

Communist Party of Australia



Political Resolution

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**Taking the Party
to the People**

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Taking the Party to the People

This Congress must mark a decisive shift in the work of our Party with the incoming Central Committee leading a process within the Party to improve its presence and increase its activity in the community.

Capitalism is entering its most dangerous phase since the 1920s and '30s. Not only are social contradictions and class struggle intensifying, but so too are both right-wing and reformist efforts to prevent the working class from reaching for demands that would fundamentally challenge continued capitalist class rule.

The economic crisis, the resultant reactionary political developments and the growing threat of war require the urgent response of the working class and progressive people in every sphere – in the workplace and community, at the national level and with the building of links of international solidarity.

The inequality developed by the current system has discouraged and disenfranchised the people. While many have headed for right-wing groups and political parties, we should see this as an opportunity to take the Party to the people. Opportunities present themselves while people stand up to struggle to maintain and improve their current condition and rights; as Communists we should be on the barricades with them.

These developments, along with the gathering momentum towards global environmental catastrophe, have led to a crisis in civilisation and a threat to continued life on the planet. This makes the overthrow of the capitalist system that has produced this grave situation humanity's most urgent need for this and the coming generation.

In order to confront imperialism's brutal offensive, it is indispensable to strengthen the struggle of the working class and its allies, building the broadest possible unity of all progressive and anti-imperialist forces. Communists have an enormous responsibility in organising this struggle and in achieving this unity.

For the CPA to play its role in this process, the slogan for the 13th Congress, "Taking the Party to the People", must become an active reality.

This work of improving the presence of the Party in the community means Party members must be working alongside people in their communities and trade unions, organising them to achieve their just demands.

At the same time, the Party must point out the political lessons concerning temporary victories under capitalism and how the long-term interests of the working people will only be finally secured under socialism. That link is the important extra element that Branch members must bring to their campaigning work.

Party Branches have produced some fine examples of the sort of work required to increase the effectiveness of Party campaigns. Efforts by Auburn and Port Adelaide Branch members have achieved Party representation on their cities' councils. These sorts of possibilities are opened up by consistent, visible campaigning work in the community.

The Party has still to make this type of ongoing campaigning work general throughout its Branches. Sporadic work and a lack of suitable materials and organisation are too common. The work is sometimes unfocussed, without clear targets and milestones established.

Congress is calling on all Party members to develop the class struggle and to win the battle of ideas for social change by focusing their work over the next four years around building Branches as centres of political activity and campaigning in the mass movement. This means carrying out campaigns, developing contacts with others who are struggling around similar issues in a way that builds each Branch into a respected political force in these areas.

Through our participation in daily struggles, we can win the confidence of the people, proving that we are the best advocates of their immediate and long-term interests. Through daily struggles the Party can help build a force that is politically and organisationally able to challenge and defeat the capitalist system.

Party members must be activists in non-Party organisations, most importantly trade unions, to strengthen and further the aims of those organisations and introduce relevant Party policies to such organisations in an appropriate manner.

Campaigning is more than just issuing a leaflet. It should involve a series of activities that allows us to talk to workers, explain the issues and put our perspective. A campaign must be carefully planned, targeted and organised. It must have an aim of addressing the needs and interests of the people and gain their commitment to effecting change.

Occasional involvement in local issues will not help the Party win the leadership of the working people in their locality or workplace.

Our aim is to build a Party able to organise and have a presence and influence among the working class and its potential allies. This can only be achieved through sustained, constructive and visible work and organisation in different areas of the community, unions and mass movements.

The left in Australia is weak and divided. In these circumstances, it is vital that the Communist Party of Australia seeks to win a leadership role and takes to the people its working-class alternative to capitalist despair and destruction.

Capitalism in crisis

Facing a period of deep world crisis, capital has unleashed a ferocious offensive against the rights and living standards of the people. Capitalism is trying to recoup all the achievements of the working class and peoples' struggle.

Despite the ideological attacks and the curtailment of democratic rights, people are resisting. In Europe, powerful movements against austerity have arisen. In the US, mass movements against inequality and racism are being mobilised. Massive strike struggles have been waged in India and Bangladesh. The struggle for national liberation continues in Africa and Latin America. South Korea has been rocked by protests unprecedented in their scale against the corrupt practices of the former President of the Republic.

However, much of this disillusionment is being expressed in support for populist right-wing groupings, notably One Nation, indicating on one hand the strong ideological hold of the mass media on much of the population, and on the other the difficulty for progressive forces to effectively reach out to the masses.

Economies are struggling to restore levels of growth achieved prior to 2008. Previously effective methods of public cash injection combined with low interest rates are not working and the manic drive to ever-greater profits at the expense of the working class and other exploited people worsens.

Corporations continue their takeover of functions and decision-making once the preserve of national governments. Multilateral economic pacts continue to threaten the legislative independence of countries despite the abandonment of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) by the US.

Short of massive upheavals within the USA itself, the drive for maximum profits by US-based transnationals at the expense of workers across the world, including in the US, and backed by the military might of the world's greatest power, will continue irrespective of the administration in office at the time.

Phenomena such as the challenge by Bernie Sanders against the Democratic Party establishment and the election of Donald Trump, arise as a consequence of a growing rejection of current capitalist economic and social agendas. The exit of the UK from the European Union also reflects great discontent among the people but, without a progressive, alternative path to follow, hopes for change will be lost.

The threat still posed by the proliferation of investment treaties is grave. Australia has more than 20 bilateral investment treaties as well as numerous other "trade" treaties with other countries including the People's Republic of China (PRC), ASEAN, New Zealand, Chile, the European Union, India, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand.

The new generation of "trade" deals goes well beyond the reduction of tariffs and other, similar protectionist measures covered in past agreements. They are designed to serve corporate interests by such means as removing restrictions on the entry and exit of foreign capital and preventing governments from reversing privatisations or tightening regulations. They give investors unrestricted rights to transfer funds abroad in relation to their investments.

Most of the agreements contain Investor State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) clauses which give foreign corporations the right to sue governments for loss of income that results from or might result from any regulatory or statutory changes. The process overrides domestic courts and sovereignty, with a panel of corporate representatives hearing cases in secret.

As of January 1, 2016, the total number of publicly known ISDS claims had reached 696. So far, 107 countries have been respondents to one or more known ISDS claims. (Source UNCTAD) Global corporations are not shy about making the most of these ISDS clauses.

Australia played an important role in pushing the US's corporate agenda in the secret negotiations around the Trans Pacific Partnership and is party to the secret negotiations around the Trade in Services Agreement (TISA).

TISA will alter the definition of a worker, denying many workers even the most basic International Labour Organization (ILO) protections.

While much of its contents remain hidden from public view, what has been revealed by WikiLeaks shows TISA to be the most dangerous of all the agreements. It would amount to depriving governments of their regulatory powers over international and domestic services including financial, transportation, pharmaceuticals, health, cross-border data flows, communications, media, utilities, water and much more. Sovereign governments and nations would be subordinate to global corporations acting as global bandits with monopoly powers.

Social, cultural, environmental, employment, education, health and social services are treated purely as commodities. The people who use them are "consumers" and profit is all that counts. Governments sign away their right to give preference to local providers of services, such as broadcasting, education, electricity or sanitation, or to limit foreign investors and require majority local directors for sensitive services sectors. Any progressive government seeking to plan economic development would quickly find itself being overridden.

The US news outlet CNBC described the impact TISA would have on public services in these terms: "This massive trade deal will put public health care, child care, postal, broadcasting, water, power, transport and other services at risk. The TISA will lock in the privatisations of services even in cases where private service delivery has failed – meaning governments can never return water, energy, health, education or other services to public hands. The TISA will also restrict a government's right to regulate stronger standards in the public's interest. For example, TISA will affect environmental regulations, licensing of health facilities and laboratories, waste disposal centres, power plants, school and university accreditation and broadcast licences. The proposed deal will also restrict a government's ability to regulate key sectors including financial, energy, telecommunications and cross-border data flows."

Racism and xenophobia are being fanned as part of the ideological attack on the interests of workers and other exploited people. So is hostility to reason

and science. Climate change denial is spreading its influence. At the same time, the future of life on this planet as we know it, including the human species, hangs in the balance. Rights to water and land, particularly that of Indigenous peoples, are being stripped from their rightful owners. Water insecurity has become a major threat to communities to which capitalism, crippled by its economic and social crises, is unable or unwilling to respond due to its perverse priorities

People in Australia and elsewhere are feeling increased insecurity about the economy, the loss of supports that existed previously as the result of struggle by the working class and other exploited people. They see climate catastrophe looming with no adequate response from governments. Trade union rights are under worsening attack with legitimate and necessary activity becoming criminalised. Cuts to public services and social security entitlements are deepening. Privatisation of the few remaining public assets is underway.

Living standards, workplace standards and real wages are falling. Unemployment, underemployment and precarious employment are increasing. Housing is becoming less and less affordable while homelessness and other signs of social distress are on the rise.

Peace and war

Imperialism's violent nature is revealed by policies of war and aggression and its offensive against national sovereignty and independence. War has always been a hallmark of imperialism. Its violent nature is revealed by the policies of war and aggression.

There is an unprecedented level of brutality against countries in order to exploit and plunder their resources, but the profound change in the world balance of forces at the end of the 20th Century revealed all the brutality of which this system of exploitation and plunder is capable. Lies and propaganda by capitalist-owned media confuse the public.

Inter-imperialist contradictions have sharpened, and the race for control of markets, resource-rich areas of the world and energy routes have intensified. This has led to unprecedented wars and military conflicts.

Intense pressure over many years from people around the world and their governments has finally won a United Nations treaty for the elimination of nuclear weapons. On July 7, 2017, an overwhelming majority of the world's nations adopted a landmark global agreement to ban nuclear weapons, known officially as the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

Subservient to the US as always, the Australian Government boycotted the Nuclear Weapons Ban negotiations and refuses to sign the treaty.

This is particularly important since the improved missile systems developed under the Obama Modernization Program and being escalated by Trump are now capable of instantly wiping out the Russian deterrent. This escalation by the US of its offensive capacity is massive overkill, which undermines the global balance of forces. It prohibits nations from developing, testing, producing, manufacturing, transferring, possessing, stockpiling, using or threatening to use nuclear weapons, or allowing nuclear weapons to be stationed on their territory. It also prohibits them from assisting, encouraging or inducing anyone to engage in any of these activities. Space-based weapons are also on the agenda again.

All Party members must support efforts to persuade the Government to sign the treaty and to get the ALP to come out openly and strongly in support of it.

Australia's boycott will have grave implications. It calls into question our commitment not only to the UN but also to the 1968 nuclear non-proliferation treaty, article 6 of which obliges all member states – not just those with the weapons – to “pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to nuclear disarmament”. This flagrantly disregards community opinion. A Nielsen poll in April 2014 showed 84 percent of Australians want the government to join international efforts to ban nuclear weapons.

Australia's boycott will also make advocacy in other areas less credible. Who will believe government claims to want peace and security if Australia actively undermines this historic effort to strengthen international law and give effect to the disarmament obligation written into the non-proliferation treaty.

Australia lends bases, ports and infrastructure for the United States nuclear war fighting apparatus. In particular, Australia's integration with US missile defence programs makes us complicit in what is arguably the most destabilising of US ambitions: the acquisition of a first-strike capacity.

With growing arms transfers and large military budgets in many of the region's countries Asia and the Pacific have become increasingly militarised. There has been a growing tendency for states to rely on the accumulation of weaponry and threat or use of force as the primary instrument in matters of external security and to secure domestic social order.

Australia has assisted in these processes by its own military build-up, increasing arms sales to the region and by the militarisation of its foreign policy.

Australia needs an independent and non-aligned foreign policy. The time has come for ANZUS to be abandoned, for the US bases on our soil to be closed, US Marines in Darwin to be evicted, and for joint war games to be discontinued.

The role of the war fighting and surveillance base at Pine Gap in particular makes our country a potential nuclear and terrorist target. It also undermines our independence and sovereignty.

Pine Gap is built, financed and maintained by the United States. It has grown in its functions and now captures all electronic communications, whether military, civilian or commercial, in Australia and many other countries around the world.

The interoperability practiced during the biennial Talisman Sabre joint US-Australian exercises could well make it exceedingly difficult for Australia's armed services to manoeuvre in an independent way, should there be an outbreak of hostility in our region.

Drones have many economic and scientific uses which are valuable but weaponised drones are a completely different question. Their use does not comply with accepted rules of war and Australia should work in international forums to ensure that these rules are complied with in future. The CPA believes that Australia should not purchase, lease or use weaponised drones but should stay ahead of the latest advances in drone technological development for peaceful purposes.

We oppose the use of depleted uranium in weapons and the plating of armour on tanks because of its extreme toxicity and extremely negative impacts on human health. Depleted uranium causes severe birth defects and other outcomes in those exposed to its radiation. Depleted uranium has a lasting impact in the same way agent orange did in previous imperialist wars.

People's Republic of China (PRC)

Although signifying a major regional shift in geopolitical power, the rise of the PRC poses little threat to US national security. This fundamental strategic reality is underpinned by the vast military gap between the PRC and the US. Militarily, US strength is complemented by allies who surround the PRC – Japan, South Korea and Taiwan – and a global network of military bases.

The US maintains over 1,000 foreign military facilities (the PRC has one), has elite forces deployed to 134 countries and annually conducts 170 military exercises and 250 port visits in the Asia-Pacific region alone.

The US is capable of applying economic sanctions to the People's Republic of China, blocking resources and products necessary for Chinese industry and ultimately the PRC's survival. US war plans involve contingencies for blockading China, which is why China's development of the New Silk Road Eurasian trade route that takes China's trade away from areas dominated by the US is so important.

The issues of the islands in the South China Sea must be worked out by the nations concerned. The Philippines seems more than able to come to an agreement with the PRC about their disputed islands and a similar pattern should be encouraged with the other nearby countries and China. Australia need not and should not interfere.

The primary motivation of the US is not to protect freedom of navigation but rather its ability to engage in military surveillance as close inshore as it can to the PRC. It is unacceptable that Australia should support a position whereby an array of US warships can sail with impunity close to the Chinese coast. No nation would permit such a threat. The suggestion that Australia should use its military to enforce "freedom of navigation" is dishonest, unnecessary and dangerous. The PRC's response is to protect its air and maritime approaches.

Democratic People's Republic of Korea

The Democratic Peoples' Republic of Korea must be treated as a sovereign country following usual diplomatic protocols and courtesies.

The DPRK has had a permanent US nuclear-capable military force posted on its border for over 50 years and the US, which has the biggest military arsenal in the world, often refuses to negotiate, or does not fulfil agreements made.

Cancellation of the annual US military exercises rehearsing an invasion of the DPRK would assist to de-escalate the threats of war, even nuclear war.

There can be no peace, let alone reunification, until there are genuine, respectful negotiations leading to a genuine peace treaty and, ultimately, a nuclear-free Korean peninsula.

Every effort must be made to move the Australian Government position from blind subservience to US plans to one of support for negotiations. This is particularly so because the US military facility at Pine Gap will play a critical role in both conventional and nuclear-armed US attacks on the DPRK.

Global interventions

US imperialism threatens war and destabilisation in many regions where it has strategic military, energy and other interests. It undermines states and co-operation between countries seeking to defend their sovereignty, as with the case of Venezuela, Ecuador and the other countries supporting the ALBA (Bolivarian Alternative for Latin America) trade pact and the countries of BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, the PRC and South Africa). Every conceivable means, economic financial, monetary, political, diplomatic, military and ideological are used to subjugate countries, dominate their markets and secure control of energy and trade routes.

The US continues its attempts to destabilise and overthrow progressive governments in Latin America including Cuba (despite claims of normalised relations), Venezuela, Ecuador and Bolivia. The Obama and now the Trump administrations have maintained a hostile stance towards Cuba and Venezuela, in particular, and make no secret of their desire for "regime

change” or fundamental “concessions”. The US has used every conceivable tactic to undermine the economic and political systems of these countries, even removing modestly reforming governments.

Even more extreme intervention was unleashed on Syria. A protest movement against the popularly-elected government in Syria was quickly subverted to a campaign of terror and foreign intervention to bring down the legitimate government of President Assad and dismember a sovereign country pursuing its own social and foreign policy course. The most reckless tactics, including the formation of richly-resourced terror groups, have been unleashed on Syria, along with an unprecedented campaign of disinformation through the corporate media.

The extreme tactics used against Syria were previously applied in Libya. Destabilisation was followed by the actions of fully-funded and directed mercenary terrorist groups to maximum effect. Support from the US and allied military is provided. The same course is being pursued in Yemen. Iran and Egypt have also been subjected to outrageous levels of meddling and disruption by outside forces serving US imperialism. Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Israel and others are complicit in plans to redraw the map of the Middle East regardless of the dire and predictable consequences.

US imperialism supports proxy wars in the Middle East and dangerous confrontation against the PRC and Russia. It is supporting fascism and vicious anti-Communism in the Ukraine and elsewhere.

The actions of the US have caused a massive refugee crisis to which the US and its allies have responded with callousness and in violation of international law.

The CPA calls for action by all its members to help win a change in Australia’s foreign and defence policies. We demand that our relations with all nations and peoples be based on equality, mutual respect, friendship, cooperation and solidarity. This must be combined with an independent and non-aligned defence policy that should be efficient, affordable and genuinely serve the defence needs of our country and the need for peace and stability in our region.

Such a policy can only be implemented by a government that is no longer beholden to the interests of transnational corporations and banks.

Australia in the world economy

Neo-liberal policies by successive governments and the process of capitalist globalisation, have seen the Australian economy undergo a massive restructure over the past four decades. This experience is not unique to Australia. A radical economic restructuring of economies has been taking place across the globe, which is largely driven by transnational corporations. Traditional manufacturing industries have been decimated in western industrialised economies, in particular vehicle manufacturing, steel, clothing, footwear and textiles. The services sector now accounts for more than 70 percent of employment.

Forty years ago, the manufacturing sector employed 25 percent of the work-force. Today it is just under eight percent. Areas of manufacturing have also undergone transformation, with the traditional ones having all but disappeared as their profitability has declined. With General Motors Holden's exit this year, vehicle production comes to an end.

The major manufactures today are in the areas of food (25.6 percent of total), beverage and tobacco products, machinery and equipment (19.7 percent), metal products (16.5 percent), and petroleum, coal, chemical and rubber products (16.3 percent). (Figures from Department of Industry, Innovation and Science)

At the same time, an increasingly large proportion of capital has been invested in the financial sector – in banks, investment houses and insurance companies. The parasitic financial sector is the largest contributor to Gross domestic product (GDP), absorbing much of the value added in other sectors of the economy. It is followed by construction, mining, health care and social assistance. (Source: Australia Trade and Investment Commission, *Why Australia: Benchmark Report 2017*) Twenty percent of Australia's GDP is sourced from the export of goods and services.

Bourgeois economists constantly refer to Australia's great economic performance compared with other economies, in particular several decades of positive growth. When the financial crisis hit in 2008 and deep recession hit economies across the globe, Australia did get off relatively lightly. The economy slowed, the government pump-primed it in traditional Keynesian fashion with short-term hand-outs to boost consumption. This stimulus, alongside the constant flow of new finance from superannuation

funds, played an important role in maintaining growth, helped prop up the stock market and the government's taxation revenue from companies and individuals.

This was followed by the biggest resources boom, possibly since the gold rush of the mid-1800s. The Australian government, under the influence of the mining industry, has privileged the extractive industries leading to adverse community, agricultural and environmental consequences.

The primary focus of state and federal governments' economic subsidies is on the mining sector, with an emphasis on boosting exports. The industry is capital intensive, employing relatively few workers, is largely foreign-owned and a major polluter.

Top Australian exports are iron ore and concentrates, coal, education-related services, natural gas, personal travel services, gold, beef, aluminium ores, crude petroleum, and wheat. Education and tourism make a significant contribution to exports.

Growing GDP figures have hidden attacks on workers' wages and conditions, the replacement of permanent, well-paid jobs by precarious employment. These very negative impacts on the people are a direct result of the burgeoning profits of the big corporations and the financial sector.

The parasitic financial and insurance sector is the most powerful by far. It has controlling interests in the top corporations listed on the Australian stock exchange. Along with construction and transport it has the highest returns on shareholders' funds. The big four banks exited the global financial crisis and recession more profitable than ever, having sailed through thanks to the support of the government.

The sector comprised the largest share of Australia's stock of investment abroad in 2015, with \$1.5 trillion or 69.7 percent of Australia's total investment abroad. A considerable proportion of this would be related to superannuation funds and their investments in shares on international stock markets. It also includes the purchase of derivatives and other speculative products by financial institutions and their expansion offshore. Other major industries for Australian investment abroad include mining (\$130.6 billion or 6.1 percent), and manufacturing (\$106.7 billion or 5.0 percent), the latter reflecting the movement offshore to exploit cheaper, unregulated labour.

The massive export of capital by the financial sector is ethically reprehensible. These funds, if invested in Australia in productive ventures such as affordable public housing, schools and hospitals for the public sector, public transport and development of renewable energies, could be of enormous benefit to society as well as the environment.

The liberalisation of capital flows and the floating of the Australian dollar has left the government with few economic levers. The Reserve Bank, stacked with representatives from industry, sets interest rates that can play an important role in controlling inflation, stimulating investment and job creation, though within the constraints set by the functioning of capitalism.

Debt

By international standards, Australia's public (government) debt is not high. In October 2016, the International Monetary Fund estimated that it would be 21.1 percent of GDP in 2017 compared with 72.9 percent for industrialised economies as a group.

The sustained growth in GDP figures owes a great deal to the resources boom and to the rapid expansion of trade in the Asian region. The growth in domestic spending however has been propped up by people drawing on their savings and increased personal debts.

Record low interest rates have made it easier to borrow. The housing market boom, fuelled by lower rates and negatively geared investors, is laying the basis for disaster. When prices crash or interest rates rise again, many mortgagees will be hit hard.

Many mortgagees have borrowed to the hilt, relying on wages to rise and so reduce the relative burden of repayment. But wages, in particular for those on lower incomes and in precarious employment, are falling or at best stagnating.

Australian banks, insurance companies and other financial institutions have \$7.5 trillion in assets – four times larger than Australia's GDP. They have \$1.5 trillion of managed fund assets, such as superannuation investments under management, the 6th largest such capital reserve in the world and the largest in the Asian region.

Their power and wealth is beyond that of any other group of capitalists and yet they are ever seeking to increase it and their profits.

Budget deficit and government debt

The Coalition government and economic commentators in the mass media indiscriminately treat budget deficits and government debt as evils. Yet these same forces encourage individuals and companies to run up debts. Debt in itself is not evil. It is a question of why the money is borrowed, what good might come out of it and capacity to cover the cost of that debt (interest) and repay the loan.

Running up a debt to spend to spend a trillion dollars on escalating an arms race and preparing for wars of aggression hardly serves a useful purpose or increases security. Nor does the tens of billions of dollars being spent in subsidies to the fossil fuel industries and other corporate welfare.

At the same time, government debt incurred for building public housing, developing a public transport system or building schools and hospitals brings huge returns to society in terms of job creation as well as social and environmental benefits. Such schemes can return much of the borrowings through increased income tax revenue, fares and rent. Whereas military spending creates few jobs, is environmentally destructive, creates insecurity and costs lives. Not to be confused with an affordable public housing scheme, the federal government's "affordable housing" program does not involve the government spending a cent on housing.

In the Coalition's first budget, the Abbott government declared a "budget crisis" and set out to slash spending on health, education, pensions, social security, the public sector and continue privatisations.

Since then, the deficit has more than doubled with little sign of being reduced. The language has changed after more than three years in office. There is now a "spending problem". The CPA strongly opposes the austerity measures and the spending cuts that have been targeted to the most disadvantaged and vulnerable in the community.

The talk of crisis or spending problems is an attempt to justify the unjustifiable. As former Treasurer Joe Hockey pointed out, the government's aim is to abolish company taxation and income taxes. To do this it needs to

reduce the public sector to the bare minimum, hand over responsibility for social security to charity and philanthropic organisations. It still has plans to increase the GST to at least 15 percent and extend it to cover health and education.

At the same time as crying poor, the government can find billions of dollars in subsidies to subsidise its big business backers, continue with its plans to cut the official taxation rate on company profits – that is for those companies that pay any tax.

A struggle for an equitable social budget is part of the class struggle. Questions about the distribution of wealth created by workers and how it is taxed, how much surplus value (company profits) is paid in tax, and how much allocated to social services can be answered in Parliament, on the streets or by other means.

The government constantly talks about a “spending problem” failing to address the question of income. Corporate tax cuts, negative gearing, capital gains tax concessions, the superannuation and other tax rorts are a genuine income problem. If they were addressed, then there would be no difficulty balancing the budget, and additional income would be available to meet unmet social needs.

Increasingly, the budget is being tipped more obviously in favour of the capitalist class with tax cuts and corporate welfare and the share going to the working class reduced by cuts to services and payments.

The CPA calls for an increase in the taxation of corporate profits, genuine measures to curb tax avoidance by big corporations, the phasing out of negative gearing, and an end to the rorting of superannuation by the wealthy and capital gains tax concessions. This would increase the government’s revenue by billions of dollars. In addition, the government should slash military spending, end the fossil fuel rebate and private health insurance rebate. This would restore the budget to surplus overnight and lay the basis for increases in social spending such as age pensions, unemployment benefits, public housing, public transport and other worthwhile projects that benefit the whole community.

End of mining boom

All booms come to an end and the recent mining boom was as unsustainable as any before it. With an oversupply of iron ore, coal and other resources on global markets, prices fell. The People's Republic of China, which had been a net importer of steel, increased production and became a net exporter.

Australian workers suffered from plant closures. These closures could have been and probably were foreseen by the corporations involved. The potential is there for industries to be converted, workers to be retrained so that communities and livelihoods are not destroyed.

The mining sector exerts considerable power. Successive governments of both Labor and the Coalition, both the recipients of political donations from mining corporations, have placed heavy emphasis on the resources sector to the detriment of the environment, agriculture and jobs and other sectors of the economy.

Over 80 percent of the sector is foreign owned and their profits largely go overseas. The industry pays little or no tax and a large percentage of the mining royalties paid to state governments is then returned as subsidies to those same companies.

Environmental and security threat from uranium industry

The Coalition government, with the support of Labor, plans to expand uranium mining in Australia. It is an industry that has been plagued by leaks, spills, accidents and failed attempts to rehabilitate former mine sites.

In what can only be described as a totally irresponsible and dangerous act, the government is going ahead with the export of uranium to India. This will only increase tensions in a region already on a knife's edge, in particular, with India's neighbour Pakistan, another nuclear-armed state.

Past reports have revealed Indian workers' exposure to radiation through leaks and contaminated water and a complete disregard of those workers' rights and health. Other reports note incidents of uranium being stolen and unaccounted for. Nothing has occurred to suggest this situation has changed.

In an equally reckless and dangerous move, the Coalition government signed a Nuclear Cooperation Agreement with the Ukrainian Energy and Coal Industry Minister, paving the way for the export of uranium to Ukraine, another region where tensions are high and there can be no guarantees of its “safe” usage in the nuclear power chain.

Uranium is a very small part of our export industry and a very small part of our workforce, yet the mining industry wields such significant power over both the Labor Party and the Liberal-National Coalition, doing so through its agents in Parliament, the promises of lucrative jobs after leaving Parliament and through political donations.

Global nuclear waste dump

Decades of pressure from the mining industry via lobbyists, agents in academia, the media and through political donations, saw the South Australian Labor government initiate a Royal Commission into the nuclear fuel cycle. The Commission was headed by former SA Governor and retired Rear Admiral Kevin Scarce. To nobody’s surprise, its recommendations were for a waste dump to be established in the state and for other nuclear options, including power generation, to remain open.

A dump (officially a “storage facility” or even “repository”) for high level nuclear waste is being sold as a jobs and a financial bonanza. In reality it, would bring few jobs but many new dangers that could have an impact on Australians for the next 300,000 years. Currently, there is a plan to receive up to one-third of the world’s high-level radioactive waste and bury it in South Australia. The planned land for use is Aboriginal land, but the industry and government describe it as “empty”, a concept harking back to the days of *terra nullius*.

The CPA supports Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians in their struggle to prevent state and federal government agendas, particularly the reckless proposition for a high-grade waste dump in South Australia, and supports the closure of existing mines. Otherwise, it would then be a short step to nuclear power generation and even nuclear weapons. Australia must not buy into this nightmare.

For a long time the majority of South Australians have been very clear that they do not support an international, high-level or medium-level waste dump in South Australia.

Environment

Australia is still doing far too little to address emissions. Most of our electricity is still supplied by coal-fired power stations. This is because government policy has for some time been determined by representatives of the industry and their lobbyists, some of whom have previously worked inside government. Bodies such as the Minerals Council of Australia and the Australian Industry Greenhouse Network and well-connected lobbyists like Martin Ferguson, former Labor Minister for Mining, play a critical role.

At the same time as industry insiders are determining climate change policy, Australia's top scientists have been gagged from public debate on this vital question. The science of climate change, scientists, and the Commonwealth Science and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) in particular, have come under unprecedented and unprofessional attack from the Coalition government.

Australia looks set to become the world's largest exporter of gas. Gas is also non-renewable, a fossil fuel, albeit producing about half of the emissions per unit of electricity generated compared to coal. The CPA opposes the opening of new gas projects, including coal seam gas (CSG), and calls for the phasing out of liquified gas as a fuel and its replacement by renewables. The government should intervene to ensure prices are capped and exports limited so that adequate domestic supplies are maintained.

The majority of current government infrastructure programs are for the construction of tollways and roads, not public transport. Compared with Europe, Australia is lagging far behind in the use of electric cars and development of alternative sustainable, renewable energy. The CPA booklet *Hot Earth* makes it clear that the carbon tax was and is not a solution to global warming.

Many serious environmental problems have arisen including global warming, soil erosion, salination and desertification, the pollution of towns and rivers, deforestation and the loss of biodiversity. In Australia, the Great Barrier Reef, the world's largest coral reef system, is dying. Climate change,

pollution and, most recently the opening of new coal mines, are taking their toll and increasing the threat to the environment. State and federal governments are failing to uphold their international responsibilities.

In its inexhaustible quest for profit capitalism causes excessive and avoidable damage to the environment as its corporations pollute the water, soil and atmosphere, and destroy its vegetation and biodiversity irrespective of the consequences for the long-term survival of all forms of life on earth.

The destruction of the environment is a crime against humanity. Protection of the environment must be a primary struggle of the working class and all people. It is part of the struggle for socialism.

Today, the struggle for sustainable development is, in essence, a struggle to restrain and restrict capitalist corporations and to compel an end to environmentally damaging production processes. It is a struggle to fulfil human needs through more creative, democratic and ecologically respectful practices. The contrast with uncontrollable capitalist growth and exploitation of natural resources for profit is stark.

Sustainable development must be based on renewable energy sources. The sun, wind and tides can create clean, safe power that will never run out. Sustainable development requires policies that replace privatisation, deregulation and market mechanisms with regulation, controls on monopolies, planning and an expanded public sector.

This requires a new kind of government, one which is made up of representatives of the people, a government prepared to challenge the power of the monopolies in the interests of the people and the environment.

A planned transition from fossil fuels to sustainable energy requires public control of Australia's energy infrastructure. Public ownership, democratic control and planned development are essential.

In the coming period, priorities are likely to include campaigns against coal seam gas and the expansion of coal and uranium mining, on the issues around global warming and climate change and market-based "solutions" for the environmental crisis, as well as water usage and biodiversity. In these struggles, it will be vital to forge alliances of trade unions, farmers, communities, Indigenous peoples, landowners and others impacted by the environmental destruction wrought by resource monopolies, for example influential activist organisations like the anti-CSG Lock The Gate Alliance.

Renewable energy

In 2014, The Australia Institute estimated that over the previous six years mining corporations had received \$18 billion in subsidies from state governments. These highly profitable corporations also receive the lion's share of the \$10 billion per annum in fossil fuel subsidies from the federal government. That is in addition to the other subsidies through tax concessions and publicly funded infrastructure such as roads and ports.

These billions of dollars are at the expense of social services and infrastructure. There is very little return to the community. A fraction of this money spent on research and development of renewal energy sources would not only result in direct social benefits but also be of value in terms of reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Government intervention supported by the people, not markets, is the way forward. There must be subsidies for renewable energy sources, not research for elusive “clean coal”.

In more recent times, under sustained pressure from the environment movement, western industrialised countries have shut down coal mining. Scotland, for example, has developed wind, solar, marine (tidal and wave) power and has set a target of 100 percent renewable electricity generation by 2020 – a target it is well on the way to meeting. The renewable sector is a major employer providing 21,000 jobs including onshore and offshore wind, biomass, solar, hydro-power and renewable heat. Coal-fired power was switched off in 2015.

In Scotland there are numerous community-scale energy projects such as small wind farms which are sited adjacent to the communities, and owned by a community co-operative. Funds from excess energy fed into the main grid are then spent on that community. Small farms also have their own energy resources. Research is being done on other forms of energy; fuels including the use of hydrogen in cars and buses. Surprisingly, for a climate where relatively little sun is seen, solar panels are quite common. Once heavily reliant on coal mining and later offshore oil, Scotland provides a model of best practice for Australia.

In regard to climate change, Australia is failing to even meet the inadequate targets it set at the conference in Paris. The only barrier to Australia moving to 100 percent renewable energy are the mining and energy corporations whose profits rely on fossil fuels. There are no technical barriers for a

country surrounded by water, with such a large land mass that can be used to generate marine, thermal, wind and solar energy. The CPA remains committed to opposing nuclear-powered energy.

The CPA advocates that mining and resource jobs should be protected and converted into areas of environmental sustainability on no loss of pay. It is crucial that the working class becomes involved in the struggle to save the planet from environmental catastrophe. Workers must be confident that protecting the environment is in their interests and the interest of future generations. No worker must be worse off as a result of environmental protection measures.

By substituting capitalist environmental and resource policies with socialist ones, Australia could have new export industries researching, developing and manufacturing technologies for the storage of energy and other infrastructure needed for a more sustainable future.

Change will only come through the mobilisation of people with the working class at the forefront. Progress will be hampered by the influence of the monopolies over Australian politics and gains will only be secured with the victory of socialism. Nevertheless, the fight for the environment must be fought day-by-day right now.

Agriculture

In the last few decades agriculture has been hard hit by decisions of successive Governments, beginning with the dismantling in 1994 of agricultural support through the establishment of the National Competition Policy. The policy based on an assessment that support had to provide proof of “social benefits”, which was narrowly restricted to economic efficiency.

Deregulation of a number of agricultural industries led to further declines in farming and trade. The promised increases in productivity and trade did not follow. Milk production has declined and dairy exports dropped. The number of dairy farmers has fallen dramatically from around 12,500 in 2000 to about 6,000 in 2016. Dairy farmers have been squeezed on all fronts with high input costs of capital equipment, fuel and stock feed and below cost payments for their product. The benefits of deregulation have been delivered to major retailers, in particular Woolworths and Coles, and to the remaining cooperatives that have corporatised. The largest of these, Murray Goulburn,

decided on a partial float in 2015 to obtain funds for expansion. In 2016, they declared a profit of \$41 million and paid dividends to shareholders and at the same time cut the milk price paid to farmers (Clint Jasper, ABC Rural).

Deregulation has also hit grain leaving farmers to deal directly with corporations, the biggest being Cargills. Four corporations control 90 percent of the world's grain with the Australian wheat board privatised and taken over by Cargills in 2011 (Reuters). The corporations set the commodity price and have great influence over the government regulation of food. A secondary effect has seen local silos emptying, rail services cut and more trucks on rural roads. Deregulation has also impacted on wool and other produce and led to an increase in contract farming in industries such as poultry and vegetables. Through contracts directly with farmers, corporations dictate the supply of a particular quantity at a certain time, quality and price. Farmers have little power and corporations maintain control by threatening not to accept their crop.

OECD estimates of tariffs, subsidies etc. places Australia for the sector at 1.3 percent, the second lowest of any OECD country. When the Australia-US Free Trade Agreement was signed in 2005, Australia abolished its import restrictions with the US and reduced some of its trade barriers to a truncated list of agricultural products. Despite predictions of a \$4 billion benefit to Australia this agreement has had a negative impact as the Australian market got flooded with US imports. In the years 2005 to 2009 the trade gap grew by \$5.2 billion and continues to increase yearly.

These factors and the increasing concentration of agribusinesses in processing, exporting, retailing and production have reduced competition between buyers and increased it between farmers. Farm income continues to drop and rural debt grows more than doubling in 10 years from 1999. More and more farmers are being driven from their land. Technology has not increased farm income; the value of increased production has not gone to the farmer or the consumer. It is estimated for every dollar that technology increases output the cost to the farmer is \$1.44. Labour contractors have seized the opportunities of the squeeze on farmers to create a system of worker exploitation that includes wage theft. Back packers and seasonal workers on visas supply cheap temporary labour, often employed through contractors on poor conditions, low piece rates and high deductions for board and transport.

To protect agriculture in Australia, governments must act in the interest of farmers for ecologically sustainable development, social welfare and equity considerations, community service obligations, regional development and regional employment. Protections must be put in place to protect against market failures in essential services and against corporate exploitation of their market powers. The CPA calls on all levels of government to reintroduce regulatory safeguards and reregulate agricultural industries and withdraw from the Australia US Free Trade Agreement.

War on the poor

Bit by bit the former Abbott and Turnbull Coalition governments have been targeting social security recipients and families to fund corporate tax cuts and a bloated military budget of \$1 trillion over 20 years. The government takes a punitive approach towards the unemployed, as though it is their behaviour that has caused their unemployment, and hence they are undeserving.

Payments have been shrinking and eligibility requirements for income support have become tougher and tougher. The Social Services Legislation Amendment Welfare Reform Bill 2017 went before Parliament on June 22. No one was spared – single parents, unemployed, disabled people, migrants, the aged and families were all targeted.

The government, in its 2017-18 budget, came up with a new approach to stigmatising the unemployed, this time for substance abuse. Instead of the well-worn “dole bludger” line, that has worn rather thin, an unfair association is being made with unemployment and substance abuse, as if this were the cause of their unemployment.

A two-year trial of random drug testing of 5,000 new recipients of Newstart and the Youth Allowance payments will begin in 2018, in three locations. The drug testing will be contracted out to the private sector and carried out when Newstart and unemployed Youth Allowance recipients attend Centrelink for interviews. It is a gross invasion of privacy and human rights.

Since 2010-11, the government has cut staffing in the Department of Human Services (DHS) by over 15 percent with the loss of 5,500 jobs. Years of cuts in the name of “efficiency dividends” have crippled the public sector, resulted in loss of services, increased inefficiencies and put greater pressure on remaining staff to do the impossible.

Perhaps the most serious of the government's attacks on social security recipients is its Online Compliance Intervention (OCI) regime for recovery of alleged overpayments. Means testing for social security is based on fortnightly income. If in a particular fortnight your income is above the threshold, you do not receive a payment. If it falls below that threshold for a period of time you receive a payment. DHS staff would manually check your records and then contact you.

The DHS has embarked on a new, automated data-matching process drawing on Australian Taxation Office records. The ATO data provides only quarterly information. Using "robo-debt", income is automatically averaged out to an average fortnightly amount. The onus has been placed on recipients of debt notices to track down pay slips and employment history from up to six years ago to prove they did not wrongly claim benefits. How many people could produce fortnightly pay slips dating back six years? An estimated 220,000 people have received aggressive robo-debt letter with a senate enquiry finding at least 20 percent were incorrect.

Social security payments should be seen as a right, not some sort of charitable, stigmatised payment. The CPA recognises we should have a collective responsibility to provide for the well being of society.

Privatisation and deregulation

Privatisation, deregulation and outsourcing have removed other government controls over social and public services and destroyed whatever public accountability there was previously. Fees have been introduced or increased, the quality of services has deteriorated and access has become more restricted. Privatisation and deregulation result in job losses, cuts in wages and conditions, de-unionisation and a shift in the prime motive from delivering a service to one of making maximum profits.

Workers' retirement savings are being invested on domestic and international stock markets, in derivatives and other speculative products with workers taking all the risks.

The privatisation and deregulation of many functions of Centrelink and other government agencies once responsible for the maintenance of a social security "safety net" have had major negative impacts on the lives of the most vulnerable in the community.

Privatisation of healthcare

The federal government's attack on Medicare struck another blow at the poor. The deferral of indexation of the Medicare rebate for doctors is petty and hits those on lowest incomes the hardest. Doctors are charging more, a number have abandoned bulk billing and more patients will either not seek treatment, risking a more serious condition and more expensive treatment later, or turn to the overloaded public hospital system.

The cuts are cruel and unnecessary. The \$7 billion plus rebate for private health insurance is a backdoor subsidy for private hospitals and should be abolished. That would provide more than enough to fund a universal dental scheme under Medicare, improve services at the point of primary care, offer universal access to bulk billing and increase resources for community care.

Unfortunately, dental care does not rate a mention.

Elderly people are taking up hospital beds because of lack of qualified staffing in aged care facilities. The privatisation and deregulation of aged care is exacerbating the situation, resulting in inadequate care and short-cuts. Little is done to encourage doctors to adequately service patients in aged care facilities. Inspections are far too rare.

In contrast to the attacks made on public healthcare by successive governments, the CPA supports:

- Accessible quality medical and dental treatment for all Australians, bulkbilled under Medicare, centrally funded through progressive forms of taxation reforms.
- A nationalised health scheme providing a quality primary care system with GPs, nurses, allied and community health workers working together, must become our frontline for maintaining people's well-being with emphasis on preventing disease, including early detection of illness.
- Team-based care focused on early intervention and providing care in the community and in the home.
- Priority on preventative medical services including campaigns by governments to educate people about healthy lifestyles, the importance of vaccinations, regular

tests and check-ups. Preventive medicine should also encompass restrictions on corporate advertising and on the production and sale of unhealthy products.

- End to the privatisation of Australia's health system and, in the meantime, an immediate end to the wasteful private health insurance rebate which is driving further privatisation of Australia's health system and which will lead to rationing of health care for those who need it and means-testing of public hospitals.
- An expanded Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) so that all effective medications remain affordable for all Australians. PBS scripts should be free for all unemployed, pensioners and other card holders and the cost for others reduced. The CPA supports public control of pharmaceuticals, diagnostics and medical supplies along with the employment of salaried staff specialists in public hospitals. We further support the development of our own publicly-owned pharmaceutical manufacturing industry so that Australia has some independence from shortages in overseas supply and during critical moments such as major pandemics. Australia should withdraw from international agreements that prohibit such production and not sign new ones.
- A nationalised health system is essential for the provision of a quality, affordable and accessible health system, but we cannot wait until this is achieved to take action. Our public hospitals are under extreme pressure right now. As a minimum the federal government must immediately increase its share of public hospital budgets to the 50 percent that existed prior to the Howard government.
- Improvement of the public health system in outer suburban, rural and remote areas with measures put in place to ensure the health system caters first and foremost for working families and the sick and the elderly in these communities.
- A system of generous workers' compensation benefits for all injured workers and their families and strong health and safety rules in the workplace to prevent worker injury in the first place.

- Retirement age for those on shift work to be set at five years before the rest of the workforce due to increased aging effects of their work patterns on the body.
- A system of expanded and well-funded public aged care, including adequate numbers of properly trained nurses in aged care. This public system to replace the private for-profit aged care “industry” that takes people’s houses in payment for care that is frequently inadequate and certainly never worth what is charged. Support services must be in place to assist those elderly who choose to remain at home or those with chronic illness or terminal cancer who want to die at home.
- Workers and local communities should have a say on where their health facilities are placed and how they are managed – including having a voice on local hospital boards.
- Mental health services require urgent expansion.
- Funding increases for people with disability should be brought forward and services provided by the public sector.

Housing crisis

Homelessness is receiving token attention by governments as nothing is done to bring down the cost of housing – rental or purchase. There has been an unparalleled growth in the number of people who are homeless. An estimated 100,000 people are now homeless and close to a million face housing stress on a day-to-day basis, uncertain of whether they will have a roof over their head the next week or month.

Governments at all levels must massively increase the funding to solve the housing crisis. Public housing represents the best way to help solve the massive housing crisis problems.

Public housing is subsidised housing, not charity. It is a positive element of the whole housing system, as infrastructure and not welfare. Public housing should not be only a safety net for vulnerable people but should be a major element of the housing system. Rather than cater only for the disadvantaged, public housing should be available to everyone who needs it.

Community housing providers should not be used by government to offload its housing responsibilities onto the non-government and charity sectors.

Low interest rates alongside a shortage on the supply side of housing, have fuelled a property boom, in particular in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane. Household debts are at record levels and wages have been falling or at best stagnating for workers on lower to middle incomes. Employers are using casualisation, subcontracting and the super exploitation of visa workers to drive down wages and working conditions and maximise profits. The penalty rate cut for low income workers in the hospitality and retails sectors has compounded the problem, reducing the prospects of these workers owning their own home or even affording the rental of a home.

Rents have risen in line with the rising cost of housing as investors seek to make a good return on their capital. The government is fuelling the rising prices through negative gearing and capital gains discount. Negative gearing alone is costing the government around \$5 billion in lost taxes every year. If abolished, that \$5 billion would go a long way towards building public housing. The capital gains tax discount should also be abolished, it is nothing more than a tax rort for the rich.

Those who have been able to enter the property market for the first time and have taken out large mortgages are facing grim consequences when the bubble bursts or interest rates rise.

A place to call home, a roof over your head, is a basic human right. In such a rich society as Australia, there should be no homelessness. Without a home, it is virtually impossible to exercise other rights such as studying, going to work or meeting basic hygiene requirements. The homeless live a very precarious existence, constantly worried about their safety and stigmatised by society. It is also difficult to meet the various demands of government bureaucracies.

The CPA pledges to go on fighting for:

- Accessible, good quality, affordable, well-maintained and safe public housing.
- Government investment in building more new public housing stock.
- No sell off of public property or public lands.

- All current public housing stock to remain as public housing.
- A No forced relocations.
- Security of tenure for housing tenants.
- No privatisation of public housing by transfer to community housing providers.
- Proper maintenance and repair for public housing. No more “demolition by neglect”.
- Protection of long-standing communities.
- Governments to use their powers to control rents; with rents to be based on a set percentage of a tenant’s income.
- Governments to plan development in response to social needs, not the wishes of profit-gouging developers.
- Governments to take responsibility for the provision of basic infrastructure and services to meet the needs of the community.

Privatisation of education

Education is being privatised by stealth. From 2009 to 2014 government funding to private schools increased at twice the rate of public schools – even though the public system has higher student need. It has reached the point now where combined federal and state government funding per student for a number of public schools is less than that being received in some Catholic and independent schools, despite their students not having the same needs. With more cuts to public school funding on the agenda, this situation is set to worsen.

The National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) and the MySchool website are vehicles for the creation of education markets where schools compete and education becomes a commodity. Education involves much more than passing numeracy and literacy tests. It is about the full development of human potential, equipping people for life as well as preparing them for further studies or work.

The guiding principle and aim of the education system must be the provision of free, universal and secular public education for all children from pre-school through to post-secondary, to produce a highly educated and cultured

society. The same principle must be applied in the provision at all levels including university and Technical and Further Education (TAFE), which must be restored after a sustained, pro-private attack in the provision of vocational education and training.

Education is a basic human right, not a privilege for those who can afford it. Australia has the wealth to be able to provide every child with a quality education. This applies to all levels of education and to lifelong access to education and re-education such as workers wishing to upgrade or develop new skills. The CPA puts forward following policy measures:

- Increased funding for teaching and non-teaching staff, for the building and maintenance of classrooms and other school facilities, and the purchase of resources.
- Phasing out of state aid to non-government schools.
- Removal of the MySchool website.
- All teaching and non-teaching staff employed centrally by education departments on a permanent basis for ongoing work. The education system needs democratisation not privatisation.
- No voucher system, the CPA believes there is no place for class-based choice or competition in education.
- The abolition of fees in public educational institutions at all levels.
- Public education and apprenticeship programs must be properly funded and subsidies to private institutions phased out.
- Universal student unionism and former student services restored, in particular, subsidised childcare.
- Religious education be replaced by ethics classes and lessons promoting multiculturalism and knowledge and understanding of different religions and cultures.
- The important role early childhood educators in the emotional, intellectual, social and cultural development of pre-school children be recognised. These educators should be paid a salary commensurate with their qualifications and responsibilities.
- All children should have access to free early childhood education.

War on workers

Workers and trade unions are under attack around the world. The Abbott and Turnbull governments, the Murdoch and Fairfax media and big business have launched an all-out war on the trade union movement in Australia. The media are conducting an ideological war and doing their best to discredit any union that dares to defend its members. The government offensive includes the Heydon Royal Commission, the Productivity Commission inquiry, anti-union legislation and the slashing of penalty rates of low paid workers. Australia's anti-union legislation violates international labour laws (and therefore human rights laws) under ILO standards.

Legitimate trade union activity is being criminalised and penalised with penalties running into the millions of dollars. Union officials are increasingly being denied access to workers to organise and recruit or attend to safety and other matters. The Australian Building and Construction Commission is up and running with additional powers, larger penalties. Community pickets in the industry have been outlawed. In the construction industry, unscrupulous employers run free to cut corners and cheat workers.

The constant and pervasive barrage of anti-union propaganda, the repeated description of militant unionists as thugs, criminals, corrupt, etc., is having an impact. It does not help when repeated by leaders and former leaders of the labour movement.

There has been a significant deterioration in working conditions and full-time permanent jobs that are being replaced by various forms of precarious employment.

Foreign students and holiday visa workers are subject to wage theft by contractors and the franchises of large multinationals. These students are being paid a fraction of the minimum wage and denied their other rights.

Temporary visa workers are used to break solidarity, de-unionise workplaces, and pit worker against worker in a race to the bottom. It creates fear and divisions, fosters racism and xenophobia, as local workers who lose their jobs or cannot find work see the foreign workers being brought in as "taking their jobs". Temporary visa workers are not the enemy of the working class in Australia. They are part of the international working class and must be welcomed. The enemies are those who exploit these workers, not the workers themselves.

The solution lies in organising and campaigning to ensure visa workers are paid the same wage rates and enjoy the same working conditions and other entitlements as local workers. This would remove the incentive for employers to use temporary visa workers.

The CPA calls for an end to all forms of racial discrimination and xenophobia, which is currently fostered by employers, the government and media. Historically, Australia has had immigrants, not temporary visa workers, or guest workers as they are referred to in some parts of the world. The CPA calls for a cut to temporary visa worker programs and a marked increase in the number of workers entitled to come to Australia as migrants.

The union movement has suffered serious setbacks over recent decades both in terms of numbers and ideology. If the union movement is to survive it will require the maximum unity of all trade unions, and strong relations with and support from the community.

The independence of trade unions is an important part of this struggle. Trade unions should be free to adopt policies in the interests of their members using their own democratic structures.

The CPA supports the struggle for unity and the rights of workers to form unions. We campaign for:

- Independent trade unions.
- Legalisation of the right to strike.
- Rights for workplace union representatives including right of entry.
- Union representatives on company boards elected by the workers.
- The right to collective bargaining and workers to be represented by their unions.
- Full inspection rights to workplaces for union officials.
- Legalisation of pickets and other solidarity action.

Trade unions are the largest mass organisations in Australia. When united in struggle they have the power to bring about change. At present the trade union movement is in the tight grip of social democracy. The CPA strongly supports independent trade unions which are not affiliated to or bound to any political party but follow the interests of their members.

Undermining of democratic rights

Under bourgeois democracy, with all its class bias, people have still enjoyed a number of democratic and human rights. These have been won over years of struggle and are now under serious threat.

Over the past several decades or more there has been a gradual undermining of democratic rights. The Howard government, during its 11 years in office (1996-2007), passed more than 20 bills curbing and removing long-standing basic democratic rights. These laws are wide open to abuse, both by police, ASIO, the military and government ministers.

“War on terrorism”

The Howard government’s “anti-terrorism” legislation contained many serious breaches of key democratic and long-established legal principles. These included lack of transparency and public accountability, reversal of onus of proof, replacement of proof with suspicion “on reasonable grounds” and arbitrary detention without a court order.

Under the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) legislation it is illegal for the media to report any information on warrants issued for questioning and detention by ASIO. The media is not permitted to talk to detainees about their detention, nor disclose the existence of any warrant, or event, for two years following the expiry of the warrant.

The broad definition of a “terrorist act” severely undermines the right of journalists and cartoonists to make independent political commentary or analysis. The definition of an act of terrorism is so broad that workers, for example nurses, who are taking industrial action are construed as affecting the health or well-being or lives of anyone could be found to be terrorists.

The laws permit ASIO to intercept e-mail, voicemail and SMS messages without a warrant. They give ASIO the powers to arrest and detain citizens “incommunicado” and also reverse the onus of proof for those charged with “terrorist” offences. The presumption of innocence is turned on its head and the right to silence and the right of access to the “evidence” being used as a reason for detention are denied and normal judicial processes are bypassed.

The penalties for breaches range from large fines to life imprisonment.

The references to terrorism were a smokescreen for the removal of the democratic rights of trade unionists and other political activists who organise and protest against the actions of governments. The Howard government's WorkChoices removed basic trade union and workers' rights.

As a result there is now a battery of anti-democratic laws in place that could be used against communists and other progressive forces, trade unionists, Indigenous groups, environmentalists, peace activists, critics of the government and those opposing the actions of big corporations.

The CPA fights for the repeal of these laws and the enshrinement of democratic and human rights in legislation. There are other means by which to prevent terrorism and deal with acts of terrorism. The CPA strongly opposes and rejects terrorism. It is not a legitimate form of struggle.

Protest rights denied

The real power of the people is not exercised through Parliament but through the ability to come together to take action and force governments and employers to take notice and listen. Most of the things that we take for granted today, including the right to vote, withdrawal from the Vietnam War, progress towards pay equity, social security, working conditions, and our public health and education systems are a result of activism – of marches, protest actions, speaking out, etc. This highlights the importance of the right to protest, to peaceful assembly and association. State and federal governments have undermined these rights. A series of bills have been passed across Australia by conservative state governments which all protect the corporate interests of mining, forestry and other corporations.

Tasmania's Workplace (Protection from Protesters Act) 2014 punishes any protest action that might hinder business activity with massive fines and up to two years' jail in the case of a second conviction. Members of the public who "incite" or advertise a protest action that "disrupts or invades" a workplace are also at risk of being caught by the legislation. As well as attracting a life-long criminal record, the new law removes all judicial discretion in sentencing and imposes mandatory prison terms for protesters. Fines range as high as \$10,000 for individuals and \$100,000 for bodies corporate. In effect, the legislation criminalises community pickets and a great deal of legitimate community and trade union action. The Act singles out the forestry and mining sectors for special mention.

The former Victorian Coalition government amended the Summary Offences Act, giving police broad powers to “move on” workers and activists engaged in peaceful protests, pickets and demonstrations who block access to buildings, obstruct people, block traffic or who police think might turn violent. The legislation targets groups such as the anti-East West Link pickets, as well as trade unions. It provides for “exclusion orders” which could be used to ban individuals or groups from public spaces for up to 12 months with a penalty of two years’ jail. The Victorian Labor government has since repealed the move-on laws and is strengthening its Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities 2006, which includes the right to peaceful assembly and freedom of association.

The NSW laws give police excessive powers to stop, search and detain protesters and seize property as well as to shut down peaceful protests that obstruct traffic. They expand the offence of “interfering” with a mine, which carries a penalty of up to seven years’ jail, to protect coal seam gas exploration projects and extraction sites. The laws are so broad that farmers fighting against the coal seam gas industry on their own properties, face large fines and up to seven years in jail. Adding insult to injury and leaving no doubt as to who the NSW Coalition governs for, the government changed the law so that resource companies that illegally mine can receive a \$5,000 penalty notice instead of a potential \$1.1 million fine.

In Western Australia, the former Coalition government attempted to pass legislation containing extremely broad new offences of “physically preventing a lawful activity” and “possessing a thing for the purpose of preventing a lawful activity”. The bill provided for penalties of up to two years in prison and fines of up to \$24,000. This offence applied to situations such as where protesters were found in the vicinity of a proposed “obstruction site” with devices such as thumb locks, chain locks, arm locks or any article that is adapted for the purpose of creating an obstruction. The bill, if passed, would have allowed the police to act on the suspicion of intent to carry out a criminal offence with the onus of proof of intent reversed. Fortunately, it was not passed and with the defeat of the conservative government means it is off the table for now.

On a positive note, the Labor government in Queensland is looking to protect fundamental human rights, including protest and assembly rights, in a Queensland Human Rights Charter.

All of these laws severely restrict the right to protest, to take action and carry heavy financial penalties as well as jail sentences. They give the police increased powers far beyond those required to keep law and order. The aim of the legislation is to protect corporate interests, in particular mining, forestry and developers at the expense of people's interests, democratic rights, including trade union rights.

Bypassing the courts

The national government is forever lecturing other governments and the public on the importance of the “rule of law”, of due process where there is a separation of powers between Parliament and the courts. This is seen as the bedrock of Australian democracy and the Constitution. The government has bit by bit been eroding the role of the courts and judicial processes. This is occurring in a number of ways.

Firstly, the government is increasingly seeking to limit the powers of the courts to review the legality of its actions. This is particularly so in regard to the detention of asylum seekers and “national security”. At the same time the right to appeal against government decisions is being restricted. Secrecy surrounding government actions is also on the rise.

The Migration Act, for example, contains a number of provisions limiting the ability of people to take court action, to appeal decisions of the Minister. The Minister has incredible powers to make decisions about the fate of individuals and does so with a heart of stone. What happens in Australia's offshore detention centres is beyond Australian law and our courts. Immigration officials can revoke the citizenship of dual nationals without recourse to the laying of charges or a conviction in the courts. The government uses the Navy to turn boats back without the right to judicial process by those affected or any public accountability by the Minister.

Recent amendments to the Migration Act and US President Trump's attempts to ban people from seven countries with Muslim-majority populations have strong similarities. There are differences in form, Trump attempting to directly use his presidential powers and Dutton seeking to gain similar powers through parliamentary legislation.

The Migration Amendment (Visa Revalidation and Other Measures) Bill 2016, seeks to give the Minister for Immigration and Border Protection

unchecked discretionary powers to subject any race, nationality or other group holding a visa, regardless of whether the visa is permanent or temporary, to a revalidation test and possible cancellation of their visa. Visa holders would be required to update information and answer other questions as and when determined by the Minister. Failure to meet requirements set by the Minister would result in loss of visa. There is the potential to ban groups by race or religion. The legislation applies to any type of visa.

According to the Memorandum of Understanding accompanying the bill, visa revalidation “is designed to manage the risks to the Australian community that may arise in the context of longer validity Visitor visas, including a person’s individual circumstances changing over time, or in the event of a serious incident occurring overseas which may create a situation where it is in the public interest to reassess a visa holder’s individual circumstances in light of such an event. The amendments will allow the government to ensure that visa holders continue to meet the health, character, security and other requirements for entry to Australia.”

Then there is the attitude of the former Attorney-General George Brandis who at times appears to treat the courts with utter contempt. This was the case when the MacKay Conservation Group won a court review of a decision for the expansion of the controversial Carmichael coal mine. Brandis had failed to comply with the provisions of the law, but instead of correcting his mistakes, set about amending the law to remove the provision that enabled the court appeal. He described the court action as “vigilante litigation.”

In some states the rights of residents and various groups to appeal decisions of councils or other government bodies have been weakened or removed giving developers and mining corporations a virtual free hand.

The “bikie” laws introduced by the Newman conservative government in Queensland gave the state’s Attorney-General the power to declare organisations unlawful without court involvement.

The cost of access to the court system is beyond the average person, meaning the system is stacked against them from the start. This situation has been worsened by government cuts to funding of community law centres and legal aid.

Fostering hatred

Freedom of speech is a basic democratic right. It is also a right which must be exercised responsibly. It is not a licence to say anything to anyone regardless of the consequences.

The Howard government fostered a climate of racism and xenophobia in an attempt to win over potential One Nation voters. This changed the political climate, and set the scene for the bigots to come out openly against immigrants and multiculturalism. The Murdoch media gave them all the space and time they wanted to spew their divisive hatred. The Abbott government took up where Howard left off, this time with a government that was in the grip of right-wingers. He was followed by Malcolm Turnbull, a hostage to those same right-wing forces.

Section 18C of the Anti-Discrimination Act makes it unlawful to “offend, insult, humiliate or intimidate” a person because of their race, colour or national or ethnic origin. In 2014, the extreme right of the Coalition under the leadership of Tony Abbott and Attorney General George Brandis sought to have this section repealed, but were forced to back down following a massive public outcry. The aim of removing the Section was made clear by Attorney George Brandis at the time: “In a free country people do have rights to say things that other people find offensive or insulting or bigoted.” He called for the right of people to be bigots, not for the right to be free of bigotry or racism.

The pressure from the extreme right never went away. In March 2017, Malcolm Turnbull returned to the issue with a bill to amend Section 18C.

Following a terrorist incident in London, in March 2017, Turnbull responded to One Nation leader Pauline Hanson’s call for a ban on Muslim immigration by warning that “inciting hatred against any part of the Australian community is always dangerous. It undermines the mutual respect that we have in our community,” which underpins social cohesion, he said. Almost in the same breath Turnbull hypocritically supported amendments to Section 18C that would substantially weaken the Act by replacing the offences “insult”, “humiliate”, and “offend” by the higher test of “harass”.

By fanning hatred and intolerance, they divide the working class and divert attention from the government’s policies which are hurting low paid workers and the most vulnerable. Increased job insecurity, casualisation, mass

sackings and rising unemployment have raised the level of insecurity felt by many Australian workers. Instead of looking to blame the capitalist system and the big corporations who exploit them and throw them on the scrap heap, their attention is drawn to other groups including Muslims, African immigrants, and “queue jumping” asylum seekers who are set up by the ruling class as scapegoats.

Freedom of speech eroded

Secrecy laws and an increasingly aggressive stand towards whistleblowers mean that people who dare to expose the most serious cases of human rights abuses, corruption and other wrongdoings face jail or at best the sack. Journalists and others face up to 10 years’ jail if they reveal information about operations that the Attorney-General deems “special intelligence operations.” This includes information about the harm being done to asylum seekers and drownings at sea when boats are turned back.

Special legislation was introduced to silence journalists, medical staff, teachers and other staff in detention centres with “offenders” facing punishment of two years’ jail. Later the government exempted doctors but for other staff the legislation remains in place.

Meta data laws, ostensibly put in place to combat terrorism, threaten the ability of journalists to maintain confidentiality on matters of public importance. This is another way of silencing the media.

The freedom to criticise governments is a basic democratic right, but one that is increasingly being eroded.

The government is including gag clauses in funding agreements with non-government organisations to prevent them from taking a public stand on issues such as the environment, housing, social community services. It is targeting its funding cuts at environmental organisations and groups that represent the most disadvantaged and vulnerable. It has threatened some organisations with the loss of tax deductibility for gifts to these organisations – a tax status that is important to many of them.

The Department of Immigration and Border Protection is reported to have required organisations working in offshore centres to pay bonds of up to \$2 million that might be forfeited if they spoke against the government’s

policy. Save the Children refused, seeing it as a gag clause and paid the price – they lost their contract. It is reaching a situation where any organisation or individual who is critical of the government’s actions is punished and vilified. This has led to self-censoring by some organisations and creates a chilling climate of fear.

In the case of the Australian Human Rights Commissioner Gillian Triggs, the government turned on her with vengeance and attempted to force her resignation following her damning but honest report, *The Forgotten Children: National Inquiry into Children in Immigration Detention (2014)*. The government also retaliated by cutting the Commission’s funding by 30 percent. In relation to her opposition to the government’s amendments to 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act, former Prime Minister Tony Abbott described the Commission as a “lecturing, hectoring, bullying bureaucracy.” He should look in the mirror!

Some state governments have also introduced gag provisions. When Labor came to office in Queensland, it removed gag clauses from NGO contracts imposed by its predecessor.

It is impossible to talk about freedom of speech when people can go to jail for revealing the systemic abuse of children, women and men who come to our shores fleeing war and persecution, seeking our assistance. By freedom of speech the government means freedom to be a bigot, a racist, to practice xenophobia. The media and whistleblowers must be able to hold governments and corporations to account without fear. The *Guardian* has an important role to play, one which can only be achieved through a massive effort to increase sales and reach a larger readership.

The CPA calls for the strengthening of the federal *Not-For-Profit Freedom to Advocate Act 2013* which prevents the insertion of gag clauses in government agreements, and for restoration of full funding to peak sector bodies such as the Refugee Council of Australia, the National Congress of Australia’s First Peoples and other peak bodies advocating for housing and the homeless and the environment. Funding agreements such as those with community legal centres that ban policy work should be overturned. These peak councils are in an excellent position to develop policy and lobby for it in consultation with the grass roots organisations they represent. This is an important part of the democratic process.

The cumulative result of multiple pieces of legislation and changes in attitude by the government should be ringing alarm bells. Authoritarian methods are creeping in and fundamental rights are being replaced by more repressive instruments of power. There are many similarities with developments in the 1920s.

Asylum seekers

Successive Australian governments have attempted to criminalise asylum seekers and those who assist them. People associate “people smuggling” with illegal activity when it is not illegal to claim asylum at all. It is the government’s inhumane treatment and mandatory detention of asylum seekers that is illegal under international law.

Yet, the penalties for people “smuggling” offences – up to 20 years’ jail for boats carrying more than five passengers – are now at the level of such crimes as terrorism, rape and murder.

But the fact is unauthorised travel to Australia is driven by the needs of people fleeing persecution in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Iran, Syria and Sri Lanka. Many of those fleeing war and persecution in their homeland are doing so as a result of US-led wars in which Australia is a player. Australia has a moral responsibility to increase its intake of asylum seekers and do all it can to provide them with a new start here.

Turning back boats puts lives at risk. It does not save lives as the government claims. This was exposed graphically in the boat turn-backs of Rohingya asylum seekers from Indonesia, Thailand and Malaysia in May 2015. At least 300 drowned as a result. The exact number of turn-backs and deaths is shrouded in secrecy in the name of “national security interests.”

Labor and Liberal alike have imposed mandatory detention in conditions that are nothing short of torturous and barbarian. Children are subjected to physical and sexual abuse, they are denied a normal childhood and access to the necessary medical services. Many of them will never recover from the mental and physical impact of their indefinite incarceration.

In 2015, the UN Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment said: “... by failing to provide adequate detention conditions; end the practice of detention of children; and put a stop

to the escalating violence and tension at the Regional Processing Centre, [Australia] has violated the right of the asylum seekers, including children, to be free from torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment.” (Report of the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, Juan E Mendéz, Human Rights Council Twenty-eighth session 6 March 2015)

Numerous reports from other international and national bodies have found Australia to be in breach of its international human rights and refugee obligations. Australia has become an international pariah at the same time as it has become a model for far-right parties’ immigration reform proposals across the world.

A report released by Save the Children/UNICEF in September 2016, found that the government’s deterrence policies against refugees cost a total of \$9.6 billion over four years between the 2013 and 2016 financial years. This includes the cost of detention both in Australia and on Manus and Nauru, as well as the government’s turn-backs. (*AT WHAT COST? The Human, Economic and Strategic Cost of Australia’s Asylum Seeker Policies and the Alternatives*).

In 2010, the Labor government introduced legislation to create a new offence of providing advice and material support to assist an asylum seeker to get to Australia even if that assistance is entirely for humanitarian reasons. The new offence is clearly aimed at family members, refugee communities and supporters and makes them potentially subject to ASIO surveillance.

The CPA strongly opposes mandatory detention and offshore processing. Asylum seekers should be quickly processed in a humanitarian manner and then released into the community with the necessary support. Not only is this the humanitarian thing to do but it would cost a fraction of what the government is wasting now and would see new refugees making an important contribution to society. It is costing more to incarcerate asylum-seeking refugees on Nauru or Manus Island than it would to provide each of them with a new house in rural Australia each year!

The treatment of asylum seekers should also serve as a warning of what conservative and Labor governments are prepared to do to fellow human beings.

Indigenous rights

The struggle by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders peoples is centred on land rights. This campaign is more than an issue of civil rights. It goes beyond this bourgeois democratic aim for it contains a significant revolutionary aspect, the demand for the return to collective ownership of part of the basic means of production.

The Communist Party of Australia remains committed to the campaign to win recognition of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the original owners and occupiers of Australian territory and their right to own and control their land and resources.

The demand for communal and inalienable property challenges capitalism as it puts forward a case for the expropriation of private property. It creates an alternative to private property, and raises the question of the social ownership of land and other resources by all the people, black and white, in a people's Australia.

Land is a major source of wealth – its use for sheep, cattle and farming, the natural resources in and on it (gold, oil, bauxite, copper, diamonds, timber and so on), as real estate and for tourism. All this and more makes land one of the country's most valuable assets.

For monopoly corporations, which are intent on owning or leasing all the resources of this country in order to make the most profit possible, a return of any of this valuable asset to the people as community property sets a dangerous precedent.

Land rights mean recognition of prior Indigenous ownership of the entire Australian continent. There must be legislation to return land to its traditional owners on the basis of traditional ownership, cultural association, long occupancy, connections or need. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders land title must include full rights to minerals and other natural resources as well as to all sacred sites, heritage areas and areas of traditional significance.

The CPA supports the establishment of autonomous areas on the basis of communally owned land in accordance with the wishes of traditional owners and local Indigenous communities.

The problems of Indigenous people do not exist in isolation, separate from the class structure of society or the class struggle. The militant struggle of

the Indigenous people against racism and oppression, against the denial of their rights is also an ideological struggle against individualism in support of a collective society based on cooperation not competition.

Land grab

The mining and property booms of the 21st century prompted a new push against Indigenous people. Mining companies want ore-rich lands in rural areas and property developers want Indigenous land holdings closer to the towns and cities.

Governments, mining corporations, pastoralists and other powerful capitalist forces were intent on destroying self-determination and Aboriginal control over land. Their aim was to regain ultimate control over Aboriginal lands from the local communities so they could better exploit the mineral wealth below.

Governments have facilitated this push by attempting to break down the traditional collective custody of land; by the notorious 2007 *Northern Territory National Emergency Response Act*, commonly known as the Intervention, which was aimed at “disciplining” the Indigenous people; and by disbanding representative organisations in order to undermine the fight-back by Indigenous people.

Ending this situation is a priority for all Communist Party members if we are to stay true to our understanding that labour in a white skin can never be free while labour in a black skin remains in chains.

Uluru statement

In May 2017, 250 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander delegates from across the country gathered at Uluru and adopted a landmark Uluru Statement calling for a new national body that would take over funding of Aboriginal programs and set priorities.

The Uluru Statement said in part:

“We, gathered at the 2017 National Constitutional Convention, coming from all PARAs of the southern sky, make this statement from the heart ...

“We seek constitutional reforms to empower our people and take a rightful place in our own country. When we have power over our destiny our children will flourish. They will walk in two worlds and their culture will be a gift to their country.

“We call for the establishment of a First Nations Voice enshrined in the Constitution.

“Makarrata is the culmination of our agenda: the coming together after a struggle. It captures our aspirations for a fair and truthful relationship with the people of Australia and a better future for our children based on justice and self-determination.

“We seek a Makarrata Commission to supervise a process of agreement-making between governments and First Nations and truth-telling about our history.

“In 1967 we were counted, in 2017 we seek to be heard. We leave base camp and start our trek across this vast country. We invite you to walk with us in a movement of the Australian people for a better future.”

However, a Referendum Council report generated after the Uluru summit created a wave of disappointment and protest from Aboriginal groups across the country.

The report delivered only symbolic recognition, calling for a referendum to establish a “Voice to Parliament” — a national Indigenous representative body. This would be an advisory body only, not able to make laws, deliver services, administer any revenue or supervise anything.

But the historic Uluru meeting had said they wanted change of substance, a treaty, a truth and justice commission, a new elected national body with its own source of revenue, and constitutional recognition.

Façade of democracy

Bourgeois democracy is a façade behind which the capitalist state hides the nature of corporate dictatorship. For over a century the parliamentary process has delivered alternating social democrat and conservative governments committed to managing the capitalist system. The two-party system has served capitalism well.

In the decades of rapid growth following World War II capitalist governments faced competition from the Soviet Union and East European socialist countries. The working class struggle in Australia won many social and economic gains from governments and employers. By the mid-1980s, there was a marked shift in policy from Keynesianism to neoliberalism. This was centred on privatisation, deregulation, the liberalisation of trade and investment and “small government”. These policies have fuelled a massive redistribution of wealth in favour of global capital and the rich.

Corporate profits have soared and the wealthy have increased their share of wealth at the expense of workers who create the wealth. Global monopolies have increased their concentration of wealth through mergers and takeovers. At the same time cuts to social security, public services and to wages and working conditions have resulted in growing insecurity and disillusionment with the major parties.

People are questioning neoliberal government policies and asking why:

- (a) the government is not representing the people;
- (b) there is increasing inequality;
- (c) the government still supports fossil fuels despite climate change;
- (d) tollways are being built while ignoring the need for public transport;
- (e) \$1 trillion is found for defence but nothing for community health and welfare;
- (f) corporate taxes are reduced while education costs are raised;
- (g) homelessness is increasing;
- (h) the government legislates for lower wages instead of introducing infrastructure to create jobs;
- (i) free trade agreements are being entered into that adversely affect Australian companies and local jobs?

These questions, these actions of capitalist governments reveal the decline and bankruptcy of capitalism, and the deepening of the general crisis of capitalism over the past century. The contradictions have reached breaking point.

Decades of neo-liberalism have resulted in broken promises, growing insecurity, disillusionment and increased attacks on the democratic rights of workers, the organised working class, the unemployed, students, women, refugees, Indigenous people, Muslims and other groups existing at the margins of capitalist society. People want change.

A choice

Australia and other western economies are on the path towards a deep and possibly prolonged recession or depression. In its pursuit for ever-increasing profits and share of wealth capitalism can no longer or is no longer willing to make the concessions of the past. It is on the offensive, in the process of taking back past gains. A battery of anti-democratic laws has been put in place in the name of fighting terrorism. The surveillance and data collection powers of spy and other government agencies have been increased. These laws lie in reserve to suppress any resistance to the status quo.

With capitalism in decay and bourgeois democracy breaking down, the traditional major parties are being challenged in western industrialised nations from the left and the right. In Europe, in countries where the left forces are stronger than in Australia, the struggle has intensified. In the US, there have been many actions against the neo-fascist executive orders of President Trump. In Australia, the left political forces remain weak and divided. Social democracy prevails amongst the working class, although conservatives are winning over larger numbers to their position.

Scientific and technological developments have reached the point where the massive increase in productive power has outstripped the capacity of capitalism to use it.

Why, with such an immense increase in productive power, scientific advances and the possibility of universal abundance, are the living standards of millions of people falling, so many people becoming impoverished, starving to death, dying of curable or preventable diseases?

The capitalist class ownership of the means of production has outlived its progressive role, and has become a barrier to development. It has intensified the basic contradiction of capitalism and deepened the general crisis of capitalism. As Marx pointed out, the cyclical crises were "... always but momentary and forcible solutions of the existing contradictions, with violent

eruptions, which restore the disturbed equilibrium for a while” (*Capital III – Part I*, Cosimo Incorporated, New York 2007, p 292). The destruction of capital that occurs during the crisis results in a higher concentration of capital and the resumption of production on a higher plane, but is not a permanent solution.

The way forward for Australia and its people is neither a neoliberal agenda nor a Keynesian one.

Fight back!

Capitalism is killing humanity and killing the planet. It is a bankrupt and moribund system. Our efforts now must be directed at developing the struggle of the working class and its allies against the capitalist ruling class. This is the only way to ensure the future for humanity; a peaceful and socialist future.

The CPA and the Australian trade union movement currently lack the strength to defeat the forces of the right on their own. However, in unity with other progressive community forces, the extreme right attack on trade union and other democratic rights can be defeated. Medicare, public education, and other public services can be defended and improved. Indigenous rights can be won. The environment can be protected. These and the many other struggles require maximum unity and co-operation between the different progressive sectors to create a powerful force for change.

The CPA has identified three key levels of unity – unity of the left, working class unity and democratic, people’s unity. Each has its own basis and characteristics. However, all forms of unity are interdependent, interconnected and influence one another.

The political left is made up of those who recognise that class struggle is a basic feature of our society and that it must be fought in the interests of the working class and all those oppressed and exploited by capitalism.

The left understands that the capitalist system is the cause of the present economic and social crisis and that it must be challenged and replaced by a socialist system. The left defends and fights for the interests of the workers and does not shrink from the truth that the working class must pursue its interests by struggle against the employers and their political representatives.

The CPA must strive to be the most advanced and resolute of the left forces, one that pushes forward all others, and to do this it must win support for its policies among the working class.

The left is for peace and disarmament, democracy for the people, security and employment, equality for women, for the expansion of the public sector, for indigenous and refugee rights and many other issues.

The united front of the working class means the establishment of unity in action by all sections of the working class in support of their economic and political interests. It is also a political concept, the essence of which is unity of those forces favouring a revolutionary change to socialism with those who, as yet, limit their political concepts to the struggle for reforms.

Most of our social struggles are conducted by workers as they fight for their interests on a variety of issues. They have waged many campaigns and strike struggles for higher wages, for jobs, for a shorter working week, increased compensation payments, safety in industry, increased social services and against the penal provisions of anti-trade union legislation and other issues. Other struggles include those for democratic rights, a peaceful foreign policy, environmental protection and regeneration, taxation reform, a greater say in production, for nationalisation of key industries and so on.

Building the united front of the workers means advancing policies and demands which workers will actively support and which will strengthen the struggle and organisation of the working class. It means seeking the widest support and involvement of all workers to achieve the policies decided on. It means being prepared to work with other political organisations and individuals willing to advance the cause of the working people irrespective of other differences.

The Communist Party is an essential element in the united front. It works unreservedly for the aims of the front and for unity. In assuming leadership in the struggles for peace, national independence, democracy, economic security and progress, the working class must also give specific support to the needs of the other anti-monopoly forces. These may include small businesses, family farmers and other groups exploited by monopoly capital.

Real steps towards unity for change

So far, Australians have been following an international trend to look to the populist right for alternatives to the faltering two-party system. The success of Bob Katter's Australia Party, the Jacqui Lambie Network and Pauline Hanson's One Nation are indicative of this search for alternatives. The emergence of racist organisations such as Reclaim Australia and fascist groups like the United Patriots Front completes a disturbing picture of the political landscape in Australia today.

Ten percent of registered voters did not vote in the 2016 federal election, five percent voted informal and 25 percent voted for other than the two major parties of capital, indicating widespread disillusionment with the major parties and policies.

However, relatively few are coming over to the left at elections or more generally. The Greens have attracted a substantial following and popular vote but have succumbed to pressure to adopt a less progressive stance on several issues including assets testing of the age pension. They are not a working class party and within their ranks are members with ideologies from the left to conservative.

Both internationally and in Australia, major political players, the media monopolies and the education system have carried on an unrelenting campaign against the left, the Communist Party in particular. The electoral system, including the requirements for registration as a party, imposes obstacles to full participation. Since the 1960s, the political landscape to the left of the Australian Labor Party has been crowded out by small Trotskyist and other leftist groups and single issue organisations.

There is an urgent need to build unity on the left with the forces sincerely pursuing the interests of the working class with significant involvement of the CPA. Some examples exist but have not yet established a sufficiently strong presence. Left Unity in Adelaide brings together left groups and individuals on the basis of joint actions and hosting of events. The Community Union Defence League unites left and progressive people, including left trade unionists, concerned about the unrelenting attacks on the trade union movement in Australia.

The formation of united front organisations must remain a top priority for the Party in the coming period. While not primarily an electoral party, the

CPA should continue to participate in elections at all levels of government to present its alternative of pro-people, pro-peace, anti-imperialist and anti-monopoly unity in struggle. These efforts must be carried out in the most professional manner possible and unite the capacities that exist in the Party for such work.

Party education

Marxism-Leninism is a vital tool for the understanding and orientation of Party members as they seek to analyse events taking place around the world and engage in the struggles taking place around them. Knowledge of this theory gives them confidence in the ultimate victory of socialism. Without this theoretical equipment, activity is blind while theory without practice is sterile.

A dedicated group drawn from leaders of the Party at all levels must be developed to ensure the planning and running of political and theoretical education in our Party. This must be one of the principal tasks of the incoming Central Committee.

Aspects of Party education have improved markedly at the national level since the last Congress. Two national Party schools have been conducted per non-Congress year since 2013 and the feedback from participants has been positive. The schools have combined theoretical with practical topics with the objective of building the skills base in Branches for use in their campaigning and Party-building. Participation in group work was another good feature of recent schools.

Efforts to take material used in the national schools to Branches have been undertaken but on a limited scale. There have been visits by Central Committee members to Branches that have included leading classes but, in general, best advantage is not being made of the revival of the national schools. Proposals for the recording or packaging and circulation of the materials from the schools have not eventuated.

In general, much more needs to be done by the incoming Central Committee to ensure that new members receive an education in the basics of Marxism-Leninism and that the knowledge of existing members is deepened. An up-to-date national curriculum for Party education and a package for inducting new members into the Party must be developed.

All Party organisations, from the Central Committee to Branches, should undertake regular study of all subjects – theory, practical work, organisation and administrative skills. Party committees should impress upon members the importance of individual study, which can be undertaken in conjunction with objectives set by Party organisations and linked to life and work.

All Party Branches must provide prospective and new members with a basic introductory education program which includes understanding the Constitution, basic introduction to Marxism-Leninism; Party Program and aims and priorities.

Recruitment

Recruitment is another area of work in the Party that suffers from a lack of a systematic approach. It is a difficult task in the current political climate to recruit members to the Party, to engage and retain them. There is no magic formula for achieving these aims but certain principles can be applied.

Branches must be visible in their localities and industries and present themselves in a professional manner with attractive campaign materials, etc. Party members must lead by example and win respect of those they work with.

Recruitment should be part of the Party's campaigning activity. Relationships with prospective members should be developed patiently. Opportunities to ask suitable persons to join the Party should not be passed up. Too many potential members never joined the ranks of the CPA simply because they were never asked.

Branches should organise and review recruitment efforts. Members should share experiences and methods for recruitment and comrades having problems with their recruitment efforts should be helped in a constructive and supportive manner.

More consideration needs to be given to the use of social media, how we can make the Party more attractive and appealing to younger people.

Youth

The various crises of capitalism and its rising contradictions are having their greatest impact in Australia on its youth. Unemployment, the prevalence of precarious work in de-unionised workplaces, low wages and wages theft, the shortage of affordable housing, the privatisation of health and education and the resultant prohibitive costs, the barrage of individualistic, bourgeois ideology through various media are hitting young people hardest of all. With the rise of automation and the creation of artificial intelligence, unemployment will increase. Unless appropriate measures are taken by a much-needed responsible government, youth are set to suffer the worst consequences of climate change and other environmental threats.

These attacks on our youth have led to an increase in the numbers of people joining after becoming disillusioned with the two-party hegemony of mainstream politics. If the CPA is to secure its future, develop new generations of leadership and extend its influence, larger numbers of youth should be attracted into the ranks of the Party. Recruitment of youth is of urgent strategic importance to the CPA.

At the CPA's 12th National Congress, a resolution was carried encouraging the younger members of the CPA to network by suitable means including social media to discuss how to improve the appeal of the Party to young people. It was thought that the time was not yet right for the re-establishment of a separate youth league.

Party youth have maintained contact through social media, exchanged views and made efforts to recruit younger members since that time but it appears efforts are hampered by a lack of leadership. Activity and discussion have not been developed in a systematic way.

Finance

If the Party is to achieve its goal of having full-time cadres in every major city, more attention will have to be paid at every level to the question of finance and fundraising. Progress in building the Party without the engagement of a team of full-timers will remain too slow for the CPA to step into its vanguard role in the intensifying class struggle. Finance and fundraising are, therefore, strategic questions for the Party.

Branches should consider major fundraising events in the Branch Plans brought to their Annual General Meetings. Preparation, including promotion, should be made with sufficient time for bringing together a successful event. Branches have had success attracting supportive crowds by holding regular, well-hosted events such as the Politics in the Pub held monthly by the Perth Branch.

The Party still has some way to go with the collection of the Party pledge from members. The 12th Party Congress made the payment of a regular financial contribution a condition of membership. This Congress will discuss setting guidelines for the amount of the pledge. It was never envisaged that the pledge would force members into hardship but a bigger income from pledges would make it easier for Branches to meet their quota and for plans for Party growth to be implemented.

Party media

The Party's media encompass all forms of communication of which the *Guardian* is most important. Media include the *Australian Marxist Review*, leaflets we produce, the signage of the Branch/Party, social media.

The *Guardian* remains a central undertaking of the Party. It is hard to conceive a Leninist Party without a central organ educating and organising its members, supporters and more active, progressive workers. It keeps its readership informed of the progress of campaigns and provides analysis of the events, at home and internationally, that shape their lives as workers.

The *Guardian* is an essential tool if we are to be successful in taking the Party to the people.

The *Guardian* should be part of Party life; it must carry direct reportage from struggles our members are involved in. Comrades have a responsibility to report on activities and struggles to the *Guardian* and to send information promoting upcoming activities. One of the ways the Party can support community and trade union organisations is through advertising their events and reporting on their struggles and victories.

A Leninist Party needs a central organ to educate and organise its members, supporters, activists, and progressive workers. Its role is to keep our readers informed of the progress of campaigns and provide analysis of the events, at home and internationally, that shape their lives as workers.

Some time ago, the Party resolved that the work of the *Guardian* should be on the agenda of every Branch meeting and that a member of the Executive should be responsible for matters relating to the Party's weekly paper. The incoming Central Committee shall review the status of these decisions of the Party and take steps to ensure their application.

The Party will need to increase sales of the *Guardian* in the coming period. The sale of the paper is facing mounting challenges.

Branches should put out regular newsletters and/or leaflets in their area of work identifying the Party's policies and views on local or workplace issues.

Each branch should endeavour to have a number of social media sites that reflect what the Party branch is doing and should seek to gather friends or followers to that site as well as being members of others. Clear links need to be made between branch, state, national and other Party social media sites and publications.

While the future of hard copy newspapers is unclear, the Party will do its utmost to retain the weekly paper in printed form. Parties internationally and in Australia that have switched to the provision of online news and analysis have suffered in terms of activity and visibility. In the meantime, the Party must continue to develop its online presence and more fully exploit the possibilities presented by social media.

Signage for stalls should proudly display the Party logo and proclaim that there is a Communist Party in Australia. There is no excuse for amateurish handmade signs when professional looking signs and banners can be bought relatively cheaply.

Priorities for the coming period

Many challenges face the working class and other exploited people at this time of deepening, multi-faceted crisis. There are many urgent calls on the CPA for its participation. There are many events taking place internationally that deserve our solidarity.

Priorities may vary throughout the Party due to local circumstances and the needs of the people with whom Party organisations are working. Nevertheless, it is essential that Party Congress set national priorities for the coming period.

The Party has two major priorities in the coming period – firstly, the defence of trade union and other democratic rights and secondly, the assuring of human survival by participation in peace and environmental protection campaigns.

Our main emphasis in the immediate term must be the defence of democratic rights against their destruction during the consolidation of corporate dictatorship.

This mighty task will require Party organisations to bring together many forces concerned about the erosion and outright loss of rights achieved over decades through struggle. The working class will be the most vital part of the resistance to the offensive of capital and the analysis and guidance of the CPA will be essential.

A part of the process of securing democratic rights will be the participation of the CPA in the breakup of the two-party system in Australia. The CPA is not primarily an electoral party. It is an activist party that believes the major forces for thoroughgoing economic and social change are to be found in workplaces and communities.

The coming period also brings with it the very real danger of war, possibly nuclear war. The Party has a responsibility to work with others to build the peace movement – both local groups and most importantly the new national organisation, the Independent and Peaceful Australia Network (IPAN) – and to build the struggle for the removal of US bases and an end to the US-Australia Alliance. Winning government support for the United Nations treaty to ban nuclear weapons is another priority before us.

Environmental catastrophes threaten massive destruction and even the end of life on planet earth. The Party also has a responsibility to work with others to build the movement to protect all aspects of our environment.

Conclusion

The current global situation, with its dangers and threats of worse to come, does not spare Australia in any way. This is a time of potential for catastrophe but, at the same time, there are great possibilities for the organisation of resistance and a major breakthrough for left and progressive forces.

A great responsibility falls to the Communist Party of Australia. If it fails to strengthen its own ranks and to unite left and progressive forces around a program for radical change in Australia, the forces of the right are certain to pounce and deliver a future of greater oppression, poverty, wars creating masses of refugees, environmental degradation and other threats to the well-being and survival of humanity.

The Communist Party can and must play the major role in presenting a persuasive and attractive alternative to the capitalist path of fascism and war. No other party is equipped to carry out this task. The CPA is the Marxist-Leninist Party in Australia. The work has to be done in the face of opposition from an apparatus with enormous economic and ideological means at its disposal.

Despite the inequality in the contest between the old society and those seeking to establish the new socialist one, we remain confident that the 21st Century will be the century of socialism. No force on earth will stop people struggling for their liberation and no machine devoted to hiding the truth of the failure of capitalism to establish conditions of peace, equality and prosperity can deceive and pacify workers and other exploited people forever. The cracks in the façade are appearing all over the world. The future belongs to socialism. It is our job to now take the Party to the people.

