



Bushfire tragedy – time for answers

Bob Briton

As the full impact of the tragic loss of life in the Victorian bushfires continues to sink in and the huge task of rebuilding is considered, a dozen fires are still threatening regional and rural communities in the state. The federal and state governments are making commitments to rebuild devastated settlements in Victoria and to get answers to the many questions raised by the Black Saturday tragedy.

The media has focussed almost unprecedented attention on the disaster and canvassed all sorts of ideas about the origins of the crisis and how to prevent a recurrence. The coverage has crossed the line on many occasions and sought to exploit the suffering of victims in the worst “info-tainment” tradition. While ABC Radio has provided a lifeline source of practical update information on the status of fires and availability of emergency supplies to vulnerable communities, the corporate media has generally presented a package of “human interest” stories and spectacle.

Some very fundamental questions could be asked – if we can work and organise ourselves on the basis of solidarity and mutual aid when tragedy strikes, why can't we do this in the course of our usual day-to-day social and economic life? Why should people who care enough to make these sorts of sacrifices for one another during this emergency go back to the dog-eat-dog of neo-liberal Australian capitalism once it has passed?



Pressing questions

Other, more immediate questions about the fires demand answers. Is the trend for people to move from the suburbs to heavily wooded semi-rural locations responsible for part of the fires' heavy death toll? Should the drift be allowed to continue? Has the Victorian government mismanaged emergency services and early warning systems? Is climate change behind the twin disasters striking the country in the form of floods in the north and unprecedented hot spells, droughts and bushfires in the south? Will climate change mean we will need to live with these sorts of conditions and this sort of threat permanently?

Climate change does appear to be a contributing factor to the fires and Victorian Premier John Brumby has said that it will be “on the table” when a Royal Commission into the fires begins. A system for monitoring convicted and suspected arsonists – similar to that operating in South Australia – will also be examined. The policy of urging people to flee approaching fires early or “stay and defend” property is still

being supported by state authorities but will be questioned in view of the intensity of the fires and the speed with which they struck.

Kicking the green can

Wilson “Crowbar” Tuckey, the attention-seeking member for the WA seat of O'Connor, was probably the first public figure to put the blame for the fires on what he claims are Greens' policies. “The refusal of major political parties in NSW and Victoria to anger Green activists by conducting appropriate thinning and fuel reduction procedures in their national parks and reserves is clearly the reason for the massive escalation, in intensity and frequency, of wild fires and their destructive capability,” Mr Tuckey said recently.

The finger pointing at the Greens and environmental groups has caught on. Rather than wait for the results of any enquiry, the Greens are already being scapegoated in reactionary quarters for the tragic events in Victoria. The effectiveness of current fuel load reduction practices

obviously needs to be looked into. Gary Nairn, the Liberal MP who headed a 2003 House of Representatives Select Committee on the bushfires that took place in that year, has weighed into the prescribed burning debate claiming that bureaucracy still slows the process.

The position of the Greens on prescribed burning has been assumed by some and distorted in the media coverage. This has prompted the group to release a statement last Friday that made the following points:

- The Greens have explicitly supported hazard reduction burns, particularly works undertaken to protect human life, where the scientific evidence indicates they will reduce risk. The environment movement has largely advocated the same level of controlled burning as bushfire experts.
- The amount of hazard reduction burning has been limited by the number of days on which it would be safe to conduct this activity, not by any policy directive influenced or otherwise by the Greens.

- Dryness and climatic conditions have a greater impact on fire speed than fuel levels.
- Forestry activities may promote dryness and hence the speed of fires by thinning forest canopies.

For more details, see the Greens' bushfire policy at <nsw.greens.org.au/policies>.

Shifting the blame

The attack on the Greens is a shameless attempt to pre-empt the findings of what the people of Australia hope will be a thoroughgoing and honest enquiry into the bushfire tragedy. Big issues like climate change – a crisis demanding changes that threaten the heedless “business as usual” operation of capitalism internationally – are being ignored or downplayed in an effort to isolate progressive voices on the Australian political scene. It won't work. The Australian people have been moved by the plight of the fire victims and the survivors and want answers, not the same old vested interest politics. ✪

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The Guardian

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A tragedy galvanising the nation

The Victorian bush fires have claimed at least 200 victims, up to a million animals and hundreds of homes. They are a disaster of unprecedented magnitude and the public response too is unprecedented. It has galvanised the nation, giving expression to the great potential of a society when its members band together around a common objective.

The country has mobilised at the grassroots to gather support for the victims. Over \$90 million had been raised in the community at the time of going to press.

Halls and other temporary depots in country Victoria are overflowing with donations of clothes, blankets, food and other basic supplies brought in from all over Australia. Many Queenslanders suffering the effects of major flooding in the north of their state have donated their aid cheques to the victims of the Victorian fires. Fire fighters are rightfully being celebrated as the heroes of the hour.

Such was the public response to calls for people to give blood that the Australian Red Cross Blood Service called on Victorians to stagger their donations over the coming months. The chief executive of the service said, "It's been overwhelming. Our resources are stretched. It has been the greatest interest we have had to a single event in the history of the blood service." As well queuing to give blood, tens of thousands made pledges online.

There were magnificent contributions from emergency service workers – ambulance, health professionals, all the volunteer firefighters; from various tradespeople; businesses big and small; thousands of schools around the country whose students pooled their money to make donations; the trade union movement which immediately swung into action with money donations and volunteers. The various sports – cricket, AFL, NRL, football etc – each handed over amounts in the hundreds of thousands of dollars.

The pervasive spirit of solidarity washes away in an instant the capitalist argument that humans are essentially selfish and greedy, that capitalism accords with these fundamental self-interested drives and that socialism cannot work because it flies in the face of what is falsely called "human nature".

The response to the Victorian bushfire tragedy is inspiring but not unique. Australians rallied to the aid of the people of Darwin in the wake of Cyclone Tracy on Christmas Eve 1974 with a toll of 71 lives. People have responded similarly to other natural disasters. The same capacity for stricken communities to organise themselves and for other members of the community to rally to their aid was displayed.

The Communist Party of Australia expresses its sincerest condolences to those who have lost family, friends, their homes, livelihoods and irreplaceable personal possessions.

PRESS FUND

Scientists are now claiming that the terrible Victorian bushfires provide clear evidence of climate change, and that we will have to accept new mandatory safety requirements for living in the country areas. Many people are now looking to smaller political parties to ensure that adequate measures are introduced to avert the worst effects of climate change. Publications such as *The Guardian* also play an important role, but we are constantly dependent on your support by way of contributions to the Press Fund in order to make this happen. So after you have contributed to the relief appeals, why not send us something for the next issue. We offer our sincere thanks to this week's supporters, as follows:

John Dyball \$10, Mark Window \$10, Kerry Kalen \$60, "Round Figure" \$10, Max Whisson \$10.

This week's contributions: \$100

Progressive contributions \$2,525

Message of condolence to Australian victims of wildfire

From SACP General Secretary Dr Blade Nzimande

Dear Comrades,

The South African Communist Party is deeply shocked at the enormous loss of life in wildfires across Australia. We wish to convey our heartfelt condolences to all families of the victims, in which it is believed that close to 200 people, have died.

Whilst the cause of the fires is yet to be ascertained, we are hopeful that more profound measures regarding environmental disaster awareness, climate change and early warning systems will be put in place.

The SACP is moved by the demonstration of deep national unity and a mobilisation of all efforts towards urgent rescue operations, saving lives as a priority, with comprehensive medical treatment of the injured, shelter, transport and the provision of basics.

It would be a fitting memory to those who lost their lives if the state takes a proactive lead, assisted by an alert international community, in providing humanitarian and other interventions, subdue and eliminate the fires and the normalisation of peoples lives.

Our deepest sympathies to all those who lost their loved ones.

Blade Nzimande

Message to fire victims

Sister of member of the Cuban 5

Dear Friends:

I have learnt of the damage from the bushfires that have cost the lives of hundreds of people including children in several towns in Victoria. It is sad for the victims' families and the effects of this catastrophe which occurred in a beautiful country like Australia. We feel sorry for this incident with our best wishes and hope that this disaster can be stopped immediately and prevent more victims. I remember all of you dearly,

Maria Eugenia Guerrero

Without revolutionary theory, there can be no revolutionary practice.



COMMUNIST UNIVERSITY

The Communist Party of Australia has launched a new website. The website is called Communist University and is designed to provide an introduction to Marxist Leninist theory. It is intended to offer an opportunity for those who wish to gain an understanding of the socio-economic structure of society from a materialist perspective to do so in their own time and at their own pace. If they wish those accessing the site can respond to the set questions and receive feedback.

The site will be developed to include topics that will allow participants to apply the basic concepts to contemporary events in order to provide them with a theoretical basis for their practical work.

The Communist Party would appreciate any comments or suggestions on how to improve the site.

The site can be found at www.comunistuniversity.org or via a link through the party website at www.cpa.org.au



International Women's Day

Morning tea
10 am Sunday March 8
1 Salar Place, Dianella

Guest speaker
Cheryl Davenport
Former Member of Parliament

Senior women in Federal Government & the contemporary issue for Australian women today

Bring a plate of food or drink
\$5 Donation

Organised by the CPA WA
0421 113 343 or cpaperth@gmail.com

Saturday 21st Feb 2009 @ 6pm
Casa Latinoamericana Hut #47
142 Addison Rd Community Centre Marrickville

Featuring a documentary of the struggle of the Guatemalan People against the gold mining

Guest Speaker - Vinnie Molina
Trade unionist from Guatemala, living in Perth

Organised by the Committee for Human Rights in Guatemala
For Information phone Victor on 0425324621

15th National Consultation Aust/NZ-Cuba Friendship Society

April 4th & 5th 2009, Perth WA



In this Year of the 50th Anniversary of the Cuban Revolution the ACFS Perth invites you to attend the 15th National Consultation & celebrate 50 years of revolution in Cuba and the 15th anniversary of the ACFS in Perth.

State Schools Teachers Union, SSTU
150-152 Adelaide Terrace, Perth

Full consultation Sat 4th & Sun 5th April, 9-5pm
Includes workshops, dinner and Latin Party \$50
No charge for interstate & overseas visitors.

Workshops & Party Sat 4th April, 1:30-4:30pm
Party 8:00pm \$20/\$25
Latin Party Only Sat 4th April 'til late \$15/\$20

More info call ACFS on 0421113343 or 0419812872 or email: acfsperth@gmail.com

In memory of Peter Symon
The CPA wishes to thank the following for their contributions to the Fund set up in memory of Peter Symon, the Party's leader for thirty-seven years. Their contributions will be used for the development and further work of the Party.

Anonymous \$20, Robert \$10, Des Donley \$200, EK \$300, KJ Manski \$100, Paul Wecker \$100.

Contributions for the past fortnight: \$730.

Total contributions to the Peter Symon Memorial Fund: \$7,307

March on Parliament over NT intervention

Darren Coyne

Hundreds of people marched on Parliament House in Canberra the week before last to protest against the ongoing Northern Territory intervention into "prescribed" Aboriginal communities.

They rallied from all over Australia to call for the scrapping of the emergency intervention and the re-instatement of those parts of the Racial Discrimination Act 1975 (RDA) which Howard removed to circumvent legal obstacles to the intervention, such as appeals against compulsory welfare quarantining and leases over Aboriginal land, to proceed.

Although Labor had promised to reinstate the RDA if elected, it remains set aside, 12 months after the Apology to Australia's Indigenous peoples.

Prime Minister Kevin Rudd had been expected to deliver his "report card" on the first sitting of Parliament, but that was delayed until the day before the first anniversary of the Apology.

Instead, the first sitting day was dominated by the government's \$42 billion stimulus package in response to the meltdown of the global economy, although a protest by Indigenous people and their supporters briefly interrupted question time.

That disruption followed an attempt by Federal Police officers to question a person at the Aboriginal Tent Embassy next to Old Parliament House down the hill. The police quickly retreated

after being told in no uncertain terms by numerous Aboriginal people that they were unwelcome.

The previous day, protesters had stormed the High Court after the court rejected a challenge against government-imposed leases on Aboriginal land.

Meanwhile, Professor Gordon Briscoe told the gathering before the march on Parliament House that Australian politicians had "raped our people" when they took away human rights.

Professor Briscoe said the removal of protections offered by the RDA meant Aboriginal people had no other option but to challenge the government's actions in the United Nations "because here we have no protection".

"We have not yet got to the point of putting solar energy on our roof because many of us don't even have a roof," he said.

"We want change ... and we also want a dialogue about the way they initiated this intervention."

Intervention campaigner Barbara Shaw, of Mt Nancy Camp near Alice Springs, met with Indigenous Affairs Minister Jenny Macklin the morning after the protest and delivered a copy of the UN complaint.

Sydney-based human rights lawyer George Newhouse said the Australian government's treatment of his Aboriginal clients was akin to that of a despotic third world ruler.

Former Federal Court judge Ron

Merkel, QC, is also working on the case, which will be taken to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

"The complaint will be that the intervention laws are racially discriminatory and they breach Australia's international obligations, in particular under the race convention," Mr Newhouse said.

Meanwhile, speakers at the protest included Maurie Japarta Ryan, who described the apology last year as shallow, and questioned the validity of the Australian Constitution.

"The Constitution is invalid because we have never given away our sovereign rights," he said, before announcing he was forming a political party called the First Nations Ethnic and Multicultural Political Party.

He also said the government was only listening to a chosen elite - Warren Mundine, who lived in the suburbs of Sydney, Noel Pearson from Cape York, and Melbourne academic Marcia Langton.

Irene Fisher, the CEO of the Sunrise Health Service at Katherine in the NT, which oversees ten remote communities, said Aboriginal people felt isolated.

"The people of remote communities came out in force to support Labor but nothing has changed," she said.

"There were 220 submissions to the review of the intervention, but Jenny Macklin has ignored them. The health of our people is getting worse."

Ms Fisher told the crowd that



rates of anaemia were rising and many young pregnant women were missing out on important pre-natal care because they were frightened of the intervention.

She said young males especially, were feeling shamed by the intervention, and there had been a rise in youth suicides.

"This blanket approach doesn't work in remote communities ... millions are being spent but it's all going in the pockets of the bureaucrats," she said.

Harry Nelson, of the Warlpiri tribe at Yuendumu, said he had been asked to perform a ceremony in his

community but had chosen to travel to Canberra because "this is more important".

Valerie Martin said Aboriginal people were being blackmailed by the government into giving up their land.

"Now they want 60-year leases over our land. Without our land we're nothing. If we give up our land we are nothing," she said.

Ms Martin rejected the reasons given for the intervention.

"Our kids are happy and healthy. They've been well cared for long before this invasion came," she said.

The Koori Mail ☘

End privatisation, build the public sector

Anna Pha

The Rudd government's \$42 billion stimulus package passed through the Senate last Friday, with the support of the five Greens senators, South Australian independent Nick Xenophon and Family First Steve Fielding. The Coalition were politically left out in the cold.

When Senator Xenophon indicated that he was voting against the package on Thursday night, the government was forced back to the negotiating table. Without opposition support, the government needed the support of the other seven Senators.

The government agreed to

accelerate the buy-back of water licences in the Murray-Darling basin and other water policy measures. This involves bringing forward \$500 million of spending already scheduled for 2012 and 2013.

The deal also includes funding for stormwater harvesting and commits \$200 million to community water planning. "This is a first for Australia. We hope this will support community planning projects in some of the hardest hit areas of the Murray Darling Basin - bringing expertise in planning, water management and sustainable agriculture together to support local communities to weigh up

their options and develop a shared vision for the future," said Greens Senator Rachel Siewert. Ten million dollars of new money will be provided for a bioremediation program to rescue South Australia's Lower Lakes and create more than 100 local jobs there.

"The Greens have secured a commitment that the \$14 billion schools infrastructure spending and the \$6 billion for social housing will result in buildings designed for energy efficiency, helping the most needy Australians save money as well as reduce their impact on the climate," said Greens deputy leader Senator Christine Milne.

The government agreed to an additional \$435 million Local Green Jobs package to create over 10,000 new jobs for local unemployed people. Councils will be able to apply for one-off grants for the construction of local infrastructure to improve community amenity. Some \$550 million has been won for the reopening of the Local Community Infrastructure Program due to the efforts of the Greens and Senator Fielding.

An initial \$40 million has been agreed to for cycleways in Australia's major cities, with the aim of reducing traffic congestion and cutting pollution. This is to be followed by further investment through Infrastructure Australia.

Apart from the Murray-Darling basin projects, the additional commitments will be funded by reducing the tax payments for individuals and one income families by \$50. As a result, tax payers with an annual income of up to \$80,000

will receive \$900 each, for incomes between \$80,000 and \$90,000 it will be \$600 and then up to \$100,000 the sum of \$250.

Cash payments to farmers, the back-to-school child bonus and training payments will be \$950.

The stimulus package is similar to those being introduced in Europe and the USA and is in line with calls by the International Monetary Fund for temporary, timely and targeted measures. Temporary is the major weakness in the package.

This package will not save Australia from recession or make serious inroads into unemployment. The government itself is predicting the creation of 90,000 short-term jobs. Although of great value to local communities and the environment, the additional green and job-creating measures negotiated by the Greens and other senators, will not make any indent into overall unemployment.

In addition to an immediate stimulus, medium and long-term measures are required to assist in sustaining the purchasing power of the community and for job creation on a large scale.

The question of purchasing power can be addressed by giving age pensioners, carers, unemployed and other welfare recipients an immediate, ongoing increase in their benefits. Their needs are great, struggling for survival on a day-to-day basis below the poverty line, and they will spend every cent they receive and continue to do so in coming years.

As for job creation, the public sector is the most efficient and

socially beneficial area for allocating funds. The for-profit private sector has proven time and time again to be more costly, less efficient, less reliable and offering poorer quality of services.

Government departments should not be treated as businesses. They exist to provide services to people and business, and to assist government in its affairs. The old public works departments that built roads, schools, hospitals, public housing, etc, have been quietly wound back and dismantled, and their work handed over to the private sector at great cost and wastage to the taxpayer and community. The public sector was once a major employer of apprentices. The private sector employs fewer people for the same dollar amount.

A 10 percent cut in Australia's military spending, which is over \$60 million a day, redirected to hospitals and schools and pension increases would provide greater security and many more jobs than it does now. The bulk of these cuts could be achieved by cutting spending on fighter planes, weapons and other military purchases from the US and withdrawing all Australian military forces from Afghanistan and Iraq.

Job creation should be centred around rebuilding the public sector, and restoring the public sector as a provider of public facilities, infrastructure and services. That is where the public funds in the Future Fund should be directed, and where superannuation funds should be mandated to direct some of the savings they hold. ☘

Pete's Corner



Attack on Sydney Ferry workers

A serious attack on workers rights and of the use of non-union agreements on Sydney Harbour is aimed at creating a very dangerous precedent and threatens to undermine the conditions of over 500 Sydney Ferry workers.

Following the finalisation of the publicly owned JetCat service to Manly, the NSW government, through the Ministry of Transport, has allowed Bass and Flinders Cruises to operate a fast ferry between Manly and Circular Quay. The tender process put in place by the government did not require the tenderers to collectively bargain or to pay the correct rates of pay within the industry. In fact zero standards were required within the tender and protection of workers' conditions were never considered in this whole process.

This was despite several meetings with the Minister, David Campbell, urging decent standards to be put in place. The Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) met with Bass and Flinders initially in relation to their operation and the only bottom-line position the union put to the company was that it could not move off the base rate of pay for commuter ferry workers in the harbour.

The union also stated that it required a collectively bargained agreement. After Bass and Flinders received MUA's initial draft proposal and was questioned about some serious safety concerns, they informed the union that they had registered a Greenfields Agreement. This use of

WorkChoices has shut the union out of negotiations. Further the agreement provides for a 25% cut to the base rate and a 20% cut in leave.

The position put to workers was: "This is the agreement – take it or leave it"! So much for WorkChoices being dead. The impact of a non-union private operator at this current time is particularly dangerous because the public ferry system is being benchmarked against private operators in a market testing exercise.

If a private operator can successfully come in and slash wages by 25% it is clearly going to be an enticement for other unscrupulous employers to enter the fray and tender for the entire ferry service on the basis of non-union WorkChoices wages and conditions.

As a result the MUA has established a daily community assembly at number 2 Circular Quay. While maintaining a presence in the morning and afternoon, the MUA requests the assistance of comrades for the afternoon activity which commences around 3:30pm every afternoon.

Any solidarity support that could be offered in terms of people at the community assembly from 3:30pm daily would be greatly appreciated.

The MUA also requests that unions make it known to contacts in the state government that this poor decision needs to be reversed and government intervention is required in this instance to ensure the rights of workers are preserved. ✪



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Union guarantee of Mayne jobs

The Health Services Union (HSU) said it would ensure the sale of Mayne Hospitals in NSW, Victoria, Tasmania and the ACT would not affect the jobs and entitlements of members working in them.

The HSU national secretary Craig Thomson said he had successfully sought a guarantee that all staff would remain employed, continue to receive the same wages and conditions and have their prior service recognised.

They will also remain eligible for the significant pay increases and better conditions being negotiated in the first national agreement with Mayne Health.

That agreement is due to be finalised this month and will then be put to meetings of members around the country for a vote. "We have a guarantee in place for staff after the sale and we will be making sure that the new owners of these private hospitals stick by it," Mr Thomson said.

"There are always concerns among staff when a hospital changes hands but we will be discussing this with them and reassuring them that their jobs are safe."

Mr Thomson said he would also be seeking to meet with Healthscope as soon as possible to discuss a smooth change in ownership and remind them of their obligations to their workforce.

"We see no reason why there should not be a smooth transition and we will be encouraging Healthscope to provide, in concert with staff, the best possible service to the public."

The hospitals being sold are the Mosman Private Hospital in Sydney, the National Capital Private Hospital in the ACT, the Geelong Private Hospital and Sunbury Private Hospital in Victoria and the Hobart Private Hospital, Mersey Community Hospital and St Helen's Private Hospital in Tasmania. ✪

AMWU support for bushfire victims

Two Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) members lost their lives in the fires that have devastated Victoria and a number more have lost family members or their homes.

Like the Australian community more broadly, AMWU members have responded with great generosity and compassion with collections being organised in worksites across the country.

In one workplace alone, 200 AMWU members at Mt Newman in Western Australia raised \$150,000.

The AMWU has donated \$20 000 towards the victims of the Victorian bushfires, as part of the \$250 000 contribution by the ACTU.

The contribution is being made through the Red Cross Fund. Members are encouraged to make individual donations or organise collections at their workplace.

Donations to the Red Cross appeal can be made at www.redcross.org.au, by phoning 1800 811 700, or at any Woolworths Supermarket or Commonwealth Bank Branch. ✪

Workers front Senate inquiry over collective bargaining

As *The Guardian* goes to press, workers are due to protest against the behaviour of major employers that continue to use WorkChoices when they front the Senate Inquiry into the Rudd Labor government's Fair Work Bill.

The unethical behaviour of Telstra management in denying the rights of its employees to union representation demonstrates why WorkChoices must be abolished urgently, workers and their unions will tell Senate Inquiry hearings this week.

The Community and Public Sector Union – one of the three unions representing workers employed by Telstra – will appear before a Senate Inquiry into the Fair Work Bill in Melbourne. The ACTU will also appear at the Inquiry in Melbourne.

Telstra management has refused to meet with unions to negotiate a collective agreement for employees since last July. Workers at the telco have not had a pay rise since September 2007.

Members of the Community and Public Sector Union and the Communication, Electrical and Plumbing Union are now taking protected industrial action to pressure the company to respect the rights of its employees and come back to negotiations.

ACTU secretary Jeff Lawrence said Telstra has been one of the most high-profile supporters of WorkChoices and continues to take every advantage of the remnants of the Howard government's laws to undermine workers' rights.

"The company's submission to the Senate Inquiry is also pushing for changes to the federal government's IR proposals that would strengthen the power of employers and weaken the rights of employees to good faith collective bargaining and union representation.

"Other employers, including in the large retail sector, are trying to use the last gasps of WorkChoices to lock retail workers into job contracts that would leave them out-of-pocket by more than \$5500 a year.

"It is vital that Labor's new IR laws are amended to give Australian workers strong collective bargaining rights and are passed by Parliament as soon as possible," said Mr Lawrence. ✪

FSU protests Suncorp CEO \$2.4 million payout

The Finance Sector Union (FSU) has called on the federal government to intervene in the \$2.4 million pay out to Suncorp's chief executive John Mulcahy and recommend the payout be subject to Suncorp's shareholder approval.

Michael Clifford, FSU Queensland state secretary said it was an astounding payout for a Chief Executive who has failed to deliver for the company, its shareholders, its customers and employees.

"The company's profits are in freefall, and its value has been slashed. Yet in the midst of Suncorp's business failure John Mulcahy has received a pay out of \$2.4 million without shareholder scrutiny.

"Over the past year Suncorp shed 650 jobs. It is not because of their failings that these workers jobs have gone. It's time for the regulator to assure the thousands of employees and Queensland investors of Suncorp's current financial position and future viability," Mr Clifford said.

The payout has reignited debate for a cap on executive bonuses and pay in Australia following President Barack Obama's crack down in which he limited executive salaries at \$US500,000 as a condition for receiving a government bail out.

"In return for taxpayer funded assistance for the finance industry, we must see caps placed on executive salaries.

"Instead of slashing jobs and

throwing skills and people out the door, the money saved should be channelled into investment in jobs and skills.

"This shows the double standards between what happens to chiefs at the top, and every day insurance workers. If any workers chose to leave of their own accord, they would not get any pay out," said Michael Clifford.

The FSU has developed an Industry plan for the financial crisis, which includes:

- An end to off shoring Australian jobs;
- The establishment of an industry skills fund;
- Greater job protection; and
- Limits on executive payouts. ✪

NSW residents up in arms over shooting law changes

Peter Mac

A bitter row has erupted over the approval to extend a shooting complex at the NSW Southern Highlands village of Hilltop. The controversy is revealing a disturbing trend towards an increase in the influence of the gun industry lobby,

The proposal to extend the shooting centre followed the decision to close the rifle range in the Sydney beachside suburb of Malabar. The site for the extension of the shooting centre was especially created by the former Iemma government, by excising 1,000 hectares from the Bargo State Conservation area, which is home to many endangered species and lies within the Sydney water catchment area. The development would also involve a contribution of \$5 million of taxpayers funding.

Local residents have objected to the extension proposal, and have pointed out that it will involve a massive increase in the noise level, a major increase in the frequency of gunshots, an extension of the shooting hours, an increase in the demand for local parking, and increasing pollution of local waterways. The existing site is already heavily contaminated with lead and heavy metals from its use over the last twenty years.

Residents already complain that they can hear the gunshots from the existing complex, which caters for 12 shooters at any one time, but the proposal would cater for up to ten times this number simultaneously, and up to 250 shooters per day.

The development will involve extensive clearing of bushland, construction of additional pistol, air pistol and shotgun ranges, a clubhouse, an armoury, a generator, expanded water storage and an expanded car park. The Army is also likely to use the complex.

Clearing the way

Construction of the existing Hill Top centre in 1986 was opposed by local residents, but the project went ahead after the NSW Labor government of Barry Unsworth (formerly nicknamed "the killer in the cardigan") used special state powers to override local government zoning regulations.

At this time the government also

ignored objections from the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) over the erosion of pristine natural areas and the elimination of walking tracks. The NPWS expressed extreme concern that the area was a high fire risk. The recent Victorian bushfires have provided the most clear evidence of the increasing risk of bushfires from human activity, but this crucial advice from the NPWS is still being ignored.

In order to expedite the current development, the NSW government removed the power to approve the development application from the local council by declaring it to be a project of state significance. Under laws formerly passed by the Iemma government, the responsibility for approval of these projects lies directly with the state Minister for Planning.

In July 2007 lawyers acting for the Hill Top Residents Action Group pointed out that wording in proposed new planning legislation would forbid any Minister from approving a development which had already been prohibited by local government zoning. The former NSW Planning Minister Frank Sartor subsequently amended the planning regulations by way of an announcement in the *Government Gazette*, thereby effectively removing this obstruction to major development. The Shooting Centre development application then proceeded on its way.

Shooters get their way

The application to extend the Shooting Centre was dogged by rumours that the Iemma government had reached an agreement with the Shooters' Party to gain their support for new planning legislation which would remove impediments to inappropriate new major developments. The Shooters' Party holds two of the votes that the government requires to pass legislation opposed by the conservative coalition in the upper house. Since gaining parliamentary representation the Shooters' Party has voted with the ALP government about 63 percent of the time.

Frank Sartor certainly appears to have given an undertaking to allow the massively enlarged shooting centre to operate seven days a week, and on some nights to remain open until 10 pm. Current Planning Minister Kristina Kennealy, on the other hand, has more

cautiously indicated that the development will be banned from operating on the weekends or public holidays.

Predictably, Shooters' Party MP Robert Brown has complained bitterly: "If you have a regional shooting complex and it's going to be running major ... competitions for some of the clubs that are going to be using it, most of these events happen on long weekends because people come from all over the state, and even interstate and overseas." That, of course, is just the point that local residents are trying to make.

It remains to be seen whether the Minister will stick to her guns (as it were) over the operating hours, but the indications are that the Shooters' Party may well carry the day.

Support from the Shooters' Party is keenly sought by all the major political parties. Last year, despite objections from women's organisations, the Police Association and the National Coalition for Gun Control, Government and Coalition MPs combined to pass Shooters' Party legislative amendments which would allow subjects of apprehended violence orders to have their guns returned immediately after expiry of the order.

Gun lobby influence

The anti-gun group Gun Control Australia has pointed to the close relationship between some Australian shooter clubs and extremist US gun organisations. Australia's largest gun club, the Sporting Shooters Association of Australia (SSAA) and the handgun group Pistol Australia are affiliates of the US National Rifle Association (NRA).

The NRA gained particular notoriety after the Virginia Tech massacre, by refusing to support a ban on gun ownership, and instead advocating that teachers should be armed and that employees should be allowed to carry guns to work in their cars. It also wants ex-military rifles to be available for private use.

For its part, the SSAA has appointed a Canberra lobbyist, apparently with a view to persuading federal politicians to liberalise the existing gun laws. A representative of Gun Control Australia commented: "We don't need American gun values and gun policies in Australia any more than we need America's 20 times greater rate of gun homicide." *



The Hon. Robert Brown, NSW MLC representing the Shooters Party, also a member of the parliamentary committee for Road Safety.



The Australian Indigenous Doctors' Association welcomed the government's announcement to establish a Healing Foundation, hot on the heels of the first anniversary of the Rudd government's Apology to the Stolen Generations of Indigenous Australians this month. "The Apology initiated the journey, but the process is ongoing and it may take some time," said Association president Dr Tamara MacKean who also noted that it is crucial for the process to address the past, present and future. "The fundamental aim of healing is to provide a better future for our kids."

The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission has put out a warning about a bushfire charity scam. The ACCC said that there have already been reports of people being approached by rip-off merchants attempting to exploit the Victorian bushfire tragedy.

Still on the bushfires, the Pentecostal Church's "Catch The Fires Ministries" have also exploited the tragedy, saying the laws decriminalising abortion in Victoria make Australia an "open target for the devil to destroy". The church's leader Danny Nalliah says he had a dream in October about raging fires and that he woke with "a flash from the spirit of God: that his conditional protection had been removed from the nation of Australia, in particular Victoria" because of the new laws. Former federal treasurer Peter Costello, having recently sent a video message to an Australia Day prayer meeting run by Nalliah, was unsurprisingly quick to distance himself from the bible basher.

NSW Aboriginal chairperson Bev Manton and NSW Premier Nathan Rees have signed a partnership to address the unacceptable water standards faced by Aboriginal people in regional and remote areas of the state. "It gives me immense pride ... to sign this agreement," said Ms Manton. The agreement will address situations in communities where water supplies have been chemically contaminated, where untreated sewage was discharged and where the risks of respiratory infections are high.

CAPITALIST HOG OF THE WEEK: is the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry. The Rudd government's plans to update disability and age discrimination laws has business up in arms. The changes will see employers and owners of premises have to comply with new obligations to ensure they make "reasonable adjustments" to accommodate people with disabilities. But the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry warned that the changes could "force employers to accommodate the needs of staff whose disabilities they may not know about". The employer body whined, "As we enter into a possible recessionary period, there is no clear policy rationale to introduce such changes that may have unintended consequences."

Malabar, a scandal in stone

Peter Mac

The extensions to the Hill Top Shooting Centre are intended to replace Sydney's Malabar rifle range, said to be the largest in the Southern Hemisphere.

But this is not the first time that the Malabar range has been slated for closure. Around about the time that the existing Hill Top Shooting Centre was being constructed in 1986, the NSW and federal governments were both involved in extensive programs for the replacement of the original yellowblock sandstone, the exquisite flawless stone used in Sydney's historic buildings.

However, the only available

source of yellowblock in NSW at that time was the privately-owned quarries at Gosford, and the cost of this stone was astronomical. Stone of equal quality could, it was said, be shipped all the way from quarries in Western Australia and be landed at the Sydney wharfs more cheaply than to bring it from Gosford.

The state and federal governments therefore decided to conduct geological studies to locate areas of government-owned land under which lay areas of yellowblock, and which were suitable for quarrying. And the biggest site of all was the Malabar rifle range, under which lie billions of dollars worth of yellowblock stone.

However, the company which owned the Gosford quarries sprang into action with a PR campaign which bemoaned the potential loss of jobs in the Gosford area if other quarries were opened up on government-owned land – or, for that matter, if yellowblock was imported from other states.

And lo and behold, both the state and federal governments went to water, and cancelled the quarrying program! The Malabar range site will now, presumably, be sold off for major housing development, an approach entirely consistent with the state Labor government's adoration for big development and big developers. *

No paradox in bailouts and nationalisations

The following is the text of the speech that Sitaram Yechury, member of the Politburo of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), delivered at the sixteenth Lal Bahadur Shastri memorial lecture on "The Global Crisis and the Indian Response" on January 11, 2009 at National Museum in New Delhi.

The current crisis of international financial capital that spearheaded globalisation in the last two decades is, by many estimations, far graver than any other crisis in the history of capitalism, including the great depression of 1929. The crisis is still unfolding and its full ramifications will be realised only much later.

Many believe that we, as Communists, must feel resoundingly vindicated that Karl Marx's penetrative analysis of capitalism has, once again, proven itself to be true. Marxists do not derive satisfaction for the vindication of their analysis at the expense of the ruin and misery of millions of victims of this capitalist crisis. We work to ensure that the common working people are not subjected to such inhuman trepidations being at the mercy of the rule of capital. This shall, however, happen only when we "change the world", not remaining satisfied with the correctness of our "interpretation of the world".

Re-nationalisation

Capitalism, in the wake of this crisis, has embarked on a spate of nationalisations that would have surprised the former socialist USSR. When the time to defend capitalism from such a crisis comes, all ideological attacks against the state, public property or nationalisation with the accompanied extolling of the virtues of private capital and their laser-beamed God – the market – are mercilessly abandoned.

Britain, which heralded modern privatisation, has socialised most of its banking sector. (Recollect that Margaret Thatcher once said, "It is not the business of the government to be in business".) The USA is pumping in an overall US\$2.5 trillion of tax payers' money to shore up its financial system [all amounts in US dollars].

Marxists do not derive satisfaction for the vindication of their analysis at the expense of the ruin and misery of millions of victims of this capitalist crisis. We work to ensure that the common working people are not subjected to such inhuman trepidations being at the mercy of the rule of capital.

France's Nicholas Sarkozy, says, "Laissez-faire is finished". There is a profound paradox here. Defending capitalism, in this present crisis, means greater state intervention. The paradox, however, is only superficial. The fact remains that the capitalist state has always defended and enlarged the avenues for private profits. These bailouts, as the future will testify, are designed precisely to first save and then to create new avenues for profit generation.

Neo-liberal globalisation

This crisis is an inevitable consequence of the path of globalisation that was unfolding in recent decades.

Globalisation and its ideological underpinning – neo-liberalism – arose under conditions of gigantic levels of capital accumulation and the emergence of globalisation of finance capital (correspondingly as capitalism develops, there has been a centralisation and concentration of capital).

The current crisis has specific features. The present process has not seen a nation-state based finance capital engaged in struggling with "rival" finance capitalist in "rival" national states. In a sense, it has transcended the nation-state. This, however, is not to suggest that the relevance of the nation-state and its sovereignty has ceased, as some would argue.

Present day finance capital is globally instantly mobile, sucking in finance capital from individual countries dominated by finance capital originating in the advanced countries. Further, this finance capital is more pre-occupied in its search for quick speculative gains than in joining in the pursuit of industrial capital to economic development. Finance capital, therefore, truly represents the parasite that thrives at the expense of real economic growth.

The emergence of this finance capital is an important factor that explains the relatively low growth rates accompanied by high unemployment rates in the advanced countries over the last decade or so. This happens because in order to appease international speculators, there is a competitive reduction in tax rates and restrictions on the size of the fiscal deficit. In other words, governments are forced to cut back expenditures and thereby deflate both employment and domestic demand leading to lower rates of growth.

This, in turn, leads to a situation where the advanced countries turn to the third world economies looking for greener pastures. The imposition of neo-liberal policies serves the purpose of removing obstacles to the free operation of internationally mobile finance capital. In addition, it seeks to impose a new form of international division of labour, this time not through direct colonial occupation but through coercing third world economies to dovetail to

their interests. It is the consolidation of this process over the last decade that laid the basis for the current crisis.

Two important features of globalisation, however, require attention to understand the present crisis. First, this process has been accompanied by growing economic inequalities both within countries between the rich and poor, and between the rich and the poor countries. Secondly, globalisation has given rise to the phenomenon of "jobless growth". This is so because the trajectory of profit-maximisation invariably replaces human labour by investing more in developing technology rather than developing human resource capacities. The growth of employment during this period has always been lower than the GDP growth rate globally.

Both these features put together mean the purchasing power of the vast majority of the world's population has been declining. Now, capitalism inevitably plunges into a crisis

Iceland's IceSave bank established an online banking service. When its parent bank, Landsbanki was "bank" guaranteed the savings of its homeland customers but not those of overseas investors. The access to their bank accounts for eight weeks.

when what is produced is not sold. Under these circumstances, the only way that capitalism can sustain its levels of profits is by encouraging people to procure loans, so that spending maintains levels of economic activity. However, when the time comes to repay these loans, there is the inevitable default.

The banks

This is precisely what happened in the USA in the current sub-prime crisis leading to large scale defaults (loans given at interest rates lower than the prime rates initially to lure borrowers, only to be re-set higher later or loans given to borrowers whose credit worthiness is suspect).

Defaults should not have really come as a big surprise. *The Wall Street Journal* reported on October 12, 2007 that the wealthiest one percent of Americans reportedly earned 21.2 percent of all income in 2005. This increased from 19 percent in 2004 and exceeded the previous high of 20.8 percent in 2000. In contrast, the bottom 50 percent earned 12.8 percent of all income which was less than 13.4 percent in 2004 and 13 percent in 2000.

The consequence of such growing inequalities will lead, according to Merrill Lynch, to a fall of \$360 billion in consumer spending during 2008-09. Obviously, Merrill Lynch, now emasculated, did not take its own assessment seriously, busy as its executives were in giving themselves handsome perks and bonuses.

Capital, in search of higher profits, continuously creates new commodities through which it expands its market operations. As Marx said, "Production not only creates objects for the subjects, but also creates subjects for the objects". The present day advertising industry is testimony to this. Under the rule of international finance capital, capitalism creates new financial commodities. One of these that has played havoc and generated the current crisis is known as the "derivatives".

Derivatives are shadow financial instruments that include futures, options, forwards trading etc. If one buys or sells a share in the stock market, then it is actual trade. However, if one buys or sells the option to buy or not to buy a share, then it is derivative trade. The seller of the option, believe it or not, need not own that share. Likewise, the buyer need not pay the full money for the share.

According to the Bank of International Settlements, as of September 2008, the total

value of derivative trade stood at a staggering \$600 plus trillions. This has grown from US\$100 trillion in 2002. Thus, this shadow economy is 10 to 12 times larger than global GDP (\$50 to 60 trillion) and more than six times larger than the actual trading in shares in the world's stock exchanges (\$100 trillions).

While these are the figures from the official commodity exchanges, it is variously estimated that the total value of financial exchanges included in derivatives, whose trade takes place even outside of the commodity exchanges, was a staggering 40 times the total global GDP. It is this speculative financial bubble, pumped to inflate to infinity, that had to burst, and it did.

Reams of analysis seek an explanation for this crisis (obfuscating the systemically inherent dynamics of the capitalist system) in the greed of a few, a violation of some ethical norms, *a la* Nobel laureate Paul Krugman's "moral hazard," or, the lack of transparency and the weakness of regulatory mechanisms and failures of credit rating agencies.

Capitalism hanging itself

In *Das Kapital*, Marx concludes his chapter on the genesis of the industrial capitalist states: "Capital comes dripping from head to foot, from every pore, with blood and dirt". He buttresses this with a quote, in a footnote, from a worker and trade union leader TJ Dunning: "With adequate profit, capital is very bold.

"A certain 10 percent will ensure its employment anywhere; 20 percent will produce eagerness; 50 percent, positive audacity; 100 percent will make it ready to trample on all human laws; 300 percent and there is not a crime at which it will scruple, nor a risk it will run, even to the chance of its owner being hanged." It is this pathological drive to maximise profits at any cost, the inherent character of the capitalist system and not the individual greed of some or weakness of regulatory mechanisms that is the root cause for the present crisis.

If profits were reemployed into enlarging productive capacities, then through the consequent employment generation, the purchasing power of the people will grow leading to larger aggregate demand, which, in turn, would give a further impetus to industrialisation and growth of the real economy.

The gigantic accumulation of international finance capital, however, given the inherent laws of capitalism, supersedes this process, seeking

Happy 200th Birthday Charles Darwin

The classic English country gentleman, Darwin seems an unlikely figure to create a controversy. He had developed a radical theory that brought him into conflict with a very traditional establishment – the Anglican Church. History has vindicated him and he is now celebrated as one of the greatest and most innovative scientists who ever lived. But, Alfred Russell Wallace, who hit upon the theory at the same time, has not received similar recognition.

To this day, Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection is widely accepted, and explains the distant origins and fantastic variety of life on Earth.

The young naturalist

Born in 1809, Darwin was fascinated by all living things from a young age. While growing up he was an avid reader of nature books and devoted his spare time to exploring the fields around his home, collecting plants and insects.

In 1825 he became a medical student at the University of Edinburgh but was so traumatised by an operation performed on a child without anaesthetic that he gave up his studies without completing the course. He then went to Cambridge University to study theology. Darwin graduated four years later, but was in no hurry to take holy orders. Instead, he set off on a journey that was to change his life, and much more besides.

In 1831 Darwin embarked on a five year voyage aboard the Beagle. The ship sailed to South America to carry out surveying work. Darwin, who had been recommended by one of his Cambridge professors, had a joint role as naturalist and companion to the ship's captain, Robert FitzRoy.

Darwin explored remote regions and marvelled at a world so different from the one he knew. He encountered birds with bright blue feet, sharks with T-shaped heads and oversized tortoises.

Everywhere he went, Darwin amassed plants, animals and fossils, and took copious notes. These collections and records were to provide the clues he needed to develop his remarkable theory: The theory of natural selection Darwin returned to England in 1836. A methodical and industrious scholar, he spent years analysing his specimens.

Darwin realised that evolution occurs by the process of natural selection. The "fittest" animals or plants – those with the characteristics best suited to their environment – are more likely to survive and reproduce. They pass on these desirable characteristics to their offspring. Gradually those features become more common, causing the species to change over time. If the changes are great enough, they could produce a new species altogether.

Darwin had collected some finches from



the Galápagos Islands, which helped him to formulate his idea. Some had stout beaks for eating seeds, others were insect specialists. Darwin realised that they were descendants of a single ancestor. As they dispersed to different islands, the birds had adapted to eat the various foods available. Natural selection had produced 13 different species.

A joint announcement

Darwin knew his radical ideas would meet with stiff opposition. He delayed publishing them for many years while he assembled a mountain of evidence. He sought the advice of Cambridge professors, pig breeders and pigeon fanciers.

During this time, Darwin learnt that Alfred Russell Wallace, a young naturalist, had developed similar ideas to his own. Scrupulously honest, Darwin volunteered to send Wallace's ideas to a journal for immediate publication. However, his friends advised that the fairest solution would be a joint announcement.

Darwin's contentious, celebrated book, *The Origin of Species* was published in 1859 and provoked outrage from some members of the Church of England as it implicitly contradicted the belief in divine creation. Darwin's opponents accused him of blasphemy but their efforts

were in vain – the book was already becoming a bestseller.

The Descent of Man, published in 1871, aroused even greater debate since it suggested that humans descended from apes. The vexed Bishop of Oxford famously asked Thomas Huxley, one of Darwin's most enthusiastic supporters, whether it was through his grandfather or grandmother that he claimed descent from a monkey. Despite the attacks, Darwin's conviction in scientific theory remained unshaken.

Darwin's legacy

Although Darwin's theory has been modified over time, it remains fundamental to the study of life sciences. But the controversy still exists.

There are some who don't agree with Darwin's theory being taught in school biology classes. However the theory of evolution is accepted by the scientific community as the best, evidence-based explanation for the diversity and complexity of life on Earth.

Darwin changed not only the way we see plants and animals, but also the way we see ourselves.

The animals and plants he collected form part of our national heritage. Natural History Museum ★

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renationalised in 2008 the self-touted "transparent" left its 400,000 European customers without

predatory profits through speculation. In fact it decimates this process by enveloping it under the speculative financial bubble. This is similar to when monopoly capital, emerging from free competition, decimates the latter completely.

To summarise: under globalisation, with a sharp decline in the purchasing power in the hands of the majority of the world's population (like the growing gulf between "shining" and "suffering" India), finance capital, in its eagerness for quick profits, chooses the speculative route of artificially enlarging purchasing power by advancing cheap (sub-prime) loans.

Profits are made while these loans are spent but when repayment is due comes default, ruining the loan taker, also crippling the system. To put it simply, as seen above, this is precisely what happened on a gigantic scale. Capitalism's supreme diabolic irony lies in the fact that in the name of protecting those who have already been ruined, the banks and financial institutions are bailed out using tax payer's resources! Indeed, privatisation of profits and the nationalisation of losses!

In the meanwhile, independent sovereign countries like India are protected only by insulating ourselves from such massive speculation. To a large extent, if India has been spared a full throttle devastation, it is because the Left parties prevented the current UPA government, during the last four years, from embracing greater financial liberalisation. Even our worst detractors are forced to admit this, though most reluctantly!

It would, indeed, be suicidal if the government embarks, as it appears to do, on a path of relaxing the regulation on the flow of international finance capital in the name of injecting greater liquidity into our economy. This is expected to generate greater expenditures and, hence, boost aggregate demand, thus, fuelling growth. This process cannot be done through importing speculative capital. This needs to be done through greater public investments generating employment and, thus, feeding the cycle of demand led growth.

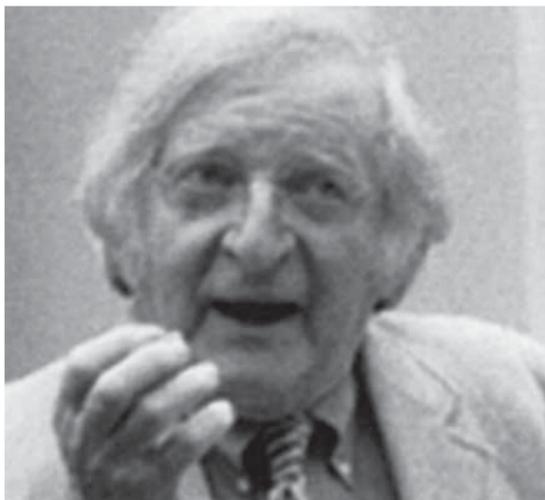
The manner in which the crisis is tackled defines the priorities. Recollect, some ways of emerging from the 1930's depression led to the rise of fascism! One way to resist such horrifying possibilities is to put people before profits while tackling the crisis. The current bailout packages announced across the globe, however, do the opposite.

People's Democracy ★

Defending Political Activism

An exciting documentary about the career of US civil rights attorney

Leonard Weinglass



Leonard Weinglass is a defence lawyer and civil rights activist. In his long career he has defended many high profile political activists from Angela Davis, Jane Fonda, Mumia Abu Jamal, to leaders of the American Indian Movement, among others. He is currently one of the US-based attorneys for the Cuban Five.

In the US the Leonard I Weinglass Award annually honours lawyers who contribute to human rights and civil liberties causes.

The documentary charts many of his legal cases in the context of key social and political events taking place around the world at the time.

Weinglass will be touring Australia and New Zealand in 2009 to win support for the Cuban Five.

Friday February 20 at 6.30 pm Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts

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Leonard Weinglass Tour Committee Sydney Free the Five Committee

For more information email: freethethefive@yahoo.com Or phone 0424 652 802

Documents reveal prisoners tortured to death

Stephen C Webster

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) has released previously classified excerpts of a government report on harsh interrogation techniques used in Iraq, Afghanistan and Guantanamo Bay. These previously unreported pages detail repeated use of "abusive" behaviour, even to the point of prisoner deaths.

The documents, obtained by the ACLU under a Freedom of Information (FOI) Act request, contain a report by Vice Admiral Albert T Church, who was ordered to conduct a comprehensive review of Defence Department interrogation operations. Church specifically calls interrogations at Bagram Air base in Afghanistan as "clearly abusive, and clearly not in keeping with any approved interrogation policy or guidance."

The ACLU's release comes on the same day as a major FOI document dump by three other leading human rights groups: documents which reveal the Pentagon ran secret prisons in Bagram and Iraq, that it cooperated with the CIA's "ghost detention" program and that Defence personnel delayed a prisoner's release to avoid bad press.

"In both cases, for example, [prisoners] were handcuffed to fixed objects above their heads in order to keep them awake," reads the document. "Additionally, interrogations in both incidents involved the use of physical violence, including kicking, beating, and the use of 'compliance blows' which involved striking the [prisoners] legs with the [interrogators] knees. In both cases, blunt force trauma to the legs was implicated in the deaths. In one case, a pulmonary embolism developed as a consequence of the blunt force trauma, and in the other case pre-existing coronary artery disease was complicated by the blunt force trauma."

In a press release, the ACLU

summarised the documents as detailing, "[An] investigation of two deaths at Bagram. Both detainees were determined to have been killed by pulmonary embolism caused as a result of standing chained in place, sleep deprivation and dozens of beatings by guards and possibly interrogators. (Also reveals the use of torture at Guantánamo and American-Afghani prisons in Kabul).

"[An] investigation into the homicide or involuntary manslaughter of detainee Dilar Dababa by US forces in 2003 in Iraq.

"[An] investigation launched after allegations that an Iraqi prisoner was subjected to torture and abuse at 'The Disco' (located in the Special Operations Force Compound in Mosul Airfield, Mosul, Iraq).

"The abuse consisted of filling his jumpsuit with ice, then hosing him down and making him stand for long periods of time, sometimes in front of an air conditioner; forcing him to lay down and drink water until he gagged, vomited or choked, having his head banged against a hot steel plate while hooded and interrogated; being forced to do leg lifts with bags of ice placed on his ankles, and being kicked when he could not do more.

"[An] investigation of allegations of torture and abuse that took place in 2003 at Abu Ghraib.

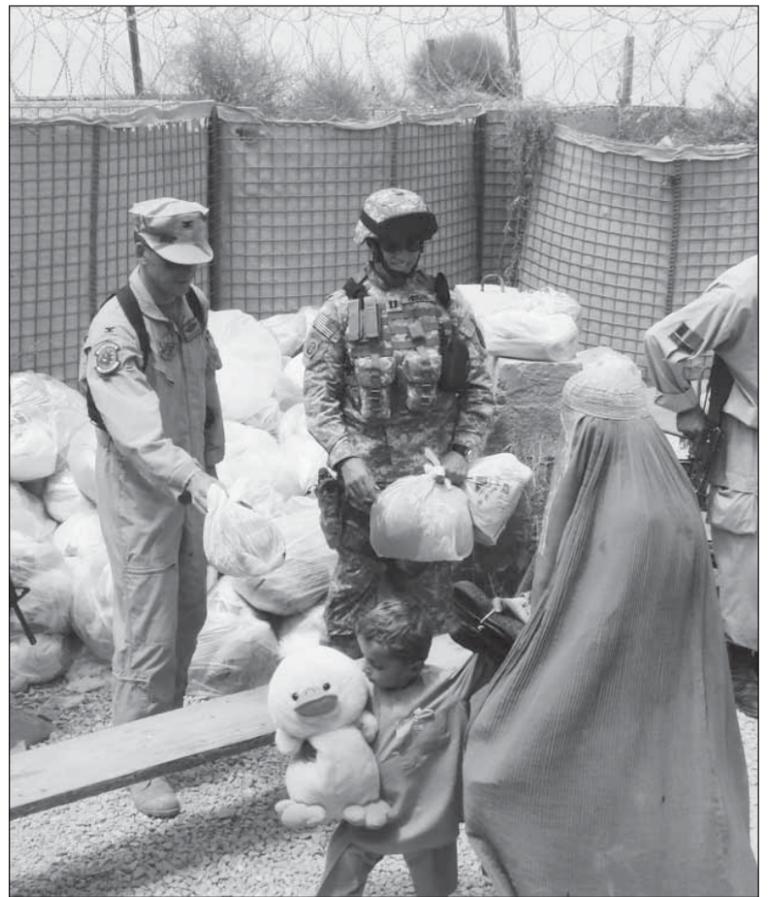
"[And an] investigation that established probable cause to believe that US forces committed homicide in 2003 when they participated in the binding of detainee Abed Mowhoush in a sleeping bag during an interrogation, causing him to die of asphyxiation."

"A large portion of the torture, maiming, and murder of detainees occurred under authority issued under secret rules of engagement in the Pentagon," wrote Scott Horton, a contributing editor with *Harper's* magazine. "Much of this flowed through Undersecretary of Defence for Intelligence Stephen Cambone, a figure who has so far evaded scrutiny

in the torture scandal and now serves as vice president for strategy of QinetiQ North America, a subsidiary of the United Kingdom-based defence contractor QinetiQ.

"Even the Senate Armed Services Committee review fails to get to the bottom of Dr Cambone, his interrogations ROEs for special operations units he controlled, and the death, disfigurement and torture of prisoners they handled. This is one of many reasons why a comprehensive investigation with subpoena power is urgently needed. But full airing of the internal investigations already conducted by the Department of Defence is an essential next step."

Information Clearing House ✪



Bagram Air Base in Afghanistan – outwardly offering a welcome smile, food, clothing and toys for the kids.

Pakistan comes clean on Mumbai attack

Pakistan has acknowledged for the first time that the Mumbai terrorist attacks were launched from its shores and at least partly plotted on its soil. Interior Ministry chief Rehman Malik confirmed that Pakistan had arrested most of the main suspects and initiated criminal proceedings.

"Some part of the conspiracy has taken place in Pakistan and, according to the available information, most of the suspects are in our custody," he said.

Mr Malik said that criminal cases had been opened against eight suspects on charges of "abetting, conspiracy and facilitation" of a terrorist act and that six of them were already in custody.

He reported that investigators had traced a boat engine that was used by the attackers to sail from Pakistan to India and had busted

two hideouts of the suspects near Karachi.

Other leads pointed to Europe and the US, Mr Malik said, adding that Pakistan would ask the FBI for help.

He also reported that the pieces of evidence that had been collected "connect to" the leadership of Lashkar-e-Taiba, including Zaki-ur-Rehman Lakhvi and Zarrar Shah, who India says masterminded the attacks.

But he said that Pakistan needed more assistance from India if it was to bring a successful criminal prosecution.

India and the US have urged Pakistan to crack down on Lashkar-e-Taiba, a Pakistan-based militant group that has been widely blamed for the bloodshed.

Pakistan has already arrested several of the group's leaders.

New Delhi says that all 10 gunmen, only one of whom was captured alive, were Pakistanis and that their handlers in Pakistan had kept in touch with them by phone during the three-day assault.

Pakistani investigators have not yet identified the nine gunmen killed in the attack.

But they have confirmed that Mohammad Ajmal Kasab, the gunman who was caught alive, is a Pakistani.

Mr Malik's statement indicates that Pakistan is serious about punishing the people behind the November attacks which killed at least 173 people and stirred fears that the nuclear-armed neighbours could slide towards war.

Senior Indian ministers have accused Pakistani security agencies of some involvement in the attacks. *Morning Star* ✪

Security upgrade in Central Asia

At the beginning of February this year a meeting took place in Moscow which may have very long-term effect on the world security. The Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) is transforming itself into a full-blooded military bloc which will be as powerful as NATO, according to Russian President Medvedev.

The CSTO is a security grouping which consists of former Soviet republics of Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.

The treaty, signed in 1992 following the collapse of the Soviet Union, remained practically dormant until 2000, when Russia began regaining its influence in Central Asia.

In 2002 an organisation with a permanent structure was set up on the basis of the treaty. This was at the time when Russia and

the United States vied for a leading role in Central Asia where the USA set up its bases after 2001 to supply NATO's troops in Afghanistan.

The US is pulling out of most Central Asian republics where it originally deployed its forces – Kyrgyzstan is the latest in deciding to scrap its agreement with the USA on the Manas Air Base.

The US is not very happy about this development but it has been offered cooperation in supplying its troops in Afghanistan by land.

Current events show a strong desire on the part of CSTO members to pursue an independent policy in this area, keeping third countries out. A collective rapid-response force will give the CSTO a quick tool to deal with whatever emergency develops (leaving no time for third parties to intervene). The stated aim of the rapid

response military force will be to repulse military aggression, conduct anti-terrorist operations, fight transnational crime and drug trafficking, and neutralise the effects of natural disasters.

The force will be permanently based in Russia and placed under a single command, with CSTO member countries contributing special military units.

The creation of this post-Soviet regional security bloc may also indicate that the former Soviet republics are continuing the trend towards closer cooperation and mutual assistance.

It also means that the USA may have less opportunity to gain control of the region's rich resources (gas and oil) and create tensions between countries such as China and Russia through the use of its military bases in the region. ✪

Indonesian: Manager imprisoned for union-busting

An Indonesian union has won a historic case against a company manager found guilty of violating local and international labour regulations.

The manager has been sentenced to 18 months in prison for discriminating against union members in a court case brought by the Federation of Indonesian Metalworkers Union (FSPMI).

Fathoni Prawata, local manager of electronic component manufacturer PT Kim Jim Pasuruan (KJI), was imprisoned after being found guilty of a number of union-busting tactics including unfair dismissal of union members.

KJI is a subsidiary of Japanese company King Jim Co Ltd.

According to FSPMI president Said Iqbal this is the first time Indonesian courts have found management personnel guilty of violating ILO Convention 98 and Indonesian labour law 21 and sentenced them appropriately.

FSPMI lodged the court case after Prawata unfairly dismissed FSPMI members and refused to pay wages, bonuses and leave to workers who demonstrated during negotiations for a collective agreement.

The case sets an important precedent. FSPMI hopes the decision can assist other unions to take similar action and serve as a disincentive for other anti-worker employers. FSPMI is an affiliate of the International Metalworkers Federation. ✪

Canada becomes Israel

Yves Engler

Canadian Prime Minister Steven Harper's government publicly supported Israel's brutal assault on Gaza and voted alone at the UN Human Rights Committee in defence of Israel's actions three weeks ago. Now Canada has taken over Israeli diplomacy. Literally.

In solidarity with Gaza, Venezuela expelled Israel's ambassador at the start of the bombardment and then broke off all diplomatic relations two weeks later. Israel need not worry since Ottawa plans to help out. On January 29, *The Jerusalem Post* reported that "Israel's interests in Caracas will now be represented by the Canadian Embassy." This means Canada is officially Israel, at least in Venezuela.

Prior to the recent bombing in Gaza, the Harper government made it abundantly clear that it would support Israel no matter what that country did. It publicly endorsed Israel's 2006 attack on Lebanon, voted against a host of UN resolutions supporting Palestinian rights and in January 2008 refused to criticise illegal Israeli settlement construction at Har Homa near Jerusalem (even Washington publicly criticised these settlements).

Canada was also the first country (after Israel) to cut off financial aid to the elected Hamas government and Ottawa has provided millions of dollars as well as personnel to create a US-trained Palestinian police force to act as a counterweight to the Hamas government and to oversee Israel's occupation.

Harper's support for Israel is extreme, but despite what many well-meaning commentators claim, it is not a break from Canada's role as an "honest broker" in the Arab-Israeli conflict. There is a long history of Canadian support for Zionism, a European settler ideology that has violently dispossessed Palestinians for more than six decades.

The idea for a Middle Eastern Jewish homeland to serve Western imperial interests has a long history in Canada. Since at least the 1870s Christian Zionists called for their biblical prophecies to be fulfilled under British auspices. By November 1915, Solicitor General (and then

Prime Minister) Arthur Meighen publicly proclaimed, "I think I can speak for those of the Christian faith when I express the wish that God speed the day when the land of your [Jewish] forefathers shall be yours again."

"This task I hope will be performed by that champion of liberty the world over – the British Empire." Two decades later Prime Minister RB Bennett began a national radio broadcast of the United Palestine Appeal with a speech about how the Balfour declaration and British control over Palestine was a step towards Biblical prophecies. "Scriptural prophecy is being fulfilled," he noted. "The restoration of Zion has begun."

During the 1947 UN negotiations over the British mandate of historic Palestine, Canada played an important role in creating Israel. Lester Pearson (then under-secretary of state for External Affairs) who chaired two different UN committees dealing with the mandate and Supreme Court Justice Ivan C Rand, a member of the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP), played central roles in the negotiations that led to partition.

In *State in the Making*, David Horowitz (the first governor of the Bank of Israel and first director general of Israel's ministry of finance) writes: "It may be said that Canada more than any other country played a decisive part in all stages of the UNO [United Nations Organisation] discussions of Palestine."

The UN's 1948 partition plan gave the new Jewish state the majority of Palestine despite the Jewish population owning roughly seven percent of the land and representing a third of the population. Rand's assistant on UNSCOP, Leon Mayrand, provides a window into the dominant mindset at External Affairs: "The Arabs were bound to be vocal opponents of partition but they should not be taken too seriously."

"The great majority were not yet committed nationalists and the Arab chiefs could be appeased through financial concessions, especially if these accompanied a clearly declared will to impose a settlement whatever the means necessary." A dissident within External Affairs, the department's

only Middle East expert, Elizabeth MacCallum, claimed Ottawa supported partition, "because we didn't give two hoots for democracy."

Above all else support for partition was driven by a geostrategic worldview. An internal report circulated at External Affairs explained: "The plan of partition gives to the western powers the opportunity to establish an independent, progressive Jewish state in the Eastern Mediterranean with close economic and cultural ties with the West generally and in particular with the United States." The Ottawa mandarins largely supported Israel as a possible western outpost in the heart of the (oil-producing) Middle East.

When the first Palestinian intifada broke out in 1987, then Prime Minister Brian Mulroney told the Canadian Broadcast Corporation (CBC) that Israel's brutal suppression of rock throwing Palestinian youth was handling the situation with "restraint." When questioned by a CBC reporter about the similarity between the plight of Palestinians and Blacks in South Africa, Mulroney replied that any comparison between Israel and South Africa was "false and odious and should never be mentioned in the same breath."

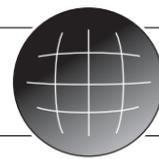
A decade later, Ottawa signed a free trade agreement with Israel. It was only Canada's fourth free trade agreement. Begun January 1997, the Canada-Israel Free Trade Agreement includes the West Bank and Gaza Strip as part of where Israel's custom laws are applied.

The political motivation for supporting Israel has not changed significantly over the years. The government in Ottawa today receives limited electoral support from the Jewish community, but is close to a right-wing Christian Zionist movement. Most importantly, the Harper government strongly supports Western (US-led) imperialism in the Middle East. This is why Canada has taken over Israeli diplomacy in Venezuela.

Yves Engler is the author of the forthcoming *Canada on the World Stage: A Force for Good or Bad Actor?* and other books. He can be reached at yvesengler@hotmail.com
The Electronic Intifada ✪



Mural in Victoria, British Columbia, depicting Canadian PM Steven Harper standing next to fellow imperialist George Bush.



Global Briefs

ITALY: Hundreds of protesters last week occupied a former airbase in Vicenza to block construction of a new US base. They cut the surrounding fence and set up an encampment to block bulldozers already at work. If completed, the facility would serve as a US military command centre and as home base for an Airborne Brigade Combat Team. Last February, 200,000 demonstrators protested against Italy's acquiescence in US plans to place the installation close to downtown Vicenza, a world heritage site. Nuclear weapons are located nearby, according to envirosagainstawar.org.

SOUTH AFRICA: Responding to the recent Israeli war on Gaza, the COSATU labour federation is refusing to unload Israeli cargo ships. Its affiliated longshoremen's union SATAWU targeted one slated to arrive in Durban on February 8. A union press release recalled longshoremen's refusals to work on apartheid-era South African ships in Copenhagen, Stockholm, Liverpool and San Francisco. While Palestine solidarity groups and the Young Communist League demonstrated nationwide, owners brought the ship *Johanna Russ* into port early, on February 5. They enlisted scab longshoremen. But, COSATU said, "vigilant workers were on guard" and that night, the *Johanna Russ* "sneaked out of the Durban Harbour."

BRAZIL: The Landless Workers Movement (MST), 25 years old last month, met in Rio Grande do Sul for its 13th national conference. Gains were celebrated: 35 million hectares of land appropriated, 370,000 families with farms, new schools, and 400 cooperatives. Helicopters overhead and police barricades on entry roads dampened the occasion. Quoted on upsidedownworld.org, MST leader Marina dos Santos told reporters that land acquisition has become difficult, "because it is not just against the landowner, but a multinational corporation." Co-founder João Pedro Stedile explained, "Capitalism has transformed itself ... and dramatically altered the model of agricultural production in the world." The MST identified the multinational agro-industry as its prime target. Moving on to the World Social Forum in Belem, Stedile lectured leftist presidents of Ecuador, Venezuela, Brazil and Bolivia at a January 29 plenary session. Calling for another leadership summit, this time with social movements as full participants, Stedile asserted that to realise "structural changes," social movements need free reign.

ILO issues warning on global crisis

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) warned last week that the global financial crisis is generating increasing social unrest and called for greater dialogue between governments, bosses and workers.

ILO chief Juan Somavia said that European and central Asian countries were heading into "a dangerous downward spiral" as their national economies go into recession.

The UN agency has warned that the downturn could put 50 million people out of work worldwide this year.

Speaking at an ILO regional meeting in Lisbon, Mr Somavia

said: "I sense a huge popular frustration brewing."

He pointed out that the economic meltdown is "provoking tensions, political uncertainties and even possible security risks."

"People are suffering, people are worried. They can't see a light at the end of the tunnel," Mr Somavia observed, stressing that economic stimulus packages must address people's concerns about jobs and welfare, rather than just propping up banks.

He declared that the era of "neoliberal globalisation" was over.

"Now that neoliberal globalisation no longer exists, the

European social model remains," Mr Somavia said, adding that Europe should play a "bigger role" in easing the crisis.

"We have to put in place a dialogue in order to act better to soften the impact of the crisis through increased contact between governments, workers and employers," he said.

The ILO chief emphasised that workers must be at the centre of government decisions on anti-crisis measures and that there should be a special UN council co-ordinating national responses to the economic downturn.

Morning Star ✪

Letters to the Editor
The Guardian
74 Buckingham Street
Surry Hills NSW 2010



email: tpearson@cpa.org.au

Banding together

Natural disasters bring the best and the worst in people. The majority are trying to help in any way they can – through donations, volunteering, etc. There is a small number of others who try to profit on the grief and sorrow of others by running fund-raising scams, looting, or actually starting fires in the bush.

All of these low-life individuals hopefully get their comeuppance one day. Decent people everywhere can recognise the need of a helping hand and they do help – generously and freely, not expecting to gain anything in return.

In a very short time huge amounts of money and goods were collected. As usual decent people act in a decent way. At the same time I am appalled by reports on banks (I don't remember which ones) which continue charging the victims interest rates on their loans!

I do not remember coming across anything as cynical and insensitive as this. The least they could do was to suspend the payments and work out how they can help the people who have lost everything they ever had.

How the banks supposed they should pay – in ashes? What would

it cost the banks to write off the debts as their contribution to fire victims? That way they may even gain some respect.

**Mati English
Sydney**

A life of struggle

I joined the Party in the great depression and have been through two World Wars, worked on a dairy farm in slavery, working from 3.30am to 9 and 10 pm. My wages were set by a Labor government at 6/- shillings first year, an increase of two shillings next year and fifteen shillings the last year under the state's control.

While I was working these ungodly hours the government was stealing my wages, which I never received a penny and have been fighting the Queensland Labor government ever since. They are hoping I'll peg out so they would not have to pay me my money.

To penalise me for being born out of wedlock, I had to work out in the boiling hot sun in nearly 50C, fed on bread and dripping and Golden Syrup.

In the winter time I slept in barns, rat infested with fleas and an occasional snake chasing rats and mice to eat.

The government saw we only had a limited education, primary school level, we could neither read nor write, when working we never saw anyone, never read a paper or a magazine or heard a wireless.

I told the boss after he tried me out, the day I was finished with the state, they went to town, had dinner, went to the pictures arriving home at midnight. I was still with the cows, finishing at 2 am next day. In good old Australian terms I told him what he

could do with his job; I had no more to do with him.

My life started to change, working as a carpenter on 15 shillings a week six days a week, when a union official arrived.

I was asked if I was the boss. I said no. He asked me where the boss was. I said at the races. The union confronted him and made him pay all the back money and pay the present award rates and keep a log book with my signature.

The union official was a member of the Communist Party. I joined the Party and the union and became a member of both and played an active part in both.

Being blackballed by the Master Builders' Association; I could not get a job in the industry.

I am writing my life's story and my life's experience. I wanted it put to the university as a project because there are a lot of students from different parts of this planet. After having it for some time the university handed it back to me.

**Des Donley
NSW**

Letter of solidarity with the Palestinian people

To: House of Representatives, Parliament House, Canberra, ACT 2600

From: Sydney Public Meeting, Politics in the Pub, Gaelic Club, Surry Hills, Sydney, NSW

The killing of over 1,300 people in Gaza, a large proportion of whom were children, plus the devastation of homes and basic infrastructure prompts the question, "Where is the respect for human rights?" This

Sydney – February Film Night

Time: 6.30pm

Date: Friday, 27 February

Location: CPA office, 74 Buckingham St, Surry Hills

Donation: \$8/\$5

Made in 1943, *Casablanca* is essentially a grand Hollywood romance inextricably intertwined with an equally romantic wartime anti-fascist thriller.

Think about it: the hero gives up the woman he loves for the good of the anti-fascist cause, and then persuades her to make a similar sacrifice.

The black&white photography is gloriously atmospheric and the music is justly famous. The admirable supporting cast is made up of Warner's character actors augmented by a gallery of refugee actors fleeing the Nazis.

The most amazing thing about the film is that the script was being written the night before and only handed to the actors the following morning. It must have driven the production people nuts, but it did result in a certain tension in the performances that might not otherwise have been there.

For all its "Hollywood" elements, the film is splendidly done, the product of a very proficient production house at the height of its collective creative powers.



question also addresses Hamas' firing of rockets which, during the long siege of Gaza, killed at least eleven Israelis.

In relation to the Gaza catastrophe, we ask that the government cease the practice of treating Israel as an exceptional State, above international law, able to ignore UN resolutions, steal more land for settlements and able to kill at will. Please also find the courage to challenge Israeli spokespersons' explanations and excuses for their brutality.

We also ask you to find the courage to develop an independent Australian

policy which recognises that peace with justice for the Palestinians, as identified by the rulings and principles of international law, would also provide security for Israel. Dialogue for a just peace, including meetings with Hamas, is the least costly, the most visionary and the only non violent way to address this decades old injustice.

**Yours sincerely,
Stuart Rees,
Chair, Public Meeting,
Sydney Peace Foundation
Letter endorsed by 300 +
participants**

Culture & Life

by
Rob Gowland

Fight or flight

The bushfire catastrophe in Victoria provoked a number of media types, the ABC's Kerry O'Brien among them, to loudly question the wisdom of NSW and Victorian fire authorities' advice to residents to "leave early, if you are going to leave", otherwise "prepare your property then stay and defend it".

The negative comments from the bourgeois media were prompted, of course, by the number of people who were trapped in their cars trying to flee at the last minute. And there can be no doubt that if they had evacuated much earlier, hours earlier, the loss of life would have been a lot less.

But it is also clear from the survivors' accounts that *no one* anticipated the speed and the ferocity of the Victorian fires. As someone who lives in the bush, in a house surrounded on three sides by trees two or three times the height of the house, I am acutely aware of the danger posed by bushfires.

The media pundits were none too subtly advocating a policy of enforced mass evacuations in advance of any and every fire threat. And of course that would certainly reduce the number of potential human casualties. But the glib mantra "homes can be replaced – lives cannot" is simply inadequate for this question.

Some readers will remember the

fires about thirty years ago when the NSW Police Minister panicked and declared that "we will lose 1,000 homes". He had the police close major road and rail arteries, trapping hundreds of people in their cars on the Central Coast for over a week.

People who left work to return to their partners and children in case the fire came to their street were turned back by police, although the fire was not yet actually at their street, and when they persisted in attempts to join their families they were arrested and even handcuffed!

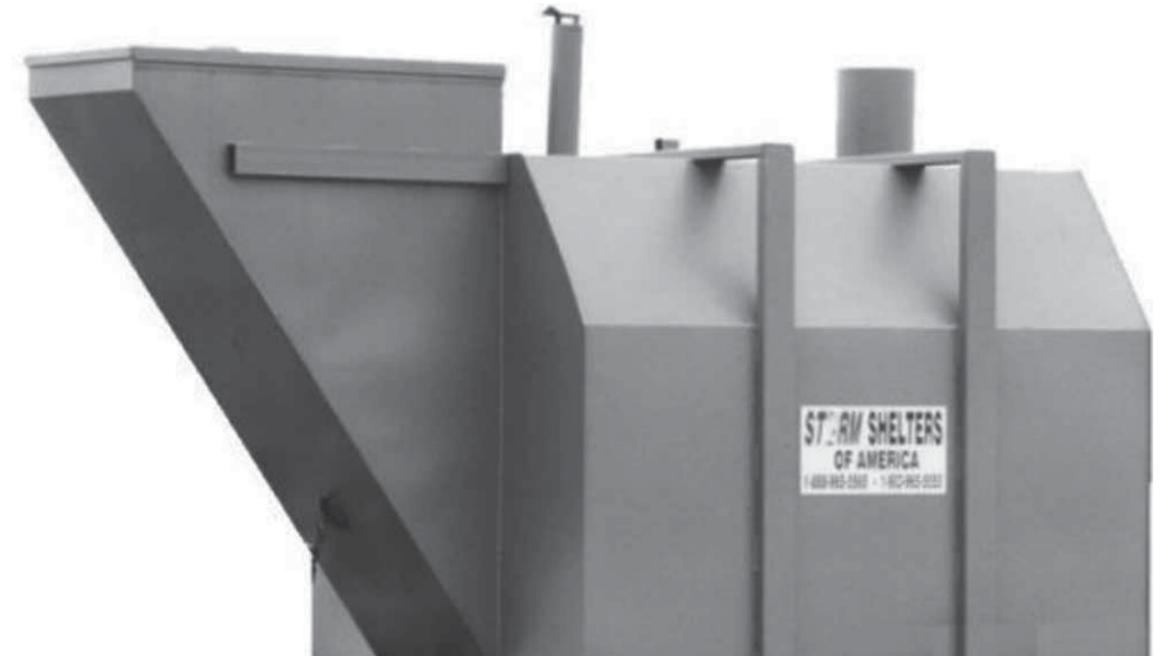
Such heavy-handed policing was unquestionably counter-productive. Up our way, people sneaked behind the police roadblocks to attend to stock and in one area to water and feed the animals penned in a wildlife refuge, all of whom would have died of thirst if it had not been for these law-breaking amateur "blockade runners".

I was reminded of those times when watching a woman on a television news clip from Victoria beseeching a young copper to let her family through to their property to check on their stock. They had already lost their house in the fires, and were understandably anxious to save what they could of their surviving animals, if any.

Her property like many others had been declared a "crime scene", however, and although she argued her case cogently ("we've already lost our home – do you want us to lose what little stock we have left as well?"), she was up against the military mindset and the copper merely answered "I'm sorry, I have my orders".

The Rural Fire Service in NSW, like its Victorian counterpart, is opposed to the enforced evacuation of residents, believing instead that people should have the right to decide whether they are going to leave or fight. And there are sound reasons for such a policy.

A few years ago when fire ravaged the Ridgeway between Tuggerah Lakes and Gosford, it was very noticeable that



A US company offers its range of "affordable solutions" to protect you against "tornadoes, hurricanes, earthquakes and even potential terrorist attacks". This is your basic bottom of the range. It seats 12 comfortably and is very affordable – if each of those 12 people coughs up \$500 each!

the houses that were saved were the ones that were defended by residents while the ones that were lost were predominantly those belonging to absentee owners resident in Sydney.

It stands to reason that residents know where to locate swimming pools, dams and water tanks, how to gain ready access to their properties, and what assets should have priority for rescuing or protecting.

Evacuating people *en masse* simply leaves too much undefended, placing a huge additional burden on the bushfire brigades and dooming a vast number of extra people to the catastrophic loss of everything they owned.

I worked in a business that was burnt out once. That was not my personal loss, and yet it was traumatic enough. To lose your home, all your possessions, your children's toys, your books, your mementos and keepsakes

– everything, would be calamitous, utterly devastating.

If staying and defending can prevent that, it should be the preferred policy of most people. And yet, there is the problem posed by the type of lightning fast fires that fell upon the unfortunate people in Victoria.

I was struck by the ingenuity of one family who fled down the paddock when the fire reached their house, heading for the creek. The creek they knew was dry, but they carried wet bed-sheets with them and they went feet-first down the wombat burrows in the creek bank, pulling the sheets in on top of themselves.

They survived, which raises the question: why don't Australian bush homes have fire-proof cellars?

American farm dwellings have storm cellars in which to shelter from tornadoes; why can't we have dugouts

in which to shelter from bushfires? They do not have to be very big or elaborately equipped since they would be used only for very short periods at the height of a blaze.

Surely governments funds can be allocated for research into developing such a safe shelter which can then be mandated into the design of new rural dwellings without adding hugely to the cost of construction. In-room water tanks with spray fittings and generator-driven pumps are already mandated for some houses in heavily timbered areas.

However, so long as houses are built as a for-profit industry rather than to satisfy human needs, the widespread construction of fire-proof housing will remain a dream, a dream that will have to await the advent of socialism before it can be realised. ✪



Sun 22 Feb –
Sat 28 Feb

The two-part series of *Message Stick* entitled *Voices From The Cape* (ABC1 Sunday 1.30pm, repeated ABC2 Monday 5.00pm and ABC1 Friday 6.00pm) should settle the hash of those ignorant red-necks who think that Aborigines are getting more than their fair share of government funding.

It follows the progress of a six-week course at the community school in Aurukun given by David Vadivelloo, filmmaker and former human rights lawyer, to engage the locals kids in creating a voice for their community.

The community is obviously poverty-stricken (this is Australia as a Third World country) and the kids are not only marginalised but demoralised, expecting nothing worthwhile from the institutions of the state. For them, Vadivelloo's approach breaks new ground.

The fact that he is clearly interested in them and their problems has evident effect. Kids who have stopped attending school start to re-appear as word gets around the community. Vadivelloo's "Community Prophets" depends on the involvement of the parents as well as the kids, but as he says, it can engage any group of

young people in any community in the world.

Clearly, it certainly engaged with the youngsters in Aurukun.

This week's episode of *Wild Caribbean* (ABC1 Sundays 7.30pm) is entitled *Hurricane Hell* and devotes itself to an examination of the effects of hurricanes on the nature and wildlife of the Caribbean islands and the techniques nature has evolved for surviving these extreme weather events.

It makes for dramatic – and interesting – viewing.

These hurricanes, which develop across the Atlantic near Africa during the hot summer months, can be extremely ferocious and still only kill one or two people. On the other hand, they can be utterly devastating, like Hurricane Mitch at the end of the '90s, which killed 11,000 people in one Caribbean nation alone.

Over aeons, the Caribbean islands developed a natural defence against the more destructive aspects of hurricanes, a buffer against the effects of storm surge: mangrove forests, whose tangled root systems absorb the shock of the massive waves and hold the beaches and coastal environment intact.

But the increasing frequency and power of these extreme weather events is taking its toll on even the mangroves. Hurricane Mitch destroyed 97 percent of the mangrove forest where it made landfall.

Evolution works slowly. The rainforest's survival strategies need time after the usual five or six hurricanes to recover, to allow trees and animals to produce new babies and to raise a new generation. But these days the number of hurricanes has increased to as much as fifteen to twenty in a season, one every two weeks, giving the environment no chance to recover.

This can be particularly tough on the wildlife. The Puerto Rican Parrot



Indigenous Aurukun kids filming – *Voices From The Cape* (ABC1 Sunday 1.30pm, repeated ABC2 Monday 5.00pm and ABC1 Friday 6.00pm)

was not long ago reduced to about a dozen breeding pairs in the wild. Careful work by US wildlife scientists built up the population to around forty breeding pairs. Then a hurricane struck and today the population is down to a near-extinction figure of just three breeding pairs.

This series from BBC Bristol certainly makes clear the catastrophic effects hurricanes can have on the nature of the region. Excellent use is made of images from space showing the birth and progression of hurricanes across the Atlantic. The program also examines the role of little creatures

– worms, termites and millipedes – in clearing storm debris from the forest floor and kick-starting the recovery process.

This week the sketch comedy show *Ruddy Hell! It's Harry And Paul* (ABC1 Wednesday 9.35pm repeated ABC2 Thursday 9.00pm) demonstrates why sketch comedy will never replace the sitcom. In a half-hour dramatised comedy, a gag can be developed, it can be built, adding nuances and more facets as the program proceeds, becoming more complex, and racking up the laugh potential as the routine builds to a climax.

In a sketch show, the gag is simply a one-off; it cannot build because there is no more of it, it is already over. To overcome this drawback, producers of sketch comedy shows tend to re-use or repeat gags with minor variations, but it does not allow the comedy to use what has gone before to build the gag up: each sketch remains short and isolated, with no opportunity for development.

In this week's episode, the talented Harry Enfield and Paul Whitehouse

do (and re-do and do again) a sketch about "Barbican Man", a man from the 1970s who walks into a modern-day mini-mart and asks for a product, in this case "Barbican Lager", which the shop keeper has never heard of. "It's like regular lager", he explains, "but it's had all the alcohol taken out." No, the shop keeper has never heard of it.

This unfunny sketch is repeated with slight variations half a dozen more times. It remains just as unfunny each time.

On the other hand, the sketch about the arty-farty building workers is clever, with them perched on the scaffolding around a building site talking ever so posh about gallery openings and sophisticated parties etc, before switching personalities to shout sexist abuse (accompanied by lewd gestures) at a young woman walking past, then reverting to their former personalities to discuss the aplomb with which she took their abuse.

Even this, however, palls with repetition: repeating a gag does not make it funnier. ☹



But now we want the land back

By Hannah Middleton
Special price \$3 (p&p \$2.50)

This is the first Marxist analysis of the history of the Australian Aborigines. It is a partisan book, carefully documented but also human and moving. The Aborigines have lived in Australia for at least 60,000 years; white people for 220. In the book the balanced and cooperative nature of Aboriginal traditional society, the brutal and tragic story of white colonisation and the growth of organised black resistance to discrimination and exploitation are analysed. In the final section the place of the Aboriginal national minority in the Australian nation is shown and the role of the capitalist establishment, the media and ultra radical ideology in destroying the crucial land rights campaign and in splitting the Aborigines from their white working class allies is exposed. It ends with an assessment of the future for the first Australians and an appeal for unity in the struggle for their rights. This book is essential reading for anyone committed to justice and equality for the Aboriginal people of Australia.

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"Supporting the Palestinian people's struggle for self-determination is a duty of Israeli communists."

Interview with Mohammed Nafa'h, Secretary General of the Communist Party of Israel

Efraim Davidi & Gema Delgado
(Originally published in the February 2009 issue of *Mundo Obrero*, a publication of the Communist Party of Spain.)

The Communist Party of Israel celebrates its 90th anniversary this year. The party is one of the three organizations that trace their lineage to the Palestine Communist Party since the late 1940s, the other two being the Palestinian People's Party and the Jordanian Communist Party.

The CPI has a three-deputy parliamentary fraction in the Knesset (Israeli parliament) and several mayors, including the mayor of the "Arab capital" of Israel, the city of Nazareth, where the CPI has governed for the last 32 years. It also has a significant presence among students and trade unionists.

In the last municipal elections in November, Communist MK Dov Khenin obtained 36 percent of the votes in the city of Tel Aviv, against the Labor mayor who received 51 percent. The CPI, Marxist-Leninist, is the only party in Israel in which Jews and Arabs are equally important members, and the party publishes the only daily Arabic-language communist newspaper in the Middle East, *Al Itihad (Unity)*, and a Hebrew weekly newspaper *Zo Haderekh (The Path)*.

Mundo Obrero: Since December 28, the Communist Party has called demonstrations around the country against the Israeli military aggression on the Gaza Strip. What is the position of the Communist Party of Israel on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict?

Mohammed Nafa'h: Since 1947, our party has advocated the position of "two states for two peoples" and supports the Palestinian people's right to self-determination, i.e., the Palestinians' right to a free and sovereign state in the territories occupied by Israel in June 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital. We also demand the dismantlement of the Jewish settlements in the territories and the solution to the question of the Palestinian refugees in accordance with the UN resolutions.

MO: And on the situation in the West Bank and the "wall of shame"?

MN: Israel must withdraw to the ceasefire lines prior to the war of June 1967 and dismantle the wall, which we call in Hebrew and Arabic: the apartheid wall.

MO: How do you coordinate your activism against the assault on the Palestinian people, in this case in Gaza, with social, anti-war, and campus-based movements?

MN: First, we try to establish the broadest possible alliances, as it is clear that the Communists aren't the only ones opposed to the Israeli occupation. Second, we try to coordinate street protests with political consciousness raising and "practical" solidarity: sending clothes, food, and other humanitarian aids.

The fact that more than 700 have been arrested in the demonstrations, from Nazareth and Haifa in the north to Be'er Sheva in the Negev desert, shows that many people have been moved to action by so much death and disaster. Finally, it means that we act in coordination with forces of the Palestinian Left.

Traditionally, with the Palestinian

Communists, but the day before the attack, knowing that its commencement was imminent, we got together in the city of Ramallah with the leaders of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, and the (Communist) People's Party in order to join forces. We held discussions with them again the day after the Israeli withdrawal.

MO: How would you explain, to foreigners, the fact that over 70 percent of the Israeli population support or justify the Israeli military attacks on Gaza that have killed more than 1,300 Palestinians, 90 percent of whom were civilians according to some humanitarian organisations?

MN: Regrettably, a large part of the Israeli population has been deceived by the fallacious official propaganda that defined the colonial war in Gaza as an "act of self-defence." Censorship and self-censorship of the local media contributed to this. TV viewers in Israel did not see the dreadful scenes on their screens that people in Madrid or Barcelona saw night after night.

Furthermore, Hamas's adventurist policy and its repeated provocations also contributed to turning the mostly poor civilian population of southern Israel into victims of missiles launched from Gaza. Many times, we have said that we support the struggle against the occupation, the political, mass struggle of the Palestinians, but we condemn attacks on the civilian population on either side of the border.

Time and again, we have reiterated that there is no military solution to the Palestinian problem; the only solution is the end of the occupation and the creation of a Palestinian state. We have expressed this position before, during, and after the criminal attack perpetrated in January.

MO: In 2003, there was an attempt to assassinate the former Secretary General, Issam Makhoul, by placing a bomb under his car, though miraculously his life was saved. Why did the perpetrators want to kill him? What is it like to live as the "enemies" of Zionist politics in the state of Israel?

MN: It is no secret that the democratic spaces in Israel are threatened by the government as well as extremist right-wing groups, officially "out of control", but everybody knows who is in charge of them. During the protests in recent weeks over 700 demonstrators were arrested, and some are still under detention until their trials.

Right-wing groups attacked our events, causing injuries, while the police were "looking the other way." The war has unleashed a truly racist campaign against the Arab population under the leadership of the chauvinist party "Yisrael Beiteinu" (Israel Is Our Home) of the racist Avigdor "Yvette" Lieberman. In other words, there is a real danger that the Israeli society is advancing into the fascist direction, whose first victims will be the Arab-Palestinian national minority and the consistent left-wing sectors.

MO: Do you have contacts with Jewish communists living outside Israel and do they share your rejection of the Israeli policy of war against the Palestinian people?

MN: Our party does not claim to be "Jewish" or "Arab." Ours is a class-based party that makes no ethnic or religious distinctions. We have close ties with all pro-peace and progressive



Joint Arab and Jewish demonstration in Tel Aviv against the Gaza onslaught.

Jewish activists and organisations in Europe, Latin America, North America, and Australia. The Israeli leadership seek to galvanize the Jewish communities around the world into adopting their colonialist positions, but there are large Jewish sectors, organisations as well as individuals, that disagree with them and are even fighting against this colonialist policy. Not every Jew is a Zionist, neither in the rest of the world nor even in Israel.

MO: What relations do you have with the Communist Parties in Palestine, Syria, Iraq, Egypt, Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan?

MN: Our party has close relations and frequent contacts with Communist Parties and workers in the Middle East. Primarily with the Palestinian Communists, with whom we have closely collaborated since the beginning of the occupation in 1967, bringing all kinds of material and political support.

Do not forget that supporting the Palestinian people's struggle for self-determination is an international duty of Israeli communists. We also maintain ties with the Tudeh Party of Iran, and last year we published a joint declaration of the Communists of the United States, Iran, and Israel warning that an attack on Iran would bring the region a tragedy of major consequences. The Communists of the Middle East get together at least once a year.

MO: What are the hidden objectives of the government behind the attack on Gaza and what relation does this show of force have with the next Israeli general elections in February?

MN: The Israeli government tried to deal a blow to Hamas, but what it did was to victimise all Palestinians in Gaza, particularly civilians. The objective is clear: to try to deepen the existing division – which is unfortunate – among the major Palestinian factions to postpone the creation of an independent state. In the ruling Kadima and Labor parties there are those who believed that the colonial war would bring some political gains in the upcoming elections. But

the only beneficiaries have been the racist, far-rightist parties.

MO: What are the main points of your program for the elections?

MN: When we began the parliamentary election campaign, once the municipal elections were finalised in November 2008, we thought that we could present a program that we would characterise as "against the current": against capitalism, against the occupation, against privatisation, against globalisation, and against racism, and for the rights of working men and women, for equality of the Arab population of Israel, for a healthy environment, for the rights of gays and lesbians.

We called this program "a new socialist agenda for Israel." But with the criminal war and its terrible consequences in January, we had to abandon the plan and invest all our human resources, which are considerable, and all our material resources, which are meagre, in the struggle against the war and its domestic consequences: particularly racism and fascism. Anyway, we make clear that capitalism engenders the occupation, oppression, and racism.

Faced with the international capitalist crisis, which is hitting Israeli workers hard, the next government that gets elected won't last in power for long. Its fall will be due to the multiple crises that beset Israel: the crisis of the occupation, the capitalist crisis, the crisis of political leadership thanks to their bribes and kickbacks, and the ideological crisis of Zionism.

All these situations will open up a new period of social and class struggles and new resistances to the occupation. Many young people look to the Communist Party and understand that we are marking a new path and presenting a real choice facing the crisis, the multiple crises. We are very much concerned about the present, but our commitment to the future is firm. This will be a future of peace and social justice.

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