

Workers' Liberty



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

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After Queensland electoral wipeout for Libs

Abbott on the skids

We need a labour movement fightback

By Riki Lane

With much of their punishing budget attacks on workers blocked in the Senate, the Liberals are reeling after the Queensland electoral tsunami that has swept the ALP back into office.

They have turned on Abbot for his lame performance and inability to read the public mood. The 61-39 win in the spill seems unlikely to save Abbot's position for long.

It is no surprise Abbot is turning to "security" questions, but it seems unlikely he can find a Tampa or a war to whip up nationalistic fervour and rescue his and the government's apparently hopeless position like Howard did in 2001.

Seeing the Liberals get defeated — first in Victoria and then so dramatically in Queensland — is great for labour movement activists' spirits, and opens the way to limiting the damage the government can inflict on working class living conditions and ability to organise. The potential is there for a revival of the labour movement, with a growth in grass roots organising and rebuilding of decayed workplace structures. The struggles that the NUW have been leading show the way.

However, the union bureaucrats may well stuff it up. It is great to see the ACTU organising demonstrations on 4 March — even if it is triggered by the leadership challenge to Dave Oliver, as rumours suggest. But what will be the follow up? Will there be a real organising focus, with a push for rebuilding workplace structures, building solidarity for workers taking industrial action and coordinating action across workplaces and unions? Or will it be more of the same old "keep your powder dry and get the ALP back in at the next election"?

We can't trust the ALP, or just spend the time up to the next election in campaigning to kick out the Libs —



we need to organise a stronger base in the workplaces. Shorten's small target strategy is to say as little as possible and watch the Liberals destroy themselves. Now, given that he sounds like a block of wood every time he opens his mouth, perhaps this is his only hope. But workers need the labour movement to put forward an actual alternative set of ideas that will benefit workers and tackle the big issues like climate change. Necessarily, that will mean taking on the bosses

There is much media commentary on the short term electoral cycle now, with one term governments, and no possibility for "hard reforms" (what we would call counter-reforms, that hurt workers), how voters won't accept broken promises. A lot of this is just blatant capitalist ideology — you can't trust workers to vote against their own interests. But part of it is the lack of an alternative — all major parties are committed to the capitalist system and neo-liberal ideas, even when there are some substantial policy differences (e.g. climate change). The Greens are a partial exception and have done well. Even voting for Palmer's rabble expresses some sort of inchoate dissatisfaction.

We need both a return to grass roots organising in

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the workplaces and the development of a labour movement political force that can put forward an alternative to capitalist neo-liberalism on a mass scale.

The lessons from Victorian and Queensland elections are:

- Attacks on unions and workers' rights are not popular: both Vic and Queensland ALP victories benefited from strong union organising, and their leaders publicly thanked the unions and defended them.
- Neither is privatisation: two elections in a row, Queensland voters have registered huge electoral swings to throw out governments (ALP then LNP) that were promising privatisation of state assets.
- Organising works: grass roots campaigning against the East West Link in Victoria and privatisation in Queensland forced the ALP to shift the policies that they took to the elections.

How Queensland unions forced a political turn

Peter Simpson, Queensland state secretary of the ETU union, spoke to Workers' Liberty about the 31 January 2015 Queensland election result, in which Labor came back to defeat the ruling conservatives after having been reduced to just seven seats in the 89-seat parliament last time round.

1. By all accounts the ETU played a major part in the big swing to Labor in the Queensland state election of 31 January 2015. It's very unusual, especially in recent times, for a union to have a big impact on the outcome of an election. How did the ETU do it?

It wasn't just our Union. Most Unions, white-collar and blue-collar, ran campaigns that were in the interests of their respective memberships. Ours was the biggest, both financially (over \$2 million over three years) and on the ground. We have the advantage of having electricity workers in every area of the State, out west, broadly across the State. Most of these members were involved in the campaign, although we did have some who couldn't be arsed, thankfully they were in the minority.

To put our anti asset sales campaign into perspective, prior to us launching www.not4sale.org.au in 2012 we had spent the previous three years fighting the Labor party over their sell off of \$15B worth of our as-

sets, including our Railways. We lost that fight and punters and workers are paying the price for that.

2. What lessons should other unions draw from that success?

That whilst the Tories will always be able to out-spend us, they cannot mobilise a grass roots campaign. I used to taunt them to run pro privatisation rallies, every time they had a crack at one of our rallies. We have the ability to also engage the community and similar interest groups, the Tories can't touch that. The Union movement and the community used to be one and the same back in the day. The ETU has put a lot of effort into rebuilding those bridges and engaging more with the community, in particular the aboriginal community. I think if other Unions wanted to pick up on that aspect, the community and the movement would be all the better for their efforts.

3. What help, or other response, did you get from other unions for your "Not For Sale" campaign?

We kicked off by ourselves in 2012, other Unions went into the Queensland Council of Unions (QCU) campaign, others did their own thing, some both. We went along for around 12 months before the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU — old Metal Workers Union) came on board. They threw in some money and we teamed up at the first by-election that came along, the Redcliffe by-election, we won with a swing of 17.1%.

From there the MUA (Maritime Union of Australia), Professionals Australia (Engineers Union), the Services Union (white-collar clerical union) came on board. We also gained some financial support from United Voice (used to be the Miscellaneous Workers' Union).

We maintained control of the campaign and spent the majority of the resources but it gave us the opportunity to broaden and strengthen the campaign

4. The "Not For Sale" campaign had an impact, but it's limited to demanding that things not be made worse. Does the union have demands that the new Labor government do things to make things better? You were expelled from the Labor Party in the run-up to the last state election in 2012, in which Labor lost hugely. Do you think you and the union have been able to make Labor learn from lessons from that? How?

Our 2009-12 campaign was against Labor. They lost, ending up with 7 seats in an 89 seat Parliament. Our assets were sold before that election, Labor were annihilated. I was expelled from the party along with one of my officials. We picked up the pieces, were admitted back into the party and have had a say in things ever since. We had one of our shop stewards elected recently

and have four ETU members now in the Parliament.

We most certainly have demands, no future privatisations being the main one, plus looking after workers through good industrial relations and agreements, better workplace health and safety and consultation.

I think we've achieved the bulk of that, more work to do, which is all I've been doing since the election — but I hold high hopes of this Labor Party being vastly different to the one that was kicked to the kerb in 2012

Yes, Labor has learnt alright. The new Premier has acknowledged that asset sales last term were a huge mistake. Whilst most of her new caucus are new, the recycled ones are all on the record as apologising and promising to be a Labor Government (novel, I know) and only take Labour policies to the election, which they ultimately did and won.

I am the most confident I've ever been that this Government will be closest thing to a true "Labour" Government that we will see in my lifetime, and the prospect of that makes me extremely proud.

Revitalising the movement

By Bob Carnegie

On Saturday 31 January the state of Queensland (Australia) underwent another seismic political change. A first-term conservative government which held a record majority 66 seat majority in an 89 seat parliament was defeated by a not very confident Labor Party whose central program was opposing the sale of state-owned assets such as electrical distribution and supply and state-owned ports.

It was truly a momentous defeat for the conservative parties, and has had a direct impact on the damaged authority of the conservative leadership at federal level.

Front and centre in the defeat of the conservatives in Queensland was the brilliant "Our Assets, Not for Sale" campaign waged by the Electrical Trades Union (ETU). The ETU is a union of some 16,000 members; since 2002 it has revitalised itself and has grown some 250% in those 13 years.

What set the "Not for Sale" campaign apart from most union and or political campaigns waged over, say, the last 30 years was that it was a campaign that genuinely engaged the rank and file, their families and communities. Right across the huge land area of Queensland (seven times the area of Great Britain), you would see "Assets Not for Sale" signs in the most remote of spots.

The various state-owned corporations that generate and distribute electricity employ ETU members. These



Bob Carnegie of Workers' Liberty on polling day with ETU activists Gary Rogers and Wendel Maloney



jobs are decently paid and stable, and workers tended to make careers of them. The conservatives' plan to privatise those state-owned assets would have cut a swathe through those workers, severely disrupting their lives, their families, and the communities they live in.

The ETU's campaign kept plugging away day in and day out, week in and week out. It developed a powerful presence and became the single most visible anti-privatisation campaign in the state.

The ETU's state secretary, Peter Simpson, was extremely visible and was out front and centre fighting for not just his union's membership but in general for working people and their families at each and every possible opportunity. No rally was too big or too small for Fellow Worker Simpson or any other leader of the ETU to speak at.

The effectiveness of the ETU's campaign meant that, for all intents and purposes, the Queensland election became a referendum on whether state-owned assets should be sold to retire debt or kept in the hands of the state. The people of Queensland chose the latter — thanks in mainly to a five-year campaign by the ETU.

Greece: blackmail and resistance

As we go to press on 28 February, one-third of Syriza's parliamentary group has voted against the deal with the eurozone finance ministers.

By Theodora Polenta

The "win-win" approach was always illusory: the approach aiming for an agreed solution beneficial for all, from the Greek worker to the Greek banker and investor to the Eurozone, ECB and EU, and the illusions that a "national" negotiating team (including even previous memorandum "enemies") would deliver the desired outcome smoothly.

Driven by the logic of seeking this impossible harmonious agreement, the Syriza leaders:

- Dropped the aim of writing off the majority of the debt with a European Summit similar to the German in 1953;
- froze, instead of disbanding, the official privatisation agency Tapped;
- Made vague and contradictory statements about privatisations, which include Varoufakis supporting selling-off the railways for one euro and the privatisation of Piraeus and Thessaloniki Port Authorities;
- Signalled acceptance of the capitalist golden rules of primary surpluses.

It is the duty of the left inside and outside Syriza to strengthen the party operations and the channels of communications, restore the collective functioning of the party, and make the Syriza party capable of pushing the government "from below" and "from the left".

The Greek government has been the victim of relentless and outright extortion, lacking all the weapons available to counteract it (nationalisation of the banks without compensation under worker's control, control of capital movements, default or pause on debt repayments, being prepared for a Plan B and a forced euro/EU exit). In defence of the Eurogroup statement, the leadership of Syriza and some of its friends argue that the main achievement of the agreement is the gain-

ing of time. One can legitimately do what with the gained time? What exactly will change in the next four months, so that the new negotiation with our partners will take place under better conditions? What will prevent the deterioration of the political, economic and social situation of the country?

The combative working class and the broader anti-memorandum movement should not "sign up" for the government's agreement with the eurozone. Oust now the nationalist and pro-capitalist government ministers!

For a government based on mass organisations of workers, unemployed, neighbourhood community movements, peasants! Self-organisation and self-defence of the people against paramilitary fascist gangs and against police attacks! Nationalisation without compensation of the banks and the strategic pillars of the economy under workers' control and management; control of capital movements! Call for internationalist revolutionary action to the workers of Europe!

- More: www.workersliberty.org/world/greece

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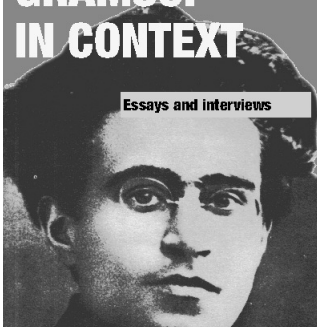
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GRAMSCI IN CONTEXT

Essays and interviews



This is the second, revised, edition of the book *Antonio Gramsci: working-class revolutionary*, published in 2012. It summarises Gramsci's life and thought. It presents the major ideas from, and engages in debate with, Peter Thomas's big study, *The Gramscian Moment*; disputes the "post-Marxist" readings of Gramsci; discusses the relation between Gramsci's ideas and Trotsky's; and, in this new edition, includes a "Gramsci glossary", critically reviewing concepts and terms from Gramsci now widely used or misused in political discourse.

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