

Privatisation IS THEFT



The looting of NSW public assets

Jim McIlroy

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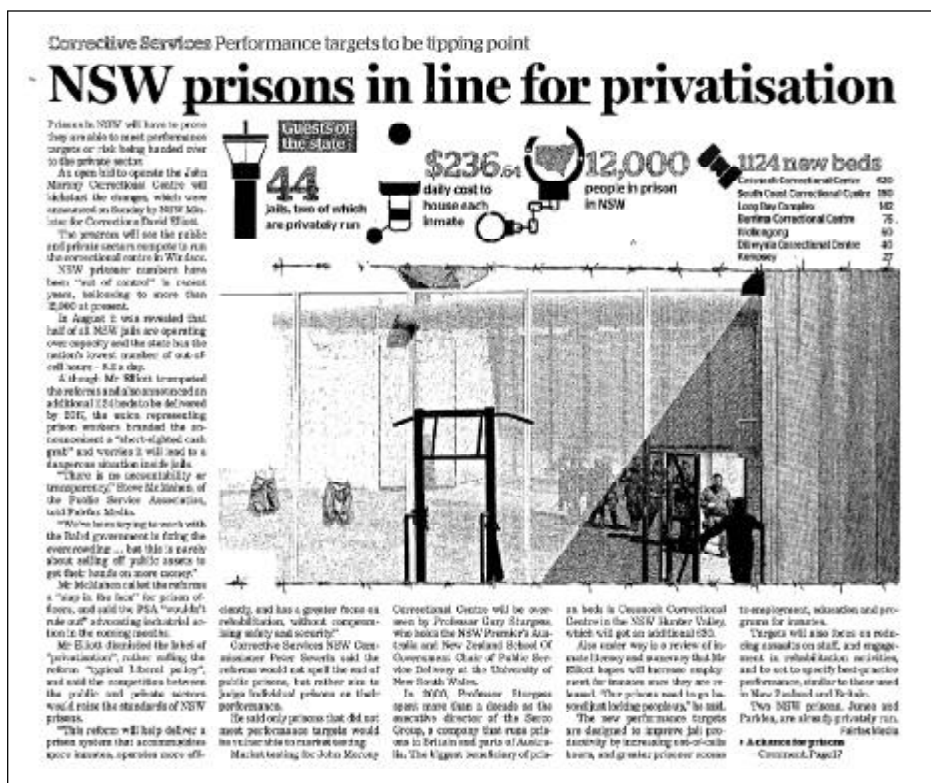
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Cover photo: Protest against NSW Mike Baird government, Sydney, May 28, 2016.

Published October 2018

Printed by Red Print, www.redprint.com.au

THE SCOURGE OF PRIVATISATION



Sydney Morning Herald, March 21, 2016.

The scourge of privatisation of public assets has been a critical part of the neoliberal offensive launched over the past 40 years in the capitalist world. The neoliberal offensive began in earnest under the leadership of US President Ronald Reagan and UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s.

Neoliberalism began with experiments conducted under the influence of the Chicago School using the brutal Pinochet dictatorship in Chile and other regimes as advance guards for an all-round counter-attack by big business against gains made by working people in the post-World War 2 period. Neoliberalism seeks to seize back any economic and social advances made by the labour movement during the post-war economic "boom", and under the threat of communism during the Cold War.

In Australia, the neoliberal offensive began under the Hawke-Keating Labor Party federal government of the 1980s and 1990s. Under the cover of the Prices-and-Incomes Accord with the ACTU and the union movement, the ALP government started by de-regulating the banks and other corporations, and moving on to begin the process of privatisation of key public assets, such as Qantas and the Commonwealth

Bank — a process which was accelerated under the John Howard Coalition regime and afterwards.

Since the turn of the 21st Century, the privatisation onslaught has continued, and deepened to the extent that the very existence of a substantial public sector in this country is now under threat. First, Telstra was sold off, then large sections of the electricity industry, transport including train and bus networks, public land and buildings, and many other key government facilities.

In Victoria, the Jeff Kennett regime of the 1990s sold off everything it was able to get away with, and in Queensland the Anna Bligh ALP government privatised rail, ports, roads and ports. Strong resistance to privatisation by some unions and the community eventually brought down the Bligh government and its successor Liberal-National Party regime under Premier Campbell Newman.

However, the most corrupt and ruthless neoliberal regime in Australia at present is the Coalition state government in NSW, which is selling off massive amounts of public assets — including the power industry, roads, health facilities, forests, the

Land Titles Office, public museums such as the Powerhouse in inner Sydney, and so on.

This pamphlet tells the story of this privatisation mania, focussing on the federal and NSW spheres, and also of the growing resistance from unions, the public and community organisations to the sell-off of the people's property.

The chapters in the pamphlet are articles reprinted from the socialist newspaper *Green Left Weekly*, during 2017 and early 2018. They tell the story of the ongoing attacks on the public sector by Coalition state and federal governments, and the mounting opposition by the community to these attacks.

Defence of the public sector against neoliberal assault is now a key question for the labour movement and the people. We must now mobilise popular protest to challenge this scourge of privatisation and defeat it.

It is now time, as is happening currently in Britain under the Labour Party leadership of Jeremy Corbyn, to revive the call for the nationalisation (or re-nationalisation in many cases) of key corporations and industries, such as banking, power, transport and telecommunications. These industries must be placed under democratic management, in the hands of boards elected by workers and the community.

The vast resources of these industries can then be utilised not for private profit, but for the interests of working people and the community, to extend public facilities in the areas of health, education, housing, transport and the environment.

Hopefully, the material in this pamphlet can provide information which can assist in building the kind of mass movement which can indeed "Halt the scourge of privatisation", and advance to demand the nationalisation under workers' and community control of the "commanding heights of the economy" — as a stepping stone in the direction of a genuinely socialist society. ■

GOOD RIDDANCE MIKE 'BAD' BAIRD

[January 19, 2017; #1122]

Good riddance to former state Liberal Premier Mike "Bad" Baird who announced on January 19 that he was resigning from his position.

A year ago, Mike Baird was the most popular politician in the country. By the end of last year, suffering one of the biggest falls in opinion polls in Australian political history.

This is largely because he took a leading role in a ruthless neoliberal political offensive. Despite the failure of the former Abbott federal government and the current Turnbull government, Baird was nevertheless able to ram through major parts of the federal Coalition's public sector cuts and other attacks on working people's economic and social rights in NSW.

Baird led the charge on privatisation with his sell-off of the state-owned power facility Ausgrid and his push to privatise huge swathes of public land, buildings and other assets. He also rammed through the forced amalgamation of local councils in the face of widespread opposition, even within the Coalition parties.

He took a stand against the cruel greyhound racing industry, but later backflipped under pressure. He was widely criticised for his laws enforcing earlier closing hours on inner-Sydney pubs and bars. He pretended to be listening to regional and rural communities concerned about coal seam gas, while also making it clear he supported the industry.

His eviction of residents from public housing — and the sell-off of their homes — especially in Millers Point, was another cruel attack. Teachers, students and others had run a concerted campaign against the NSW Coalition's cuts to TAFE and other parts of the public education system.

Nurses and doctors in the public hospitals had also campaigned ceaselessly against the privatisation of several of the state's hospitals and other health facilities. Public transport unions had put up a fight against his plans to privatise sections of the state's rail and bus system.

Baird also came under fire for weakening

the Independent Commission Against Corruption and trying to cover up the corruption being revealed within members of his own Coalition parties in NSW. His arrogance knew no bounds as he also moved to criminalise the right to protest.

But a sleeper issue, which has been growing in impact as the community protests against it increase, is the monstrous WestConnex tollway and tunnel project. This project, estimated by the government to cost \$17 billion and counting, has already destroyed large numbers of heritage homes and green space in Sydney's inner west, and will lead to a massive blow-out in traffic in the city's inner suburbs.

Right now, WestConnex is destroying hundreds of trees in Sydney Park for a massive network of exit roads in St Peters.

The unpopularity of WestConnex is set to escalate as commuters from Sydney's west begin to feel the full effects of the huge road tolls they will be forced to pay.

The NSW government should invest in public transport instead of tollways and road

tunnels to really solve the city's transport problems but Baird was more interested in throwing money to his corporate mates through lucrative WestConnex contracts.

As a result of this increasing community opposition to his extreme neoliberal policies, Baird has finally decided to pull the pin on his political career. There is speculation that he intends to resume his career as a merchant banker.

Whatever his stated personal reasons, Baird's resignation is a victory for people's movements in NSW. A 5000-6000-strong march on NSW Parliament last May was a clear expression of the widespread opposition to his policies. More such mobilisations are going to be necessary in the coming months as whomever becomes the next NSW premier resumes where Baird left off.

We need to get rid of the NSW Coalition government once and for all. And we should not accept a paler shade of similar policies from any future Labor government.

We want all of Baird's privatisations reversed and an end to the environmentally insane WestConnex tollway. NSW could be a leader ecologically sustainable jobs, energy and services. This will require a lot more community mobilisation and the Socialist Alliance is committed to this objective. ■



Photographer: ZebedeeParkes.com - GreenLeft.org.au

Protest against Baird government.

NEW PREMIER FALLS SHORT ON REAL ACTION FOR HOUSING

[January 27, 2017; # 1123]

The NSW government is selling off public housing such as the Sirius block in The Rocks. Despite declaring that housing affordability would be a key priority of her government, the new NSW Premier Gladys Berejiklian has squibbed the challenge of any real action to improve the lot of first home buyers and renters in New South Wales.

Berejiklian was unanimously elected premier on January 23 after former leader Mike Baird resigned in the face of widespread opposition to his neoliberal policies.

She immediately named housing affordability as “the biggest concern people have across the state”.

Yet she refused to support calls for cuts to tax concessions such as negative gearing, which currently favour wealthy people purchasing houses as an investment over new home buyers, or the reintroduction of

measures such as an inheritance tax. As the former state Treasurer, Berejiklian had resisted calls to abolish stamp duty on property purchases in favour of a broad-based land tax.

Berejiklian merely said that “housing supply” was “the best way to address housing affordability”. This repeats the mantra of Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull and Treasurer Scott Morrison, but does nothing to really tackle the issue of the outrageous cost of housing in Australia’s major cities.

Sydney has been rated the second most unaffordable city for housing in the world, behind Hong Kong. At the end of 2016, the Domain Group revealed that Sydney’s median house price had climbed more than 10% to a record \$1,124,000.

As a letter in the January 25 *Sydney Morning Herald* pointed out: “The federal government needs to address negative

gearing and the favourable capital gains tax treatment both to take the heat out of the housing market and encourage investment in more productive enterprise.

“The state needs to reform the Residential Tenancy Act to increase tenants’ security of tenure, so making long-term renting a viable option for lower and middle-income earners (as it is in Europe), rather than struggling to meet mortgage repayments that place them under severe financial stress.”

As well, instead of forcibly evicting public housing tenants and selling off their homes, as the Baird government did to the Millers Point residents and others, the state government needs to radically increase the construction and supply of public housing to meet the huge waiting list for public housing in NSW.

It should also act to mandate the inclusion of a significant proportion of genuinely “affordable housing” in all new property developments.

These are just some of the immediate measures which are essential to begin to tackle the housing crisis in NSW. ■

PREMIER BEREJIKLIAN ALREADY ON THE RUN

[February 3, 2017; #1124]

Gladys Berejiklian is trying to distance herself from Baird’s unpopular policies. New Premier Gladys Berejiklian is already on the run, after only a couple of weeks in the job.

Since taking over from disgraced former premier Mike Baird on January 23, Berejiklian has managed to cobble together a new cabinet of misfits, but is already reported to be preparing to dump one of Baird’s signature policies — the forced amalgamation of the state’s local councils.

In response to leaks on February 2 indicating the Coalition state government is discussing ending forced mergers, Save Our Councils Coalition (SOCC) spokesperson Phil Jenkyn said: “Save Our Councils wants to see an immediate withdrawal of the government from all forced council amalgamations, whether in court or not. The government should immediately withdraw from all legal

proceedings with councils.

“The councils which have been forcibly amalgamated should, by way of proclamation, be reinstated; the administrators should be removed and the legitimate elected councils should be re-appointed.

“Local democracy is just as precious to the people of Leichhardt as it is to the people of Cabonne, and the way this government has trashed local democracy and ignored the community had made many, many people very angry.”

The SOCC position clearly goes a step further than the rumoured government plan to allow plebiscites of residents on the mergers, possibly with the next election for those councils that have already been forcibly amalgamated. SOCC rightly demands an immediate reversal of all forced mergers, and a return to properly elected local democracy.

Commenting on Berejiklian’s new cabinet in the February 2 *Sydney Morning Herald*, Jacob Saulwick queried why former planning minister Rob Stokes was removed from his portfolio. Under the heading “Bizarre reshuffle is an own goal” Saulwick asked: “If housing is the biggest issue in the state, as Berejiklian suggests, on what lunacy would she move from the job ... the person in government who has given it the most thought, and who may even have a perspective to deal with it?” Stokes had supported cuts to negative gearing tax concessions on investment housing.

Adrian Piccoli was obviously sacked as education minister because he was a prominent critic of the federal government slashing its financing of the Gonski program of national needs-based funding for schools.

The premier’s new cabinet is clearly based on factional deals within the Coalition, and a desperate bid for political survival — especially with crucial state by-elections coming up shortly.

To add to the premier’s woes, on February 2 a leaked Treasury document

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GOVERNMENTS FAIL TO TACKLE AUSTRALIA'S HOUSING CRISIS

[February 4, 2017; #1124]

Housing is primarily a source of investment by the wealthy in this country — not a basic social right. Sydney may be in the grip of an apartment boom, but the construction of thousands of units across the city has done little to put a lid on rents, according to an analysis of the latest rental data.

Apartment living became more expensive in Sydney in the year to September 2016, after rent increases in all but three of the city's local government areas, according to the NSW Tenants' Union Rent Tracker report.

Tenants' Union advocacy and research officer Leo Patterson Ross said: "Apartment rents are growing faster than house rents at the moment."

Median rents for flats and apartments are

... BEREJIKLIAN ON THE RUN

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revealed NSW's land titles registry is earning \$130 million profit each year, increasing pressure for the government to ditch its privatisation plans.

The government hopes to receive \$2 billion for leasing the Land and Property Information office for 35 years to corporate investors. These documents show the buyers would make billions of dollars in profits over that period.

This revelation that the government is planning to sell off even more of the farm to benefit its big-business backers, is another blow against Berejiklian.

It further strengthens the public understanding that the state government is an administration by the bankers, for the bankers: both Berejiklian and her predecessor Baird came from the banking sector.

Now is the time for the various community-based campaigns against the NSW government's neoliberal attacks to unite and mobilise to bring down the Berejiklian regime as soon as possible, while keeping up the pressure on the Labor opposition to abandon its largely me-too policies on the major issues. ■

running at well over \$500 per week in Sydney. That is almost twice the current basic payment rate for the unemployment benefit of around \$530 per fortnight.

The median price of houses in Sydney has reached \$1.1 million and, even more alarming, only 8% of housing purchases last year were to first-time new home buyers.

This emphasises the fact that housing is primarily a source of investment by the wealthy in this country — not a basic social right, as it should be. The fabled "Australian dream" of owning your own home is fast becoming a nightmare.

Meanwhile, the NSW and other state governments are moving to sell off public housing stock, rather than constructing thousands more government-owned homes to attempt to meet the huge waiting lists for public housing all around the country.

There is an alternative to the pro-corporate housing policies of the major parties. Socialist Alliance is totally opposed to the federal and state governments' privatisation of public housing and giving big hand-outs to developers and private landlords from the public purse.

Socialist Alliance policy is that housing is a basic human right that should not be reduced to a commodity only available at the whim of the market. We aim for housing

that is affordable, secure, good quality and appropriately located, for all.

The Socialist Alliance advocates a massive expansion of public housing. It should not be a residual service grudgingly provided only to those who can prove they are extremely poor. It should be available for all workers who want it.

In moving to properly regulate the private sector, governments should address Australia's spiralling rental price increases by implementing rent control laws similar to those in Los Angeles and New York, which limit the amount by which rent can be increased and all rent is capped at a maximum of 20% of income.

The Socialist Alliance calls for the elimination of capital gains tax exemptions and negative gearing, which work to inflate the market and keep lower-income people out of home ownership.

The general housing affordability crisis in Australia is a product of the "free-market" madness of the capitalist system, in which human need is subordinated to big-business greed.

Green Left Weekly has campaigned strongly in support of the struggles of public housing tenants such as those at Sydney's Millers Point, who are facing eviction and the forced sale of their homes. And we have consistently advocated for alternative housing policies such as those promoted by Socialist Alliance.

If you agree with the need for housing as a human right, not a market commodity for the rich, then assist us to get the message out more broadly by contributing to the *Green Left Weekly* 2017 Fighting Fund. ■



Protest for public housing in Glebe, 2017.

OPPOSITION GROWS TO NSW LAND TITLES OFFICE SELL-OFF

[March 17, 2017; #1130]

Opposition is growing to the NSW Coalition government's move to privatise the state-owned land registry, the Land and Property Information office (LPI). Sources inside the LPI are increasingly alarmed at the government's rush to sell the office as community concern mounts against the sale itself.

The government is proposing to lease the LPI for 35 years to private investors for an estimated \$2 billion, which it plans to spend rebuilding sports stadiums. Opposition to the sale is coming from community groups, and peak bodies representing lawyers, surveyors and even developers, who all say that the integrity of the state's world-class land titles system is at stake.

The LPI, which currently produces a 70% profit margin, generated \$190 million in revenue for the state in 2015–16, which will be completely lost if the LPI is sold. Fees for regulated products will rise with the Consumer Price Index each year.

"It's a bargain, and I believe they're underselling it by \$3–4 billion," an inside source told the *Sydney Morning Herald*. The source revealed there was a small group within government "hell-bent" on

privatising the LPI. He added there was an "unhealthy influence" of the big infrastructure companies.

"There's an unholy alliance of consultants and advisers, all of whom are earning good fees, and there seems to be a pre-destined outcome," he said. "It's a privatisation feeding frenzy."

The NSW Public Service Association (PSA) said on February 3: "It is becoming increasingly clear the NSW public has nothing to gain and everything to lose from the sell-off of LPI. Despite this, the Berejiklian Government currently plans to move ahead with its privatisation."

The PSA has applied for the release of the government's modelling of future fee structures under the Government Information (Public Access) Act. "What is most galling is the fact the Berejiklian government knows absolutely that house price rises will occur as a result of its fee rises, at a time when house prices are already out of reach for many," the PSA said.

On February 23, Labor leader Luke Foley released previously secret government documents showing that almost 400 local full-time jobs could be lost as a result of the draft terms and conditions of sale of the

LPI.

"The sell-off of Land Titles Information is a travesty. No one wins," Foley said. "It puts every decent home and business owner in NSW at risk of error, fraud and guaranteed higher costs."

"Britain's Conservative government was rocked by the full implications of privatising land titles — and confronted by the massive public opposition to it. The Tories backed off — but Berejiklian stubbornly ignores the same facts. She thinks she knows better."

NSW Greens Treasury spokesperson Justin Field said on February 2: "The Greens don't support selling this world class asset, but the public would be even more furious to know it is being so short changed in the sale."

"The government's plan represents a one-off 'sugar hit', but that would undermine the true value of this asset to the people of NSW as a safe and secure property transfer service."

"It is impossible to calculate today what sort of new and adapted services will be possible through the digital transformation of the LPI and the sorts of profits a private operator could make using the public's data. While the LPI should be kept in public hands, if the government insists on a sale, a profit-sharing arrangement should be included to ensure the public gets a fair price." ■

SYDNEY PROPERTY BUBBLE TO BE SENT TO CAYMAN ISLANDS

[April 8, 2017; #1133]

"The NSW land titles registry's \$190 million-a-year revenue stream could soon start flowing towards the Cayman Islands," the *Sydney Morning Herald* reported on April 3.

A Fairfax Media investigation found that "behind the newly created companies that may house Land and Property Information are an array of foreign players, a mysterious trustee, and business links to tax havens such as Bermuda, the Cayman Islands and the Isle of Man."

The state government is set to announce the successful consortium that will operate

Land and Property Information (LPI) — the currently publicly-owned Land Titles Office, which provides essential titling and registry services for NSW property-owners — for the next 35 years. The current LPI generates \$190 million in revenue and makes \$130 million in profit annually for the state treasury.

The state is expected to gain about \$2 billion from the sale of the LPI, which means the state will be worse off within 15 years. Opposition to the sale is coming from community groups and peak bodies representing lawyers, surveyors and even

developers, who all say the integrity of the state's world-class land titles system is at stake.

On March 28, a rally and march to state parliament was held to protest the sell-off. A broad network of organisations supported the rally, including the Law Society of NSW, Institute of Surveyors NSW, the Concerned Titles Group, LPI Staff Union, the Public Service Association of NSW and the Real Estate Institute of NSW.

Greens MP Justin Field said: "The Greens are calling on the NSW government to abandon the sale. The more we find out about the sale of this monopoly and essential service, the more opposition grows."

"The community is right to be concerned about increasing risk of fraud, misuse of personal data and increasing costs of

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PSA: LAND TITLES REGISTRY SALE 'A DISASTER'

[April 22, 2017; #1134]

The NSW Coalition government's decision to lease the 150-year-old Land Titles Registry to a private consortium of Hastings Funds Management and First State Super is "a recipe for disaster" for millions of property owners across the state, the NSW Public Service Association (PSA) said on April 12.

First State is a \$59 billion superannuation fund, which developed from a NSW public sector fund. Hastings is owned by Westpac Bank.

"It is, hands down, the most appalling fire sale decision yet by a government with a strong track record in that area," PSA general secretary Stewart Little said.

"The government trumpets its efforts on 'life-changing projects' but what could be more life changing for millions of people across NSW than to lose the security on their

own property?

"Just as the PSA feared all along, ultimately the personal property records of the people in NSW will be held offshore, given a portion of the successful consortium is based in London."

For the past century and a half the state government has provided insurance and security of property titles. But now the registry, called Land and Property Information (LPI), has been leased to a private operator, individual landowners may be forced to take out insurance to guard against unscrupulous property developers and fraud.

"These super[annuation] companies will be out to turn a profit for their members," Little said. "In recent times, registry costs to the consumer have increased by 300% just to fatten the company for sale, and it will only get worse.

"How can [Premier Gladys] Berejiklian call this a win-win situation? Selling a critical government function that has such an enormous bearing on the economy and the lives of every land and property owner in NSW is nothing short of ideology gone mad.

"Academics, former senior staff, community groups, major newspapers, property developers and even prominent members of the Liberal Party have all joined the PSA in condemning the idea."

The NSW government will invest \$1 billion of the \$2.6 billion sale price into upgrading Parramatta, Homebush and Moore Park football stadiums. The remaining \$1.6 billion will be spent on other infrastructure projects, the government claims.

Labor Opposition Leader Luke Foley said he doesn't believe the government's promises that privatisation will lead to better outcomes for customers. "In the last year, they put fees up for many transactions, often to the tune of several hundred per cent," Foley said.

"Now they say 'oh, the new owner will be barred from putting up fees above CPI' — the government has done all the dirty work for them. They put all the prices up sky high over the last 12 months to fatten the pig for market day."

He said the deal was a poor one for the state as the registry made a \$130 million profit in 2015–16. "They've sold it off for 20 years' worth of the current profit ... and we know the profit is going to keep going up."

NSW Greens Treasury spokesperson Justin Field said on April 12: "The land titles privatisation will risk making property prices higher, expose property owners' interests and leave the taxpayer worse off in the long term. How many times do governments have to learn the lessons that privatisation will cost consumers more and lead to poorer services?

"The sell-off of this world class and monopoly public asset is bad public policy. Voters can now be confident that the Berejiklian government will just continue with the Coalition's 'privatisation at any cost' approach.

"The Greens oppose the land titles sale and will watch closely to make sure its private owners meet the requirements of the concession legislation. If there are avenues to overturn this privatisation in the future, we'll pursue them." ■

... SYDNEY PROPERTY BUBBLE

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property purchases as a result of the privatisation."

Field raised fears that costs will rise under a private operator, reducing access to public information, and the integrity of the records may be compromised.

"I've also heard of uneasiness around the privacy of household data once it is in private hands," he said. "Will data be kept in Australia or on overseas servers? Will personal data be safe and exempt from sale?

"The NSW government should listen to the experts, LPI staff and the community and stop the sell-off of land titles."

Labor opposition finance spokesperson Clayton Barr told state parliament: "It is unthinkable that a state government in Australia would consider entering into a sale process that supports tax evasion."

But wait. Look on the bright side. If a substantial part of the proceeds of the investor-driven Sydney housing bubble disappear offshore to the Cayman Islands or some other tax haven, perhaps the bubble will burst and the price of housing will come

down? Then first-home buyers will finally be able to afford to purchase a home.

Or maybe not. Perhaps that's just another "alternative fact" to be promoted by this neoliberal Coalition government and its backers in the conservative media.

The privatisation of LPI is just the latest in a litany of sales of public assets by pro-capitalist state and federal governments to their big-business masters in recent decades. It is certainly one of the most grotesque for some time, as it is opposed by 84% of the NSW population and almost every sector of society, except for the corporate and banking vampires.

Green Left Weekly campaigns strongly against the privatisation of the people's property. We argue for an end to the sell-offs and instead advocate the nationalisation of essential industries under community and workers' control, to be utilised for the good of the public and the environment.

If you would like to support this campaign, please make a donation to help *Green Left* spread the word. Every contribution you can make to the *Green Left Weekly* Fighting Fund will help us get the message out more broadly. ■

PROTESTS AS MILLERS POINT EVICTIONS BEGIN

[May 13, 2017; #1137]

Residents, unionists and supporters protested outside the NSW Department of Housing office in Redfern on May 10, following the first forcible eviction of a resident of Millers Point public housing.

Peter Muller, a 57-year-old electrician, was out working, when police broke into his home and removed a number of supporters who were defending the house.

About 50 protesters heard speeches condemning the actions of police and the sheriff, who were carrying out a court ruling. Almost 500, mostly elderly residents, have now been relocated from the historic Millers Point public housing estate to other suburbs, with a core of about two dozen residents determined to stay.

A spokesperson for the residents, Barney Gardner, told the protest: "After an all-day picket outside Peter's home yesterday, police forced their way in this morning, escorted the young people out and put Peter's belongings in a removalist van.

"Why are all these Millers Point homes now vacant? The government says it is selling our homes to build new public housing. But where are these additional public housing dwellings?

"There are 60,000 people on the NSW public housing waiting list. Yet, there are now 36 empty houses in this section of Millers Point.

"The government and department have told lies all through this process. We have suffered three years of stress, including suicides and multiple hospitalisations of elderly and vulnerable residents.

"It has been wonderful to see all the support we have been getting from unions and community groups. This is not over by a long shot."

Paul McAleer, Sydney branch secretary of the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA), told the crowd: "Maritime workers have lived in Millers Point for well over a century. This is a unique community, officially recognised as a 'national treasure'.

"We are proud of those who have stood beside Peter and the other residents of Millers Point facing eviction. The second eviction won't be as easy for the authorities. We will stand alongside them, as long as it takes."

The rally followed an all-day blockade of Muller's house by about 100 protesters to prevent authorities entering the property. Members of the MUA and other unions, as well as residents and other supporters, stood outside Muller's house and chanted: "Peter Muller, here to stay! To the sherriff, go away!"

Muller told News.com.au: "After me, all the remaining Millers Point tenants are aged pensioners.

"We are trying to get the Department of Housing and the Premier Gladys Berejiklian to review and ideally rescind the total social cleansing of Millers Point, of working people. Workers still need homes in this city. If we lose homes, it's going to affect future generations of workers.

"We'd like them to consider leaving 120 homes on some sort of 99-year social housing lease and that would be all of Sirius and at least 40 of these 1-2 bedroom workers cottages." ■

NSW BUS DRIVERS STRIKE AGAINST PRIVATISATION

[May 20, 2017; #1138]

Sydney bus drivers walked out on May 18 in a 24-hour strike against plans by the NSW Coalition government to privatise public bus services in the city's inner-west.

The action, which defied the NSW Industrial Relations Commission (IRC), affected four bus depots: Leichhardt, Burwood, Kingsgrove and Tempe.

The Rail Tram and Bus Union of NSW (RTBU) issued an open letter to commuters saying in part: "Sadly, we cannot commit to you that this will be the last disruption you will face over the coming months. If the premier does not intervene as a matter of urgency this will, indeed, be Sydney's winter of discontent."

RTBU Bus Division secretary Chris Preston said the government's May 15

decision to privatise bus services would slash routes, close bus stops and cost the jobs of 1200 public transport workers. He said it would lead to "rolling closures of bus services and bus stops for commuters across inner-western Sydney".

"We oppose privatisation because we know, at the end of the day, it's the commuters who'll pay. Private bus operators put profits before the public. To make money, they'll slash services and cut back on maintenance. We've seen it happen before."

Preston said there had been no consultation with bus drivers or the community about the decision. As recently as December, the State Transit Authority told all public transport workers that their jobs were safe for the next five years.

"If the government cannot be trusted to

keep its promises not to privatise bus services, what can it be trusted on? There should be no doubt the government now intends to privatise all public transport across NSW."

Labor's transport spokesperson Jodi McKay said on May 15 she feared the Coalition was planning the wholesale sell-off of Sydney's transport network, but stopped short of saying what Labor was doing to fight it.

NSW Greens MP and transport spokesperson Dr Mehreen Faruqi slammed the sell-off plan saying the Coalition government has "an addiction to privatisation".

"The NSW Liberals and Nationals are desperate to sell off all publicly owned and operated transport services ... The strategy is to run down public transport services, attack the workforce and use that as a pretext for washing their hands of the matter.

"Public transport is not a luxury or a commodity. It is a basic and essential need that provides mobility and connects our

Continued over page.

SYDNEY BUS DRIVERS HOLD ‘FARE-FREE DAY’

[June 3, 2017; #1139]

Bus drivers across Sydney closed their opal readers giving customers a “fare-free day” on June 1. Bus drivers across Sydney implemented a “fare-free day” on June 1 as part of their campaign of industrial action against the NSW government’s plan to privatise buses in the inner west. Drivers from 12 depots around the city turned off their Opal Card machines and wore plain clothes to draw the attention of passengers to the threat to public bus services.

Rail, Tram and Bus Union (RTBU) divisional secretary Chris Preston said drivers were angry at the government’s

move: “They’re out there trying to let the public know what [Transport] Minister [Andrew] Constance is up to because the public overwhelmingly do not want their buses privatised. They want to keep them in public hands,” he said.

“Private operators will put profits before people,” RTBU bus division president David Woollams said. “As a result, the community will get higher fares, fewer services and the removal of local bus stops.”

The “fare-free day” follows a 24-hour strike by bus drivers at four inner-western depots on May 18. The union is planning further action, both industrial and in the

community, to stop the government’s plan going ahead.

The RBTU has warned that the sell-off of the inner-western bus routes is just the first step towards the privatisation of the whole public bus system. The move to privatise buses follows the sell-off of the ferry system several years ago, and the move towards private operation of the new Metro train lines now in the pipeline.

A leaflet distributed by the union states: “More than 200 bus routes, the entire inner western fleet, will be sold off in the biggest bus privatisation in inner Sydney. Andrew Constance’s privatisation will mean: Higher fares; crowded buses; fewer services.”

The union has established a public campaign against the bus sell-off and is calling for widespread community support. ■

SALE OF SYDNEY GPO ‘SCANDALOUS’

[June 10, 2017; #1187]

The proposed sale by Australia Post of Sydney’s historic GPO building to private business is “scandalous” and puts the complex at risk of neglect, according to the head of the National Trust NSW (NTNSW).

Architect and NTNSW branch president Clive Lucas, who specialises in restoring historic buildings, said the GPO was one of, if not the most, important colonial post offices in the country.

“I think it’s scandalous that such an important building in such an important city should be sold off in this way,” Lucas said

on June 1. “A nation that forgets its history is a nation that has no future.

“I think lots of people are very much against us selling our heritage, selling the family silver and there’s nothing more important to Sydney than the Sydney GPO. It’s the heart of the city,” he said.

Singaporean developer Far East Organisation is reportedly in the process of buying part of the Martin Place heritage site for \$150 million. FEO already owns nearby property and leases part of the interior of the GPO for retail and restaurant use.

The controversial sale has received no objections from either the federal or state governments, and has since been approved by the Foreign Investment Review Board (FIRB). It only awaits a final go-ahead from Commonwealth Heritage.

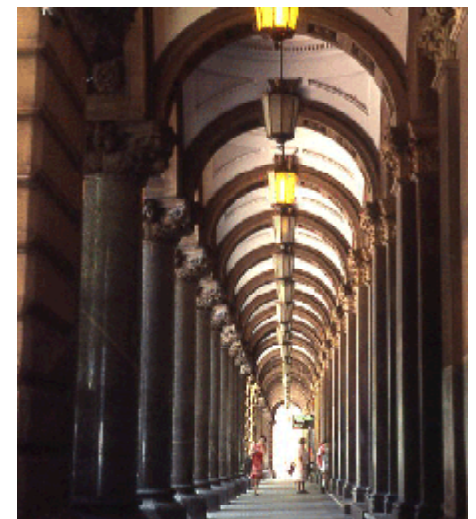
Sydney Lord Mayor Clover Moore has slammed the planned sell-off: “I’m deeply concerned about the circumstances surrounding the decision to sell off the GPO,” she said. “This Victorian-era architectural and artistic masterpiece — the equivalent of the Sydney Opera House in 19th Century Sydney — is unquestionably one of the most important heritage

properties in Australia.

“A building such as this should be preserved in public ownership with ongoing public access and a publicly endorsed conservation plan to protect it.”

Malcolm Gunning, president of the Real Estate Institute of Australia, questioned the secrecy surrounding the sale of the building: “Why wasn’t the GPO put out to public tender?” he asked.

He said there was a probity issue as the building wasn’t publicly sold and he questioned whether Australia Post got value for money. “I think you could say it doesn’t stand the pub test very well — \$150 million for a prominent building in Martin Place sounds a bit cheap,” he said. ■



Colonnade of Sydney GPO.

... NSW BUS DRIVERS STRIKE

Continued from previous page.

communities and people to their jobs, education and healthcare.”

Faruqi pointed to Melbourne’s privately-run transportation system to show the scale of the disaster. “When the only motivation is profit, you see the loss of routes, less services, [all of] which disproportionately affects vulnerable people who rely on it, like the elderly and the unemployed.” ■

NSW BUDGET 'BIGGEST CON-JOB IN THE WESTERN WORLD'



NSW Treasurer Dominic Perrottet & Premier Gladys Berejiklian, June 2018.

[June 24, 2017; #1142]

"The NSW Coalition government's 2017 budget might be better described as the 'biggest con-job in the Western world'," Susan Price, Socialist Alliance candidate for Ashfield in the upcoming Inner West Council elections, said on June 21. She was responding to state Treasurer Dominic Perrottet's declaration that his inaugural budget was "the envy of the Western world".

"Having sold off the state's electricity network for an estimated \$20 billion, the government now boasts it is investing billions in hospitals and schools. In fact, the people of NSW have lost a huge source of long-term revenue from the privatisation of major public assets such as the power industry and the Land Titles Office, and now the [Gladys] Berejiklian government is trying to trick people into thinking they've got a bargain," Price said.

The government's stamp duty income on residential property soared almost 10% to \$6.8 billion. With a forecast 6% increase for each of the next three years, it is clear that Sydney's insane housing market is providing

a huge boost to the state's finances.

But how long will this housing price bubble last? There are already signs that Sydney's property boom is starting to cool off.

"The government is living on borrowed time," Price said. "The state's revenues, like those of the Western Australian government, which collapsed when the mining boom subsided, will eventually fall when the housing bubble bursts."

"That's why the labour movement and the NSW community need to fight for the ongoing rights of all residents to affordable rents and increased public housing, and for genuine measures to make housing available to first-home buyers at reasonable prices."

The Treasurer's budget speech on June 20, revealed surpluses totalling \$12 billion this year and \$73 billion in planned infrastructure spending over the next four years. The main expenditure items are \$7.7 billion on health and hospitals, \$4.2 billion on new and upgraded schools and \$11 billion on transport, especially roads, this year.

The last item includes \$3.2 billion set aside

for the controversial WestConnex tollway, which is due to be privatised in the near future. The government is also preparing to sell off the state's share of the Snowy Mountains Hydro scheme.

Very soon there will be no substantial public assets left to sell.

As state Labor opposition leader Luke Foley pointed out, the announced spending on hospitals is a "cruel hoax", due to their proposed completion dates of 2024 and 2025. Shadow treasurer Ryan Park said the government should use its surging revenue from stamp duty on house sales to accelerate the hospital upgrades.

According to NSW Greens Treasury spokesperson Justin Field, the state budget is "a lost opportunity to invest in a future where people are given opportunities to build a good life for themselves, where we protect our environment and ensure a healthy climate and good public services."

"There is not one mention of climate change and no real plan to ensure young people can afford a home or a place to rent in the future. Is that wise? Is it fair?"

Greens transport spokesperson Dr Mehreen Faruqi said the NSW budget had once failed regional communities, with no significant boost in funding for public transport in regional NSW. Faruqi said: "It is embarrassing to see the treasurer gloat about keeping billions of dollars locked away in surplus, but fail to make a big investment in public transport for people outside of Sydney. The money is there, the need is there, all that is missing is the political will."

"Literally billions of dollars is being wasted in Sydney while the government ignores opportunities for new regional rail or for a big expansion of the bus and community transport in Northern Rivers, South Coast and other areas."

Meanwhile, more than 500 jobs from TAFE will be cut in the middle of a skills shortage. In the budget papers, TAFE full-time equivalent (FTE) workers for 2016–17 is listed at 10,470, but in the budget forecast for 2017–18, that number drops by 501 to just 9969. The cuts will hit both TAFE teaching and support staff. ■

'DON'T SELL OUR BUSES' CAMPAIGN HEATS UP



[June 30, 2017; #1143]

More than 200 people packed into the Pitt Street Uniting Church on June 28 to protest the state government's plans to privatise public bus services in the city's inner west.

The community assembly, organised by UnionsNSW and the Sydney Alliance, drew bus drivers and other workers, unionists and concerned members of the public to join the growing campaign to stop the sell-off of public transport.

The proposed privatisation of buses in Sydney's inner west, or Region 6 of the metropolitan bus network, is a threat to the entire public transport system in the city. There are 233 routes in Region 6, with commuters taking more than 42 million trips on these routes every year.

About 1300 workers are based in the four depots to be privatised — Tempe, Kingsgrove, Burwood and Leichhardt. These depots are just the first to be placed in the government's privatisation firing line.

Transport minister Andrew Constance told the Australian Financial Review on

March 20: "They will all be private. In 10 to 15 years' time government will not be in the provision of public transport services."

State secretary of the Rail Bus and Tram Employees Union (RBTU) Bus Division Chris Preston told the meeting: "This [Coalition] government has no mandate to privatise the buses. They went to the last election pledging that public transport would not be sold off."

Associate Professor Kurt Iveson, from Sydney University, outlined the case to keep buses public. He refuted Constance's claim that inner suburban public buses get more complaints than the private services on the outskirts of Sydney as "just not true".

He exposed the other government claim that "privatisation reduces costs" by noting that international experience of privatisation shows that while costs may go down initially, in the end they go up again. Meanwhile, there are job cuts, reduced services, and increased fares.

Labor Opposition Leader Luke Foley said the move to sell off Region 6 of the bus

network was announced "without warning" despite a commitment before the last state election by then-transport minister, now Premier, Gladys Berejiklian that the government had "no further plans" for privatisation of public transport,

"Public buses have been operating in Sydney now for 85 years. If the government gets away with this, the rest of the bus network will be sold off too. We can't let them succeed."

UnionsNSW secretary Mark Morey said: "This government has privatised some \$50 billion of our state assets. We have had enough. This is not just about the buses, but about our whole public sector. It's time to hold these politicians accountable. We can win this."

Greens transport spokesperson Dr Mehreen Faruqi told the meeting: "We have to stop this privatisation madness. Public transport must work for the people, not the profiteers."

"The government is already gifting the new Metro rail line to private operators. And the attack on rail and buses in Newcastle shows what we have to fight against, with all our strength."

The speeches were followed by a roll call of representatives of unions and community organisations committed to supporting the struggle to stop the bus sell-off.

Finally, Thomas Costa from UnionsNSW explained some next steps in the campaign to save the public bus network. The first major public effort will be a community mobilisation on July 5 to gain more than 10,000 signatures on a mass petition against the sell-off.

Campaign supporters were urged to attend suburban bus stops to hand out leaflets and gather signatures from the public. More than 10,000 signatures will allow opposition parties to force the government to a parliamentary debate on the bus privatisation.

The June 28 community assembly follows a strike by bus drivers on May 18, a "free fare day" implemented by drivers on June 1, a June 15 public meeting in Marrickville, organised by Labor and one hosted by the Greens on June 20 in Leichhardt.

[For more information visit www.dontsellourbuses.org.au.] ■

BOWRAL AND WYONG HOSPITALS TO REMAIN IN PUBLIC HANDS

[July 15, 2017; #1145]

The NSW Nurses and Midwives' Association (NSWNMA) welcomed reports the NSW government had capitulated on July 7 on the proposed privatisation of Bowral and District Hospital. This followed the announcement on July 6 that Wyong Hospital, south of Newcastle, will also remain in public hands.

NSWNMA general secretary Brett Holmes said the decision was a testament to 10 long months of campaigning with the community group Public Health First, local health workers and their supporters.

"Another day, another victory for the people," he said. "This is a sensible outcome for Bowral Hospital and will ensure the redeveloped facility remains in public hands, as it should be.

"Our members had been extremely concerned, not only about their own job security under a public-private partnership arrangement, but also over the lack of guaranteed safe patient care and accountability of taxpayers' money.

"Now the [Gladys] Berejiklian government has walked away from plans to privatise Bowral Hospital, it must bring forward the remaining funds required to

deliver a better public health service for the people of Bowral."

On July 6, Holmes had also welcomed the cancellation of NSW government plans to sell off Wyong Hospital. "Today's decision by the Berejiklian government to walk away from plans to privatise Wyong Hospital is a step in the right direction," he said.

"After allocating \$10 million in last month's budget to the hospital's redevelopment, the state government must now fast track the remaining \$190 million to ensure the upgrades are delivered on time."

While these victories for people power at Wyong and Bowral are important, government plans to privatise hospitals at Maitland and Shellharbour still remain unclear. A debate in state parliament on September 14 over the plan for a new Maitland private hospital has been triggered by a local petition signed by more than 10,000 people.

There is much evidence that public-private partnerships in the health sector simply do not work and often end up costing the government, and taxpayers, much more than if they had been kept in public hands.

Health Services Union NSW secretary Gerard Hayes said the campaign against



Protest against sell-off of Wyong Hospital.

hospital privatisations would "intensify" following the Wyong decision. "We are encouraged by today's decision in Wyong, but we won't back off," he said.

The union-backed community campaign against privatisation of public hospitals is showing signs of success. In addition to the victories at Wyong and Bowral, the state government was forced to announce in October it was backing off from plans to privatise Goulburn Base Hospital.

These wins are vital not only in pushing back the Coalition government's drive to privatise the state's public hospitals, but also strengthen the growing campaign to defeat this government's neoliberal obsession with selling off every available public sector asset to big business. ■

SYDNEY BUS DRIVERS PROTEST PRIVATISATION PLAN

[July 28, 2017; #1147]

Bus drivers and supporters rallied outside Burwood Bus Depot on July 20 to oppose plans by the NSW Coalition government to privatise Inner West bus services.

At the rally, petitions containing around 14,000 signatures against the bus privatisation were handed over to Labor and Greens MPs. Petitions with more than 10,000 signatures trigger a debate in state parliament.

The government reportedly announced a call for corporate expressions of interest in the privatisation the same day.

Speakers explained that the drivers at all 12 depots had held firm against accepting the privatisation and the government had withdrawn their industrial allowance worth around \$150 a week. The State Transit Authority says it will only reinstate the allowance if the drivers agree to the privatisation plan.

Labor Opposition Leader Luke Foley told the crowd: "The people know that if buses are privatised the service will suffer." He promised that an incoming Labor government would "pay you back your industrial allowance, with back pay" if they

won the next election.

Greens transport spokesperson Mehreen Faruqi said the government's "privatisation madness" will mean a "massive loss" to the community. "Routes will be cut, stops will be missed," and jobs and services will be reduced, she said.

Other Labor and Greens MPs also addressed the rally, pledging support for the campaign against the bus sell-off. The campaign for more signatures against the bus privatisation is continuing, and possible further industrial action by the bus drivers is under discussion.

Rail Tram and Bus Union bus delegate Leon affirmed: "We will not back down. We will continue the fight until we win."

To sign the petition, visit the website. ■

OUTRAGE OVER POWERHOUSE MUSEUM MOVE SECRECY

[September 1, 2017; #1151]

Community outrage over the NSW Coalition government's decision to shift the iconic Powerhouse Museum from its central city location in Ultimo to a flood-prone site on the Parramatta River is growing, fuelled by the excessive secrecy surrounding the cost of the move.

At a NSW Legislative Council inquiry into the plan, museum experts claimed the transfer could cost at least \$1.5 billion, and risked destroying irreplaceable artefacts crucial to the collection.

Despite having promised to release a preliminary business plan for the move in March, the state government has now declared the documents to be "cabinet in

confidence". The government had earlier claimed the move would cost the same as the expected amount to be raised by the sale of the current building — about \$250 million.

Lindsay Sharpe, founding director of the Powerhouse Museum and a world-renowned expert on museum construction, said the decision to move the museum had been made in haste and without full consultation by a government that was ideologically driven to encourage private inner-city development.

He said the cost of building a new museum, with all the necessary infrastructure, plus the cost of shifting the existing collection, would mean "you are not

going to get much change out of \$1.5 billion".

This is yet another example of the government's insatiable drive to sell off public assets in the interests of private developers. The sale of the historic Powerhouse Museum building will no doubt further enrich corporate developers, who are best mates with the Liberal Party.

The obvious alternative, as many in Sydney's western suburbs agree, is to build a new Museum of Western Sydney at Parramatta, focused particularly on the history and culture of the region and boosted by the huge stock of artefacts in storage at the existing Powerhouse Museum, because of lack of display space.

Just like all the other examples of neoliberal privatisation being imposed by the NSW Coalition government, the sale and destruction of the Powerhouse Museum is another proof that this corrupt and rotten regime must be brought down as soon as possible. ■

'ASSET RECYCLING': ANOTHER GIANT PRIVATISATION SCAM

[September 8, 2017; #1152]

Heritage-listed public housing at inner-city Millers Point has been sold for nearly \$450 million. The NSW Coalition government has sold off more than \$9 billion in publicly-owned property since it took power six years ago, a state parliamentary inquiry was told on September 4.

"Over the last six years ... approximately \$9.14 billion of real property assets have been recycled [sold or leased] by government agencies," the CEO of Property NSW Brett Newman told a Budget Estimates hearing.

Another \$1 billion in sales is forecast for the coming three years, taking the total projected sales under the Coalition government to more than \$10 billion over its two terms in power. Overall, the state government's "asset recycling program" of selling off assets, supposedly to invest in new infrastructure, has resulted in government divestment of more than 20,000 properties, up to the last financial year.

With total NSW government property holdings estimated at about \$140 billion, the Coalition's planned sell-off represents about

7% of the state's property assets.

The controversial sale of heritage-listed public housing at inner-city Millers Point has harvested nearly \$450 million for the government so far, Budget Estimates heard. About 4000 properties owned by the Department of Family and Community Services have been sold, *The Sydney Morning Herald* reported on September 4.

The Coalition government has also sold 384 Department of Education properties since taking office. These properties were deemed "surplus to requirements", despite reports the government is facing a \$10.8 billion backlog in school maintenance and an explosion in student numbers.

Newman was unable to give any guarantee that the Education Department would not be forced to buy back some properties in the future — no doubt at inflated prices, benefitting those Liberal Party mates, the big property investors, who will have snapped up these properties for a song.

These huge sell-offs by the NSW Coalition government are only some of the most extreme cases of the sale of public

assets by state and federal governments, whether Coalition or Labor, in recent times. Under Premier Gladys Berejiklian, the NSW government's privatisation mania, initiated under former Premier Mike Baird, has merely accelerated.

Asset recycling is merely a sham re-badging of the large-scale privatisation of public assets, which has been occurring in Australia and internationally for the past several decades, as part of the neoliberal capitalist drive that began in the 1980s.

Asset recycling was launched by Prime Minister Tony Abbott in 2014, but ended by the Malcolm Turnbull government in 2016, with just half its allocation spent. Under the scheme, state governments were bribed to privatise public assets with an asset recycling subsidy from the federal treasury.

Even the Productivity Commission warned that asset recycling "could act to encourage privatisation in circumstances that are not fully justified and encourage the selection of new projects that do not have demonstrable net benefits."

University of Queensland economist Professor John Quiggin, writing in the June 7 *Guardian*, described asset recycling as the "last gasp of a failed model".

"The core problem with the 'recycling' idea is that income-generating assets were

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RE-NATIONALISE THE POWER INDUSTRY

[September 15, 2017; #1153]

The electricity industry crisis has reached new heights, with the federal government pressuring giant energy company AGL to keep the ageing Liddell coal-fired power station open for a further five years after 2022, its due date for closure.

Liddell, in the Hunter Valley region of NSW, is a coal-burning dinosaur. The reality is neither the government's policy of defending Big Coal, nor its reliance on the so-called "energy market", will solve the problem of skyrocketing electricity prices for consumers or the looming environmental crisis.

Energy commentator Giles Parkinson explained: "The proposal to extend the life

of Liddell is increasingly looking like a proposal of breath-taking stupidity — a decision that would do exactly the opposite of its stated purpose of boosting reliability and lowering costs. It would kill innovation and new investment, and lead to huge questions about probity and markets.

"AGL has said that Liddell's output could be replaced by wind, solar, battery storage and pumped hydro. But that whole process is now put at risk by [Malcolm] Turnbull's extraordinary intervention."

Despite the pressure from the Prime Minister, AGL still appears likely to reject the government's demands. AGL chief executive Andy Vesey said: "We are committed to finding the best solution for

the market. We believe we can deliver that without having to consider the extension or sell the plant and that's what we are going to work on."

With the sale of most of the NSW power grid to private corporations last year, the bulk of Australia's power production and distribution networks is now in private hands. The energy market is merely a figleaf for a cartel of monopoly corporations, currently 60% based on coal, which are ripping off consumers.

The Liddell controversy reinforces the urgent need for a complete reversal of direction for the power industry. Far from relying on market forces to solve the energy crisis, we need to re-nationalise electricity production and distribution under workers' and community control.

Liddell and all other power stations should be re-nationalised, under combined federal-state ownership, and placed under a board of management including both workers' delegates and elected representatives of the community.

It is an (admittedly unlikely) option for the government to take over Liddell and other ageing coal-fired power stations, which are effectively worthless in financial terms, just to keep them open past their use by date.

But our demand must be to re-nationalise Liddell and other ancient coal-fired plants to ensure they are shut down as soon as possible. This would open the way for investment in large-scale renewable energy.

The Australian Energy Market Operator must be replaced by an elected national community energy council to oversee the power system and make key decisions on the closure of old power stations and investment in new renewables-based power plants.

Only in such a manner can the current crisis of the privatised electricity system, relying largely on fossil-fuel production, be fundamentally transformed into a renewable-based system, which can operate in the interests of the community and the environment. ■

... 'ASSET RECYCLING'

Continued from previous page.

sold to finance new investments that did not generate income. Rather like selling your house to buy an expensive car, this is a trick that can only be done once, and leaves governments with increased net debt.

"This end of asset recycling has been part of a broader reaction against privatisation and PPPs [Public Private Partnerships], which has swept a number of state governments from office," Quiggin wrote.

Unfortunately, this fate has yet to befall the corrupt and venal NSW Coalition government. However, with growing public opposition to the government's disastrous, soon-to-be-privatised WestConnex tollway scheme; the immoral sale of Millers Point public housing; the illogical looming sell-off and transfer of the Powerhouse Museum; and now allegations that the \$12 billion Crown Lands estate is to be officially valued as a prelude to large-scale sell-offs, the tide may be turning on the Berejiklian regime.

Apparently, the US Trump Administration is interested in the Australian asset recycling experience. US Vice-President Mike Pence reportedly told business leaders during his visit to this country in April that the US is keen to emulate Australia's model of public asset

recycling.

Meanwhile, taking advantage of his continuing links to the NSW government, former Premier Mike Baird, now a corporate officer with the National Australia Bank, visited the US in July to explain to government officials there how asset recycling is supposed to work.

"People are interested and have heard the story ... the NSW story and the Australian story," Baird commented. Not the whole story, we can be sure.

The truth about the disaster arising from the experience of asset recycling, with the privatisation of community assets for the benefit of big business and the associated cuts to the public sector in the areas of housing, education, health and the environment, must be revealed and opposed.

Green Left Weekly has campaigned ceaselessly against the sell-off of public assets, and is pledged to continue to do so. We need your help to keep up this effort.

You can contribute to the *Green Left Weekly* 2017 Fighting Fund online here. Direct deposits can also be made to Green Left, Bendigo Bank, BSB: 633-000 Account number: 160058699. Otherwise, you can send a cheque or money order to PO Box 394, Broadway NSW 2007 or donate on 1800 634 206 (free call from anywhere in Australia). ■

UNION SLAMS SERCO CONTRACT FOR CENTRELINK CALL CENTRE

[October 14, 2017; #1157]

The Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) has condemned the federal Coalition government for allowing multinational company Serco to operate a Centrelink call centre, saying the move will put thousands of vulnerable people at risk.

Human Services Minister Alan Tudge has announced Serco subsidiary Serco Citizen Services will begin operating a Centrelink call centre in Melbourne within weeks, with 250 full-time equivalent staff.

The Serco call centre privatisation move, which may be the beginning of the future sell-off of Centrelink operations, is estimated to cost \$51.7 million over three years. It represents yet another attack on the public sector by the government, which is determined to outsource as much public service work to big business as it can.

The move to sell off Centrelink call services to discredited Britain-based

multinational Serco is to be funded from the same 2017-18 federal budget that slashed 1200 jobs from the Department of Human Services (DHS), which includes Centrelink. No wonder more than 42 million calls to Centrelink were unanswered last financial year — the justification used by the government for contracting out a call centre to Serco in the first place.

CPSU national secretary Nadine Flood said on October 11: “This deal hatched by the Turnbull government is an absolute disaster for Centrelink and the thousands of vulnerable Australians who rely on the agency. Serco is a tax-avoiding multinational parasite, plain and simple, that profits from downgrading public services and underpaying the people who provide them. Everything they touch leads to services suffering.

“Trusting the highly sensitive needs and information handled by Centrelink staff to

a private operator is scary in itself and this situation is even worse. We’re deeply concerned at the prospect of Centrelink clients being dealt with by a company that runs private prisons and Australia’s immigration detention centres.

“Centrelink services have already been run into the ground as the Turnbull government has slashed more than 5000 permanent jobs from the Department of Human Services (DHS).

“This decision comes straight out of the conservative politics playbook. The Turnbull government has cut and cut and cut at Centrelink, and is now trying to use the appalling service standards it has caused as justification for privatising a critical public service.

“Centrelink clients need real help, such as that they are given by our members who have permanent jobs in the department and therefore the proper training and experience to actually resolve peoples’ problems. A private call centre that’s designed merely to make the department’s call waiting times look better isn’t going to genuinely help anyone.” ■

UNION WARNS RYDE BUSES NEXT IN LINE FOR SELL-OFF

[October 20, 2017; #1158]

The NSW bus drivers’ union has warned the public that services in the Ryde area could be next in line for privatisation, as the campaign against the sell-off of inner-western Sydney bus operations continues.

In May, the state Coalition government put services from four bus depots — Tempe, Kingsgrove, Burwood and Leichhardt — out to private tender, provoking widespread outrage from workers and the community.

Rail, Tram and Bus Union NSW Bus secretary Chris Preston said the government was now setting its sights on more sell-offs: “Commuters in the Ryde region deserve to know what’s at stake. That’s why we’re hitting the streets, talking to as many commuters as we can,” he said on October 13.

“If commuters think the buses in and out of Ryde are late and crowded now, just wait

until the private sector gets its hands on them.” He said profit-driven operators would inevitably provide services with fewer stops and services and longer travel times.

Bus drivers and supporters crowded into the public gallery of the NSW Legislative Assembly on October 12 to hear the debate on the bus service sell-off. Following the presentation of a petition opposing the privatisation which had 25,000 signatures, Labor and Greens MPs condemned the sell-off, while government ministers and backbenchers vainly attempted to justify the move.

Speakers against the sell-off pointed out that the alleged reason for the move, that complaints about late running of buses in the inner west were much higher than other regions, were untrue.

The size of Region 6 and number of passenger trips taken in the inner western

suburbs, meant that the rate of complaints per 1000 trips was comparable or lower than other regions. MPs speaking against the sell-off explained that, by comparison, the rate of complaints for some outer-suburban areas, which were already privatised, were higher than in the inner-western suburbs.

This showed that the government’s real reason for the sell-off was ideological and it was part of the government’s neoliberal “obsession” with privatising state government assets in the interests of its big-business mates, they said. ■



BONDI PAVILION SAVED FROM PRIVATISATION

[October 21, 2017; #1158]

The iconic Bondi Pavilion on the foreshore of Bondi Beach has been saved from privatisation, and discussions have commenced about plans for its future as a cultural centre and creative hub.

The big swing against the Liberal Party in recent council elections resulted in former Liberal mayor of Waverley Council Sally Betts, who was pushing hard for the commercialisation of the pavilion, being replaced as mayor.

The new mayor is Labor's John

Wakefield, with deputy mayor, the Greens' Dominic Wy Kanak. Labor and the Greens hold a majority on the council and have declared that the Bondi Pavilion will be saved for continued community and cultural use.

Wy Kanak said he was committed to "creating an open and transparent council with less secrecy, and having councillors more accessible to constituents". Wakefield has spoken against over-development of the Waverley area, declaring: "We will be very firm in sticking to our development control plan."

A Bondi Beach precinct meeting was held in early October to discuss proposals for community involvement in future plans for the Bondi Pavilion. The meeting was held in the theatre, which had been a key target of Betts' plans for a \$38 million redevelopment. The community space on the top floor of the building had been destined for sale as a private restaurant.

Wakefield and Wy Kanak announced to the meeting that the new council would be creating a Stakeholder Advisory Committee, made up of seven residents and members of the local arts community. The committee's role would be to gather information from the public and determine a "hierarchy of required and desired uses" for the building as a cultural centre and creative hub. ■

TURNBULL IS THE DRIVER OF THE NBN 'TRAINWRECK'

[October 27, 2017; #1159]

The Coalition and Labor agree that the NBN should be privatised. If the National Broadband Network (NBN) is becoming a "calamitous train wreck", as Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull claimed on October 23, then the fault lies with him.

He was the minister for communications in the Tony Abbott Coalition government who, in 2013, oversaw the disastrous decision to fundamentally change the NBN from Labor's fibre-to-the-premises (FTTP) model to a technologically obsolete fibre-to-the-node (FTTN) system. At the time, Abbott apparently wanted to "kill the NBN" entirely.

FTTP means a fibre broadband connection direct to the home or business, while FTTN means connection to the nearest street box or pillar, with the final section relying on an existing old-fashioned copper wire attachment. FTTN was meant to be cheaper, but will inevitably be slow and unreliable.

Now Turnbull is prime minister, leading a government that is implementing a third-rate national internet broadband system, inferior to the majority of countries in our region and the world. As the ABC's Four Corners revealed on October 23, New

Zealand is rolling out a FTTP broadband system, which is significantly superior to the NBN in Australia.

Telecommunications consultant Paul Budde highlighted the issue in a commentary piece in the *Sydney Morning Herald*. He emphasised that Turnbull as then communications minister led the change of NBN policy from FTTP to FTTN.

"Obviously, he didn't [then] see his change in policy as a train wreck in the making, as he indicated he could build the NBN for \$25 billion and it would be finished by 2016. The price tag is now up to \$50 billion, to be finished in 2020–21 and we are saddled with a second-rate network.

"If we want to go even further, it was under [former Coalition Prime Minister] John Howard's watch that Telstra was privatised without any conditions attached to regional broadband or to an upgrade of the network from copper to fibre."

Budde called on the current government to "stop the roll-out of the FTTN and replace it with (fibre to the curb (FTTC). More money spent on FTTN will only make the NBN less valuable and continue the waste of taxpayers' money.

"If the price of this is a delay of another one or two years, so be it. Better to do it

right in the first place."

FTTC is a compromise between FTTP and FTTP, which takes the fibre connection much closer to the premises than fibre to the node, and is allegedly cheaper than a final fibre connection from the street to the individual house. Whether that is a better overall solution in the long run is debatable.

In any case, the key issue is the need for quality high-speed internet to be made available to all Australian households at a reasonable cost and for the NBN system to remain in public hands.

So far, the signs are not good. The Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman's recent annual report showed a 160% increase in complaints about the NBN.

Four Corners revealed that some towns that were in the process of receiving NBN roll-out when the change of policy occurred are now experiencing a so-called "digital divide". Dubbo, for example, has a street with FTTP on one side, and the lower-quality FTTN system on the other.

Apparently, this has even affected the property market, with buyers wanting to know whether a house for sale has FTTP or FTTN connection, with a noticeable drop in price for FTTN

Rob Burgess explained in the October 25 *New Daily*: "The complexities of this week's debate over the National Broadband Network should not obscure two simple facts: Australia is still way behind where it

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CPSU SLAMS NEW GOVERNMENT THREAT TO ABC, SBS



[October 28, 2017; #1159]

The Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) has called on federal MPs and senators to reject new legislation tabled by federal Communications Minister Mitch Fifield, which is aimed at further undermining the independence and integrity of the national broadcasters ABC and SBS.

Fifield's legislation would make entirely unnecessary amendments to the ABC

Charter about regional media coverage and "fair and balanced" news reporting. He has also continued to demand that the ABC and SBS disclose the salaries of senior staff and has reaffirmed plans for his department to conduct an inquiry into the ABC and SBS's "competitive neutrality".

CPSU ABC Section secretary Sinddy Ealy said on October 19: "These pieces of legislation are a fresh reminder that Minister Mitch Fifield and the Turnbull government

are not to be trusted with Australia's public broadcasting system. The changes being pushed here are designed to undermine the ABC and SBS, because that's what [Pauline Hanson's] One Nation and the commercial media outlets want.

"Independent inquiry after independent inquiry has established that ABC reporting is impartial and unbiased. Yet a tiny group of self-interested people continue to peddle the notion that they are somehow not being given enough air time on the ABC. The real purpose of this legislation is to give these people another stick to beat the ABC over the head with.

"The CPSU welcomes the support that's already been shown in parliament, with Labor and crossbenchers Jacqui Lambie, Derry Hinch, Lucy Gichuhi and the Nick Xenophon Team supporting an Australian Greens motion in support of the ABC and SBS, and making it clear they would not support the Turnbull government's proposed changes.

"This legislation is by no means the Turnbull government's first attack on our national broadcasters. Harsh cuts have slashed hundreds of jobs in recent years, but hardworking staff at the ABC and SBS are continuing their critical work providing quality news and other programming for all Australians." ■

... NBN 'TRAINWRECK'

Continued from previous page.

should be, and that's due to the interests of corporations and politicians being put ahead of everyday Aussies.

"The main business beneficiaries have been shareholders in companies for whom fast, ubiquitous broadband represented unwanted disruption and competition."

Former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd told Four Corners the main beneficiary was News Ltd (since rebranded to News Corp), via its 50% stake in the Foxtel cable TV network.

Rudd said: "It's a matter of historical record that ... News Ltd did not want fibre optic to the premises. And the reason they didn't want that is that it would provide direct competition to the Foxtel cable television network."

Telstra, owner of the other half of Foxtel, also had an interest in seeing the NBN rolled

out slowly and has played hard-ball since the NBN was first announced in 2009.

Australia is now a shameful 50th on the global broadband performance rankings. Countries that are way ahead of Australia on the list include Singapore, Hong Kong, Korea and Japan, as well as Scandinavia and most of Eastern Europe.

The main long-term problem is that both the Coalition government and the Labor opposition agree that the NBN should be sold to private investors when the project is completed. In other words, once the public sector has overseen the construction of this massive institution of basic communications infrastructure, the prize will be stolen from ordinary taxpayers by big business once again.

The good news may be that the NBN as currently in formation may not be a profit-making venture and therefore not saleable to the corporate sector. The bad news is that our neoliberal government will find a

way to gild the lilly — by imposing further fees or surcharges on consumers to access the NBN system.

The labour movement and the community need to draw a line in the sand now before it is too late. There should be no sale of the NBN to the private sector under any circumstances. We must keep this crucial piece of national communications infrastructure in public hands.

Moreover, we need to start a campaign to nationalise (or re-nationalise in the case of Telstra) the entire corporate telecommunications industry, under workers' and community control. This is the only way we can defend the interests of working people and consumers in the critical telecommunications sector. ■

SHELLHARBOUR HOSPITAL SAVED FROM PRIVATISATION

[November 4, 2017; #1160]

After a concerted campaign by staff, trade unions and the community, the NSW government announced on October 27 that Shellharbour Hospital in the Illawarra will remain in public hands.

The campaign forced the government to cancel its proposed public-private partnership (PPP) plan and instead proceed with a \$251 million redevelopment of the hospital on its current site.

Nadia Rodriguez, from the NSW Nurses and Midwives Association (NSWNMA) Shellharbour branch, said: "We've literally been campaigning for 13 months and wearing our hearts on our sleeves and to finally get the correct decision is amazing.

"What this means is that we have universal health care for everyone, our patients will continue to receive high quality care and our

staff finally have security. It's a victory for everyone," she told the *Illawarra Mercury*.

Staff and their unions, together with local communities, had campaigned against the privatisation proposal since the state government announced its plans to redevelop five regional NSW hospitals under a PPP, in September last year.

After widespread opposition, those plans have now been abandoned at Bowral, Goulburn and Wyong hospitals, while the government is seeking a non-profit operator to build and run Maitland Hospital.

Health Services Union secretary Gerard Hayes said: "From the moment this privatisation was announced, hospital workers were up in arms. They know the hospital system is already stretched and that privatisation will only make things worse.

"This is a famous victory and it's one that

is well deserved. Community interest has triumphed over corporate greed.

"Public health in Australia is sacred and it should not be compromised by profit. Shellharbour Hospital workers and their supporters deserve to celebrate in style. This is a hard-earned victory."

NSWNMA general secretary Brett Holmes congratulated staff and residents for their "tireless campaigning".

"Our members have been living with this uncertainty for more than a year, which put their job security under a cloud, not to mention fears over the lack of guaranteed safe patient care and accountability under a public-privatised model," he said.

"We stand by the evidence that indicates public-private partnerships in the health sector don't work."

South Coast Labour Council secretary Arthur Rorris added: "The history of the Illawarra has been marked by struggle. Nothing has been won without it and this victory for the community is up there with the best of them." ■

INVESTMENT BANK GETS \$16.5 MILLION TO SELL OFF WESTCONNEX



[November 18, 2017; #1162]

Investment bank Goldman Sachs is set to reap \$16.5 million in NSW taxpayers' funds for a mere 11 months work as financial advisor to the state government on privatisation of the controversial \$16.8 billion WestConnex tollway. The money will

be paid for work between August this year and next July, in flogging off 51% of the Sydney Motor Corporation (SMC) which is building WestConnex.

The corporate vampires are circling as the sell-off process advances, with Transurban the favorite to buy WestConnex.

Transurban already owns most of the toll roads in Sydney.

Meanwhile, the state government has rejected an unsolicited proposal from property and construction company Lendlease to build a toll road linking Sydney Airport and Port Botany to WestConnex.

Facing increasing opposition from motorists to the imposition of yet more exorbitant road tolls, the government balked at commencing a new tollway project. This means the link between the airport and the port remains unresolved — despite that being the primary stated reason for the construction of WestConnex in the first place.

The community campaign against WestConnex continues with resident action groups circulating an online petition calling on the government to reject the WestConnex Stage 3 Environmental Impact Statement and refuse its approval for Stage 3 of WestConnex.

A coalition of action groups against WestConnex has called a major rally under the broad theme of "Fix NSW Transport", for February next year. ■

CENTRELINK TO HIRE 1000 LABOUR-HIRE STAFF FOR 'DEBT RECOVERY'

J[November 25, 2017; #1163]

Centrelink, the federal government's main social welfare agency, is planning to hire 1000 private labour-hire staff to carry out "debt recovery" operations and assist in enforcing compliance by welfare recipients.

This latest large-scale outsourcing exercise comes just a month after the Coalition government announced that controversial multinational corporation Serco would use 250 employees to staff a Centrelink call centre, supposedly to help reduce long waiting times.

Community and Public Sector Union

(CPSU) national secretary Nadine Flood described the latest outsourcing as "new and scandalous". She said it would place labour-hire staff in sensitive roles that "should be done by well-trained public servants".

"Robo-debt was an absolute disaster for both DHS [Department of Human Services] staff and the community — the [Malcolm] Turnbull government is trying to abdicate their responsibility for this debacle by outsourcing the mop-up to a private company," Flood said.

"Labour hire has no place in public services — the Turnbull government needs

to lift its arbitrary cap on public sector employment so that the community can have the services it needs."

The Robo-debt scandal, which emerged publicly a year ago, involved computerised raising of welfare debts to Centrelink, many of which were incorrect. Flood warned that moves to privatise the compliance area would only cause a further deterioration of morale within Centrelink.

"DHS staff have an important job that they take pride in and that the whole community relies on," Flood said.

"These privatisation moves make these jobs precarious and unnecessarily stressful. Staff are saying that morale has reached rock-bottom and this has real implications for staff and the community."

The new privatised compliance staff are expected to begin work early next year. ■

THE DISASTER OF PRIVATISATION

[December 2, 2017; #1164]

The publication of NSW Greens Senator Lee Rhiannon's new pamphlet, *Sold off, sold out: the disaster of privatisation and how to reclaim our common wealth*, is timely.

With the federal government now supporting a royal commission into the banks and widespread controversy over national energy policy, the damaging consequences of privatising many of the country's formerly publicly owned industries is clear for all to see.

The crimes and misdeeds of the Four Big banks has become so politically hot their CEOs have decided it is better to have a royal commission than not. Despite warnings from former Prime Minister John Howard that any such inquiry would be "rank socialism", they and the embattled Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull have decided it is the least worst option.

The biggest bank is the formerly government-owned Commonwealth Bank of Australia (CBA). It was sold to private investors by the Labor government in the 1990s for a song and made a profit this financial year of about \$10 billion.

This brings the question of the privatisation crusade, which has gripped

Australia and the Western world for several decades, into stark relief.

ORGANISED ROBBERY

The era of neoliberal capitalism began in the 1980s under US President Ronald Reagan, British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and the Labor governments of Bob Hawke and Paul Keating.

The privatisation of key public assets is effectively robbing people of their property wholesale, and handing it over at bargain prices to big business and the wealthy. This process has been an important factor in the growing inequality gap between the plutocrats and the majority of society.

This grand theft of public property is arguably the greatest organised robbery of the common wealth in human history. In Australia, the sell-off of our assets, built up over decades of class struggle and political campaigning by the labour movement during the 20th century, is now reaching a critical point.

No public sector facility or service is exempt from outsourcing, contracting or outright sale to the private corporations.

Unions and community organisations have fought against privatisation, often

successfully, over recent years. When the truth about the negative effects of privatisation is exposed, it usually proves highly unpopular — sometimes bringing down governments in the process.

We need to not only to demand an end to all future sales of public assets and services, but to call for the nationalisation (or renationalisation) of major industries, under workers' and community control.

That's where Rhiannon's new pamphlet comes in. It provides a highly readable and educational expose of the catastrophe that is the recent history of privatisation in Australia. With its focus on NSW, it gives new insight into the potential for a fight back.

Rhiannon writes: "For the public, there is no upside. They have been robbed in multiple ways by privatisations: assets are frequently sold below their true value; the sell-off is followed by higher prices and charges; profits boom, but services are downgraded; corruption emerges; there is a significant loss of earnings flowing in treasuries; there are inevitably job losses; wages and conditions for surviving employees are reduced; regional communities are the worst hit; economic health and quality of life suffer; vital investment does not occur; and, democratic control of the economy is diminished."

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... THE DISASTER OF PRIVATISATION

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Specifically, since 2011, the NSW Coalition government has sold more than \$62 billion in public assets.

It is either privatising or preparing to privatise public buses and trains, hospitals, public housing, prisons, the land titles registry, state forests and crown lands.

Other privatisations are being investigated by the secret Commissioning and Contestability Unit, whose mission is “to introduce private ownership and private provision into as many government activities as possible”.

“To cap it all, under a federal Liberal National government scheme, state governments have been handsomely rewarded from tax-payer funds for selling off our public assets — to the tune of 15% of the sale or lease price,” Rhiannon states.

CASE STUDIES

In a series of illuminating case studies, Rhiannon examines the damage to the public interest that successive privatisations in NSW have caused.

In the first example, entitled “Energy — Privatisation’s biggest disaster?” she notes: “No sector of the economy has been more privatised than electricity. It has gone further in Australia than in the UK, European Union and the United States.

“The privatisation of electricity has meant escalating (and continuing) price rises — at three times the rate of CPI increases; loss of significant income — for the NSW Treasury more than \$2 billion a year; barriers to the switch to renewable energy; drastic reductions in the number of frontline staff; a drop in productivity as managers and sales

staff proliferated; market manipulation as ownership is concentrated in fewer firms; and the appearance of ‘energy poverty’ among lower income households.

“The solution to the energy mess lies ... in renationalisation of the energy grid. ... The privatisation experiment in electricity has failed. It is time to return to public ownership.”

In the chapter “Housing — a social right, not an investment rort” Rhiannon states: “There is no worse market failure in Australia today than housing. ... Not content with this system rigged against even middle-income home-buyers, the Coalition government in NSW is liquidating housing estates.”

The Australian Greens advocate the establishment of an Australian Housing Trust, funded by raising special government bonds. The aim of the trust would be “to make housing a right rather than a commodity priced out of reach for too many people”.

In addition to a massive expansion of public housing, renters’ rights would be protected with laws to guarantee secure leases and limits to rental increases.

The section “Public transport privatisation — a slow moving train (and bus) wreck” details the recent history of the sale of public ferries, trains and buses in NSW. It concludes with the statement that: “The renationalisation of public transport must be on the timetable here too.”

After covering the privatisation of prisons, hospitals and education, Rhiannon says: “Privatisation, by introducing the profit motive, the market and ability to pay, undermines [the right to healthcare]. Moreover, privatisation of public hospitals have regularly failed.

“In fact, seven privatised hospitals have

failed nationally — invariably at great cost to the public. It is this lesson that the NSW government, blinded by ideology and in bed with private hospital operators, wants to ignore.”

On the gradual privatisation of the education system, the pamphlet proposes that education needs to be renationalised. We need “higher education funding for our public schools, TAFE colleges and universities — and an end to the attempt to make education into a market”, it says.

The final example provided is Private Public Partnerships, which is described as “a cash cow for private investors”.

Under PPPs, governments sign contracts with private corporations for the latter to build and operate essential services. They are essentially a mechanism for handing over public assets to big business.

NATIONALISATION

In an afterword, former NSW Greens co-convenor Hall Greenland argues for “some steps towards [re]nationalisation”. He notes the revival of socialist proposals by US presidential candidate Bernie Sanders and British Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn.

“In Jeremy Corbyn’s case, this included the idea of nationalisation, or more precisely re-nationalisation, the taking of essential services back into public ownership. He went into the recent British elections promising to nationalise the railways, electricity and water and the Royal Mail.

“Given the manifest failures of privatisation, it is scarcely surprising renationalisation has proved a winner electorally. These failures add immediacy to the classic case in favour of public ownership of those industries that are either natural monopolies or essential to social wellbeing and social justice.

“[W]hatever the challenges and difficulties facing assertion of democratic control over our economy, they should not deter us from attempting what ecological sustainability and social justice demand.”

Rhiannon’s pamphlet is essential reading for those wanting to join in the fight against privatisation and for the nationalisation of major industries as an important step toward a socialist future.

[Sold off, sold out: the disaster of privatisation and how to reclaim our common wealth is published by The Greens and is available free from Senator Rhiannon’s office.]■



SOCIALIST-ALLIANCE.ORG

SIRIUS BACKERS' BID TO SAVE ICONIC BUILDING

[February 2, 2018; #1167]

About 200 supporters of the iconic Sirius building gathered in its courtyard on January 27 to farewell the last remaining resident of the public housing block, 91-year-old Myra Demetriou who had lived in the building since 2008.

The Coalition state government decided in 2014 to sell Sirius as part of its program to sell off all the public housing properties in the Millers Point and Rocks inner-city areas.

Shaun Carter, chairperson of the Save Our Sirius Foundation, introduced Demetriou as "the face of our campaign, the voice of our campaign".

Architects have joined with community activists in demanding the government preserve Sirius, which was built in the late 1970s to house low-income residents in the aftermath of the NSW Builders Labourers Federation Green Bans campaign which

saved large parts of Sydney's urban heritage.

The former residents of Sirius, mostly elderly and infirm, have been gradually removed from the building, and relocated to other public housing areas. Like the residents of nearby Millers Point, they have been evicted, their community broken up, and they have been forced to live in suburbs away from their friends and family.

If the government succeeds in selling Sirius to private developers, it will probably be demolished for expensive high-rise apartments. This would continue the Gladys Berejiklian government's plan to drive low-income residents out of the inner city and gentrify the entire area.

Carter announced that Save Our Sirius was planning to gather funding to put in a bid to buy the building and preserve it long-term. The group plans to employ the original architect, Tao Gofers, for its restoration and

to "keep large chunks" as low-cost housing.

"The government wants \$100 million for this building", Carter said. "We think that's too much, but we'll pay [it]." The foundation is seeking funding from supportive investors/donors for the project.

Speakers at the gathering, including Sydney Lord Mayor Clover Moore and federal and state politicians, praised the building's "brutalist" architectural values and expressed support for the maintenance of affordable housing in central Sydney.

Moore condemned the state government's "ideologically driven" decision on the building: "Sirius will continue to be a symbol of the state government's shocking inaction on providing affordable housing," she said.

Demetriou summed the situation up in a video posted by SOS: "Can you imagine moving at the age of 91? It's ridiculous.

"It's ridiculous not to have social housing in the middle of the city. We'd be the laughing stock of the world, because every other great city in the world has social housing — London, New York, you name it, they've got it," she said. ■

NSW GOVERNMENT BACKS DOWN ON HOSPITAL SELL-OFF PLANS

[February 2, 2018; #1167]

"This is a very sweet victory for hundreds of nurses and midwives who work and live in Maitland and the surrounding areas," acting general secretary of the NSW Nurses and Midwives Association (NSWNMA) Judith Kiedja said on January 26.

She was commenting on the confirmation that the new Maitland Hospital at Metford will be a publicly built and run facility.

The local NSWNMA branch had campaigned vigorously for several years against the Coalition state government's move to privatise the new Maitland Hospital. The union had insisted that the government's push for a Public Private Partnership (PPP) or for-profit model would compromise service delivery and safe patient care.

"From the outset, our members were steadfast in their opposition to a [PPP] or

anything other than a publicly owned and operated new hospital to service their rapidly growing community," Kiedja said.

"As advocates for safe patient care and a robust public health system, local nurses and midwives knew they had a professional obligation to speak up on behalf of the Maitland community and continue to lobby for a publicly built and run new state-of-the-art hospital," she said.

The government's about-face on the move to privatise Maitland Hospital is the latest in a series of backdowns by the NSW government on its project to sell off a series of regional hospitals. Former health minister Jillian Skinner opened up more than \$1 billion in hospital upgrades at Wyong, Goulburn, Shellharbour, Bowral and Maitland to private tenders for construction and operation in 2016.

Current health minister Brad Hazzard's announcement on January 26 that all of them would now be entirely government run was a major win for the NSWNMA and the 18-month community campaign to defend the public hospital sector.

Goulburn Base Hospital was saved just a month after the Skinner statement in 2016, with Wyong next, and the others last year. The backdowns were only announced in local media, to avoid a more widespread public reaction.

However, the government has persisted with its decision to award private company Healthscope the contract to build a new Sydney Northern Beaches Hospital at Frenchs Forest, due to open late this year.

Hazzard claimed that higher rates of private health cover in the more affluent Northern Beaches compared with regional areas made the local population easier to convince of the merits of private sector involvement!

NSW Labor opposition health spokesperson Walt Secord said the decision to shelve the plan was a tactic to see the government through to the next election, and would be revived if it won.

"Make no mistake, this is about Premier

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WE CAN FIX THE PUBLIC TRANSPORT CRISIS

[February 9, 2018; #1168]

The transport system in Australia is in crisis. The push by governments and the private roads lobby to build more tollways, sell off our public transport to the big corporations is worsening services, raising costs and creating a transport impasse for the public.

At the centre of this is the current transport disaster in Australia's biggest city, Sydney.

Gladys Berejiklian's Coalition government is hell-bent on ramming through its WestConnex tollway nightmare while simultaneously privatising significant sections of the rail and bus network and refusing to spend serious money on upgrading existing systems.

The government estimates the cost in public funding of the 33-kilometre-long WestConnex tollway tunnel monster at \$17 billion. Independent experts have calculated that, with the costs of add-on tollway projects and the necessary widening of other streets, the total will approach \$45 billion. This will make it the most expensive road project per kilometre in history.

According to EcoTransit spokesperson Gavin Gatenby in the Spring 2017 Gridlock: "WestConnex is an open-ended engineering adventure, sucking limited public and private funds out of public transport, freight rail, regional and rural infrastructure and the social budget, including health and education. Critical, productive, profitable, public enterprises are being sold off to fund this one, gigantic, counterproductive project.

"What's critical for Sydney's future is a

realistic, affordable program for the expansion of public transport and rail capacity."

The January rail system meltdown in Sydney and the threat to strike by exasperated rail workers are more indications of a public transport system on the edge of collapse.

With a rail network reliant on massive, compulsory overtime by overworked and underpaid drivers, the situation is dire.

PRIVATISATION TO BLAME

The NSW Coalition government's privatisation program started with Sydney ferries.

As Greens Senator Lee Rhiannon said in *Sold Off, Sold Out: The Disaster of Privatisation*: "After the first year of privatisation, fares were up by 39% on the iconic Manly route. Overall cancellations doubled and delays rose by 36%."

Newcastle's buses were the next to be privatised, last July. Now, the government wants to privatise the rail system and Sydney buses.

The privatisation of the rail network has begun with the new North West Link. It will be a single deck Metro-style line. With 378 seats, these trains will have fewer than half the number of seats of the rest of the system's 896-seat double-deckers.

As Rhiannon points out: "By deliberate design, the more comfortable double deckers used on the rest of the rail network will not be able to use the new Metro line. Incredibly, a similar situation exists with the two privately operated light rail lines; they too are not compatible. If these systems were publicly owned and publicly operated, this incompatibility could have been avoided."

NSW transport minister Andrew Constance also wants to privatise Sydney's Inner West buses, arguing that the cost of public transport subsidies will drop with privatisation. But any reduction in costs can only be achieved by reducing services, cutting wages or increasing fares — or by all three.

As Constance put it in March last year, if

the NSW Coalition government had its way "[State transport] will all be private".

"In 10 to 15 years' time, government will not be in the provision of public transport services", he said. "It will be all on demand, private sector driven, underpinned by innovation in technology. Already, every new train that we are bringing online now, whether it is the Metro train or light rail, are all private sector partnerships."

The problem of privatised transport is not confined to NSW. Before privatisation, Victorians were promised high-quality, cost-efficient privately run public transport. Subsidies to private operators were predicted to end by 2010. However, they have increased by 60% to more than \$1 billion a year. Public transport users have rated the private Melbourne train network the worst in the country.

Meanwhile, in Britain there is growing support for the Labour Party's policy to renationalise the privatised public transport system.

Rhiannon argued: "In the recent British elections, the policy of rail renationalisation was a vote-winner for Labour. Renationalisation of public transport must be on the timetable here too."

TACKLING CLIMATE CHANGE

The publicly-owned alternative to private transportation systems is not only necessary for working people's welfare, it is essential if we are to tackle climate change.

Transport is responsible for an estimated 18% of Australia's greenhouse gas emissions. Road transport makes up about 90% of that share. To reverse this, public transport must be at the centre of urban development plans.

Urban design and redesign to promote active transport (walking and cycling), and living closer to workplaces, shops and schools can reduce the need for the time, space and energy wasted on road-dominated transport systems.

Public transport and electric cars can provide an energy efficient system for moving people longer distances, as needed.

We need a huge investment in public transport and rail freight to make it a real option for commuters and industry. A successful public transport system will have reliable, free and frequent services within five minutes' walk of most homes, including

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... HOSPITAL SELL-OFF PLANS

Continued from previous page.

Gladys Berejiklian looking after her own job," Secord told the *Sydney Morning Herald*.

Nevertheless, the defeat of the government's hospital sell-off plan is an important victory for the union movement and the people, faced with a relentless push by the NSW Coalition government to privatise massive chunks of the public sector in the state. ■

WILL OUR SUPER FUND TRUMP'S INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN?

[March 1, 2018; #1171]

During his recent meeting with US President Donald Trump at the White House, Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull proposed that Australian superannuation funds invest in Trump's plan to renew the US's ailing national infrastructure. He was repeating a view being pushed by Australian ambassador and former Treasurer Joe Hockey for the US to adopt Australia's controversial "asset recycling" scheme by state and local governments, aided by federal subsidies.

The *Sydney Morning Herald* reported: "In face-to-face talks at the White House [last] week, Turnbull [proposed] using a chunk of Australia's \$2.53 trillion superannuation pool to help unlock funding for Trump's infrastructure push.

"Trump's US\$1.5 trillion (A\$1.9 trillion)

public-works plan has hit potholes amid a lack of bipartisan support in Congress and questions over who would pay for the initiative, despite his pledge of US\$200 billion in federal funding over 10 years.

"Australian politicians have pointed to their own success in selling or leasing public assets to finance new construction without incurring new debt — a concept known as asset recycling."

This claim of "success" is extremely debateable. Community opposition to privatisation of public assets and "asset recycling" has grown in Australia, and internationally, in recent years.

David Whiteley is chief executive of Industry Super Australia, the representative body for not-for-profit funds that invest the super funds of five million workers. It has more than \$224 billion under management.

"The key blockage in the US," he said, "which is also common across the world, is the political risk due to community concern over private ownership of what people perceive should be public assets."

Assets in Australia's superannuation funds have increased nearly 10 times in the past two decades. Superannuation assets are expected to peak in 20 years, by which time the system will be worth between \$3.5 trillion and \$5.1 trillion.

Many US states and municipalities remain wary of private ownership, even if assets are bought by not-for-profit retirement funds. Ten years ago, Chicago's move to lease its parking meters for 75 years cost the city US\$974 million in lost revenue and angered residents who were left paying higher fees.

University of Queensland economist Professor John Quiggin, writing in the *Guardian* last year described asset recycling as the "last gasp of a failed model".

"The government's asset recycling fund, established in 2014, was shut down in 2016, with barely half of its budget allocation spent.

"This end of asset recycling has been part of a broader reaction against privatisation and PPPs [Public Private Partnerships], which has swept a number of state governments from office," Quiggin wrote.

We could include among those state governments: the fall of the Coalition government in Victoria in 2014, the demolition of the Campbell Newman Liberal National Party regime in 2015 and the collapse of the Barnett Coalition government in WA in 2017. The [Gladys] Berejiklian Coalition state government in NSW could well be next in line.

However, there is also the controversial question of whether superannuation funds, especially union-influenced industry super funds, should invest in "asset recycling", whether in Australia or overseas.

The involvement of industry funds in shareholdings in privatised public facilities, such as toll roads, is totally unethical and should be opposed by unions and all workers who are obliged to pay super contributions into these funds.

A case in point is the fact that Unisuper — the superannuation fund for university staff — is the largest single shareholder in Transurban, the company that already

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... PUBLIC TRANSPORT CRISIS

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in outer metropolitan regions.

Electric cars can fill the inevitable gaps in such a system to provide 100% renewable energy transport. We need a publicly-owned and integrated system of heavy and light rail, and ferry and bus services.

In its Climate Action Plan, the Socialist Alliance urges a transition to free public transport, starting with the elimination of fares for concession holders, and for greatly expanded transportation services.

"Nationalise and upgrade interstate freight, passenger train and ferry services, including high-speed rail from Adelaide and Melbourne to Sydney and Brisbane", it suggests.

It says there should be a much greater public investment in cycleways and better facilities for cyclists. It also suggests that all new private cars and other road vehicles (other than special-use vehicles) be electric and that petrol stations be replaced with charging stations.

The Socialist Alliance's policy for sustainable transport policy calls for extensive community consultation on how

to improve public transport options. Motorways and tollways must end and businesses must pay the full cost for their road transport by introducing electronic tolling for heavy freight vehicles on all major roads.

The interstate and country rail networks must be upgraded, and more public transport workers must be recruited to ensure safe, comfortable and efficient services.

It calls for the re-nationalisation of all privatised tollways (and the tolls eradicated) and privatised public transport routes.

It says the corporatisation of state-run public transport services and their authorities must be reversed and that boards elected from among public transport workers, commuters and residents public transport be asked to run the public transport system.

To do this, however, we need a concerted union and community campaign to combat the privatisation mania of state and federal governments.

A comprehensive, publicly-owned transport network is essential to meet society's economic and social needs. It is also a critical part of tackling the climate crisis. ■

NSW GOVT FORCED TO REVEAL CASE FOR POWERHOUSE MUSEUM MOVE

[April 19, 2018; #1177]

The NSW government may be forced to release the business case for moving it to Parramatta. The campaign to save the iconic Powerhouse Museum in inner-city Ultimo from being sold off to private developers and moved to a flood-prone site in Parramatta has received a sizeable boost by a motion passed by the NSW Legislative Council that will force the NSW Coalition government to release the "business case" for their plan within two weeks.

Greens MP Jamie Parker successfully moved the motion on April 12, with the support of Labor, the Shooters, Fishers and Farmers, Animal Justice and a maverick Liberal member, former fair-trading minister Matthew Mason-Cox.

Parker said: "Earlier this week, the government announced plans to withhold their business case for the Powerhouse demolition for three months after their final decision is made. This means committing

\$1.5 billion to blow up the Powerhouse and move it to Parramatta without telling the public why it's a good idea.

"Since the beginning, I've said the Powerhouse relocation isn't about creating a world-class museum in western Sydney, it's about ripping off the public by letting greedy property developers snatch up land in Ultimo. Today we're a step closer to revealing this truth."

Mason-Cox, who earlier publicly opposed the Gladys Berejiklian government's original plan to demolish and re-build two football stadiums at a cost of \$2.5 billion, said the government had developed a "perverse culture of secrecy".

"The key problem with the Powerhouse decision is that the decision came first, followed by the business case and a pretend consultation process," he said.

The Powerhouse Museum's planned shut-down has been declared "an act of cultural vandalism" by the Legislative



Council parliamentary committee investigating the move. Former museum trustee and consultant curator Kylie Winkworth described it as the "wilful demolition of a world-class museum".

Stewart Little, secretary of the Public Service Association, which represents museum employees, said a national icon like the Powerhouse Museum should not be treated so shabbily. "Staff have been left completely demoralised by the shambolic way the state government has approached this issue from day one," he said.

Labor opposition leader Luke Foley has finally been forced to move towards opposing the museum shift, after initially endorsing the idea. He said he could not support the "dismembering of a great cultural institution".

"Western Sydney deserves its own cultural institution, not the leftovers from the Powerhouse Museum which I understand will be strewn across Sydney."

Under pressure, the government is apparently proposing to leave some of the museum at Ultimo, sell off part of the site to developers and move the rest to Parramatta and at least one other western suburb.

As Winkworth wrote, the destruction of the Powerhouse Museum would merely result in construction of a "cut-down version of the museum in Parramatta, on a site which is not just at risk of flood, but whose themes and content bear no relation to Parramatta's stated cultural priorities or notable cultural opportunities." ■

... TRUMP'S INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN

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owns 13 tollways in Australia, and is expected to buy Sydney's monstrous \$17 billion WestConnex tollway network when the NSW government puts it up for sale later this year. Unisuper currently owns 12.6% of Transurban.

In all the recent mainstream media coverage of Turnbull's trip to Washington, and the accompanying push for increasing Australian big business trade and investment with the US, the underlying issues of Australian superannuation funds' involvement in potentially stealing American workers' public assets is largely hidden.

Green Left Weekly, on the other hand, has strenuously and continually exposed the corrupt privatisation rorts of Australian governments. And we have campaigned to oppose the sale of public assets, whether to multinational corporations or

superannuation funds.

The truth about the disaster arising from the experience of asset recycling, with the privatisation of community assets for the benefit of big business, and the associated cuts to the public sector in the areas of housing, education, health and the environment, must be revealed and opposed.

Green Left Weekly has campaigned ceaselessly against the sale of public assets, wherever they are and whoever they are sold to, and will continue to do so. But we need your help keep up this effort.

You can contribute to the *Green Left Weekly* 2018 Fighting Fund online here. Direct deposits can also be made to Green Left, Bendigo Bank, BSB: 633-000 Account number: 160058699. Otherwise, you can send a cheque or money order to PO Box 394, Broadway NSW 2007 or donate on 1800 634 206 (free call from anywhere in Australia). ■

CPSU SLAMS CENTRELINK CALL CENTRE OUTSOURCING

[May 3, 2018; #1179]

CPSU national secretary Nadin Flood says the union has been calling for more permanent Centrelink staff for years. The Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) says that contracting another 1000 private call centre operators to answer calls to Centrelink will not fix the problems caused by the federal government's damaging cuts to the agency.

Minister for Human Services Michael Keenan announced on April 23 the introduction of another 1000 low-paid and insecure jobs, on top of the 250 positions currently generating a profit for multinational company Serco.

CPSU national secretary Nadine Flood said: "We've been calling loudly for years for more permanent Centrelink call centre staff to replace the more than 5000 jobs the government has slashed in this department. Instead, the government is continuing to sell the agency off piece by piece, lining the pockets of their corporate mates like Serco, rather than putting that money into wages and secure jobs for call centre workers.

"Centrelink service standards have been falling since the first day of this government. You don't need to be Einstein to see that cutting 5000 jobs — and they're still cutting more even today — and then adding 1250 privatised positions through a profit-making multinational isn't going to fix this."

Serco's contract, which began in October

last year, will cost the government \$51.7 million over three years and does not include the 1000 new operators announced on April 23. The expansion would be funded from within Human Services' existing budget, Keenan said.

He refused to reveal when the new operators would start or how much it will cost, saying it would be put out to tender, although experts say it will cost the government at least \$200 million.

When asked why the government would not employ public servants to answer its calls instead, Keenan said he did not believe the staff would be needed long-term.

Nearly 1200 jobs were cut from the Department of Human Services, which includes Centrelink, in last year's federal budget. Flood accused the government of paying call centre contractors to "click through" calls to improve its statistics, without resolving clients' problems.

She said: "Our members in Centrelink are telling us the Serco call centre is being used to fudge the damning stats on wait times and missed calls to Centrelink, rather than actually improving the situation for people trying to get their situation resolved. Serco's role is to answer as many calls as possible, and actually helping clients takes more time, more training and gets in the way of that."

"Outsourcing like this isn't just bad for Centrelink clients, but for the people employed by Serco and other profit-making

providers when they should have permanent jobs directly with the department. Serco workers have told us about their poor working conditions, low wages and completely inadequate training. These people are being paid less so Serco can profit more."

Labor's Human Services spokesperson Linda Burney said it was "nonsense" that 1000 contract workers could clear a backlog of calls. "Centrelink needs permanent full-time staff who are familiar with and equipped to deal with the complex circumstances facing income-support recipients," she said on April 23.

Greens Senator Rachel Siewert said using a private company to reduce Centrelink call wait times created serious privacy concerns.

"It is nonsensical to use a private company when there are casual staff in the department who could be made permanent to help reduce call wait times. The private information of Australians accessing the social safety net is at risk in the hands of a private company," she said.

Flood said: "[This] announcement is another example of a damaging and cynical tactic often employed by conservative politicians. The [Malcolm] Turnbull government has cut and cut at Centrelink and is now trying to use the appalling service standards it has caused as justification for privatising a critical public service.

"The Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit continues to uncover damning examples across Commonwealth agencies of this government's addiction to inefficient and opaque arrangements using contractors, consultants and labour hire." ■

DEVELOPERS WARNED OF GREEN BAN ON SIRIUS BUILDING

[May 31, 2018; #1183]

The Sirius building is being sold by the state government. The Save Our Sirius (SOS) group campaigning against the New South Wales government's decision to sell off the historic Sirius public housing building has warned potential buyers against proceeding with the purchase.

The NSW Coalition government

announced on May 25 it had put the now-vacant building onto the market. Media reports suggest the government is expecting to sell Sirius for upwards of \$120 million.

SOS Chair Shaun Carter issued this advice to those who might be interested in buying Sirius: "Sirius has a Green Ban placed on it. You buy this site at the risk [that the] CFMEU [Construction Forestry Mining and

Energy Union] and Save our Sirius will lock the site up if Sirius is not protected. We will picket the site and disrupt any activity. If you intend to buy the site and demolish the building, you will have trouble from the Green Ban and Save Our Sirius.

"We strongly advise anyone interested in buying Sirius to work with us and the building's original architect Tao Gofers, to preserve Sirius for state heritage listing. If you don't, you run the real risk of trouble from the Green Ban, from Save Our Sirius, and from the people, cultural and heritage organisations that have been asking this

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CAMPAIGN BEGINS TO KEEP ABC PUBLIC

[June 20, 2018; #1185]

ABC Friends National has called for nationwide rallies in July to protest the continual funding cuts to the ABC, the ongoing conservative attacks on the independence of the ABC and the recent Liberal Party Federal Council motion supporting privatisation of the national public media organisation.

The Liberal Party's peak body voted by a margin of more than 2:1 on June 16 for "the full privatisation of the ABC, except for services into regional areas that are not commercially viable".

Despite denials by Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull and other senior federal ministers that the government has any plans to sell off the ABC, community outrage has been growing over the Liberal Party motion, which was initiated by the right-wing faction-dominated Young Liberals.

ABC Friends National called on Liberal Party voters to reject any sell-off of the ABC as being both anti-Australian and anti-democratic.

ABC Friends National president

... SIRIUS GREEN BAN

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government to find a better solution for Sirius."

SOS again called on the state government to stop the sale, deploy Sirius for Key Worker Accommodation, and list it on the State Heritage Register.

The campaign to save the brutalist-style Sirius building, which was built for low-income public housing in the 1970s as a result of the NSW Builders Labourers Federation Green Bans movement, is continuing.

The SOS campaign has been closely linked to the parallel struggle to prevent the sell-off of public housing in nearby Millers Point, and the eviction of its tenants, which was ultimately unsuccessful. While almost 400 Millers Point homes have now been sold, there is little sign of implementation of the government's stated aim of using the funds raised for new public housing. ■

Margaret Reynolds said: "Australian public broadcasting has an 80-year history and is supported by more than 80% of the community. It is not a plaything of the extremists who have dismissed public opinion in pursuit of their preoccupation with private profits.

"ABC Friends National has for some time been warning of threats to the ABC, and now the proof is there in the resolution of the Liberal Party's governing body this weekend."

ABC Friends National spokesperson Randal Macdonald wrote on June 18: "It is interesting that after 125 pages in their IPA [right-wing think tank Institute of Public Affairs] sponsored book *Against Public Broadcasting* (just released) promoting selling off the ABC, the authors come to their conclusion that 'the single biggest impediment to privatising the ABC is public opinion'."

ABC Friends National vice-president Peter Monie said he was shocked no party members — including not one federal minister — spoke against the privatisation motion at the Federal Liberal Council meeting.

The federal government's 2018 budget includes a freeze on the ABC's annual funding indexation for three years from July next year, cutting a further \$84 million from its income. The ABC has suffered \$254 million in funding cuts since 2017, which has resulted

in the loss of more than 1000 jobs.

Monie said the Australian public is already angered by the cuts and the motion could seriously hurt Liberals at the next federal election. "We're upset this is just further staging in what seems to be an unrelenting attack on the ABC," he added.

On June 19, ABC managing director Michelle Guthrie strongly criticised the push to privatise the ABC, declaring to the Melbourne Press Club that the wider public views the ABC as a "priceless asset" that should not be sold, no matter how much a commercial buyer might be prepared to pay.

"[Australians] regard the ABC as one of the great national institutions [and] deeply resent it being used as a punching bag by narrow political, commercial or ideological interests," Guthrie said.

"Inherent in the drive against the independent public broadcaster is a belief that it can be pushed and prodded into different shapes to suit the prevailing climate. It can't. Nor should it be."

The rationale for privatisation "completely ignores the public value of the ABC, both in direct dollar terms but also as far as the wider public good remit," Guthrie said. She cited a forthcoming report showing that the ABC contributed \$1 billion to the national economy last year — about a third of which fed into the broader media landscape.

[The rallies to Save the ABC will start with a Sydney protest on July 8, followed by Brisbane on July 13 and Melbourne on July 15. For more information, visit the ABC Friends Facebook page, which includes details of a crowdfunding appeal to support the campaign.] ■



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PRIVATISATION IS THEFT: THE LOOTING OF NSW PUBLIC ASSETS

The scourge of privatisation of public assets has been a critical part of the neoliberal offensive launched over the past 40 years in the capitalist world. In Australia the most corrupt and ruthless neoliberal regime at present is the Coalition state government in NSW.

It is selling off massive amounts of public assets — including the power industry, roads, health facilities, forests, the Land Titles Office, public museums such as the Powerhouse in inner Sydney, and so on.

This pamphlet tells the story of this privatisation mania, focussing on the federal and NSW spheres, and also of the growing resistance from unions, the public and community organisations to the sell-off of the people's property.

\$5

