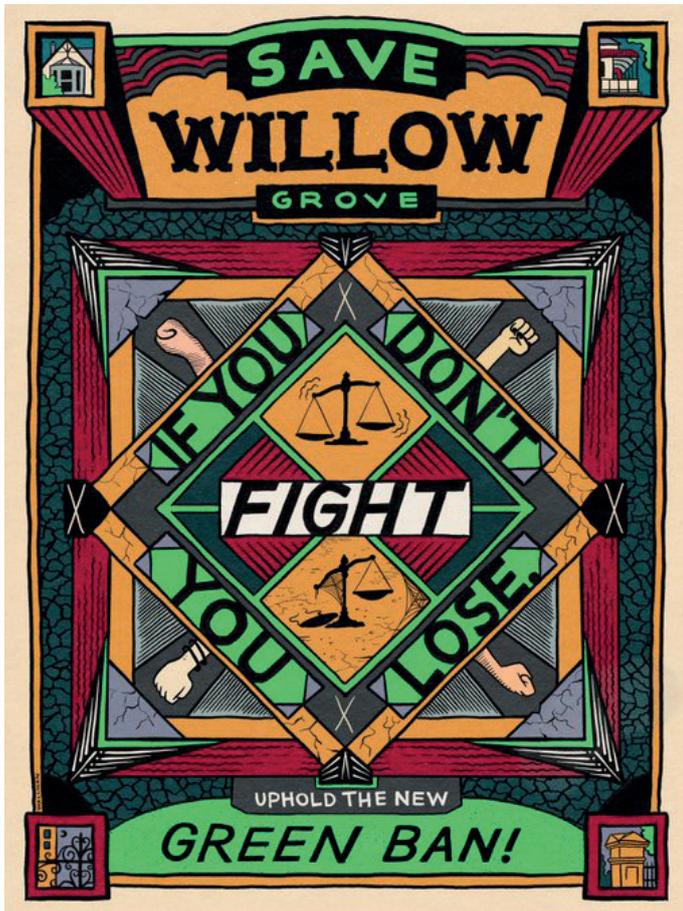


# WORKERS SOLIDARITY

## BULLETIN · ISSUE 37

In this issue of the Bulletin we look at the on-going detention of the Murugappan family whose recent 'reprieve' (a three month bridging visa for three of the four family members) has only put the family in yet another difficult and precarious position. Their story has captured worldwide attention. How can that translate to action for other refugees and migrant workers in Australia?

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Sam Wallman

### WORKERS IN STRUGGLE

#### MUA v Svitzer

The MUA is ramping up a campaign against Svitzer, the largest towage service operators in Australia after the company withdrew from Geelong and Sydney last year, placing crews on enforced redundancies, claiming COVID had made their business unviable. Svitzer has now returned to the ports and intends to use non-union, labour-hire, fly-in workers to replace the original crews. In Geelong this has meant 17 workers losing their jobs after they had been working with the company for two years and had reached an in-principle agreement before they were laid off four days before Christmas last year.

In response to what is now seen as an unashamed attack on union workers, the MUA and supporters rallied, first in Geelong last week and again on Friday at Webb Dock, Melbourne. The Webb Dock rally included many other supporting unions and activists. Christy Cain, the new National Secretary of the CFMMEU, spoke at the Friday rally, declaring that the dispute will be fought on a national stage, - with the 12-hour stoppage of the Svitzer workers at Webb Dock on Friday just the beginning of stoppages at major ports around the country.

The dispute, with its push to remove the union from the towage industry, was characterised as Patricks Mark 2, referring to the waterside dispute with Patricks in 1998. Svitzer Global is part of Maersk; an integrated container logistics company, the biggest in the world. Christy Cain said that the next rally will take the issue to the doorstep of Maersk's offices in the Melbourne CBD to raise broader awareness of the role the company is playing in undermining the job security, conditions and pay of workers.

## ASU v Geelong Regional Library Service

In a dispute over pay, safety and security which has been brewing since May, ASU members began a limited action against Geelong Regional Libraries. The actions started with wearing of union badges and t-shirts at 17 sites including Geelong, Barwon Heads, Drysdale, Lara, and Torquay culminating in ASU members and their supporters holding a stop work rally outside the Geelong library last week. Staff at public libraries across Geelong, the Bellarine Peninsula and the Surf Coast have commenced industrial action, claiming they are among the worst paid in the state. The ASU says its members' safety is being put at risk through inadequate staffing and a lack of security.

ASU Secretary Lisa Darmanin said the local libraries are recognised as the best in Victoria, but their staff are among the lowest paid.

“Management’s most recent below-inflation pay offer would further reduce real wages and was resoundingly rejected by staff despite senior managers using library resources in an effort to ram it through,” Ms Darmanin said.

“Union members at Geelong Regional Libraries are beyond frustrated with library management - they are angry that their legitimate pay and workplace safety concerns are being ignored.”

Staff are also calling for a minimum of two people working at any one time, and a permanent security presence at the main library.

## CEPU v Australia Post

Australia Post workers have asked the Communications, Electrical and Plumbing Union (CEPU) to hold a ballot for industrial action. They are fighting for better work conditions and a pay rise. Postal workers have been trying to negotiate an enterprise agreement with AP for more than a year.

Last year during the COVID-19 lockdown, Australia Post enforced a special Memorandum of Understanding, which the CEPU described as a “betrayal” because it enforced a pay cut of up to 30%, cut delivery standards and prohibited industrial action.

The union said the cuts to deliveries came “under the guise of pandemic safety when the reality on the ground was [that Australia] Post made a shameful effort to keep workers

safe”. Postal workers said that, as an example, Australia Post was slow to implement personal protective equipment.

CEPU organiser Paul Sutton said the so-called “delivery model” changes, which would reduce delivery frequency, was a deflection from the real problem – understaffing.

According to the CEPU, Australia Post has tried to prevent workers from participating in bargaining and taking protected industrial action. The protected industrial action ballot takes approximately 30 days.

## CPSU v Services Australia

The CPSU is notifying a dispute under national Workplace Health and Safety laws to force Services Australia, which includes Centrelink, Medicare and Child Support workers, to protect the safety of its workers while continuing to provide services to the community in these dangerous circumstances and to force a national rollout of clear standards for lockdowns. The union says managers are ignoring lockdown and working from home orders in Brisbane, Sydney, Perth and Darwin and in the most recent Melbourne lockdown. Workers are being forced to break lockdown orders and attend the office to perform non-customer facing roles, work from the office when they have the capacity to work from home, and being told to use their own leave when identified as a close contact.

## New Report Exposes Gross Underpayment of Farmworkers

A Migrant Workers Centre and Unions NSW report revealed alarming evidence of widespread exploitation of backpackers and rampant wage theft in the horticulture industry. It showed 78% of farmworkers are being underpaid, with some workers being paid as little as \$9 a day. Right now, farm-workers' rights are under review and workers are calling for a guaranteed minimum wage. The report says the Federal government must urgently:

- Make wage theft a crime
- Introduce stronger enforcement of backpackers' accommodation to combat widespread non-compliance with relevant housing laws
- Fund regional hubs, unions and community legal centres to run information sessions to assist workers to learn about and stand up for their rights

- Introduce a national labour hire licensing scheme modelled on Queensland and Victoria

- Make systemic changes to combat discrimination facing migrant workers, including reforming the temporary visa system, introducing pathways to permanent residency, and providing a social safety net for all temporary migrant workers.

## Ensuring Integrity Bill Likely to Return

Coalition insider Graeme Watson is reported as saying the Government will bring back the anti-worker Ensuring Integrity Bill, defeated in parliament in 2019.

“Watson’s comments, reported on Workplace Express, reveal the Government’s secret plan to again attack workers’ rights under a bogus spin campaign citing integrity,” said Dave Noonan, CFMEU National Construction Secretary.

## Sri Lankan Education Labour Union Targeted by Government

On Thursday July 8, 33 labour activists, including Ceylon Teachers’ Union Secretary Joseph Stalin, were arrested in Polduwa as they were protesting the introduction of the proposed Kotelawala University Bill. Union and human rights groups have strongly opposed this new bill as not only would it pave the way for the privatisation of the higher education sector, but it would also lead to the militarisation of universities as it would place the management of universities under the control of the ministry of defence. All the arrested activists were granted bail by the courts, but the military nevertheless took all of them away to an undisclosed location for quarantine reasons. Grave fears are held for the CTU Secretary as Joseph is a Tamil with a long history of activism in labour and human rights movements.

## Bangladesh Factory Fire Kills Trapped Workers

At least 52 workers have been killed after a fire broke out at the Hashem Food and Beverage factory in Rupganj, an industrial town 25km (15 miles) east of capital Dhaka. Witnesses report that several workers jumped from the windows in a desperate attempt to escape the fire and dozens more workers have been injured. The factory owner has now been arrested and charged with murder after

initial investigations found the workers had been padlocked inside the building. The blaze continued to burn for almost 24 hours, fueled by flammable chemicals and plastics stored on site.

Many details of this story are reminiscent of the Rana Plaza disaster, the 2013 collapse of a nine-story building in Bangladesh that killed more than 1,100 workers and spurred promises of reform.

**BACKBONE OF  
OUR MOVEMENT**



**Olly, delegate at the Australian Services Union VicTas**

**How long have you been a union member?**

Since my first job as a teenager.

**Why did you join the union?**

Working class people are the overwhelming majority of society. We do all the work, we produce all wealth, and we should run things ourselves. The only way to do this is to come together with our fellow workers and organise - to win better wages and working conditions today, and to build towards a world where we control our own workplaces and run them democratically in the interests of everyone, not just for profit.

**What’s your best memory/story about being in the union movement?**

There are so many! Walking off the job with my coworkers to the cheers of hundreds of people would have to be a highlight, but some of the smaller things are just as beautiful as well: seeing people you work alongside transform into confident, inspiring activists; listening to coworkers talk about how coming to union meetings and taking part in industrial action changed the way they see the world; forcing disgusting, sexist bosses

to cave in and give workers everything they demanded; repelling a police attack on a picket line and the sheer exuberant joy after we did this – there are endless wonderful moments like this.

**What's the most important issue facing the union movement today?**

We need, for want of a better term, more cadre – more workers with the skills, the radical politics and the confidence to go into workplaces and organise them from the bottom up.

**Why should people join their union?**

Because spending most of your waking life working to make someone else rich sucks, for so many reasons, and the only way we can change that is by organising with the people alongside us. What's more, we're heading towards ecological catastrophe and we need to radically change the way society is organised, so taking over our workplaces and running them for everyone is a good start.

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**The Worker's Solidarity Bulletin** is a living document written to reflect what is happening within the labour movement, here in Australia and across the world. The producers of this publication, and participants in Workers Solidarity more broadly, don't necessarily endorse or agree with all of the views in this publication. This is a place for debate and discussion.

See something you disagree with? Not seeing something you think we should talk about?

Write to us with your thoughts at:  
[workers.solidarity@gmail.com](mailto:workers.solidarity@gmail.com)

## Fight for the Murugappan Family to Stay in Australia Continues

### ANALYSIS

The Murugappan family is a Tamil family facing deportation under successive Liberal and Labor Governments' cruel and racist immigration policies. The family was first taken into detention in March 2018, then moved to Christmas Island in August 2019, after a last-minute court injunction blocked their deportation to Sri Lanka. They lost their attempts to gain refugee status in Australia in May 2019 when the High Court refused to let them appeal against a deportation decision. The Federal Court later decided Tharniccaa, the younger daughter, had been denied procedural fairness, prolonging the family's legal fight with the government. When Tharniccaa became ill with Sepsis, she was evacuated off Christmas Island and brought to Perth, where now she and the whole family have been united, but remain in community detention.

Workers' Solidarity's Jiselle Hanna and Pier Moro interviewed Aran Mylvaganam, from the Tamil Refugee Council.

**Aran:** The Minister announced [on the 23 June] that the family will be granted a three-month bridging visa but that is only for three members of the family; Tharniccaa, the youngest child, is still in community detention which means that the rest of the family are in community detention. The application for a bridging visa for Tharniccaa was denied and so the family continues to be in community detention because of Tharniccaa's condition and they are still unable to get to Biloela.

This three-month bridging visa, a lot of people in the community get similar types of visas. With the three month visa it is very difficult to go and get a job, even though you have this right, and you wouldn't be

entitled to any Centrelink benefits either. And even if employers give you a job if the Government takes a long time to grant you another bridging visa you have to give up your job and look for another job once you have another bridging visa. So, the family, you know, is still facing uncertainty and that threat of deportation hasn't gone away. The Minister is still determined to send this family back to Sri Lanka when the so-called options in the courts are exhausted.

**Jiselle:** I have noticed that the campaign has shifted the conversation now to actually discussing the dangers in returning Tamils to Sri Lanka. What can you say about that?

**Aran:** Well, the situation in Sri Lanka is bad for Tamils and Priya and Nades, they face danger as well if they get deported back to Sri Lanka and we are hoping that the attention that this family has received helps us raise awareness about the dangers that Tamils face in Sri Lanka.

Recently a UK tribunal found that the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade report that is used to assess Tamil asylum claims is a flawed report. It doesn't recognise the fact that torture is still practised by the Sri Lankan State and it basically said that this report should not be used to assess Tamil asylum claims.

The Australian Government continues to use this report, this is the report that has denied Priya and Nades Protection Visas and continues to deny other Tamils Protection Visas as well. We want the Australian Government to recognise the current human rights situation in Sri Lanka: and that is that the Rajapaksa Government, who is responsible for the mass murders of Tamils in 2009, is back in power and they are terrorising people in the North and East. There is a military occupation in the Tamil Homeland; for every six Tamils there is an army member present. Just two weeks ago we had a young Tamil boy murdered by police in custody, and land grabbing is continuing. The military is involved in civilian affairs, they are even running primary schools in the North. Life is quite scary for Tamils in the North and East, and we want the Australian Government to recognise it.

So far, over the last ten, twelve years, under Labor and Liberals, Australian Governments have appeased the Sri Lankan rulers down there by giving financial aid, donating Navy ships, and recently Scott Morrison donated drones to stop Tamils from fleeing

that island. Rather than aiding genocidal regimes down there we want the Australian Government to recognise the reality for Tamils in Sri Lanka.

**Pier:** You mentioned at the start that Tharniccaa hasn't been given a bridging visa like the rest of the family so she is still in community detention. I can only guess that this is a planned, thought-out strategy to say that the family has a visa, but one hasn't so that they will have to remain attached to community detention. I presume that is the reason that has happened.

**Aran:** Look, we can only assume what they are trying to do. I can't say anything with certainty. The Legal Team is looking at getting a bridging visa for Tharniccaa and there is lots of work going on behind the scenes. I'm hoping that in the next week or two, this family will get the visa and go back to Biloela to continue the fight.

One thing is very clear, the Government is not going to issue permanent residency to this family unless they feel the pressure. Everything they have done so far is because of the public pressure but it hasn't been enough to force the Government to grant permanent residency to this family. Whatever the outcome in the next week or two I doubt it will be an outcome that we are looking for but hopefully it will be some sort of temporary relief.

**Jiselle:** I share that assessment with you Aran, that everything that has been won, or gained in this case has been because of the

**“There are hundreds of other refugees in similar situations, hundreds of refugee families in similar situations, who have exhausted all the options. How do we turn this into a win for everyone?”**

community pressure, from my point of view and I am curious about your thoughts about this. I felt that it was actually quite a successful manoeuvre on behalf of the Government to issue the bridging visas and the evacuation to mainland Australia, although it was Perth, because from what I could tell it took the wind out of the campaign, that it actually deflated some of the community pressure. How do you build from here to keep the momentum going so that the family can actually be returned to Biloela where the community wants them and where they belong?

**Aran:** Yeah so, you're right that the Government's decision to move this family from Christmas Island to Perth was on the back of public pressure. It wasn't about caring about this little child. Over the last three years we have been telling politicians that detention life is hurting these children and there were many medical reports which confirmed that, but despite such knowledge politicians continued to keep this family and the children in detention and the only reason they moved them is to weaken the support this family has or make the public attention go away. And any decision that they are going to make regarding this family is going to be on the back of public pressure.

So, I am not sure about how we go from here. The way I see it the campaign has been quite successful in stopping this family getting deported. Like, it will be very hard for the Government to remove this family now. There will be so much outrage in the community. It is a matter of how we bring a permanent solution for this family now but also what do we do with the attention that this family has managed to generate? There are hundreds of other refugees in similar situations, hundreds of refugee families in similar situations, who have exhausted all the options. How do we turn this into a win for everyone? We have started the conversation about how Australia's refugee policies are hurting people, that conversation needs to continue in a way that it leads the Australian Government to abandoning its Stop The Boats policy, it leads to Australian Governments shutting down all the detention centres.

This campaign, when Tamil Refugee Council started it, was never about just one family. It was always about everyone else. It was never about this exceptional circumstance. It's about how Australia's refugee policy is destroying so many other people's lives. It was always about ending that.

## WHAT'S ON

### **Workers Solidarity General Meeting** (Online via Zoom)

Second Thursday of every month  
Next meeting 12 August, 6PM  
[workerssolidarity.org.au](http://workerssolidarity.org.au)

### **Film Screening: No Fire Zone**

Hosted by Boorloo Activist Centre  
Sat 17 July 3pm

Boorloo Activist Centre

15/5 Aberdeen St, Perth

[boorlooactivistcentre@greenleft.org.au](mailto:boorlooactivistcentre@greenleft.org.au)

### **Film Screening: Gaza Fights for Freedom**

Hosted by Green Left / Socialist Alliance

Fri 16 July 6:30pm

Level 5, 407 Swanston St, Melbourne

[Check facebook for more event info](#)

### **Rally: 8 Years of Harm**

Organised by Adelaide Vigil For Manus and Nauru, Sun 18 July 2pm

Tartanyangga / Victoria Square, Adelaide

[www.adelaidevigil.com](http://www.adelaidevigil.com)

### **Rally: 8 Years No Freedom**

Organised by Refugee Solidarity Brisbane / Meanjin

Sun 18 July 12pm

Near BITA detention centre (TBC)

Pinkenba QLD

[Check facebook for more event info](#)

### **Film Screening: Women of Steel**

Hosted by Fanfoce and Socialist Alliance  
Wed 21 July 7pm

Hoyts Cinema Charlestown

244 Pacific Highway, NSW

[Check facebook for more event info](#)

### **Rally: Sri Lanka Not Safe for Tamils**

Hosted by Tamil Refugee Council

Sat 31 July 3pm

Forrest Place, Perth

[tamilrefugeecouncil.org.au](http://tamilrefugeecouncil.org.au)