MUTINY!

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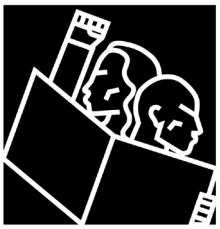
The fight for flags! Building solidarity with Palestine in the ASU p. 4

National liberation and the struggle for socialism p. 5

Student protest in the 1990s p. 9

The legend of the Fuzzy Wuzzy angels p. 10



We would like to acknowledge that the land on which we live, work, and organise is unceded Aboriginal land. We pay our respects to the Gadigal people, on whose lands Black Flag Sydney is based. We offer our absolute and unequivocal solidarity to all First Nations peoples fighting for liberation, here and overseas. We stand together, now and always.

REPORTS

p. 3 **Industrial report: Sustaining union activity after strikes**
Report on industrial and Palestinian solidarity organising in the USyd and UNSW NETU branches.

p. 4 **The fight for flags!**
Building solidarity with Palestine in the ASU—interview with a rank-and-file activist.

FEATURE

p. 5 **National liberation and the struggle for socialism**
Drawing on lessons in anti-colonial resistance.

ANALYSIS

p. 9 **Student protest in the 1990s**
Guest article by Tim Briedis. It's full on.

p. 10 **The legend of the Fuzzy Wuzzy angels**
Analysis on the dark truth of Papuan porters' experience in the Kokoda campaign.

Editorial

"For months, Palestinians and their allies have been calling for an end to the violence", wrote one Palestinian solidarity group on Instagram. "We can't do this alone – we need icons like Taylor to raise their voices". While most leftists wouldn't imagine setting up a group like SwiftiesForPalestine, it does demonstrate how all-encompassing a genuinely popular movement can be. People do not need to be cajoled into doing the right thing. Upon a base laid by activists who have been working patiently for years, popular spontaneity has led to a massive expansion in size and depth of the Palestinian solidarity movement.

Another example of this organised spontaneity is the Unionists for Palestine movement. Created organically as the solidarity movement grew, it brought together experienced leftists and unionists with rank-and-file union members who believed their unions could be a vehicle for solidarity. We are proud to bring you an interview with a member of ASU for Palestine, a key part of this movement.

Also in this edition of Mutiny is an account of rank-and-file organising in the NTEU at the USyd and UNSW, exploring where the movement is going in the aftermath of the industrial disputes at both universities that concluded last year. This includes significant crossover with the Palestinian movement.

Other articles take a look at history. We have an account of Australian forced conscription of Papuans during World War II, an inter-imperialist war that is still widely depicted as a war between good and evil.

We've also included an account of student protest in the 1990s – the first of a planned regular column detailing the history of protest in Australia. This history is generally not well known on the left, and looking over it helps understand our own activity. We're very grateful to the author Tim Briedis, who is also behind the wonderful People's History of Australia podcast.

See you round the traps...

PS: Taylor, if you are reading this – as you probably are – please take a stand!

Industrial report: Sustaining union activity after strikes

Rank-and-file lessons from Sydney universities

This article is drawn from our rank-and-file activity at the University of Sydney (USyd) and University of New South Wales (UNSW). We don't presume that organising is identical across other campuses and encourage comrades to share their organising experiences.

About every four years, the enterprise agreements at Australian universities expire, and workers bargain for new ones. These bargaining periods often represent the high watermark of union membership growth and activity: staff become invested in the clauses governing their wages and working conditions over the next few years, union activity visibility heightens, and picket lines flare up across campus.

During the last bargaining period, across the main Sydney campuses, organised rank-and-file members within each branch of the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) drove the most militant union activity. At USyd, this was through a ticket called Rank and File Action (RAFA) which currently holds a majority on their branch committee; at UNSW, activists often acted in opposition to their comparatively conservative branch committee and bargaining team. For a more in-depth recount of the bargaining period at USyd and UNSW, read the online version of this article.

Now that bargaining has ended at these campuses, the question is: how can rank-and-file activists maintain the natural energy which sparked up during bargaining periods – both in preparation for the next bargaining round, but also to fight for a fairer university and world?

Enforcing Enterprise Agreement Clauses. Union branch activism at universities mostly lulled mid-2023. During this period, RAFA activists at USYD focused upon ensuring that their strengthened enterprise agreement clauses were actually enforced. Events like staff information sessions attracted staff who had been ignorant or felt disconnected from the industrial campaign but were curious about the benefits of the new clauses.

A commitment to regular organising paid off in August, when the USYD Vice Chancellor emailed staff explaining a 'general expectation' that all staff would return to campus for the majority of the work week. This went directly against one of the new enterprise agreement clauses granting all professional staff remote work rights which could not be 'unreasonably refused.' Over 1,100 staff signed a members' petition campaigning for the clause's enforcement and about 150 professional staff attended a remote work information session. In response, university management backed down on the requirement for staff to work most days on campus.

Palestine Organising. On October 15, during Israel's escalated genocide on Gaza, Birzeit University (located on the West Bank) called upon international academic institutions, unions, staff, and students to take action to oppose Israel's war and end Zionist settler colonialism.

This call coincided with a groundswell of rank-and-file activity in support for Palestine, including at universities. RAFA members at USyd quickly called a members' meeting to pass a solidarity motion; organised a forum about academic BDS; and initiated a 'Workplace Week of Action for Palestine,' draping banners off of the City Road Footbridge, flying flags out of office windows, and posting about upcoming rallies and actions on staff portals. Rank-and-file UNSW staff, too, organised a well-attended on-campus forum and vigil.

However, union leadership has opposed pro-Palestinian activism on both a branch and state division level. At UNSW, rank-and-file activists submitted a pro-Palestinian members' motion to the branch committee and requested the branch committee to call a members' meeting to vote upon it. After a month of stalling and many emails from some of the sixty signatories to the motion, the branch committee finally called a meeting. During the meeting itself, the Branch Secretary spoke against the motion, argued that it did not represent 'all workers,' and threatened to resign if it passed, a promise he was forced to make good upon once 96% of the meeting voted in favour of it. Similarly, rank-and-file comrades on the NSW NTEU Division Council requested the Division Secretary to amend a weakly supportive pro-Palestine motion to include concrete solidarity actions, including support for academic BDS and examining universities' financial and research ties with Israeli arms manufacturers. Shamefully, the Division Secretary refused to include these amendments.

These instances are worth mentioning not because union motions have monumental significance in the face of a genocide, but because they demonstrate the importance of principled rank-and-file opposition against a union bureaucracy reluctant to commit itself to symbolic, let alone concrete, actions of solidarity.

Rank-and-file activists now need to channel the energy from rank-and-file campaigns against union bureaucracy towards longer-term campaigns. Luckily, there is a rich history of pro-Palestinian activism at universities. This year marks twenty years since the Palestinian BDS National Committee first called for a boycott of Israeli academic and cultural institutions. Moreover, many Australian universities have research ties to Israeli arms manufacturers. For example, as part of its defence Trailblazer program, UNSW has partnerships with Lockheed Martin, Raytheon, Thales and Northrop Grunman.

Universities produce the workers and research which make the capitalist war machine tick. Rank-and-file campaigns should not only fight for universities to stop aiding and abetting genocide, but for a system of education which puts people's liberation before profit.

Conclusion. Staff and student unions should stand for safe working conditions everywhere, which are obviously impossible in occupied Palestine. At the time of writing, the IDF has destroyed or severely damaged every university in Gaza has been destroyed or severely damaged by the IDF.

Hearteningly though, we have already seen either the success of long-term pro-Palestine and anti-Zionist campus organisations, as well as the development of new groups. Now rank-and-file unionists have been jolted into action during a period of usual inactivity, benefiting from the groundwork of organisation laid down during bargaining and the enforcement of new enterprise agreement clauses. The next challenge is to sustainably foster this exciting burst of rank-and-file activity.

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Industrial interview: The fight for flags!

Building solidarity with Palestine in the ASU – interview with a rank-and-file activist.

What is ASU Members for Palestine and how does it relate to the ASU itself? What support has it received from the union and have there been any major wins so far? ASU Members for Palestine have had varying degrees of success within the union. We got our secretary Angus McFarland to speak at two Unionists for Palestine speak-outs calling for the anti-protest laws to be scrapped. However, it is still a struggle to get official ASU flags given to us to use at rallies, and we have heard reports that internally we are considered fringe and to be "extremists".

The ASU seems to be in a tough position between keeping its membership happy, while not alienating its Labor party ties. Our comrades in South Australia were able to push the branch there towards a statement calling for an end to the genocide and for Australia to cut diplomatic and military ties with Israel, we hope to be able to achieve this nationwide.

In other states, it appears that the ASU branches are willing to allocate flags to their membership at Palestine rallies, however, it has been a convoluted process in Sydney, with sympathetic organisers within the union doing what they can but ultimately having to protect the political interests of the ASU. As of now, we receive little to no endorsement from the official union.

We are constrained by this lack of support. When it comes to places to meet and organise, the cost of printing and taking action at our own workplaces, support and protection is not a guarantee. The idea that this genocide is not relevant to us as Australian workers has been floating around in different spaces including within the union bureaucracy, so it is hard to be taken seriously in our demands when these ideas are still prevalent.

Why is it important for the union to be visible at rallies and actions supporting Palestine, and why is it crucial for rank-and-file members to be organised and leading these campaigns? One of the key tenets of unionism is the concept of 'touch one, touch all.' Israel's current onslaught of terror teaches us that you need only to be living in the "wrong place" at the wrong time to live your life under occupation and bombardment. It is important to employ our collective humanity and remind the ruling class and Zionist lobbies that a great deal of Australian workers, those who provide the services society hinges itself upon, are in fact opposed to their contribution to the genocide of the Palestinian people. Trade union activity has historically been a key factor in opposing atrocities and smashing the chains of apartheid societies, as we have seen with the history of apartheid in South Africa.

However, the trade union movement in Australia has been in a state of decline for decades, amid serious attacks from the Howard government, his Liberal Party successors, and from neoliberal Labor governments on either side of the Howard-era. Within the ASU, we are given little to no information as to sector specific meetings, delegate meetings or the membership base. Many of us no longer, or have never, felt a strong union presence at work, and do not feel as though our union is democratically structured. We have been made aware that organisers will be bullied and ostracised for standing on certain tickets that defy Labor affiliation. Organising in rank-and-file fashion reminds us that a union should be its members and that in such hostile territory, paid organisers can never reflect the true desires, needs and power of working-class Australians coming together in collective action.

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What kind of tactics or strategies has the group used to build support amongst ASU members, and what are the immediate goals of the group? ASU Members for Palestine have had a range of successful endeavours. We held a workplace week of action soon after Israel's assaults began, which involved members taking photographs with keffiyehs, badges, t-shirts and signs whilst at work, which were then published on social media. This had a significant effect in boosting the presence of the group and letting members of our union know that there is still room for activism in the workplace. Beyond this, we have workplace mapping initiatives and have attempted to pass motions in our own workplaces. Through conversations with coworkers, we have learned that many people are not aware of their union, what it can do for them, and how unions are relevant to wider socio-political issues. Having a clear presence at rallies has also allowed members to approach us organically.

In the short term, we have a petition for workers in the not-for-profit (NFP) sector, which calls on NFP organisations to make a clear statement regarding Palestine. It would be a huge success to see community leaders and organisations in the NFP space begin to adopt a pro-Palestine approach, and to add their institutional weight to the campaign in the form of lobbying, information distribution and providing support to affected communities. NFPs for the most part are happy to offer their community spaces to refugees, Indigenous events and orgs, to endorse the Yes vote before last year's referendum, and to host LGBTQIA+ initiatives; they could be providing a lot of tangible support to the Palestinian liberation movement.

Crucially, we would like to see the ASU fully endorse us, to provide material support to our campaigns, and more importantly to join the fight against apartheid and occupation, as trade unions have historically done. In the long-term, we aim to see a re-democratisation of our union with a strong, organised, rank-and-file membership base at the forefront.

NATIONAL LIBERATION AND THE STRUGGLE FOR SOCIALISM

Lessons from the history of anti-colonial resistance.

The eyes of the world are on Palestine. It is impossible to turn away from the horror of the second Nakba, but the ruling class ignores our cries for a ceasefire. In what seems like a hopeless crisis, it is our responsibility as activists, unionists, socialists, as anarchists, to hold to a clear vision of justice and peace, and to fight for this future however we can.

As activists outside of Palestine, we cannot and should not wish to determine the nature of Palestinian resistance. But we must reflect critically on the means by which Israel's colonial regime can be challenged and ultimately deconstructed. What can we learn from previous struggles against violent and genocidal colonial regimes? How can the Zionist state be dismantled in a way which does not lead to the reintroduction of new forms of domination and exploitation in its place? How do we support resistance without endorsing Islamist nationalism?

We might look to Ireland for answers. Some of the most incredible displays of solidarity with Palestine have come from Ireland, a people recognised by Palestinian representatives like Dr Afif Safieh as being "among the first to hear our cries for freedom." A nation whose people overturned eight hundred years of British colonial rule through a campaign of guerrilla warfare and popular resistance. Yet, for working people in Ireland, national liberation has only meant a continuation of the same fundamental issues of poverty, inequality, economic insecurity and sectarian violence under a new flag. Only briefly in the early twentieth century did the drive to independence unsettle the rule of the British and of capital generally, when workers across the country began to take production into their own hands in a wave of strike action between 1920–23.

This revolutionary possibility was put down not only by the British military but by the leaders of the Irish Republican movement themselves. This history demonstrates not only the importance of an organised, militant working class in the struggle for national liberation but also why workers must be willing to organise politically to build a national liberation movement with a socialist, internationalist vision of liberty. This is the only pathway to lasting peace and justice in a decolonised society, and much can be done to strengthen and develop such a movement by socialist unionists around the world.

The Trajectory of Palestinian Resistance. It is important to say from the outset that armed Palestinian resistance is a justified and appropriate response to the genocidal actions of the Israeli occupation. In any discussion on the nature of resistance, we must be clear that it is not the responsibility of the oppressed to conform to the ethical or legal 'standards' that their oppressors are flagrantly abusing. Nor should we subscribe to the naive assumption that non-violent actions in occupied territories will achieve liberation; as Stokely Carmichael puts it: "for non-violence to work, your opponent must have a conscience."

Under the smokescreen of 'self-defence', Israel has secured the backing of almost all mainstream political leaders in the West, and global equivocation on whether their actions are justified has given the IDF impunity to carry out the most horrific and devastating crimes in plain sight. We are now witnessing the peak of this genocidal violence with Netanyahu's scorched earth campaign in Gaza. There should be no mistaking the intention here. This is not about safety, it was never about the hostages taken by Hamas, this is the culmination of the Zionist project to erase Palestine and its people from the map. This is a genocide.

In avoiding this reality and framing the current crisis as a 'war' or a 'conflict', our government has entirely bought into the destructive logic of Zionism. Each escalation of violence from Israel has been quietly endorsed, with the occasional muffled plea to spare civilian lives while carpet bombing civilian targets. A horrifying experiment has played out, in which our Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and Foreign Minister Penny Wong are continually asked whether October 7 justifies the death of five thousand, ten thousand, fifteen or twenty thousand Palestinian civilians. They have not just sat silently but actively endorsed the violence, sending military support to put down Houthi efforts to disrupt Israeli shipping lines, and cutting aid funding to UNRWA – one of

the main agencies which provides essential humanitarian assistance to displaced Palestinians.

How did it get to this point? How has the IDF been able to bomb its way through the entire territory of Gaza without facing any serious international sanctions or repercussions? The excuse put forward by Netanyahu and his allies, as always, centres on Hamas.

The organisation – whose name is both an abbreviation of Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiya (Islamic Resistance Movement) and an Arabic word meaning 'strength' or 'bravery' – is a multifaceted political entity, formed on the principles of Islamist Palestinian nationalism. It was a party of government in the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC), having received the largest minority of seats in the 2006 election. It has operated as the de facto government of Gaza since its violent split from the PLC in 2007. Unlike its main political rivals in Palestinian national politics, Hamas is an armed resistance group and is designated by Israel and its international supporters as a terrorist organisation.

The organisation emerged from relative obscurity in the wake of the Oslo Peace Accords in the 1990s, a process which Hamas directly opposed. Negotiated in 1993 between Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO), the Oslo Accords led to the creation of the Palestinian National Authority – or Palestinian Authority (PA) – as an institution of Palestinian self-governance in the West Bank and Gaza. The recognition of the State of Israel and its right to exist, as well as the continued need for violent insurrection against the Israeli occupation were key points of difference between Hamas and the secular Arab nationalists of Fatah, the leading political force within the PLO. The Hebron Massacre in 1994, where a Jewish-American terrorist murdered 29 Muslim Palestinians (including several children), led Hamas to reinforce its commitment to armed resistance and carry out its first instance of terrorist suicide bombing attacks in retaliation. This both strengthened the visibility of Hamas and cemented the divisions between itself and Fatah. The trajectory of the Palestinian national liberation movement thus diverged along separate paths: Fatah with the aim of securing international recognition for an emergent Palestinian nation-state alongside Israel – the so-called 'two-state solution'; Hamas with its commitment to violently destabilising and dismantling the Israeli state.

This division perfectly favours and has been fostered by the Zionist project. As Andrew Rigby notes in his 1991 work on the first Intifada:

> The Israelis, like occupying powers before them, have sought to prevent the emergence of any indigenous unified political authority that could command the allegiance of the subject people and effectively coordinate resistance activities against the imposed rule of the occupier.

The first Intifada, which began in 1987, caused significant problems for the Israeli state. It saw a widespread campaign of popular resistance, civil disobedience, work refusal and strike action, and the militant contestation of public space. It spread throughout the entire Palestinian community, with civil disruption in key sites across Gaza and the West Bank, supported by major strike actions of Palestinian workers in Israel. The Unified National Command of the Uprising (UNC) was formed in early 1988 with nationalist, communist and Islamist groups represented at clandestine meetings which aimed to cohere the movement around shared goals and strategies. Whole sections of Palestinian society were mobilised and the election of local popular committees enabled communities to self-manage civil society and basic services during the Uprising. The popular committees were a notable success, but were unilaterally banned in 1988 after the Israeli Defence Minister declared they were "undermining the Israeli government apparatus and establishing an alternative apparatus in its place."

Since the first Intifada, Hamas and other militant Islamist groups have become the easiest scapegoat for the occupation. As the political authority of Hamas has grown, the group can now exist in all the hospitals, schools, apartment buildings and market squares of Gaza . . . Total elimination of the Palestinian people is seen as the only way to ensure security for Israel.

Despite presenting a unified front publicly, tensions within the UNC emerged due to factional disagreements over the escalation of force, the importance of strengthening the popular committees, and the extent to which Fatah could claim to represent a grassroots network similar to the other organisations. When Israeli leaders were eventually forced to the negotiating table with the Oslo Accords of 1993, it was Fatah which became the de facto representative of the Palestinian people through its majority position within the PLO. With the creation of the Palestinian Authority in return for formal recognition of Israel, the PLO and Fatah successfully laid the foundations for the 'two-state solution'. They were hailed internationally as the only legitimate political force in Palestine and were held responsible for reigning in the militant actions of groups like Hamas to ensure the terms of the agreement were upheld.

The Oslo Accords only widened the chasm between the two sides of the movement, with Fatah condemned by the 'Rejectionist Front' of organisations which remained committed to total liberation. With the Intifada suppressed and the Palestinian national liberation movement fractured, Israel continued expanding its settlements and violently targeting Palestinian civilians in flagrant violation of the Oslo agreement. Since the first Intifada, Hamas and other militant Islamist groups have become the easiest scapegoat for the occupation. As the political authority of Hamas has grown, the group can now exist in all the hospitals, schools, apartment buildings and market squares of Gaza – the civilian sites which Israel has regularly targeted, both in previous attacks and the current onslaught. Total

elimination of the Palestinian people is seen as the only way to ensure security for Israel.

This is the essential core of the issue. Palestinian resistance has been so thoroughly smashed by Israel's increasingly brazen use of force that no mass popular movement can emerge. Protests and marches are put down with tanks and bullets, and even the possibility of work stoppages has been nullified by Israel's decision to replace some 70,000 Palestinian workers with foreign labourers after October 7 for 'security reasons' (as reported by Reuters, Feb 2024). This leaves the underground, guerrilla infrastructure of Hamas as the only available avenue for Palestinian resistance. If Hamas did not exist, another group would surely emerge to fill its place anyway, a group which would be used the same way by Israel.

So, we should see through the calls to 'condemn Hamas' as simply an effort to undermine what remains of the Palestinian national liberation movement. But, is the Islamist nationalism championed by Hamas any basis for a free and equal Palestinian society? We must be clear that religious nationalism breeds only further discontent and division, and it must be left behind by working class independence movements that seek true freedom. Looking to the example of Irish Republicanism shows that workers must tackle this inherent contradiction sooner rather than later if we are to seize the opportunities opened by anti-colonial revolution.

Ireland. At the onset of the Irish War of Independence in 1919, the 'threat' of socialist revolution was considered a serious possibility by both British colonial authorities and the leaders of the Irish Republican movement. Trade unionists and socialists were at the forefront of the republican movement, fighting on two fronts against the exploitation they faced in their workplaces and the violence of British rule.

These struggles were intertwined practically as well as politically. It was workers of the Irish Transport and General Workers Union (ITGWU) who originally led in the formation of the Irish Citizen Army, as a paramilitary defence force to protect workers' demonstrations from police repression. Initially an armed organ of the union movement, the ICA went on to become the primary force behind the 1916 Easter Uprising and precursor to the Irish Republican Army (IRA). Prominent socialist trade union leaders like James Connolly actively wove together the republican cause with the principles of Marxism and revolutionary syndicalism. In Connolly's own words, he was responsible for "interpreting Socialism to the Irish and interpreting the Irish to the Socialists." Embedded in the hope for Irish independence there existed the very real possibility of economic revolution, and with it, a new vision of worker self-management.

This vision was realised in the wave of militant strike actions which occurred during the War of Independence. From 1919 to 1922, strikes across Ireland regularly developed into full-scale workplace occupations which, instead of stopping work, continued production under worker self-management. Democratic workers councils were elected and 'soviets' declared, after the example set by Russian workers in 1917. During this period, over one hundred separate soviets were declared at various times and in various locations. These strikes did not limit themselves to purely economic concerns, as the nationalist cause was often inextricable from the unions' contestation of capital. The most notable example was the Limerick Soviet of 1919, which developed after a general strike was called to protest the British Army's designation of a 'Special Military Area' across all of Limerick City. The strike was coordinated by a 'soviet' formed by members of the United Trades and Labour Council and quickly gathered the support of residents generally. Fifteen thousand workers downed tools for nearly two weeks and only essential services were permitted to operate by the strike committee. Goods were distributed freely alongside newly printed soviet currency, cinemas were re-opened by workers who channelled profits back into the strike fund, and thousands of young people organised a hurling match outside the boundary of the Special Military Area, provoking a major flashpoint with the British officers. The strike was called off on the 27th of April with a guarantee that the military designation would be revoked one week later, which it was.

The success of the Limerick soviet and general strike demonstrated the political strength of the organised working class, and inspired dozens of other actions over the following years. These actions were empowered by a massive surge in union density and activity. The ITGWU was one of the most influential national trade federations involved in supporting or leading the majority of these strike actions, and the union's membership grew from around five thousand in 1911 to a total of over 100,000 members across 350 branches by 1919. Many union members were also IRA militants, and working class Catholic communities were a significant base of support for Sinn Fein. Yet the leadership of these organisations did not reflect their base, and as the labour movement continued to flex its industrial muscle after the War of Independence, tensions emerged. When strikes again broke out in dozens of factories, farms and worksites across the country in the early twenties, it was not the British Army that quashed the revolutionary potential of these campaigns, but the leaders of the IRA and Sinn Fein.

By mid-1922 the Irish Free State was experiencing an internal crisis of legitimacy due to the onset of the Civil War. Alongside this political crisis, the labour movement's success had also provoked a major crisis in the Irish economy. With the British gone, the Free State under strain, and the largest agriculturalists, landowners and industrialists losing control of their property, a second revolutionary cataclysm was imminent. However, a lack of coherent political organisation amongst Irish workers limited the possibility of any outright turn towards socialism. The strikes were not guided by the

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cause of Republicanism, but neither were they directed towards the establishment of socialism. As declared in the Workers Bulletin newspaper during the Limerick Soviet: "The strike is a workers' strike and is no more Sinn Fein than any other strike against tyranny and inhuman oppression." Distancing themselves from Sinn Fein allowed a degree of freedom for radical unionists, but without a distinct and openly socialist political platform they were unable to contest the new Republican establishment.

When the union's campaigns began to threaten 'national unity', bourgeois nationalists had the full weight of the Republican military forces at their disposal. By 1922, tides were shifting against the union movement and business owners led a coordinated effort to cut workers' wages across the board. On May 12, a lockout of around three thousand employees was declared, after workers refused to accept the significant pay cuts put to them in new agreements. With the confidence of previous successes, workers (largely organised under the ITGWU) seized control of more than a dozen worksites and production centres in Co. Limerick and Co. Tipperary. Though successful in gaining control of production, the workers had lost the fragile support of Republican leaders and bourgeois elements of the nationalist movement, who embarked on a campaign of repression against them. Anti-Treaty IRA forces destroyed gas works facilities and shot at strikers in Tipperary while trying to establish control of the area, while at the same time, the Republican government used National Army soldiers to dismantle the remaining soviets, in an effort to maintain the Free State's newfound international legitimacy.

In prioritising the construction of the new Irish state, both sides of the fractured Republican movement sought to suppress the actions of the radical union movement that had so thoroughly disrupted the rule of capital in Ireland. Where widespread disruption was initially seen as useful for the cause of national liberation, it was rejected once the popular front collapsed. Trade unionists and working class communities became the first target for bourgeois nationalists seeking to establish political control of the island.

To avoid being cast aside as popular fronts inevitably collapse, trade unionists and socialists must also be politically organised and willing to fight for a coherent platform of material liberation beyond national independence

This dynamic was established even before the British left. The earliest courts established by the Irish Dail were civil tribunals which did not challenge the British legal system but simply existed alongside it, taking on cases of land disputes and similar matters. The same legal professionals who ran the British administration simply migrated into new roles in the Dail Courts, and Republican forces began enforcing verdicts rather than the British military. As early as 1920, Republican Volunteers were responsible for banishing tenants who had seized land in Galway until they accepted the Courts' ruling in favour of the landowner. The same year, creamery workers in Cork refused arbitration of the Courts, and IRA members were ordered to escort milk through the picket lines.

These incidents precipitated the trajectory of Irish republicanism post-Civil War. Even when Republicans have acted as an insurgent force against the British and Irish states, they have simultaneously acted as strongmen in their own communities, policing dissent and brutally cracking down on "anti-social behaviour" with violent punishments. Since the Good Friday Agreement, Sinn Fein have slowly entered into the ruling class both North and South of the border, and in doing so have shown no signs of addressing the class war at the root of the problem.

At each stage of the struggle for national liberation in Ireland, the self-organisation of workers has been seen as either a distraction, a hindrance, or a threat, and the only interests truly represented in the Republican movement have been those of the ruling classes. This dynamic has not disappeared. Sinn Fein is now a mainstream force, yet its resurgence carries no promise of working class liberation. The party now holds the largest minority of seats in both the Northern Irish Stormont and the Dail Eireann, and it presents itself as a party of government willing to tackle the lingering question of national unification. But the key concerns of working people – housing affordability, climate change, income inequality, poverty, police violence – remain unanswered. In almost every way, the party leadership seeks not to disrupt the establishment, but rather to become accepted within it.

Conclusion. Rebuilding a fighting union movement strong enough to hold real power is the only sure way for workers to win change on material issues. But in the context of a struggle for national liberation, should these concerns be sidelined and redirected towards the primary goal of decolonisation? The history of the Irish Republican movement shows that a strong, combative union movement is crucial to disrupting the economic foundations of colonial regimes, and indeed can come to threaten the bourgeois elements of a nationalist popular front. To avoid being cast aside as popular fronts inevitably collapse, trade unionists and socialists must also be politically organised and willing to fight for a coherent platform of material liberation beyond national independence. If workers are able to use their power to unseat their own rulers, we can also destabilise the global economy and help dismantle the systems of colonial and capitalist oppression entirely.

Though it might seem impossible to imagine a Palestine beyond the horrors we now witness, the only way to reach a just and lasting peace is to completely dismantle the genocidal Israeli state. This means attacking the many roots of the system which stretch across our own countries. Though there are few options for Palestinian resistance fighters, we workers in Australia and around the world should be inspired by their bravery to create our own movements for liberation which can free us from both the suffocating grip of capitalism and the boot of colonial repression.

Student protest in the 1990s: 'It was like full on fucking direct democracy'

Guest article by Tim Briedis

It is September in Melbourne. A group of students have taken over the upper floors of a university building for nearly three weeks. Banners declaring 'Fighting Fees is a Full Time Occupation' and 'The Students are in Control!' decorate its exterior. Inside, debates about capitalism, sex, drugs and radical politics proliferate. Despite instructions from the university, members of the Electrical Trades Union (ETU) have refused to cut off the power to the building, helping strengthen the students' resolve. Regularly, supporters in the hundreds congregate in the streets below, making noise, banging pots and showing their solidarity.

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This is not a scene from the late 1960s or 1970s, but a 19 day student occupation at RMIT university in 1997. We often think of student protest as confined to the halcyon days of the Sixties, but in reality there were vibrant, radicalising and dramatic protests across Australia throughout the nineties. This ranged from Western Australia to the East Coast, including sizeable protests against Voluntary Student Unionism in Perth, the storming of the steps of Parliament House in Melbourne in 1992, the 1997 3 day occupation at UTS and a highly successful 14 day occupation at the University of Western Sydney's Bankstown campus. Some of these resulted in tangible victories, such as preventing the ALP's plan to turn Austudy into an exorbitant loan in the early nineties, and temporarily preventing the introduction of upfront fees at UTS in 1997.

Life in the Occupations. Many student occupations occurred throughout the nineties, and these were both radicalising moments and moments where a glimpse of a different world was seen. 'When we charged into the Bankstown administration building' recalled Michael Thorn, 'that was the moment I was radicalised'. For Andrew Viller, life in the occupation was 'a very communal existence, a very communist existence' where 'we didn't want to go back to regular life'. Of the 1994 ANU occupation, anarchist and surrealist Gerry Keaney declared that:

> That was direct democracy, I saw it in action. You know you walk around everyday life and people are like 'that'll never work' and why do you believe in that, cos oh I was actually there when it happened! 'Oh you must have been seeing things' – no it was like, full on fucking direct democracy! It was amazing. And you don't forget it. You don't walk away from something like that … I'm never coming back from that trip. Yeah that was incredible, incredible.

Occupations frequently upended social relations and showed a world where students and workers could run society, rather than the bosses.

Schools of Dissent. Beyond the success or failure of the specific campaigns, activism frequently served as a 'school of dissent', teaching protestors about how to organise campaigns and about some of the dynamics of capitalism. 'I learned more through activism than at university' was a common sentiment. Reflecting on his experiences in the Bankstown occupation, John McGuire recalled that for the activists involved this was:

> The moment they saw they could do things, and so you can see all these people who went out into different parts of Australia and [have] done different things … without that, I don't think half the people would have went on and done things.

Perhaps most memorably, the mostly Malaysian international students involved in the anarchist-leaning group NOSCA – the Network of Overseas Student Collectives in Australia – become known back home in Malaysia as 'the NOSCA mafia'. After they had graduated, many of them became prominent dissenters and activists in the Malaysian political scene, using the skills they had learnt in Australia.

Conclusion. What can radicals learn from these diverse occurrences? Perhaps the most important lesson is that powerful student activism is possible. The nineties isn't too far away from our own time – if they could do it then, students today can do it now. Activism can happen anywhere: in the nineties it didn't just happen at the most famous battlegrounds like Sydney University and Monash – it also happened in Western Sydney and from international students at UNSW. Activism was a transformational experience and one that felt incredibly meaningful. Amy McMurtrie recalled of the Bankstown occupation:

> Most people there had never experienced anything like that. There was a real sense of that we owned the campus. So I don't know what it's like now, but the Student Centre was in the middle . . . most people had to walk through there, to go anywhere . . . There was a sense of, we really did feel like we were in control, that students were in control . . . there was such a sense of momentum, that things were really going somewhere, that we were powerful.

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With determination, collective action and creativity, this can happen again.

The legend of the Fuzzy Wuzzy angels

The dark truth of Papuan porters' experience in the Kokoda campaign

The Kokoda campaign of World War II has been elevated to the status of a myth, a founding moment in Australian nationalism. In the words of Paul Keating, there could be "no deeper spiritual basis for the meaning of the Australian nation than the blood that was spilled on this very knoll, this very plateau, in defence of Australia".

In this myth, a special place is reserved for the Papuan porters who assisted the Australian soldiers in the campaign. Plaques at memorials and RSLs commemorating the heroism of the "Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels" are commonplace, the Department of Veterans' Affairs has issued "Fuzzy Wuzzy Medals", and children are taught in school about the kind, gentle "tribesmen" who were the soldiers' saving grace.

As with all kinds of nationalist mythology, this noble picture is undercut by the brutal reality of war. Rather than being a point of pride, the saga of "the Angels" should be properly understood as one of Australia's darkest moments. For the purposes of winning an imperial conflict, thousands of Papuans were forcibly conscripted and worked to the bone – a process that tore apart traditional Papuan societies and cemented Australia's own empire. The major challenge of the war in Papua New Guinea was that of logistics. In the words of the American General MacArthur, "victory is dependent upon a solution to the logistic problem". Throughout the entire conflict, the Allied commanders wrestled with the problem of turning these vast swathes of land, largely untouched by modern capitalism, into terrain that would facilitate brutal modern warfare.

At the beginning of the Pacific War, Papua New Guinea was a region without any substantial degree of capitalist development. Only the capital Port Moresby had a degree of modern infrastructure – but even this was limited to very rudimentary port and airstrip facilities, totally insufficient for supplying a modern army. Prior to the outbreak of war, the Kokoda Track was a lightly travelled footpath used by mail carriers. This is directly related to the rapaciousness of Australia's colonial governance of Papua, which began in 1906 and only ended formally in 1975. What Australian capitalists put in place in Papua was not a diversified economy or stable civil society, but an economy based on short-term economic profits derived from gold mining and plantation agriculture. Skilled workers were brought in from Australia while the grunt work in these backwards, labour-intensive industries was done by indentured Papuan labourers, kept in place by coercive colonial administrators who imposed corporal punishment on dissenting workers.

Motivated by the need to develop a "solution to the logistic problem", the Allied administrators made the decision to extend the pre-war system of indentured labour and conscript thousands of Papuans to serve as porters. In 1942, the head of the Australian civil administration in Papua (ANGAU) issued a legal order that would provide for the mass conscription of Papuan civilians. The conscription ramped up quickly, in line with the needs of the Allied army: around 2000 Papuans were conscripted in June of 1942, 3300 in July and 5000 in August. By October, over 9000 Papuans were under Australian command, and by December, the number was 16 500.

In Europe, the problem of supplying armies was accomplished with modern transportation, In Papua, it was accomplished with slave labour. The service the Papuan conscripts were made to do was brutal. They carried eighteen kilogram packs that would then be soaked in the rain and become monstrously heavy. Countless porters were injured carrying these heavy loads for dozens of kilometres a day up muddy, dangerous tracks, returning with

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Due to imposing military censorship, no reports of Australian mistreatment of Papuans made it back to the Australian public. However, primary sources remain. One sympathetic Australian medical officer sent by ANGAU to care for the porters recorded his initial impressions in his diary:

> The condition of our carriers at Eora Creek caused me more concern than that of the wounded... overwork, overloading (principally by soldiers who dumped their packs and even rifles on top of the carriers' own burdens), exposure, cold and underfeeding were the common lot. Every evening scores of carriers came in, slung their loads down and lay exhausted on the ground; the immediate prospect before them was grim, a meal that consisted of only rice and not too much of that, and a night of shivering discomfort for most, as there were only enough blankets to issue one to every two men. Australian servicemen were warned away from displaying any real human friendship towards the porters. Military publications officially endorsed and recommended racism as a means to keep "the natives" under control.

The Australian population was given a misleading image by the press, which published sweetened reports of Papuan "devotion and almost superhuman exertion". Bert Beros' poem established the racist epithet of "fuzzy wuzzy angel", still used fondly and shamelessly in Australian society today. Not all war correspondents were this shameless, but all were prevented from reporting accurately by the censors. One honest correspondent who covered the events, Osmar White, wrote that "no war correspondent can ever tell unpalatable truths soon enough to do any good". In a book written after the war, White made clear that "the majority [of Papuans] did their work only because the white men in command bullied them into doing it. Few if any were serving voluntarily and most would have deserted if possible". Indeed, desertion rates of carriers would at times reach as high as thirty percent, maybe more. In many respects, this was the continuation of the working class resistance that had begun to develop pre-war. This took the form of strikes, like the large-scale Rabaul strike in 1929, but also in the form of more individualised responses – such as simply fleeing situations of forced work.

Later in life, Papuan carriers would recall their treatment during the war, and spoke of their ongoing neglect:

> We worked hard despite all the danger. We were promised compensation and I ask now for what we were promised. Australian government said you work, you will be like us, but it hasn't happened. Work for us, we Work for us, we all sit down at the same table, same spoon, same food hasn't happened. Worked day and night so that things would change, I thought of nothing else. I worked hard for nothing. Australian men went home and got pensions. I'm just rubbish. Old men like me are dying without getting anything... nobody counted how many of us were killed.

In the 1980s, the Australian government made nominal efforts to compensate surviving carriers. They did so by paying a lump sum of AUD $3.25m to the Papuan government, which was entrusted with doling out 1000 Kina (about AUD $400) to each survivor. Predictably, many carriers reported that they still did not receive any money.

After the war ended, Australia largely continued its pre-war colonial policies. Though the system of indentured labour was abolished in the late 40s, the colonial economy never developed to any serious degree. The role of educating Papuans was delegated to religious missionaries, who did a sterling job: in 1953, only 1% of Papuans were literate. Independence was granted in 1975, but Australian domination over the country has continued up to the present, and is only now being seriously contested thanks to the emergence of China as a rival imperial power.

The shadow of World War II still hangs over us. While World War I is widely understood as a senseless conflict, World War II still has a moral image as a battle between the forces of good and evil. The truth is that it was a war between rival imperial powers, and nowhere is this more obvious than in the Pacific conflict, where the American-led victory over the Japanese empire established a long lasting hegemony that is directly and indirectly responsible for the massacre of hundreds of thousands of workers and peasants in Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Indonesia, Malaysia, Japan...

The story of Papua in World War II provides us with another valuable reminder – Imperial conflicts do not primarily play out in the "mother countries". They play out in the countries in between, the colonial possessions each bloc fights over. It is here that imperial war finds its cannon fodder and killing fields.

As tensions between the Chinese-led imperial bloc and the American-led imperial bloc develop to the point where war becomes a realistic possibility, we should keep this in mind; there is no greater resistance to global order than an uprising of workers across the entire region.

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WHAT IS BLACK FLAG SYDNEY?

Black Flag Sydney is a collective of anarchist-communist workers who organise mainly on unceded Gadigal land. Our ultimate goal is to build a society free of states, classes and currency, in order to achieve collective self-emancipation and universal freedom for all. Direct action is our method and worker self-management is our vision for today and the future. We aim not only to dismantle systems of capitalist exploitation, but to build the capacity for people to freely and truly self-manage their workplaces, communities, and lives.