been completed, and of those 81 or 11 per cent were refused registration. That gives you an idea of the numbers that we have found serious enough non-compliance with, to not accept their application for renewal."

It was reported in November 2013 that the Queensland government was looking for private provider tenants of TAFE college infrastructure. Thirty-eight TAFE sites have been identified for potential private use.

Leesa Weelahan, a VET researcher with the LH Martin Institute, University of Melbourne, submitted to a government inquiry into TAFE:

"This submission makes two key points. First, the structure of markets in VET in Australia will inexorably undermine TAFE. Second, TAFE plays a key role in articulating, developing and institutionalising notions of the social good and the knowledge and skills that are needed to support innovation and Australia's future prosperity. TAFE's future is at stake."

In introducing the "save TAFE" legislation ("TAFE changes moratorium (Secure future for public provision) Bill") to the NSW Parliament, Greens NSW MP and Education spokesperson John Kaye said: "TAFE has been driven to the brink of collapse. Public provision of vocational education and training is already facing budget cuts of \$800 million, soaring fees, cancelled course and hundreds of TAFE workers sacked. In early 2015 the new Smart and Skilled market will force TAFE to compete for students and funding with low quality, low cost private providers."

The Bill passed the NSW Upper House with Labor and minor party support, but its success depends on a change of government, as the Coalition dominates the Legislative Assembly.

Both main unions in TAFE, the Australian Education Union and the Community and Public Sector Union, are running community and workplace based campaigns and have lobbied Labor and the Greens to restore funding to TAFE. There has been some success in this regard with both Greens and Labor both

publicly committed to reversing the cuts. Labor Opposition Leader John Robertson has made stopping cuts to TAFE a centre piece of his campaign in the lead up to the 2015 NSW elections. Whether these campaigns are ultimately successful remains to be seen.

# East-West Link: Make the ALP commit to ditch contracts

**By Riki Lane**

The clock is ticking – what will the State ALP do when the Victorian Coalition Government signs contracts for the East-West Link? The state government have made it clear they will sign contracts in October – at the last gasp before the election, with Parliament's last sitting day scheduled for October 16, followed on October 30 by the "caretaker period", where governments conventionally take no initiatives. This rush is despite the totally flawed planning process, and unusually for a project spending 8-18 billion dollars, there will be no enabling legislation; they no longer have the numbers in Parliament.

The Coalition are behind in the polls and desperate to boost their failing stocks, so they want to look like they have achieved something and squeeze the ALP. There is some hope that three legal challenges – based on the misleading financial arguments used; the business case that has not been released, and the faulty planning process – will delay signing the contracts until after the election, or invalidate the subsequently. But, the whole process would be short-circuited if the ALP committed to get out of the contract however they can, if elected.

If built, this road will be a poorly planned environmental and financial basket case, that will compete with public transport for funding, given the blinkered, conservative views of what is "responsible" government spending shared by both the Coalition and the ALP. Public opinion polls show strong support for spending on public transport, not roads.

The ALP is putting out mixed messages – opposing EWL, but saying they will have to honour contracts if they are signed. They are internally divided: some want to build it, most (probably) don't, but don't want to give the Murdoch press a chance to beat them about the head. Some ALP figures have said to anti-EWL campaigners that they will "honour" the contracts by utilising their exit clauses to end them without building the road. Noted Fairfax

commentator Kenneth Davidson think the ALP wants to build the road, but is scared of losing inner city seats to the Greens  
<http://www.theage.com.au/comment/labor8217s-east-west-link-8216policy8217-is-pathetic-20140820-1069pz.html> . I am not sure he is right as there are significant ALP forces against the road.

Once the content of the contracts is revealed, there will be a public outcry – and the pressure will be on ALP leaders to make their position clear going into the elections. Community organisations and some of the left – (Socialist Party, Socialist Alliance and independents mostly) – have put a lot of work into opposing EWL. We need one last push to: support the public meetings and protests, attend electoral forums and lobby and protest ALP politicians. In particular, we need to prepare a storm of protest when contracts are signed, and use the time from then till the election to put maximum pressure on the ALP to state clearly that they will not build the road, but utilise whatever they can to shut down the contracts.

Contact

<https://www.facebook.com/MorelandCAT?ref=ts> or MorelandCAT@gmail.com or 0400877819

## Upcoming events

**Saturday 6 September**, 4pm: Public Transport, not the East West Link,

Speakers: Mary Merkenich (Rail to Doncaster), Tristan Groeger (Rail Revival Alliance - Geelong branch), Mike Naismith (Tunnel Picket)

Venue: ETU building, 200 Arden St, North Melbourne. Organised by Socialist Alliance

**Monday 29 September**, 7pm: Moreland Transport Forum

Venue: Brunswick Town Hall

Brunswick candidates meeting before the state election. Come along to help MCAT push the case for scrapping the East West Link and expanding public transport instead.

**Thursday October 9, 7pm:** Public meeting to Stop the East West Link

Venue: Coburg Court House, 1A Main Street, Coburg. Organised by MCAT

Get the latest on the campaign: legal challenges by Moreland council and others; stopping the contracts; organising for events.

**Thursday October 16, 1pm (provisionally):** Snap rally to stop the contracts

Venue: Parliament House

A protest will be held at Parliament when we get wind that contracts are to be signed – tentatively set for 16 October, the last sitting day for Parliament.

**Saturday 15 November:** Rally for Public Transport

The coalition of public transport groups fighting the East West Link is planning a big rally in support of expanded public transport and against the East West Link in the lead-up to the state election.

## Courts and cronies

**By Colin Foster**

The appointment by Campbell Newman's Liberal-National government in Queensland of Tim Carmody as chief justice of the state Supreme Court (8 July) has stirred a storm.

Leading figures in the legal establishment have protested publicly. Other Supreme Court judges boycotted the ceremony to install Carmody as Chief Justice.

Tony Fitzgerald, who led the momentous Fitzgerald Inquiry into corruption under the Bjelke-Petersen regime, has described Carmody as a "totally unsuitable choice" and his appointment as causing "irreversible... damage to the courts and the independence of the judiciary".

The Queensland Police Union has applauded the appointment, but judges and lawyers argue that Carmody's patchy legal experience and expertise disqualify him. They hint that he has been appointed only as a crony of government ministers and a supporter of their right-wing agenda.

The big question this raises is: who judges the judges? Who decides who the legal decision-makers should be?

When judges are chosen uncontroversially, selected from a conservative profession to serve a conservative elite consensus, is that really so much better than when a right-wing state government confident in its huge majority shakes things up?

Judges should be elected. The German Social-Democratic Party's Erfurt Programme, adopted

when it was a Marxist party and seen as an inspiration by socialists across the world, demanded "administration of the law by judges elected by the people".

39 of the USA's 50 states elect their judges (in different ways). In the USA, some left-minded people want these elections abolished. There is a lot of money involved in the elections, and that gives leverage to the business people who make the big donations.

For example, US state supreme court candidates raised a total of \$45.6 million during the 2000 judicial elections. Lawyers and business interests account for half of all contributions to supreme court candidates.

But that is an argument for better elections, better controls over spending and donations, and beyond that for economic equality, without which all systems of election to anything are over-influenced by the wealthy.

There is also a case for special safeguards for elections to judgeships (preconditions of qualification and experience, bans on making election promises of specific judgements, etc.)

But judges influence the interpretation of law, often to a degree that makes different interpretation scarcely distinguishable from different law, and in common-law systems they even directly make law.

There is no democracy in a society unless the authority that makes its laws is elected. If legislative assemblies should be elected, and no-one who would describe themselves as a democrat would now deny that, then judges should be elected too.

# Marxist Revival magazine publishes no.2

No.2 of the international revolutionary-socialist discussion magazine Marxist Revival is now out, and available in Australia for A\$3 from Workers' Liberty.

The first section of the issue is short articles from the participating organisations on recent interventions.

Workers' Liberty Australia writes about tasks in the PSA in New South Wales. The Alliance for Workers' Liberty in Britain has contributed a critical review of activity in the recent strikes against job cuts and restructuring on the Tube in London. Marksist Tutum, from Turkey, writes about a mobilisation by the workers' association UID-DER, and the Iranian Revolutionary Marxists' Tendency discusses activity for the worker political prisoners in Iran.

The second section comprises articles from AWL, IRMT, and Tutum on imperialism today. All three groups, in different idioms and from different angles, argue that there are large differences between the world-market imperialism of today and the "high imperialism" of rival colonial empires which flourished between the 1880s and the aftermath of World War Two.

Thus, to endorse strivings for "economic independence", or military action against the USA, by politically-independent capitalist powers which generally have their own ambitions for regional dominance, is not observance of the duty of socialists to back national liberation. It is subordinating working-class politics to battles of the weaker capitalists against the stronger. We should instead seek an independent working-class stance.

The third element in the issue is an article by Maziar Razi of IRMT on "The necessity of Marxists' convergence". Some of the ideas in that article were debated in a session in London at the Alliance for Workers' Liberty summer school, Ideas for Freedom, on 5-6 July, and again at a Marxist Revival seminar in Hamburg, Germany, on 11-12 July, which was also attended by L'Etincelle from France and Sozialistische Arbeiterstimme from Berlin.

Work is underway on producing a French edition of this issue of Marxist Revival, as a French edition of no.1 was produced.

It is a small beginning in international Marxist discussion, but a beginning which no-one else is making.

## Planning for the future

Workers' Liberty Australia members met in Sydney on 2 August 2014 to assess things.

Generally, the left and the labour movement are on the defensive in Australia at present. The protests against the budget, in Melbourne and Sydney anyway, were promising.

However, there is also a relatively low level of confidence and combativity, not just in relation to very large-scale action against the government, but on immediate, local, and tangible issues of pay and conditions.

Unemployment is being used to control workers. Unemployment is high, at 5.7% (June 2014: up 0.2% from June 2013, and increasing since 2010). It is 18% among young workers (15 to 19).

There has been some upswing among university students, on issues of fees and cuts. The government plans to completely deregulate

university fees from 2016 and make a a \$4.7bn cut to university funding.

Unlike on the budget, the union officials are doing nothing to mobilise against the government's IR plans.

Strategically, a logical rationale for the government's approach is to level down the "highlands" of union organisation in Australia. The level of unionisation in Australia, at 18%, is low compared even to the UK (25%). Yet a few sectors in Australia still have very strong unionisation by international standards - construction in big cities, ports, state school teachers.

In the longer view, the areas of strong unionisation cannot continue as islands in a sea of low unionisation. Either the union activists there find ways to spread trade-union culture and organisation to other sectors, or they will be isolated.