



The faces of some of the women and children onboard the Jaya Lestari 5 who, amongst a total of over 240 Tamil asylum seekers escaping persecution in Sri Lanka, were stranded for months in the Indonesian port of Merak after being intercepted just 45 nautical miles from Australia by the Indonesian navy under the Rudd/Gillard government's racist 'Indonesian Solution' arrangement with Jakarta.

5 August 2010 - Julia Gillard and Tony Abbott have been throwing a lot of punches. Yet a lot of these blows have not been aimed at each other. Instead Gillard and Abbott have spent much of their time bashing refugees and immigrants.

Since seizing the prime ministership Gillard has flaunted a "toughening" of the ALP government's already cruel and racist stance against refugees. In a replica of John Howard's notorious "Pacific Solution" Gillard is promising to seize Australia-bound asylum seekers and dump them into a detention camp that she plans to pressure East Timor to build.

Already the Labor government has geared up to deport more and more Afghan and Tamil asylum seekers. There is a bitter irony to all this. In Afghanistan the Australian military has terrorised civilians and sprayed housing complexes with bullets just to help extend U.S imperialist influence in Central Asia. Australian troops went into Afghanistan bearing machine guns, helicopter gunships and rocket launchers. Yet when fleeing Afghan asylum seekers come to Australia bearing only their clothes and pleading for a safer life they are deported back to their U.S. and Australian-occupied country.

Meanwhile, in Sri Lanka Australian-owned corporations run sweatshops like the huge Ansell surgical gloves factory. These Australian capitalists back – and in the case of Ansell Ltd even directly fund – the murdering Sri Lankan military. Moreover, the Lankan regime's brutal scapegoating of ethnic Tamils has, in good part, been perpetrated in

order to stop the majority-Sinhalese and minority-Tamil workers from uniting against greedy Western-owned "multinational corporations" like Ansell. Yet when Tamil refugees flee the results of all this, they are persecuted by the very same Western governments that protect the greedy corporations who helped cause their suffering in the first place.

SUSTAINED PREJUDICE TRYING TO SAVE AN UNSUSTAINABLE SYSTEM

The mainstream parties' tit for tat appeals to White Australia prejudices has extended to the question of immigration more broadly. Gillard expresses sympathy for those who fear immigration and blames population growth in Western Sydney for causing infrastructure and housing problems. Simultaneously she brandishes the slogan of a "Sustainable Australia" which she counterposes to a "Big Australia." The patently racist character of this agenda is proven by the fact that no one who is pushing it is talking about reducing the birth rate. Indeed, the previous Howard government actively pushed to increase the birth rate with then Treasurer Peter Costello famously urging families to have: "One baby for mum, one baby for dad and one for Australia." Gillard's "Sustainable Australia" push is nothing but an attempt to scapegoat immigrants for the serious social ills that exist in this country. Indeed, Welsh-born Gillard's reference to herself and her parents as "good migrants" was deliberately designed to appeal to racists who would interpret her statement as meaning that other migrants – like those without white skin – are "bad migrants." No wonder vile racist Pauline Hanson praised Julia Gillard's stance on the immigration issue and declared her "total agreement" with Gillard's call to sweep "political correctness" from the "debate" (*The Australian*, 6 July.)

Not to be outdone, the conservative Coalition has responded by promising to limit annual immigration numbers to 170,000. The Labor Party then replied by insisting that its policies would already bring migration numbers below the Coalition's target within a couple of years.

What we are seeing is like a contest where whoever hits the refugee/migrant punching bag the hardest is declared the winner. Yet this ugly spectacle is more than simply cynical electioneering. All political parties that serve the interests of the rich capitalist class must necessarily scapegoat ethnic minorities in order to divert the masses from correctly blaming **the ruling class** for unemployment and poor social services. The pro-capitalist parties want to distract people from the fact that it is big business owners who lay off workers en masse whenever they face making a few less billions of dollars in profit than usual. These parties don't want the public to realize that the reason for crumbling infrastructure is not too many migrants but the fact that so much of the country's wealth is grabbed by the corporate bosses that there is little left over for hospitals, public housing and public transport.

The more that mainstream politicians pander to the capitalist elite the more they scapegoat ethnic minorities. So consider the connection between refugee policy

and the fate of the Mining Superprofits Tax that was proposed earlier this year by the Rudd government. Although much of the revenue from the proposed tax was to go to non-mining sector business bosses in the form of lower company taxes there would also have been some tiny benefits for working class people. However, when the ALP government then capitulated to the concerted anti-tax campaign of the mining tycoons and booted out Rudd in order to better sell their gutless backdown, they ramped up even further their fear-mongering against refugees and migrants.

Today, the ALP government and its Liberal/National rivals have moved so far to the right on the immigration/refugee question that even some in the capitalist class are starting to worry. For, although the ruling class absolutely needs to scapegoat refugees and migrants in order to deflect the anger of the masses whom they exploit, they also need migrants as a source of labour especially during times of economic growth. John Howard solved this contradiction by to a degree having it both ways during the latter years of his government. On the one hand he made shrill denunciations of refugees and whipped up a racist fear campaign against Muslim and Arab people and, on the other hand, he quietly increased immigration numbers. Today that section of the capitalists who are mostly interested in short-term profits and are based in boom industries are cautioning against the excesses of the anti-immigration hype. On the other hand, those sections of the capitalist class most concerned with preserving their long-term rule hand in hand with the capitalists' media and political servants are focusing on intensifying the racist scapegoating of immigrants.

Regardless of the tactical debates within the ruling class, the thrust of the governing policy is clear. Thousands of refugees are imprisoned in hell hole detention centres within Australia, asylum seekers are being deported into life threatening situations and non-white ethnic people in this country face increasing prejudice in jobs, housing and at social venues. Meanwhile, the verbal attacks on refugees and immigration by the mainstream parties is inciting more racist violence on the streets. In one of a spate of attacks on Indian students in Brisbane in the last few months, two white men stabbed 23 year-old Sukdeb in the neck and chest and beat him with a tree branch at the Coopers Plain railway station. There is a danger, too, of igniting mass racist terror like the white supremacist riots at Cronulla Beach in December 2005 and at Manly Beach on "Australia Day" 2009.

All this is not only happening in Australia. Throughout the capitalist world, refugees and ethnic minorities have faced increased official discrimination as the ruling class seeks to blame them for the unemployment and decay caused by capitalism's worldwide Great Recession. And from Hungary to Germany to Britain, from Russia to the United States this has spurred the growth of far-right racist groups.

THE WORKERS STRUGGLE & THE ANTI-RACIST STRUGGLE MUST GO FORWARD TOGETHER

The worst thing about the capitalists' racist diversionary tactics is that they can work and at the moment in Australia they are working.



Workers of many colours gathered in Sydney to protest against the ABCC on 30 October 2009. Racism is poison to the workers movement as maximum unity is needed in its fight against the bosses and their capitalist state, always ready to use 'divide & conquer' to turn worker against worker. (Trotskyist Platform photo.)

Those layers of the masses most prone to being influenced by the ruling elite's propaganda are white-skinned, self-employed people – small businessmen, contract tradesmen, owner-drivers, farmers etc. Working for themselves - and thus often isolated from comradely contact with "ethnic" people - and seeing everyone else in their industry as rivals, these layers of the middle class can be swayed by appeals to blame migrants for their ills. Such sentiments soaked up by economically insecure layers of the self-employed and small business classes eventually seep through to the working class as well – firstly to those workers employed in smaller workplaces and then even to workers in big, unionised sites.

Any acceptance of racist notions within the working class is poison to any struggle to defend workers' rights. For such struggles demand above all else the greatest unity amongst workers. That is why

the workers movement must take up the fight for refugee rights and must stand firmly against anti-immigrant measures. The trade unions should mobilise contingents to participate in refugee rights rallies and then rise up to take industrial action against racist policies. For example, those unions which organise airline workers, refuellers and airport ground staff should take action to halt flights that deport refugees and so-called "illegal" immigrants. More broadly, political stopwork action by unions should protest against the government's policy of deportations and demand the closure of all immigrant detention centres. The workers movement should also call for the full rights of citizenship to be granted to everyone who does make it here. The current draconian measure that

prevents newly-arrived migrants from accessing social security and other benefits for two years must be abolished.

Fighting against racial oppression is not only a matter of challenging racist government policies. Discrimination and racist violence must be challenged everywhere it rears its ugly head. The fact that many non-white people have not felt safe to go to Cronulla Beach for the last few years and now even have reason to be nervous about going to Manly Beach is a travesty that must be fixed. For the upcoming fifth anniversary of the Cronulla riot this December, we call for trade unions, “ethnic” organisations and anti-racist groups to organise a huge anti-racist convoy beginning in Sydney’s multicultural southwest to go to Cronulla and assert the right of people of all colours to safely use the beach.

Of course any struggle against racism in this country must take up the defence of this country’s first peoples, the Aboriginal people, who continue to suffer the most hideous racist discrimination. The workers movement must demand an end to the “Intervention” against Northern Territory black communities and must mobilise their power to force the ruling class to restrain its cops and prison guards from murdering yet more Aboriginal people in state custody.

Just as struggles in the interests of working class people cannot be won without standing up to racism, the struggle against racism cannot be won without standing up for workers rights and for proper access to social services for low and middle income people. The ruling class needs to divert the masses with racism because the masses have anger that needs to be diverted. People are angry because there is a shortage of affordable housing, public transport is inadequate, public hospitals have unbearable queues and public schools are underfunded. Furthermore this country has an unemployment problem, a problem masked by official figures that neglect the large number of people working just a few hours a week when they want to work full time. Although exports to China’s booming socialistic, public-sector enterprises restrained the Australian economy from nose diving like the rest of the capitalist economies, underemployment here has worsened since the global financial collapse. Meanwhile, many workers lucky enough to have full time jobs are nervous about being retrenched. It is high time for our unions to challenge the capitalist business owners’ “right” to lay off workers at will. Attempts by bosses to slash jobs must be met by militant industrial action, including worker occupations of work sites. The union movement as a whole must redirect the focus of debates over unemployment by demanding that all profitable firms be banned from laying off workers. Meanwhile, we need to fight for a massive increase in public housing, for a huge boost in public hospital funding and for a major extension to public transport. This should all be financed from the pockets of the billionaire corporate bosses. In contrast to the ALP’s limp, watered down mining tax we should demand a large scale diversion of the income

that is currently being grabbed by the mining tycoons into public housing, health and education. And if the likes of Andrew Forrest and Clive Palmer respond by threatening to put up prices and lay off workers then their mining companies should be confiscated and turned into public sector enterprises.

HOW TO START WINNING OVER THE UNION MOVEMENT TO THE REFUGEE RIGHTS STRUGGLE

Many in the refugee rights movements have emphasized the importance of winning union support for the struggle. In particular, leading members of the Refugee Action Coalition (RAC) – who are often cadre of socialist groups – have expressed this perspective. That is a good thing. However, it is one thing to state the need to win union support for the campaign and another to be able to pull it off. In the way stands the fact that pro-ALP politics dominate the union movement and the fact that union members themselves may be influenced by the racist mainstream media, by the loaded anti-immigrant statements of Gillard and by the rantings of Alan Jones and other reactionary talkback hosts. To win over trade unionists against all this, we must appeal to the very interest that workers have as a class in the fight for refugee rights. In other words, **we must emphasise the point that only by standing against racist policies can the working class achieve the unity needed to fight against its exploiting bosses.** Yet while this point is made in some of the statements of the various left groups prominent in the RAC - Solidarity, Socialist Alternative and Socialist Alliance - these groups have failed to insist that this point be emphasised in RAC statements or **rally calls**. The reason for this stance is that these groups do not want to frighten away small-l liberal elements – who may be capitalists themselves or otherwise hostile to militant unionism. Yet if one restricts effective appeals to workers’ class interests for the sake of an alliance with small-l liberal elements then that is hardly a serious union-centred perspective ... is it?

The small-l liberal middle class and “progressive” capitalists may bring mainstream media attention to the movement but their support is unreliable because in the end they accept the very capitalist system that promotes racism. It is the workers movement that has the power and genuine interest to really challenge the ruling class’ racist measures. However, to genuinely orient to the working class means being prepared to break with those small-l liberal elements that would reject such a perspective.

An example of the type of work needed to win active working class support for the refugee rights struggle can be seen in the campaign to defend Aboriginal anti-racist leader Lex Wotton. Lex Wotton was prosecuted by Queensland authorities for involvement in the heroic November 2004 Palm Island uprising against the state whitewash of the racist police murder of Aboriginal man, Mulrunji Doomadgee. The campaign in Wotton’s defence was built up over many years and eventually won the active support of the Sydney Branch of the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA.) This culminated in wharfies



Horrific images from the Cronulla riot of December 2005. Now that both the ALP and the Coalition are openly pandering to Australia's racist underbelly there is a growing danger that such scenes will be repeated in the near future. Trotskyist Platform calls that for the upcoming fifth anniversary of the Cronulla riot this December trade unions, "ethnic" organisations and anti-racist groups organise a huge anti-racist convoy beginning in Sydney's multiracial southwest to go to Cronulla and assert the right of people of all colours to safely use the beach.

across all Sydney ports taking stop work action in Wotton's support to coincide with a hundreds strong Free Lex Wotton rally that took place in Sydney on the day Wotton was sentenced (7 November 2008.) Although the political climate in the country did not allow the campaign to achieve the strength needed to win the dropping of charges against Wotton, it did make the authorities realize that they could not get away with imposing anything like the level of sentence that they intended to. Now, key to winning union support for this campaign, was the fact that demonstration leaflets explicitly appealed to workers' class interests. Thus the call for the 22 September 2007 "Drop the Charges against Lex Wotton!" rally in Redfern concluded with the insistence that: "Everyone who has an interest in opposing racist violence and in standing up to all forms of exploitation and oppression – Aboriginal people, working class people and anti-racists of all colours – must stand for the dropping of the charges against Lex Wotton." Later, the leaflet that was building the Sydney contingent to the October 2008 Brisbane rallies that coincided with Wotton's trial, also emphasized that: "The subjugation of Aboriginal people is an extreme form of the repression that the authorities are also unleashing against trade unionists who stand up for workers' rights. The ABCC construction industry police are spying on and intimidating CFMEU construction union members and continue to initiate jail-carrying charges against individual union activists." Today, Trotskyist Platform proposes that points like the following be raised in calls for refugee rights rallies: "Don't let the bosses' politicians divide workers with racism! Make our unions stronger – Build workers unity - Fight for refugee rights!" and "Don't let the ruling class get off the hook by blaming refugees for society's problems. Let us support refugees so that we can better focus people on who the real enemies are – the greedy corporate bosses who lay off workers at will and grab so much wealth that there is little left for social infrastructure."

ASSISTING THE WORKING CLASS TO BREAK WITH PRO-ALP POLITICS

Framing the refugee rights campaign in slogans that appeal to workers class interests is one aspect of building mass worker support for the struggle. The other crucial and related aspect is the fight to combat the influence of the pro-ALP politics that dominate the union movement and the officials that lead it. The refugee rights movement can assist this struggle by encouraging those workers joining the movement – which means that they are at least in part rejecting ALP politics – to fully break from Laborism. What does that entail in practice? For starters it means **not** telling these workers to vote or preference the ALP at the coming elections. For no matter what "lesser evil" excuse is given, that would only serve to drive these workers back into the arms of the ALP. Rather, workers (and indeed everyone else) joining refugee rights events should be encouraged to not vote for any of the parties bidding to run capitalism – whether it be Liberals, ALP or Greens – and instead to rely only on their own power in alliance with all the oppressed.

No matter how effectively the refugee rights movement promotes a pro-working class orientation, to win mass working class support for anti-racist campaigns will **also** take a **simultaneous** political campaign **within** the workers movement. It is in debates on the shopfloor and within unions and in the course of discussions on picket lines etc that masses of workers can be won over. To do this effectively the most politically astute unionists must organise themselves into a formation that can counterpose an internationalist, class struggle perspective to the White Australia nationalist politics of the ALP. Such anti-capitalist caucuses within our unions must necessarily be linked to the best activists in other progressive struggles - from refugee right struggles to Aboriginal rights campaigns to women's emancipation movements.

This united formation is precisely what a revolutionary socialist party is. Such a party will lead the masses in struggles against the depredations of capitalism and eventually to finally vanquish capitalist rule itself. Only then, when capitalism is replaced with an egalitarian socialist system, can we finally get rid of the economic insecurities that breed racism. And only then can we consign to the history books the rule of that class, the capitalist class, that has been so cynically fostering racism in order to preserve its decaying rule.

However, for the toiling masses to reach that stage where they are able to take state power, they will need to school themselves in all manner of partial struggles. Today, such key battles facing the working class are the struggles to oppose all racist anti-immigrant measures and to win asylum for all refugees. **For trade union action to stop the racist deportations! Build workers unity across ethnic lines! Unleash struggle against the real creators of unemployment and shortages of social services – the capitalist exploiters!**