

**DEFEND THE RIGHT TO OPPOSE THE RACIST
BRUTALITY OF THE AUSTRALIAN RICH PEOPLE'S STATE!**



MUA flags fly proudly outside the Sydney District Court at the Sydney "Free Lex Wotton" rally that coincided with Lex's sentencing hearing in Townsville on November 7 last year.

Aboriginal leader Lex Wotton was jailed by a racist court in Brisbane on October 24. He was outrageously convicted on a charge of "riot with destruction." Wotton had been among those singled out by the state following a mass uprising by the Palm Island community against racist violence after police bashed to death Aboriginal man Mulrunji Doomadgee.

When Palm Island hero, Lex Wotton, first entered the Brisbane court house on October 6 at the start of his trial (as described by the *Sunshine Coast Daily*) "a large and vocal contingent of protesters waving placards and banners, gathered outside the district court on Monday morning to support Wotton." This included a contingent of supporters from Sydney who travelled on a bus donated by the MUA Sydney Branch.

Now, following Wotton's imprisonment, all opponents of racism and exploitation and all proud trade unionists must continue to energetically campaign for his immediate freedom and must continue to unreservedly



Aboriginal activist Jenny Munro addresses the November 7 rally in Sydney.

uphold the 2004 Palm Island struggle as a 100% justified resistance.

Below is a reprint of a leaflet distributed in Brisbane by Trotskyist Platform supporters over the course of Lex's trial.

October 4 - In two days time there will begin the most important political case in this country in at least the last 20 years. That is why, today, Aboriginal people, leftists, "ethnic" peoples and trade unionists from all over the country are converging on Brisbane. Many of us know that by protesting in defence of Lex Wotton we are also defending the right to mass opposition against the racist brutality of the Australian state – the very same state that committed genocide against Aboriginal people.

That Lex Wotton is being persecuted at all shows how racist this country is. The cop who bashed Mulrunji to death and the police who covered up for the killer cop were allowed to go totally free. Only heroic Aboriginal people who resisted the atrocity are being persecuted.

The policeman, Chris Hurley, who killed Mulrunji had even earlier been involved in racist brutality against Aboriginal people on Palm Island. But racist police harassment and violence against black people does not just happen in Palm Island. It occurs from Townsville to Moree to Redfern, from Perth to Alice Springs to La Perouse.

Not a single policeman has ever been jailed over an Aboriginal death in custody. No one was charged over the state murder of Carl Woods, of TJ Hickey, of Daniel Yock, of Eddie Murray. There have been over 500 black deaths in state custody in the last 27 years. That means about one in 800 indigenous people dying in custody. At this rate, if the indigenous population in Australia was the same as that of the whole population of China, the number of black deaths in custody in Australia would be equal to 1.3 million people. That is the scale of the genocide that is happening in "democratic" capitalist Australia. And

Australia's mainstream media and Kevin Rudd still have the gall to attack pro-communist China over supposed "human rights" problems there!

100% JUSTIFIED

The case of Lex Wotton is not only a story of persecution, it is a story of defiance. The 2004 Palm Island resistance involved 10% of the entire island's population. It had to be inspired by the heroic Redfern resistance just nine months earlier that responded to the racist police murder of TJ Hickey. It was because of the ongoing political impact of the Palm resistance that the cop Hurley even had to face court. But the blatant way in which Hurley was let off proved not only how unreformably racist and unjust the current Australian legal system is but also proved how correct it was for the Palm Island resistance to defy the cops and courts.

The audacity of the Palm Island and Redfern struggles has also been seen at certain times in the powerful workers movement. In mid-April 1998 during the waterfront struggle, contingents of thousands of trade unionists mobilized at Melbourne's Swanston Dock to physically face down a huge cop formation that had been deployed to smash the picket line. All these resistance struggles show the type of defiance of the oppressor's state that is needed to win not only justice for black people but equality for all exploited people. Because, let's face it, justice is not going to come through the current Australian legal system. The scales of this country's "justice" system are weighted against working class and non-white people in general. And they are especially set up against Aboriginal people. This is the lesson that has been taught in the course of hard fought struggles, outrageous court rulings, promises of justice and disappointment after bitter disappointment.

In the mid-1980s, many anti-racists hoped that horrific state killings in custody would stop when a Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody was held. But when the Royal Commission handed down its findings in 1991 it was true to form for a state inquiry – it expressed the interests of the ruling elite whose state was funding and overseeing the "independent" Commission. The Royal Commission whitewashed the racist state killings of black people in custody. Not a single criminal proceeding was recommended against police or prison officers. Since then, as before, state inquiries into Aboriginal deaths in custody have all been whitewashes. The Coroners Inquest into the police killing of TJ Hickey in Redfern was a sham. And so was the police "investigation" into Mulrunji's death! That is after all what sparked the Palm Island resistance struggle.

Justice is not going to come through Australia's parliaments either. Look at what is happening now. Kevin Rudd is proving to be another Johnny Howard -

extending the racist welfare restrictions from the Northern Territory to parts of Queensland and beyond. Labor minister Peter Garrett has threatened to extend the Intervention to La Perouse and inevitably Redfern. Meanwhile, Rudd is cranking up the racist Australian military's participation in the war on the people of Afghanistan. And the new ALP government is determined to maintain many aspects of Howard's hated Workchoices, including anti-strike laws and restrictions on union workplace access.

Whether it is Howard or Rudd in office, the same small number of people hold all the wealth as before, all the banks, mines and industry; and meanwhile the state machinery has been designed to serve these elites and these elites alone. This means that even when parliaments pass nominally progressive laws they may not be of much use to the masses. Take, for example, the Racial Discrimination Act (RDA.) Now certainly when this Act was scrapped by Howard it showed how unashamedly racist his government was. But the truth is that even when the RDA existed it provided little protection to those suffering racist persecution. For the Australian courts and legal system which interpret and implement such acts of parliament are themselves structurally racist and hostile to the poor. It is notable, then, that the first person charged under Western Australia's race hate laws (supposedly brought in to deal with white supremacist groups) was not an extreme redneck. No, it was actually a 15 year-old Aboriginal girl, apparently because she responded to racist baiting by a white adult.

INSPIRATIONAL

Knowing that they have the state machine operating for them, the ruling class always seeks to ensure that the inevitable opposition to their rule gets redirected into "official" protest channels. They want the boiling anger of the masses piped into the parliamentary and judicial chambers where it can then be contained and de-energised. What the ruling class fears most is if mass grievances explode free from these confines. That is why they hate struggles like the Redfern and Palm Island resistances and fear so much the inspirational effect that these struggles have on all of the oppressed. And that is why they want to jail Lex Wotton. The ruling class wants to show the masses that this is what will happen to you if you join struggles that burst free from the institutional channels laid out by them. But proud trade unionists and anti-racists must send the opposite message. We must prove to all potential fighters against racism and exploitation that anyone who faces persecution in connection with staunch resistance will never be alone. The masses will defend them. That is why it is so crucial to fight for all the charges to be dropped against Lex Wotton.



Maritime Union of Australia Sydney Branch Secretary Warren Smith and Assistant Secretary Paul McAleer with Lex Wotton at a function for Lex organised by the MUA on Nov 7, 2007. "One year later the union's support for the Palm Island hero was still strong as they organised a stopwork across Sydney wharves on November 7 to support him." "We are utterly committed to supporting those in the community who have their voices suppressed, and in this case supporting those in which the system and laws that govern Australia allow a death in custody to go unpunished yet a response to this crime has the full weight of the law brought against it," Mr Smith declared on the MUA website. (Photo from MUA website.)

FURTHER DEEPENING TRADE UNION SUPPORT FOR THE CAMPAIGN

We cannot expect that justice for Lex Wotton will be achieved by simply leaving the courts to run their "natural course." Left to its own devices, Australia's legal system does not produce outcomes in the interests of the masses in major political cases. All the events since Mulrunji's killing have proven this. Let us here especially remember what happened when the killer cop Hurley was finally put on trial. Mass protests in the two years that followed the Palm resistance had finally forced the authorities to make Hurley face court. But once it was announced that Hurley was to go to trial, the on-the-streets protests stopped. Many anti-racists were hoping that justice would be achieved if the legal system was allowed to "follow its natural course." But the racist legal system in the end did "follow its natural course" by letting the killer cop off in a sham of a trial. Feeling that they had successfully dissipated the protest movement over Mulrunji's killing, the racist authorities felt confident that they could get away with letting their thug in blue walk free.

Learning this bitter lesson, we must now be doubly sure that we will only win justice for Lex Wotton through mass mobilisation. And we need these mobilisations to include the power of the organized working class. The

forthright solidarity for Lex Wotton that the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) Sydney Branch is giving is important. For the workers movement itself this stance is vital because the same state that persecutes those who resist racism is the very same one that represses those trade unionists that take a strong stand in defence of workers rights. For example, currently, Victorian CFMEU construction union official, Noel Washington, is facing up to 6 months in jail simply for refusing to divulge the contents of a discussion at a union meeting to a union-busting federal authority, the Australian Building and Construction Commission (ABCC.)

DEFEND NOEL WASHINGTON – DEFEND LEX WOTTON!

Now, to be able to further mobilise union support for Lex Wotton, some political issues have to be urgently thrashed out within the workers unions themselves. One key question is the attitude that the real workers unions should take to the police so-called "union." The Queensland Police "Union" has been leading the charge to both support the killer cop Hurley and to persecute the anti-racist hero Lex Wotton. This can confuse some in the real workers unions who want to support Lex Wotton but who, while seeing the Police "Union" as racist, still see the Police "Union" as some sort of trade union that should therefore not be opposed. That is why savvy worker activists must make clear that the Police "Union" is not any sort of workers union at all because police in Australia are not workers – they are in fact the enforcers of the subjugation of workers and of all the oppressed. Everywhere these police so-called "unions" should be ejected from the real trade unions. And the real workers unions should never hold back their struggle in deference to these cop associations.

LET'S CONTINUE THIS STRUGGLE UNTIL VICTORY IS ACHIEVED

Slightly aside from the question of being in a common fight against the same oppressor, there is another important reason for the union movement to be in the forefront of the campaign to defend Lex Wotton. And that is the following point. By defending someone persecuted over the Palm Island resistance, the unions are educating themselves about the type of staunch resistance that the union movement itself must wage much more of. And by being involved in defending people like Lex Wotton and in working together with the Aboriginal activists who have been in the forefront of defending him, the courage and intellectual strength of the Aboriginal resistance will help to inspire and train staunch trade unionists of all colours.

See through to victory the mass struggle to have the charges dropped against Lex Wotton! Defend the right to oppose racist state brutality! Fight for justice for Mulrunji, TJ Hickey and all victims of Australian racist state violence! •