

# STOP ATTACKS ON INDIAN & CHINESE STUDENTS

INDIANS, LEBANESE, CHINESE, TRADE UNIONISTS & ALL ANTI-RACISTS UNITE  
**BUILD GRASSROOTS, ANTI-RACIST PATROLS!**



*31 May 2009, Melbourne: Indian students and their allies take a stand against racist attacks. Thousands of protesters staged a sit in at a busy city intersection.*

**11 June 2009 - Indian students in Australia are desperate. Hundreds of them have been assaulted in recent times. In a small number of cases the attacks have been purely about robberies but mostly, the anti-Indian violence has been motivated by racism. The perpetrators have mainly been white supremacists. In a tiny percentage of cases, hoodlums from other ethnic minorities have also been responsible.**

Bashings are becoming more widespread by the day. Four days ago, Indian student Kamal Jit was beaten unconscious by two racists as he walked to his home in an outer Melbourne suburb. Just two weeks earlier, the 23 year-old was pelted with eggs by masked men after getting off a train at St Albans. In late May, a racist gang assaulted four Indian students at a party in Melbourne and told them that they should go back to India. One of the four Indians, Shraavan Kumar Theertala was in a coma fighting for his life after the racists stabbed him with a screwdriver. Meanwhile in Sydney's Western suburbs, 25 year-old Hospitality graduate Rajesh Kumar received serious burns after a petrol bomb was hurled through the window of his Harris Park home.

What is infuriating Indian students the most is the indifference of the police to these racist assaults. Indian students note that because they are dark-skinned victims of violence, police show little interest in pursuing matters. Furthermore, the police and federal and state politicians from the Labor and Liberal parties are denying the racist character of these attacks. This is ridiculous! In many cases, Indians who have been assaulted have not even been robbed. And often the physical violence against them has been accompanied by racist verbal abuse. Yet police spokesman, Inspector Mahony, claimed that, "While Victoria Police acknowledges the Indian community are over-represented as victims, there is no evidence to support [the claim that] Indians are targeted or vilified because of their ethnicity." In February, this lying policeman outraged Indian students even further when he suggested that they should not talk loudly in their native language in public or travel around with items such as mp3 players on display. So the victims of racist violence are to be blamed for their own victimisation! Worse still when Indian students and their anti-racist supporters have protested against the attacks, they have faced intimidation and sometimes sheer brutality from the police. On May 31 a spirited, thousands strong protest against racist violence in Melbourne was violently dispersed by police. The cops arrested 18 Indian students.

The stance taken by the police and mainstream politicians has not gone unnoticed by the Indian youth. Far from it! At a protest, one Indian student concisely expressed to a Trotskyist Platform representative the opinion that the youth have of the Australian police: "The police are shit heads."

However, the response of police to the anti-Indian attacks is hardly a shock. Australia's police are the upholders of a racist social order. It is worth here recalling the reaction of NSW Police to the terrifying rampage this "Australia Day" by hundreds of white youth at Manly Beach. It was then that youth of Anglo-Celtic appearance violently attacked and threatened anyone who was not white, especially targeting people of East Asian ethnicity. One 18 year-old Asian female had to be treated by Ambulance workers after the angry white mob attacked the car she was in. Among the others assaulted were a Sikh Indian taxi driver and an Asian shopkeeper. Yet police arrested just four of the rednecks and of these only one was charged - and not for violent racist attacks but for ... assaulting police! Incredibly, Commander Dave Darcy from Manly Local Area Command claimed that the rampaging youth were no worse than a rowdy "old cricket crowd." Darcy added: "I personally gave them a good looking over, just assessing them. There was an intensity there that no doubt would be confronting to some but at that stage they hadn't crossed the threshold of criminality." Yet police consider Indian students peacefully protesting against racist violence to have "crossed the threshold of criminality"!

Just like with today's anti-Indian attacks, police (and also Manly mayor Jean Hay) worked overtime to cover up the racist character of the Manly Beach riot. Commander

Darcy insisted that, "To suggest that there were racial overtones there is, I think, way over the top." Way over the top! The mob was marching with signs saying "F\_\_k-off we're full" and chanting "lets go f\_\_k with these Lebs" and "If you're white and you know it clap your hands"!

Those least likely to get police protection from redneck violence in this country are Aboriginal people. Typical of what they face was illustrated by an incident that occurred one night in October 2006 in the NSW Far South Coast town of Bermagui. Three cars filled with armed white racists drove to the houses of two

Aboriginal families and while shouting racist abuse attacked the houses. Aboriginal men in the homes fought back while a female elder called the police (*The Age*, 11 March 2008.) However, when police arrived they not only allowed the racist attackers to leave but later in the day charged the five Aboriginal people who had gone to the police station to relate the events of that night! With such encouragement from the establishment, it is little wonder that a couple of years later, white racists again attacked one of the same Aboriginal families – the Campbells - that had been earlier targeted.

Perhaps the starkest example of the inherently racist nature of the Australian "justice" system was seen in the events that surrounded the November 2004 death of Aboriginal man Mulrunji Doomadgee in a police cell in Palm Island, Queensland. Doomadgee was bashed to death by a racist white cop, Senior-Sergeant Chris Hurley soon after he had been arrested for simply swearing. But a coroner's inquiry whitewashed this murder as an "accident." In response to this terrible injustice and to decades of police violence, 400 Aboriginal people waged a powerful demonstration during which the symbols of racist brutality on Palm Island – the police station and courthouse – ended up being damaged. Even though this Aboriginal struggle caused no physical harm to any persons, several of the heroic Aboriginal protesters were arrested and given jail terms. The leading spokesman for the Aboriginal resistance, Lex Wotton, is still doing a 6 year sentence. Yet the murdering racist policeman ended up walking away free and was even granted over \$100,000 compensation!

That is why, while it may be sometimes necessary for international students to call police in response to individual attacks on them, it is absolutely useless to have an overall



**June 2009:** Indian student Sravan Kumar Theerthala in a critical condition at Royal Melbourne Hospital. Kumar had been stabbed with a screwdriver by racists at a party in Melbourne.

strategy that looks to the Australian police and legal system to protect Indians from racist attacks. What is needed, instead, is for anti-racists of all colours to join together to form defence squads to patrol areas where attacks on Indians have been most prevalent. Courageously, Indian students in Melbourne have already organised patrols at train stations where racist assaults have been common. Four days ago, Indian youth at St Albans carried out a strong anti-racist act. In response to a bigot yelling to the Indians, "You are black, You don't belong here. Go away from our country," the Indians took firm action. (*The Times of India*, June 9.) This resulted in the racist leaving the scene in a lesser physical condition than he was in prior to unleashing his vile tirade. A car belonging to a person who has committed racist assaults on Indians was also torched.

However, it is essential that the patrols become multiracial in composition. This will enable the self-defence efforts to win broader community support and will help to ensure that the squads remain focussed on a clear anti-racist perspective rather than becoming vigilantes or an ethnic-based force. This has become especially vital because in Harris Park (unlike in Melbourne and other parts of Sydney) the anti-racist protests of Indians has in the last few days started to degenerate into hostility – encouraged by Murdoch's *Daily Telegraph* newspaper – against another victimised ethnic group. That is why we insist that activists from other communities facing victimisation – Lebanese, Aboriginal, Chinese etc – and anti-racist whites be energetically recruited into the anti-racist squads. **Let's together stand against all racist violence and all harassment by white supremacists!**

A problem that the current patrols in Melbourne are facing is that they are being opposed by the establishment. The police have been dispersing the patrollers. Meanwhile, prime minister Kevin Rudd has hysterically denounced the self-defence efforts, almost equating them with the racist violence. In the face of such opposition, the anti-racist patrols need a social force strong enough to make the state stand aside so that the squads can carry out their tasks. This social force is Australia's trade union movement. Union activists must organise contingents of union members to join the patrols. The police are quite happy to bully Indian students on patrol but they are less likely to mess around with a contingent of trade unionists – as that could trigger strike action in response. Furthermore, because trade unions bring together workers of all different ethnicities, they will help to ensure that the defence squads solidify on an unambiguously anti-racist program.

## **AUSTRALIA: A VERY RACIST COUNTRY**

The wave of attacks has hit not only Indian students but other South Asians. A group of students from Sri Lanka had the windows of their house in Northern Canberra smashed by three men hurling racist insults. One of the students, Dijula Wijesuriya was threatened



**Cronulla, Sydney, December 2005:** Notorious white supremacist riot against Middle Eastern and other non-white people. Lebanese, Indians, East Asians and anti-racist whites should unite in trade-union centred mobilisations against racist violence. Make the beaches safe for people of all colours!

with a knife by an attacker demanding “get out of our streets” (*The Hindu*, 11 June.) In the meantime, Chinese people in the tertiary education sector continue to face violent racist attacks as well. In October 2007 in Western Australia, an Australian man fatally choked a 22 year-old Chinese student Jiao Dan and left her to die on a Perth roadside. Then in January 2008, a university researcher of Chinese origin, Zhongjun Cao, was bashed to death in Melbourne while walking home from Victorian University. Cao’s killer, who pleaded guilty to the crime, heads a racist gang. The murderer and his gang had gone out the night they killed Cao on a “curry bashing” expedition against Indian students and anyone of Asian appearance. They murdered Cao and also bashed a Mauritian man Binesh Mosaheb whom they mistook for an Indian.

Racist violence and degradation in this country targets not only international students but non-white residents living here. Many first and second-generation Indians, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, Tamils, Sinhalese and Fijian Indians have gone through a range of humiliating experiences. At the lowest level, this takes the form of a “mate” mimicking in a mocking manner the way that the “mate” thinks their accent should sound ... and then worse still slapping the victim of his “joke” on the back if the victim agrees to swallow their pride and “laugh” along with the racist perpetrator. Then there is the put down of being called not by one’s real name but by patronising nicknames like “Vindaloo” and

“Chocolate Drop.” At the higher end of verbal abuse come the openly hostile taunts like “black shit.” And then there is the outright intimidation and violence.

Police have tried to whitewash the racist character of many of the recent attacks by “explaining” them away as a result of the “soft” character of South Asians. This is a complete lie proven by the fact that white racist violence not only targets South Asians. In December 2005, up to 10,000 howling white racists went on a rampage at Cronulla Beach that targeted, in particular, Middle Eastern people. The rednecks smashed several Lebanese youth over the head with beer bottles and also assaulted other non-white people including some Bangladeshi students and a mixed Aboriginal-Lebanese boy. Meanwhile, the first peoples of this land, the Aboriginal people, face a terrifyingly extreme level of racist oppression.

In Australia, for some racism has grown to the status of a national sport. Ocker, Aussie culture at its worst involves groups of men sitting in a pub boasting about how they have abused a non-white person .... and about how they have ill-treated their wives or girlfriends. To some in this country, to be racist is a badge of honour, a sign of masculinity. This “culture” is so overwhelming that even individuals from victimised ethnic groups express racist contempt for other victimised communities in order to seek “acceptance” in the mainstream.

So why is Australia so racist? Firstly, it is important to understand that racism exists in all capitalist countries. For in societies where a small number of capitalist exploiters make big profits out of the toil of workers, the rich elite must ensure that the masses do not unite against them and they do this by dividing the masses with racism. At the workplace level, cunning bosses manipulate racial divisions to prevent workers from joining together to stand up to exploitation. But racism is also fostered right from the top of capitalist governments. After the terrible September 2001 terror attacks in the U.S., the capitalist rulers throughout the Western countries seized a chance to channel the frustrations of poor white people away from them and on to Muslim and Arab people. They declared a racist “war on terror.” Although Middle Eastern people have been the main victims of this racist campaign, South Asian people have also been heavily targeted. To idiot redneck racists anyone from the Indian subcontinent is a “Muslim.”

Meanwhile, today, Labor’s Kevin Rudd is taking off from where the Liberals’ John Howard left off on the issue of refugees. In mid-April, Rudd went on a fanatical-sounding tirade on the issue: “People smugglers are engaged in the world’s most evil trade and they should all rot in jail because they represent the absolute scum of the earth” (*Weekend Australian*, 18-19 April.) This extreme language against people smugglers is code for xenophobic hostility to people “breaching” Australia’s borders. This was proven by the rest of Rudd’s rant: “... this Government is absolutely committed to dedicating all

resources necessary to fight the fight against people smugglers, to maintain a hardline, tough and targeted strategy in maintaining this country's border protection." Needless to say, such rhetoric from the top is encouraging anti-immigrant sentiments amongst the population.

As economic woes deepen and unemployment grows, the ruling class has intensified its scapegoating of ethnic minorities. On March 16, the Rudd government fed into the myth that immigration causes unemployment by, with great fanfare, announcing that it was moving to "protect local jobs" by slashing the skilled migration intake. Immigration minister Chris Evans declared that, "We don't want people coming in who are going to compete with Australians for limited jobs" (Radio Australia website, 16 March.) Such divisive politics is hardly confined to Australia. It is happening all over Europe too. The recent European Union elections showed that blaming non-white minorities for the effects of the economic crisis has been accompanied by a frightening resurgence of fascist parties from Britain to Netherlands to Hungary to Austria.

Nevertheless, even amongst capitalist countries, Australia is particularly racist. This a product of both history and geography. First the history. Capitalist Australia was formed out of the brutal dispossession and near genocide of the indigenous Aboriginal people. These crimes have stained the state institutions and indeed the whole "culture" of this country. And because these crimes have never been redressed and continue in different form today and because Aboriginal people have never been granted justice, the suffocating stench of racism continues to stink in almost every corner of Australian society.

Secondly, there is Australia's geography. Australia is a white dominated country but unlike the European countries, it is not mostly neighboured by other white countries but instead by Asian countries with huge non-white populations. White racism in Australia thus takes on a particularly fearful and therefore vicious nature. Furthermore, the average standard of living in Australia is much higher than in its Asian and Pacific neighbours. On the one hand, this is because of this country's enormous land and mineral resources and a result of the looting of poorer countries by Australian-owned "multinational" corporations (like Rio Tinto.) On the other hand the Southern Asian and Pacific neighbours have been handicapped by the legacy of European and Australian colonial domination and the continued neoconial oppression by rich capitalist powers. The wealth gap thus created between Australia and its Asia-Pacific neighbours produces a Mr Scrooge-like effect in this country. Those people here who are short-sighted think, quite mistakenly, that they can maintain a better standard of living if they jealously keep out poorer darker-skinned people in the region from gaining any access to the wealth of this country. Inevitably, such an outlook is accompanied by anti-Asian racism.

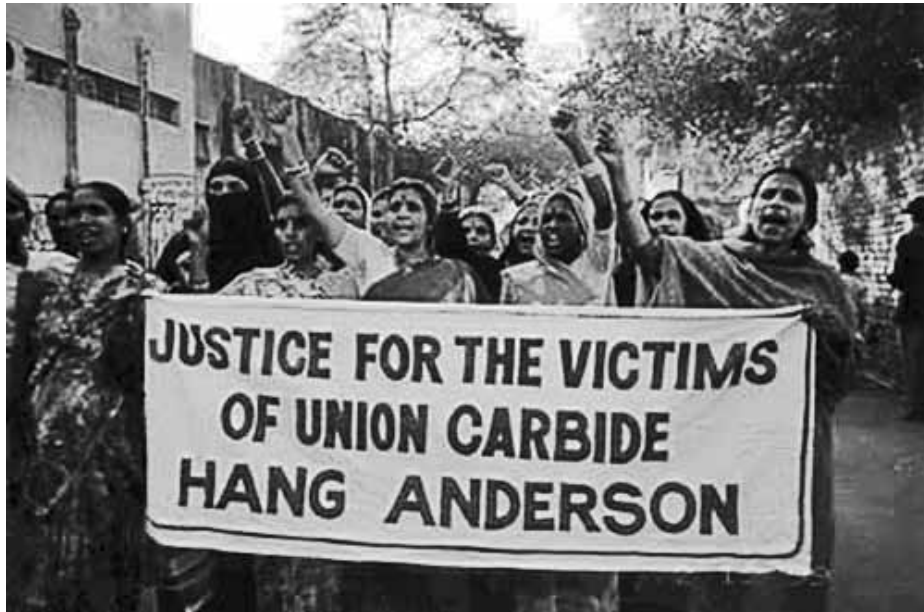
However, anti-Asian racism is a double-edged sword for the Australian ruling class. Asian countries are Australia's biggest trading partners. It is bleedingly obvious that the only reason that Australia's economy has thus far not deteriorated as quickly as its counterparts is that it is being held up by its exports to China, whose socialistic state-owned enterprises continue to power through the global financial crisis. White Australian chauvinism has always threatened to harm Australia's economic relationships with Asian countries. Most immediately, the exposure of racist attacks on Indian students immediately endangers Australia's international student market which has now become this country's third biggest export market. Australian universities gain huge revenues by charging the 430,000 international students who study here each year exorbitant fees. There are over 90,000 students from India alone paying fees here.

Thus there is division within the ruling class about what to do about the attacks on Indian students. Some within the establishment have reproached the weak response of the Rudd Labor government to the attacks, worrying that it is damaging Australia-India relations. Australian ruling class strategists have long sought to bring capitalist India into the tripartite U.S./Australia/Japan military alliance against socialistic China and North Korea. Now they fear that these plans will be impeded by the mass outrage in India over Australia's racist bashings. This is why even foreign affairs editor for *The Australian*, Greg Sheridan, a noted right-wing apologist for Aussie racism, has criticised the federal government's response.

However, the Australian capitalist rulers are in a bind. Even though the attacks on Indian students is in some ways harmful to the ruling class' economic and political interests, to acknowledge the depth of racism in Australian society would make it harder for Australian imperialism to use the pretext of "human rights" to throw its weight around the Asia-Pacific region. Furthermore, the capitalist class is reluctant to challenge racism because it actually needs racism in order to divert the anger of the masses that it exploits away from itself and on to racial minorities. Consequently, the bulk of the establishment, including the Rudd regime, has simply denied outright the racist character of the attacks on Indian students. Typical was the statement made by deputy prime minister Julia Gillard during an ABC Radio interview on June 11. Gillard stated that, "our advice from police is that these are not racially based crimes.... I take the advice of the police" (*Ministers Media Centre*.) Rudd for his part had the gall to claim that Australia is one of the safest countries in the world for international students and that the attacks on Indian students are "just a regrettable fact of urban life."

## **NEOCOLONIAL SUBJUGATION OF INDIA**

All the lies coming from the mouths of Rudd and Gillard have only infuriated Indian students even more. So has the attempt by Rudd and the Australian media to downplay



*India: Victims of the 1984 Bhopal gas disaster shout slogans against American corporation Union Carbide. December 2, 2009 marked the 25th anniversary of the Bhopal accident which killed tens of thousands of Indian people. Union Carbide's criminal slashing of safety precautions at its Bhopal chemical plant led to the calamity. The company and its chairman Warren Anderson later refused to grant more than a pittance in compensation. Callous indifference to local people shown by the American corporation illustrates how India remains a semi-colony subjugated by the rich Western capitalist powers.*

the significance of the racist attacks by pointing to violence in India. In India, there is indeed terrible oppression and ethnic violence. However, these problems have much to do with the fact that India itself is downtrodden by the ruling classes of the rich imperialist countries – including Australia. You see although India is a big country and nominally independent, it is in practice a semicolon of the Western powers. Indian workers are exploited not only by greedy local Indian capitalists but by the Western owners of multinational corporations operating there. Furthermore, through their control of world markets, corporate thugs from the rich countries are able to manipulate the prices that agricultural toilers from India and other “Third World” countries can get for their produce.

Nothing shows how the rich imperialists treat India more starkly than those hideous events that occurred in the Indian city of Bhopal – events that will soon have their 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary. On December 2, 1984 a massive leak of toxic gases from a Bhopal pesticide plant owned by American corporation Union Carbide (now owned by Dow Chemical Company) killed between 10,000 to 30,000 Indians within 72 hours and caused the subsequent death of at least another 25,000 people. This, the worst industrial disaster in human history, resulted from the greed of the American corporation and its criminal

indifference to the welfare of the Indian people. A key cause of the accident was Union Carbide's decision to manufacture the pesticide carbaryl through the production of the intermediate methyl isocyanate (MIC), a method that it knew was more dangerous - but more profitable for it - than the other commonly used process for manufacturing the pesticide. Union Carbide then callously decided to place what it knew was a dangerous plant close to a densely populated area. Then to cut costs and boost profit margins, it deliberately omitted or ran down safety systems. Union Carbide chose to only have one manual back-up system and not the four-stage system used in the U.S. To save refrigeration costs, it kept the volatile MIC at a much higher temperature than was safe. The company then slashed the number of skilled workers at the plant. All this led to a series of serious precursor accidents and MIC leaks; as well as warnings from many of an impending disaster. But Union Carbide ignored all this. **By the time of the accident, 70% of the plant's employees had been fined by the bosses for refusing to deviate from proper safety procedures when pressurized to do so by the management.** After the disaster occurred, the American corporate owners coughed up a pitiful 0.13% of the compensation called for by the Indian government! In any case, very little of this money actually ended up with the survivors. Meanwhile, Union Carbide CEO, Warren Anderson, who is wanted by Bhopal authorities for manslaughter has been protected from extradition to India by the U.S. government; while the Indian rulers treacherously show little resolve in demanding extradition being more interested in appeasing foreign investors. On August 2006, a U.S. court dismissed any remaining compensation claims against Union Carbide by Indian plaintiffs. In the meantime, the horrific consequences of this avoidable, man-made disaster such as the genetic deformities that make victims out of subsequent generations continue to this day.

The Indian masses not only suffer under such neocolonial exploitation but they are still haunted by the legacy of direct British rule. The British colonial rulers reinforced almost every oppressive institution in Indian society – from the caste system to feudal land ownership – in order to find points of support for their rule from within the local elite. They also whipped up religious hatreds – especially between Hindus and Muslims – in order to first “divide and conquer” and then to weaken their former colonial subjects once they decided that they had to move away from direct colonial rule. The extreme inequalities and ethnic riots in India – like the 2002 state-sanctioned mob killings of between 1,000 to 2,000 Muslim minority people in Gujarat province - are a product of not only India's cruel capitalist rulers but a result of the country's legacy of colonial oppression and its continued subjugation by Western powers. Thus, the Australian rulers' attempts to turn the spotlight away from the racist attacks in Australia by pointing to horrors in India are extremely cynical indeed.

## Indian Media Nails the Racist Character of the Australian Police



A cartoon that appeared in Delhi's Mail Today newspaper in the wake of the murder of Indian graduate student Nitin Garg who was stabbed to death in Melbourne on his way to work on January 2. Only a week later another man of South Asian origin was set ablaze by four attackers in Melbourne's northwest after dropping his wife home after dinner and parking his car in a nearby street. The Mail Today reported that according to the Victoria Police's own figures the number of reported attacks in Melbourne on people of Indian origin rose by more than a third between the years 2007 and 2008 alone.

### **DON'T LOOK TO HEAVIER POLICING TO STOP RACIST ATTACKS IN AUSTRALIA!**

It does not take a genius to realise that a state that is incapable of even acknowledging that racist violence exists is incapable of stopping such racist violence. Far from it! Indeed, the Australian police forces and the judiciary are themselves permeated with the White Australia racist attitudes that pervade throughout every institution of this society. But Australian police racism is more than simply a product of police officers residing in a bigoted society. In countries like Australia, the police, magistrates and judges are recruited, trained and promoted to enforce the capitalist social system. That means that their role is to maintain an "order" in which the rich corporate owners can live a high life while the masses that they exploit struggle to get by. This police role includes not only attacking trade union picket lines and anti-war demonstrations but also involves enforcing racist policies since it is through such policies that the capitalist elite is able to distract the masses that they exploit. Thus on the "front lines" of implementing racist decrees, police naturally develop attitudes that are **more** racist than the rest of the community. Racist police in Australia regularly harass, threaten and sometimes assault working class youth of Asian, African, Islander and Middle Eastern backgrounds. To Aboriginal people, the

approach of police officers often signals the start of a strip search, false arrest, bashing or worse. Over 500 Aboriginal people have died in state custody in the last 27 years, many simply murdered by redneck police or prison guards. One of the most notorious cases occurred in February 2004 in Sydney. Then an innocent 17 year-old Aboriginal youth riding his bicycle, TJ Hickey, was chased through the streets of Redfern by police vehicles and then killed by racist police who rammed his bicycle with their van.

Given that police are the biggest single perpetrators of racist violence, it is worse than useless to look to them as the force that will stop racist attacks on international students. Yet out of desperation some Indian student associations have called for a bigger police presence. Meanwhile, on June 4-5 a meeting of the elite Deputy and Pro Vice Chancellors (International) from Australian Universities called for (alongside some useful demands like travel concessions for international students) "increased visibility of police and security officers" in areas frequented by international students. Governments have indeed increased policing in order to quell outrage about the racist attacks. In good part, a motive for this move is to dampen the energy of students who have been driven to organise self-defence squads. The authorities fear such mobilizations like a pandemic. In a society of haves and have-nots, the ruling class fears any self-mobilisation that fights for justice. If anti-racists take the law into their own hands to stop racist attacks on Indian students what will be next they say: Aboriginal people and trade unionists organizing patrols to stop police attacks on black communities? Poor people lacking housing taking over unused office space and the spare rooms of extravagant mansions? Workers occupying factories to stop job cuts?

The small number of cases in the short term where the greater police presence may prevent an attack is outweighed by the extra attacks that will be caused by the police shutting down the self-defence patrols. In the longer term greater policing will be even more harmful. For starters, since police and rail security are notorious for persecuting homeless people, for picking on poor people unable to afford a rail ticket and more generally for harassing working-class migrant youth and Aboriginal people, any increase in police strength that is sold as a measure to "protect Indian students" will lead to Indian youth being blamed by poor people and other minority communities for the greater police/security harassment of them that will inevitably follow. Moreover, the racist police harassment of other non-white "ethnic" youth will inevitably target Indian international students too. Certainly, more police will not make it easier for Indian students to expose racist bashings nor will it make it easier for others to support their struggle. Quite the opposite – just look at the way police attacked the May 31 anti-racist protest in Melbourne. More generally, a stronger police force means stronger repression against the kind of mass struggles that actually challenge the unemployment, decay and imperialist wars that breed racism. For example, a stronger capitalist police force means more vicious



*Police repression unleashed against anti-racist demonstrators. Police arrested 18 students at the May 31 anti-racist rally. In contrast police have shown an apathetic attitude to stopping the racist attacks. Capitalist police can never be an ally in the struggle against racist violence.*

police assaults on picket lines of workers striking against job cuts; and more attacks against people protesting against the occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan. Indeed for this very reason, some right-wing media commentators, who are normally responsible for whipping up White Australia racism, have cynically seized on the Indian students issue to push a “law and order” agenda. They want to, for example, undercut concern about the trigger-happy NSW cops being issued with taser weapons. If these “law and order” hardliners get their way then we had better watch out when we participate at the next protest against racist violence! So let us not fall for this so-called “law and order” agenda! **No to more racist police – No to these cops having tasers! Let us organise multiracial self-defence squads of students and trade unionists to quell the violent attacks on Indian students!**

### **EMBATTLED SOUTH ASIAN STUDENTS DO HAVE SUPPORT**

Indian, Sri Lankan and other South Asian international students in Australia face a precarious situation. They face violent attacks by racists, repression of their protests by police, distortion of the truth about their plight by government and exploitation by

greedy Australian employers and landlords. Many students have also been ripped off by unscrupulous private college bosses who have lured students to pay big fees with the promise of high quality tuition and then provided them with the most shoddy courses. Some of those South Asian students who have experienced the worst of the abuse and deceit and the loneliness that comes from residing in a racist country have become clinically depressed. A few have even attempted or committed suicide.

One thing that really rubs salt into the wounds of Indian students is the indifference to their plight - and even hostility to their protests - by the well-heeled leaders of some of the locally based Indian community groups. On the eve of a June 7 Sydney protest by Indian students, an Indian community leader denounced the planned rally as “entirely futile,” saying he feared it would cause a lot of backfire on the Indian community. The wealthier sections of the local Indian community do not face the same level of danger as Indian international students. They live in comfortable suburbs, do not need to catch public transport and do not have to work late at night as employees in shops, restaurants, supermarkets and service stations. Nevertheless, even they can cop degrading racist bullying and abuse just like other non-white people in this country. Yet, upper class and upper-middle class individuals among the South Asian communities often like to turn a blind eye to this racism because they do not want to make any criticisms of the Australian social order – an order that has allowed them and certainly not their working class South Asian counterparts to have a privileged position. When their children complain to them that they are being called “blackie” and “curry breath” at school, they ignore their children’s pleas out of fear that they will be compelled to rock the boat that is taking them to affluence and high status. If these privileged elements are willing to downplay the racism that beats down upon those closest to them then they are even more willing to turn a blind eye to the racist attacks faced by international students.

However, while international students can expect no support from those “pillars of society” leading the local South Asian community organizations, they have plenty of support from other quarters. Importantly, the government of the Peoples Republic of China has expressed concern over the spate of attacks on international students. In early June, Chinese embassy counselor Liu Jin called for “better protection to international students from China and other countries and to ensure their legitimate rights in Australia.” Given Australian economic reliance on exports to China, such a stand no doubt had quite an impact.

Moreover, many activists and local students, both white Australian and non-white, have joined with Indian and Sri Lankan students in protesting against the racist attacks. There is a section of society here that is disgusted by the racism of this country and wants to change things. In 1996-1997, thousands of anti-racist whites, Aboriginal people, Chinese, South Asians and Middle Eastern people participated in mass protests outside



*Sydney, 7 November 2008: Flags of the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) proudly fly at a rally in defence of Aboriginal political prisoner and anti-racist hero, Lex Wotton. Dock workers throughout Sydney stopped work in solidarity with this demonstration. It is in the interests of the powerful union movement to stand against racism.*

meetings of Pauline Hanson's extreme racist One Nation party. Several years later there were a series of sizeable demonstrations against the imprisonment of refugees and other immigrants in hellhole detention camps. More recently, anti-racists of all colours built actions in defence of Palm Island Aboriginal political prisoner Lex Wotton (referred to above.) Notably, the campaign against the persecution of this Aboriginal hero won the support of the Sydney branch of the MUA dock workers union. MUA members came to see the anti-racist struggle in support of Lex Wotton as their struggle, as part of the overall workers struggle for justice. They declared, "Proud to be Union, Proud to Support Lex Wotton." On November 7 last year, MUA workers across all Sydney ports stopped work in solidarity with Wotton to coincide with a "Free Lex Wotton" rally in Sydney. Although the movement in defence of Wotton was not able to gain the strength required to prevent his conviction it was able to deter the racist authorities from imposing on him an even more extreme sentence than they did.

Today all the forces that have been active in anti-racist struggles, as well as fresh forces, need to be mobilized to stop the violent attacks on South Asian students and to combine this work with struggles to defeat racist attacks on other non-white people and to especially defend Aboriginal people against redneck terror. Among the demands that the movement in solidarity with Indian students should raise include:

- Stop the railway stations from being lonely and dangerous places! For all railway stations to always be staffed by at least two employees – station assistants, that is, and not the bullying railway security cops – during operational hours.
- Increase the frequency of trains and buses at night so that people are not waiting around in the dark to catch transport.
- Make much more subsidized student housing available near campus.
- So that vulnerable international students (alongside other renters) are not ripped off by greedy landlords, massively build public housing to ease the rental accommodation shortage and drive down private rents.
- Stop forcing international students to work dangerous hours just to get by! Demand that international students have the rights of citizens so that they get access to public health care, travel concessions etc. And struggle towards free education for international students – education is a right not a privilege!

Most urgently, grassroots defence squads must be built to protect international students from racist attack. Although such squads will not at first be able to patrol all areas where dark-skinned students are vulnerable, if they are able to concretely stop some racist attacks their popularity will swell. What is more if some violent racists are taught a few hard "lessons" then other aspiring racists may think twice before taking part in racist assaults. The main problem right now is that extreme rednecks see no force getting in their way. However, if these hardcore racists get beaten back a few times by multiracial squads then even soft-core racists around the country will start to realize that it is in their interests to pull their head in.

In the first instance it is the duty of the student associations – especially those led by leftists – to motivate students to join the anti-racist patrols that Indian students have initiated or to help reestablish them if these squads have been closed down. Student groups should organize a roster of students and their anti-racist friends to do duty on the squads. Most crucially, the trade union movement must throw its weight behind the fledgling self-defence squads. It is the working class that has the numbers and, through its unions, the ready-made organization to give the anti-racist squads some serious clout.

The various socialist organizations which often have close ties to student activists as well as links to union militants have an important role to play here. The left groups must not only participate in anti-racist rallies but must also physically seek to join and build the self-defence patrols while at the same time insisting that these squads take an unambiguously anti-racist character and not at all descend into vigilante-type formations. This latter danger is unfortunately real. Currently, the state is shutting down the anti-racist patrols by Indian students. But if the patrols were to start flourishing again then the authorities may try instead to co-opt the patrols by bringing them under official





protection as an adjunct of the police. If this were to happen, the patrols would cease to be a force for anti-racism since they would be allied with the state organs that are themselves the main upholders of racist injustice. Furthermore, if the anti-racist patrols were to descend into targeting poor train travelers who have not bought tickets etc (or to in any way cooperate with those who do target such individuals) they would become hated by the broader masses and quickly lose the chance to build links with working class organisations. That is why any future "offer" that the authorities may make to give anti-racist defence squads an "official" character must be rejected. The squads should refuse outright to accept any direct or indirect state funding and should never coordinate with police. They should not do in people who have not bought train tickets or who are suspected of damage to public property. Their sole role would be to directly stop racist attacks.

### **INDIAN STUDENTS SHOULD BE WARY OF HINDU CHAUVINISTS**

The main responsibility for defending Indian and other international students lies with the workers and left and student movements in Australia. However, Indian students can make such solidarity more likely by ensuring that their own slogans are clearly anti-racist and have no hint of Hindu nationalism. Unfortunately, in India the widespread anger over the racist attacks on Indian students in Australia has been partially hijacked by the Hindu chauvinist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the even more extreme Shiv Sena (SS.) The BJP/SS's prejudice against Muslims, low-caste people and the darker skinned



*Police lined up in front of demonstrators at the May 31 anti-racist rally in Melbourne.*

peoples of the South of India is of the same character as the contempt for Asians and blacks shown by White Australia racists. That is why the Indian left and communist movement ought to be in there trying to direct the widespread Indian anger over the racist attacks in Australia into combined opposition to both White racism in Australia and anti-Muslim and caste prejudice in India. Opposition to arrogant treatment of Indians in a country like Australia is a legitimate feeling. While India's ruling class is filthy rich, the country as a whole is still preyed upon by the greedy imperialist rulers (from the U.S. to Britain to Australia) that seize the juiciest bits of its economy for themselves. This, as well as the inherited memory of the horrors of British colonialism, engenders a strong hatred for the Western powers amongst many Indians. But when Indians do the noble deed of burning Kevin Rudd effigies in anger at racist attacks, this should not be done at the inspiration of India's own chauvinists but should be performed in concert with burning the effigies of prominent Indian racists - like those of Shiv Sena leader Bal Thackeray.

Unfortunately, at the Harris Park demonstrations in Western Sydney (but not at the Melbourne or Sydney city rallies) a minority of protesting Indian students started to degenerate into using nationalist slogans targeted against other embattled ethnic communities. A small number of the protesters started to shout out (somewhat fortunately in Hindi so that less people would have understood them) "f\_ck off L\_bs" after a small number of Middle Eastern youth attacked Indian students in Harris Park on June 7. Such chants are outrageous even granted the extreme desperation of Indian students over their plight. To condemn a whole community based on the actions of a small few is the very "logic" used by the racists who attack Indian students. What is more, Lebanese people are often themselves victims of racist abuse and were the main targets of the

2005 Cronulla Beach riot. The White supremacist gangs who attack Middle Eastern people are the same ones that target South Asians, in fact most ignorant racists could not tell the difference between turban wearing Sikhs and Muslims.

Not only is it plainly offensive for a small number of Indian students to lose their cool and start abusing other ethnicities but it harms the struggle for justice for Indian students. For one, the devious mainstream media have seized on the way the Harris Park events have played out to imply that the issue of attacks on Indian students is one, not of White supremacist violence, but merely a squabble between different ethnic groups that “can’t fit in.” The right-wing *Daily Telegraph* newspaper, which delights in whipping up distrust of ethnic communities, have used the dynamic of the Harris Park protests to tarnish both Indian and Lebanese people. That is why it is essential that anti-racist activists within the Indian community pull any elements displaying chauvinism firmly into line – not by counterposing a do nothing “leave it to the cops” line but by arguing the need to join together with all targeted communities and all anti-racists to build united anti-racist actions. What needs to happen in Harris Park is for Indian and Lebanese anti-racist activists to come together to build anti-racist defence squads that include both their communities as well as other ethnic people and anti-racist whites – contingents that are also held together by the glue of trade union participation. Given recent events, Indian students should not set up defence patrols in Harris Park until they have won over to participate in them a significant number of Lebanese people. This, however, should not be hard to do if the struggle to protect Indian students is linked with the fight to oppose the racism that targets Middle Eastern and Muslim people. A common agenda for establishing defence squads in the Western suburbs should be formulated that includes taking a stand on the different burning issues related to racist violence. Today, the squads will defend Indian students against racist attacks but in this coming summer they will become the core of a mass, trade union/ethnic/anti-racist convoy that will go to Cronulla Beach (and on another occasion to Manly Beach) to assert that this beach is now going to be safe to visit for Middle Eastern people and other non-white people and indeed for people of all colours.

### **THE POWER OF THE ORGANISED WORKING CLASS MUST BE MOBILISED TO FIGHT AGAINST RACIST OPPRESSION**

If anti-racist defence squads can be established alongside the struggle to defend international students and as part of the fight to ensure safe access to the beaches for ethnic communities, they can from there grow to take on more challenging tasks. These include actions to stop violent White supremacist political parties like the Australia First Party from organizing for their terror. Then there is the need to build anti-racist patrols in Aboriginal communities like Redfern’s The Block to deter police from carrying out harassment and racist bashings of black youth.



The bolder the program of anti-racist defence squads, the more imperative that they have the power of the organized working class movement behind them. It is possible to win the working class to this struggle because it is in the working class’ very own economic interest to stand against racism. Racial tensions are a killer to unity amongst workers at the

workplace. And without unity workers cannot defeat attempts by their capitalist bosses to make them work more for less pay. Thus, defeating racism is an important part of the union movement’s struggle to be able to unite workers to fight to defend their jobs and working conditions.

If the union movement were to take a stand in defence of the safety of Indian students, they would find Indian students working in supermarkets, service stations and the like being attracted to joining unions like the National Union of Workers (NUW.) Many Indian students suffer ill treatment from their employers who take advantage of their vulnerable economic position and their lack of rights as foreign citizens. A union recruitment drive combined with anti-racist defence is what is needed. The likes of the NUW could raise demands on employers that would particularly address the needs of young Indian workers such as the requirement for all late-shift workers to be given taxi vouchers for part of their trips home.

As shown by their brave protests against racist violence and their attempts to build self-defence patrols, Indian students when pushed to the wall have plenty of fight and courage in them. If unions like the NUW take the lead in organising to protect their interests, Indian students could bring much vitality and fresh enthusiasm to the union movement. This and the raising of the employment conditions of Indian supermarket and shop workers will help to protect the conditions of all workers in these industries.

The trade unions need a fresh injection of fighting spirit if they are to use their industrial power to prevent profit- obsessed business owners from slashing jobs. And it requires the workers movement to fight in this way for jobs if the economic climate that breeds racism – mass unemployment, job insecurity and workforce casualisation – is to be changed. That is why we say: **Organise Indian student workers into the trade unions! Support Indian students’ efforts to build self-defence patrols! Build union/ethnic/student anti-racist defence guards to stop violent attacks on international students!**