



May Day 2009

Economic crisis – act now for a working class solution

May Day is taking place this year in the midst of a global economic crisis. Workers around the world are being reminded that capitalism is an unplanned and crisis-ridden economic system. Employers always chase maximum profits. They use new technology to cut the cost of labour and increase output. They lower wages, abolish benefits and cut working conditions. Globalisation has allowed capitalism to double its global workforce. It has also created a worldwide wage competition and many high-wage jobs have been destroyed. Worldwide, production has rapidly expanded.

Because workers are not paid the full value of what they produce, but only enough for them to survive, the world's working people cannot buy back all the goods and services they produced. This is the situation we are in now – an economic crisis of overproduction. Working people did not create the crisis, but they bear most of the hardship.

- The recession is no longer just looming; it is already here.
- By the end of this year there will be 1 million unemployed in Australia.
- Workers are being laid off as companies cut expenses or relocate.
- Workers lose their homes as they cannot pay the mortgage.
- Superannuation funds are bleeding.
- Prices continue to rise, while wages, pensions, unemployment benefits stagnate.

Financial crisis

The present crisis has been made worse by the financiers and speculators syphoning off billions of dollars from the real economy of production and consumption and into the casino economy to make quick gains from speculation and gambling on the stock market, adding nothing to the real economy.

Markets cannot be left to function on their own. Deregulation and privatisation have failed. Profiteering has brought the world to the brink of economic collapse. It's time to put a halt to these unbridled speculative activities and for governments to re-regulate economies. Put people's needs first.

No more "neo-liberalism"

Conservative governments, as in Australia and the USA, bowed to big business demands to impose anti-worker, pro-business policies known as "neo-liberalism".

Economies were deregulated, public enterprises were privatised, government-run

services contracted out, government controls over investment were removed giving capital free movement globally to seek low-wage, non-union labour to exploit. These policies must end. They have brought misery and hardship.

People's action is essential

WorkChoices gave bosses even more freedom to cut wages and conditions and sack workers at will. The Howard government was defeated mainly by the massive combined strength of the unions and community standing up for trade union rights.

Restrictions on trade union rights are still here and will be used against workers in this crisis, so we must continue to fight against them and bring about real changes for working people.

A working-class solution is needed

Many of the current responses to the crisis such as slashing government spending on public services and infrastructure, sackings, wage cuts, evictions and similar measures pursued by governments and employers only add to people's suffering. They are also counterproductive as they reduce people's purchasing power, further contracting the economy and deepening the crisis.

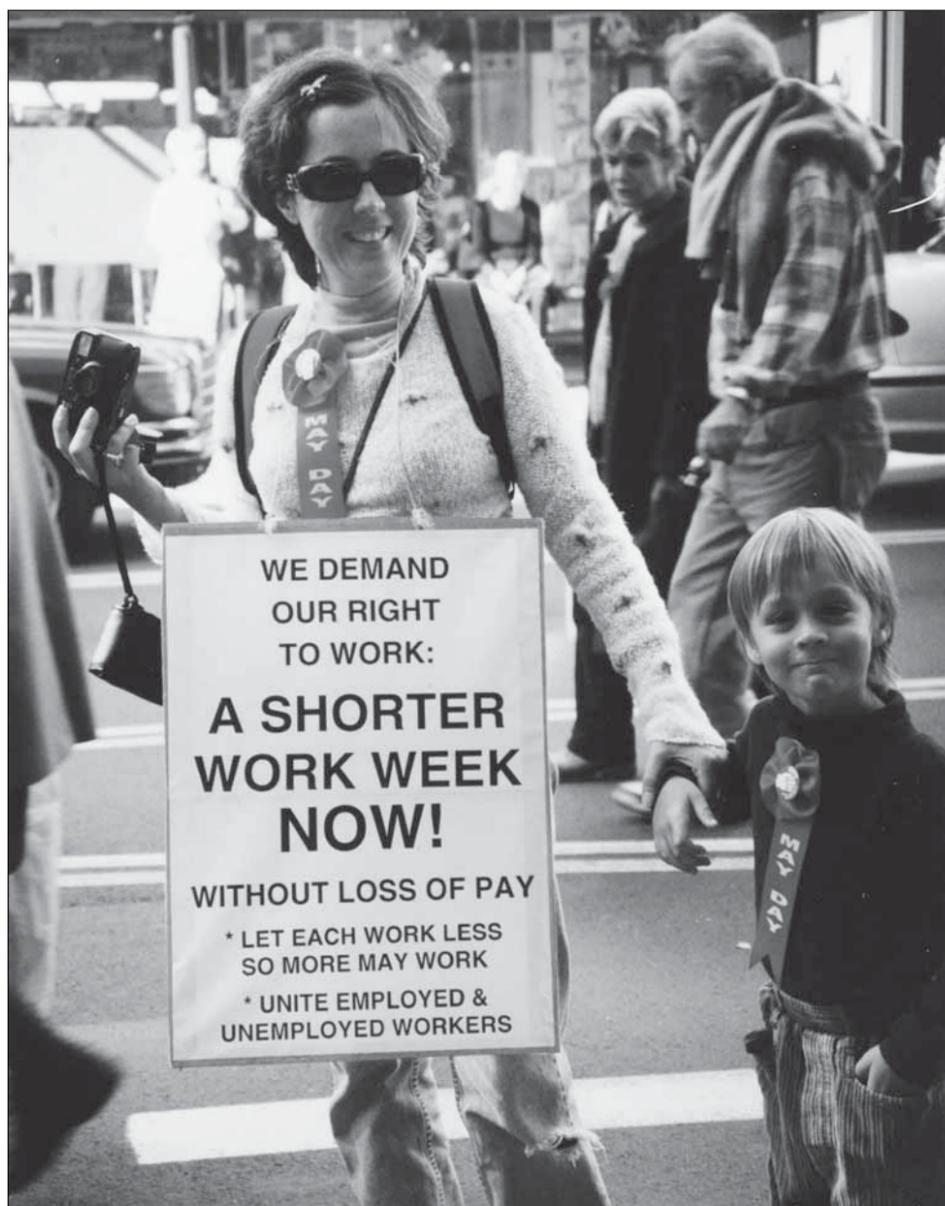
The buckets of public money handed over to bail out financial institutions divert money from the real economy and leaves those who contributed to the crisis free to carry on as before.

The federal government's stimulus package will have some effect, mostly short-term but this is not enough to hold off a recession.

Policies for real change

The priority of governments should address the needs of people who did not create the crisis, but are its victims.

- Immediately raise pensions, wages, unemployment and social welfare benefits.
- Increase spending on the public sector and infrastructure.
- Create public sector jobs and stop privatising essential services.
- Establish a government-run national superannuation scheme paying defined benefits. Investment from this scheme should go to social projects and to build infrastructure.
- No evictions. Substantially increase the available public housing.
- Full entitlements, retraining and a living wage for laid-off workers.



- End restrictions on trade union rights so workers can fully defend themselves.
- Cut 10 percent from Australia's \$62 million a day military spending and withdraw all Australian forces from Iraq and Afghanistan.
- Establish a government-owned people's bank.

- Re-regulate the financial sector. While these policies will not fundamentally change capitalism, they will benefit working people and must be struggled for. Part of that struggle is to win a new type of government in Australia, one that puts the needs of people before the profits of big business. ✚

3
page



Compassion overboard on asylum seekers

4
page



Nanotechnology – why unions are concerned

6
page



UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

9
page



Victory for ANC

12
page



Opposition grows against NSW privatisations

The Guardian

Issue 1408

April 29, 2009

Peace is union business

The government used ANZAC Day to promote Australia's involvement in the war in Afghanistan and pave the way for the release of its defence white paper expected later this week. TV channels ran with rather staged looking footage of Australian Special Forces soldiers executing "successful" military operations in Afghanistan. Defence Minister Noel Fitzgibbon was there in person, talking up Australia's involvement.

The Australian troops had killed 80 Taliban fighters in a series of running battles over three weeks. "I think too often they hear the bad news, particularly when we suffer fatal casualties," said the minister, signalling that these good news briefings would become a regular feature of government propaganda. A recent *Age*/Nielsen poll found 51 per cent of voters oppose Australia's current involvement and two-thirds oppose any increase in the number of Australian troops in Afghanistan. Despite this, the government looks set to increase Australia's involvement.

The *Weekend Australian* is predicting that Prime Minister Kevin Rudd is set to announce Australia's biggest military build-up since World War II. This includes 100 new F-35 fighters, a doubling of the submarine fleet, and powerful new surface warships, to meet what the prime minister sees as a far more challenging and uncertain security outlook in Asia over the next two decades.

A report released by the Lowy Institute for International Policy, an influential right-wing think tank, called for an increase of more than 25 percent in military spending. Its author, professor Hugh White, warned that China's growth meant the US, Australia's main military ally, would lose its dominant position in Asia in coming decades.

"China's challenge to US primacy undercuts the most basic assumptions of Australian defence policy, and poses big questions," White said. "The long-term trends suggest that Australia has no choice but to spend more on defence or accept a steady decline in strategic weight." China is the prime foreign policy target and its shared border with Afghanistan is one of the reasons that Afghanistan is of such importance to the US and Australian governments. Oil and its border with Iran are other reasons.

On the eve of the budget, with government departments forced to find "efficiency savings" via the government's razor gang, military spending is being largely insulated. Yet Australia has no business to be in Afghanistan and should get out now.

Australia does not face any military threat from China, Iran or any other nation; it certainly does not need the offensive capacity that it has, let alone an increase in it. Australia spends close to half a billion dollars a week on military, very little of which has anything to do with the defence of Australia. Military spending creates very few additional jobs per extra dollar spent. It is one of the worst polluters of the atmosphere. Military build-ups have one aim – war.

A ten percent cut in Australia's defence budget, especially on warships and fighter bombers, redirected towards social spending would have a huge stimulatory effect on the economy, and be of great benefit to working people. It would only take a few weeks of military spending to eliminate hospital waiting lists. Not many more to provide quality aged care and other underfunded and much needed community services – all labour intensive services.

A week or two cut from the war budget could raise pensions, expand public transport and meet many other important social needs. This would improve the security of people and their quality of life. It is in the interests of trade unions to fight for peace, for cuts to military spending and redirection of those funds to the social good and well being of people. Peace and disarmament are union business. Add the withdrawal from Afghanistan and a 10 percent slash in military spending to your demands this May Day.

PRESS FUND

With winter approaching the weather is finally cooling down, but at the same time the political struggle is hotting up. Climate change, militarisation, privatisation, unemployment – you name it, *The Guardian* will be covering it. But our workload is increasing, as stories compete for coverage, and as we struggle to keep up with the demands of changing technology. That's why we ask you, dear reader, to help us meet the costs of production by contributing to the Press Fund for the next edition, and if possible for those that follow as well. This week we offer our sincere thanks to the following supporters:

Angelo Attard \$50, S Bond \$12, H Chandler \$10, Tatsuo Sasaki \$142.90, "Round Figure" \$15.10.

This week's total: \$230

Progressive total: \$4,875

Pro bono suggestion "an insult"

Darren Coyne

The Aboriginal legal service in South Australia is considering another complaint to the United Nations against the Commonwealth and state governments' failure to fund the service adequately.

Aboriginal Legal Rights Movement (ALRM) chief executive officer Neil Gillespie told *The Koori Mail* newspaper that the situation was "ridiculous", with the Commonwealth government suggesting the ALRM should try to access pro bono legal services.

"They're suggesting we take a begging bowl to the legal profession to get representation for Aboriginal people who are seeking representation regarding being members of the Stolen Generations," Mr Gillespie said.

"That's appalling. I bet the Legal Services Commission would never be told to seek pro bono services for its funding, so why is this suggested to the ALRM?"

Mr Gillespie said the ALRM recently held a Stolen Generations Forum and despite many being

invited, not one politician from the State or Commonwealth governments bothered to turn up.

"Not one representative attended to explain their positions to members which was very, very disappointing," he said.

The ALRM has argued previously that its funding, and funding for other Aboriginal Legal Services around the country, had remained static since 1996, despite promises of increases by Labor prior to the last election.

Mr Gillespie said it was time for both levels of government to be put "under the microscope", adding he would welcome an opportunity to debate attorney-generals from both state and federal governments on the matter of funding.

He said ALRM would lodge a complaint under the UN Convention for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and the UN Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women.

"Australia is seeking to become a member of the UN Security

Council and one of their claims is that Australia is a principal advocate of human rights," Mr Gillespie said. "ALRM intends to write to all members of the UN General Assembly expressing concerns at Australia's claim to having a good human rights record, especially when it has a complaint lodged with the CERD committee.

"The Government is denying access to justice to members of the Stolen Generations, so we need to take it further. We need to put Australia under international scrutiny for its human rights failures as it continues to deny justice to Aboriginal people and the Stolen Generations."

The *Koori Mail* reported last September that the ALRM was lodging a complaint with the UN over the "racist" treatment of Aboriginal people.

Mr Gillespie said the complaint had been effective.

The Australian Government has endorsed the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (see page 6).

The Koori Mail ☘



CPA members took protest action outside an ANZ branch in Sydney's CBD at the bank's announcement that it was going to lay off a further 600 of its workers.

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Compassion overboard: Howard's asylum seeker policies reappear

Peter Mac

The Liberal Party has returned to its shockingly cynical and opportunist line about invasion by boatloads of asylum seekers, and has called for the reintroduction of temporary protection visas.

The Liberal leader, Malcolm Turnbull, has described the government's policy as "the softening of Australia's immigration regime", and as sending people smugglers an invitation to "come on down".

Turnbull's outburst came after the recent unexplained explosion and fire on board an asylum seeker vessel being escorted to Christmas Island by Australian Navy craft a fortnight ago. Three of the passengers were killed and two are missing, presumed drowned.

The boat could not be intercepted until it had entered Australian territorial waters. Nevertheless, in what appears to be a request for violation of international law, opposition spokesperson for immigration, Dr Sharman Stone has demanded to know why the boat was not intercepted after its detection long before the explosion.

Despite his denials, it now looks as though Prime Minister Kevin Rudd will continue much the same policy as his predecessor. The government has revealed that the 29 uninjured passengers will be kept in off-shore detention centres, and will not be given the same rights as the injured, who are being treated in mainland hospitals.

This directly contradicts the government's stated policy that asylum seekers would be allowed to live in the community until their status was determined, and that detention would only be used as a last resort.

Cynical manipulation, legal discrimination

Public fears about invasion from the north date back to the first days of European settlement, and have been used by various parties to manipulate public sentiment to their political advantage. In 2001 the Howard government used the unannounced arrival of asylum seekers to stir up racism and fears of invasion,

with a totally callous disregard for human rights, during the so-called "children overboard" incident and the Tampa crisis.

The tactic helped the Howard government return to power, but it was also responsible for the conservatives' catastrophic fall from power in 2007, after disclosures about its cynical manipulation of the public mood.

The latest increase in arrivals by boat is due to repression and military conflicts, particular in Afghanistan, Sri Lanka and Pakistan. The trip is extremely risky, and many boats simply disappear. The passengers must surely number among the most desperate and destitute people on earth, and the most deserving of our sympathy and help.

Since the Rudd government came to power, only 428 people have attempted to enter Australia by boat. Compared to those arriving by other means, this is a trickle. As columnist David Marr noted recently: "Taken all together they wouldn't fill a decent picture theatre".

If their financial resources were sufficient to allow them to arrive by more orthodox means, the "boat people" would be treated with the same courtesy and civil rights as other new arrivals. And there's the rub. The aftermath of the explosion has revealed the injustice of the Howard government's immigration legislation, which has been retained by the Rudd government.

In a bizarre irony, the uninjured asylum seekers have been detained offshore, and under this legislation are not entitled to judicial review of their appeals for asylum, whereas the injured were flown for treatment on the mainland and are therefore arguably entitled to it.

And for a second twist to the tale, evidence is now emerging that the Howard government's temporary visa system (a legal innovation originally conceived by the fascist minded Pauline Hanson) actually had the effect of enforcing people to undertake people-smuggling voyages.

Men often arrived in Australia separated from their families, but under the stipulations of their temporary protection visas their families were not entitled to join them. The



The SIEV X Memorial in Weston Park, Yarralumba, ACT.

women and children left in Indonesia and elsewhere had no alternative but to undertake the terribly risky voyages in attempts to be reunited. This was the case with many of the 353 passengers who drowned tragically when the unnamed vessel *SIEV X* sank, at the height of the Howard "boat people" scare campaign.

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees has recommended that all people arriving by boats should be allowed to enter the mainland and to have their claims for refugee status assessed there. However, the Rudd government has retained its predecessor's mandatory detention policy, and is detaining new arrivals on Christmas

Island, including children, despite promises that they would no longer be detained in offshore facilities.

The government has abandoned the infamous "Pacific Solution" under which asylum seekers were detained, often for years on end, in Nauru or Papua-New Guinea, but the devastating psychological effects will be much the same for those detained on Christmas Island.

It would appear that, despite its repudiation of the Howard government's cruel and punitive treatment of asylum seekers, the Rudd government is sliding into the same mindset, and is beginning to endorse the same policies.

Greens spokesperson for immigration, Sarah Henson-Young, commented recently that from the moment asylum seekers were contacted by Australian security forces they should be taken as quickly as possible to the Australian mainland, where they can be removed from danger and given medical attention.

She declared: "Sadly, we have allowed hysteria and prejudice on the part of some politicians and commentators to drive more than a decade of immigration policy down the wrong track. It's time government policy reflected Australia's fundamental humanitarianism and support for human rights." ✪

Telstra puts the touch on *Big Issue* vendors

Richard Titellius

Telstra has recently announced that it was proposing to have a photo of members of the Living Streets Choir feature on the front cover of Telstra White Pages for the phone book in Western Australia for 2009/10.

The catch is that the Choir members featured in the photo have been asked to sign a declaration that they do not have a criminal record.

Some of the choir members themselves have over the years acquired a criminal record, and feel that the request to sign a declaration is prejudicial and would exclude them from being on the cover of the phone book for relatively minor offences which may have occurred

years before.

One *Big Issue* vendor (the magazine that raises funds for the homeless) who declined to be named said he was advised the reason Telstra sought to have these declarations from each choir member was the telco did not want to have any backlash from members of public saying that they had a photo of criminals on the cover of the White Pages Telephone book.

The vendor said that he and other vendors who were members of Bernard Carnley's Living Streets Choir or the Working Voices Choir were offended by this request, saying selling *The Big Issue* was mostly volunteer work for which they received a small portion from the sale of each issue sold. Some of them have also had battles with

mental health issues which may have also contributed to any criminal convictions incurred.

Telstra itself is engaged in more morally and ethically reprehensible conduct by seeking to move parts of its service provision offshore where it can pay cheaper wages and thereby strip more surplus value from the sweat of the labouring classes, be they call centre operators in the Philippines or India or there own workforce here in Australia – while simultaneously giving its own senior executives such as Sol Trujillo "golden handshakes" of millions of dollars.

Telstra should demonstrate more magnanimous conduct toward these poor and often homeless people rather than trying to degrade and belittle them. ✪

Pete's Corner



Nanotechnology – why unions are concerned

Last week *The Guardian* published a statement by the ACTU on the possible health and safety risks arising out of the use of nanotechnology. The following is a detailed outlining of the health and safety concerns.

Nanotechnology is known as the science of the small. A nano particle is 1 billionth of a metre, or 100,000 times smaller than the width of a human hair. Size is not the only characteristic that gives nano particles their edge. Once materials are scaled down in size they begin to exhibit new properties, for example optical properties or magnetic properties.

Nanotechnology research and development is moving at a rapid pace and is already contained in over 800 everyday items such as sunscreens and cosmetics, food and building materials. Products developed with nano materials can be found in areas as diverse as aviation, automotive industries, food and computing to diagnostics and therapeutics.

Why is there concern over nano particles?

Nano particles can be hazardous because of their size, surface area and toxicity.

They can be inhaled or absorbed through skin. Research published in *Nature Nanotechnology* by researchers from the University of Edinburgh/MRC Centre for Inflammation Research (CIR) in Scotland, has shown that multi walled carbon nano tubes share some of the same needle-thin characteristics as asbestos fibres and when mice were exposed to nano tubes, they had the same physical reaction as an asbestos fibre in the mesothelium (lining of lungs etc.)

Other research reports that when nano materials are deposited in the gut or lung, they can enter the blood stream and travel to the liver and brain. In advice to staff handling nano materials the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in the US says, "Once in the body, some types of nanoparticles may have the ability to translocate and be distributed to

other organs, including the central nervous system"

Australian and international regulation developments

Unions agree that nano technology has important potential, but argue that regulation is needed. Despite the growing evidence to show that nanomaterials present unique health and safety hazards, no country has introduced nano-specific regulations.

Regulators, including Australia, rely on regulations that weren't designed to protect workers against nano sized materials.

In a report just released the European Agency for Health and Safety at Work has put nano particles at the top of the list of risks for workers. The French government has set a timetable to regulate nano materials.

Safe Work Australia has also initiated a nanotechnology occupational health and safety research program, and acknowledged that research is required to assess the OHS risks of nanotechnology.

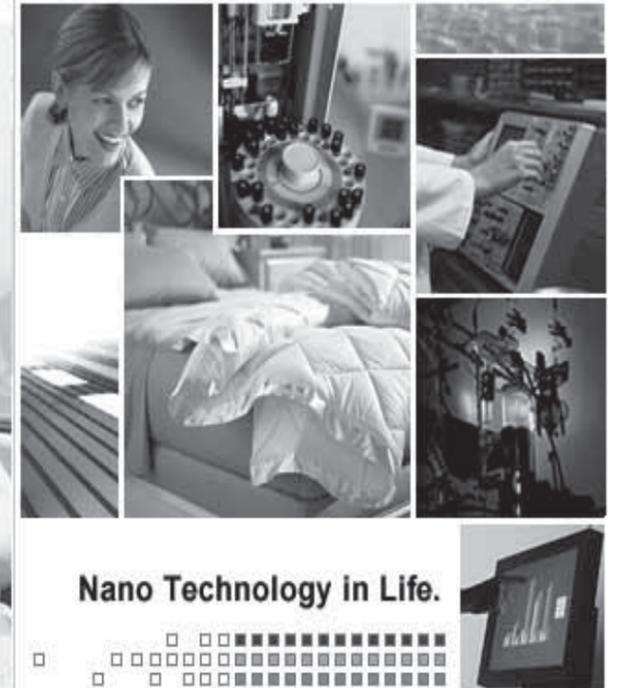
The NSW Department of State and Regional Development's recent inquiry into nanotechnology recommended that a national mandatory labelling scheme be put in place for all engineered nanomaterials used in the workplace.

Members of the European Parliament have recently set stringent new rules for the safety assessment of foods produced using nanotechnology ('nanofoods').

ANU academic Thomas Faunce argues that the OECD is investigating nano particle toxicity, but the outcome of this will not be known for some time. In the meantime the Australian government must introduce safety standards for cosmetics and foods.

Workplace activities involving nano materials

The following workplace tasks may increase the risk of exposure to nanoparticles:



Now everyone just sit back, relax and let nanotechnology take care of everything: images from the website of nanotechnology company Tipe.

- working with nanomaterials in liquid media without adequate protection (e.g., gloves) will increase the risk of skin exposure.
- working with nanomaterials in liquid during pouring or mixing operations, or where a high degree of agitation is involved, will lead to an increase likelihood of inhalable and respirable droplets being formed.
- generating nanoparticles in the gas phase in non-enclosed systems will increase the chances of aerosol release to the workplace.
- handling nanostructured powders will lead to the possibility of aerosolisation.
- maintenance on equipment and processes used to produce or fabricate nanomaterials or the clean-up of spills or waste material will pose a potential for exposure to workers performing these tasks.
- cleaning of dust collection

systems used to capture nanoparticles can pose a potential for both skin and inhalation exposure.

- machining, sanding, drilling, or other mechanical disruptions of materials containing nanoparticles can potentially lead to aerosolisation of nanomaterials.
- depending on their composition and structure, some nanomaterials may initiate catalytic reactions and increase their fire and explosion potential that would not otherwise be anticipated from their chemical composition alone.

Union recommendations

- Nanoscale chemicals must be classified as new chemicals under the National Industrial Chemicals and Notification and Assessment Scheme.
- Government agencies should

develop new standards for the handling of nanotechnology.

- A mandatory requirement that all commercial products containing nanomaterials be labelled.
- That a federal registry be established of all companies and organisations manufacturing, importing and supplying products containing nanomaterials.
- A tripartite body to be established to oversee the implementation of this regulatory framework.
- Adoption of the "Precautionary Principle" when dealing with nanomaterials.
- Development and improvement of hazard identification, assessment and control mechanisms for nanomaterials.
- Enforcement of new exposure standards using an active inspectorate.
- Monitoring of the health impacts on Australian workers involved in nanotechnology and investment in related medical research. ✪

Crew honoured for refugee rescue role

Front Puffin crew were recognised in Darwin on Monday by Australian Customs and Border Protection, Northern Command, for their role in rescuing the injured asylum seekers off Ashmore Reef, Western Australia.

The fishing vessel was intercepted by *HMAS Albany* on April 15, before exploding and sinking the next day killing several people and critically injuring dozens. The fire is subject to an inquiry.

In a complex rescue operation, the 34 asylum seekers were first transferred from *HMAS Childers* to offshore *FPSO Front Puffin* – a three-hour round trip, on April 16.

Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) delegate IR John (Madge) McGartland helped lift the injured one by one from the navy vessels on board.

"I rode the crane down to attach the stretchers," he said. "We used what's called a Billy Pugh

which is an offshore personnel transfer device. It took hours and three of us took turns to be lowered from our deck to the deck of the *Childers*.

"There was a heap of people we needed to get off until they could be airlifted out," said John. "We used the crane to pick them up on stretchers and set them up on the poop deck which was transformed into our medical or triage centre."

John said the crew pulled spare mattresses out of their bunks to make the 34 injured comfortable and assist the couple of doctors from the navy ship look after them. The first helicopter arrived around four hours later with extra medical staff. The last of the injured were flown out before midnight.

"Every one of the crew did a fantastic effort from skipper down," said John. "The whole working deck was turned into a

hospital. You couldn't believe what you saw. Ropes were strung from one side to the other to hang the drips off. It was pretty full on. The injuries were pretty horrific. But everyone stood up to it. Everyone did fantastic."

The crew were honoured with medals by the Northern Command. MUA national secretary Paddy Crumlin said the asylum seeker rescue reinforced the importance of Australia's maritime industry to Australia's security needs.

"Whether it is the offshore or shipping industry, ensuring that it meets our high national standards in regulation and competency, this incident demonstrates again the critical importance of the industry. It is an effective component of our national defence and security, and the Rudd government support of its expansion and renewal is as important as any other single policy."

The national secretary said the vessel's support role was also a major humanitarian effort true to maritime tradition and the law of the sea which calls on ships to support other vessels, crew and their passengers in distress. This is an important departure from the Howard years and the *Tampa* debacle when the Norwegian vessel was denied access to Australian ports after rescuing refugees off the west coast in August 2001.

The MUA members on board the *Puffin* for the rescue mission were Chief IR Gavin Bennett, IRs John "Madge" McGartland, Mark Taylor, Jeff Carroll, Jannik Hansen, caterers chief cook Richard De Safere, 2nd cook Steve Hulm, Chief Steward Ian Lamey and steward Jimmy Best.

The union also received special thanks from Offshore Marine Services (OMS) general manager Ian Del Rosso for their efforts and

compassion in the handling of the refugee emergency.

"I could not begin to imagine how difficult the situation would have been offshore, however the repatriation was completed successfully and the operation could not have occurred without the full support and effort of the crew offshore," he wrote.

"I have been advised that everyone was outstanding in their efforts and please be assured that OMS offers the crew our full support."

Meanwhile, at the Australian Maritime Defence Council meeting in Sydney last week, defence and customs officials reported that a number of offshore facilities had agreed to host defence and border patrol communications equipment which expands greatly the communications coverage of maritime security and border protection agencies. ✪

Taking Issue – Rob Gowland

Part 2

Strong community opposition to proposed new coal mines

On the NSW Central Coast, the opposition to the new coal mines from community and environmental organisations was so strong that the state's Labor government, whose deep and abiding concern for the well-being of mining companies has been remarked on before, realised that it would be counter-productive to just walk over the public's concerns.

So the government organised a window-dressing operation: a carefully selected "independent enquiry" chaired by an ex-politician who

'Nuff said, really.

In breach of the very concept of an "independent" enquiry, the panel hand-picked by Mr Sartor made the mining company their principal source of technical information on the possible effects on surface water of mining in the catchment area. Despite having to acknowledge that "there was insufficient baseline data available from the mining company relating to groundwater", the enquiry nevertheless asserted that mining activity would not significantly impact on the water supply to the Central Coast.

all disappointed by the response of the coal miners' union, the Mining Division of the CFMEU.

A union representative appeared on television welcoming the state government's announcement giving Kores the go-ahead for long-wall mines under the Dooralong and Yarralong valleys.

The Mining Division of the CFMEU took the same position towards the proposed mines as the union's forestry division had taken towards the logging of old-growth forests: the claim that "it will create

the matter of jobs now and into the future requires a holistic approach that links job creation, infrastructure development, population growth, working hours and conditions and the environment.

Instead of struggling around the slogan "coal miners (and forestry

workers) need jobs", the union movement should be struggling for the slogan "coal miners and forestry workers need a future".

After all, as I said before, what good are jobs if you can't breathe the air? ☘

Kerry Chikarovski, former leader of NSW Liberals and now corporate lobbyist. Ms Chikarovski waged her 1999 campaign for Premier on the platform of privatising NSW electricity. In all, hardly an impartial adjudicator!



could be relied on to protect corporate interests ahead of community ones, someone who knew how this game was played. Someone, in short like former Liberal leader Kerry Chikarovski.

Ms Chikarovski, the principal director of Chikarovski and Associates Pty Ltd, registered lobbyists, was supremely unqualified to judge the effects of mining on aquifers, water supply, coal dust pollution, and the rest. She would however be well versed in what the government would need from the "enquiry" and equally well aware of the subtle even indirect benefits that could accrue from both a grateful government and industry for a job well done.

As resident Ron Sokolowski BSc reported in the local news magazine *The Rural Grapevine*, not only did Ms Chikarovski exhibit "no qualifications or experience in coal matters, which one would consider essential for a proper outcome of the Inquiry report", but the composition of the remainder of the Inquiry panel was woefully inadequate.

"There was no environmental scientific representation, nor representation from the rural and urban communities affected by the mining proposal. The Panel was formed at the total prerogative of the Minister for Planning at that time, Frank Sartor."

Ultimately, to no one's surprise (but many people's disappointment), the Chikarovski enquiry dismissed all objections, saying in effect: coal mining posed no threat to the water table, would not pollute and was a really good thing.

As Ron Sokolowski reported to the local community: "The Chikarovski Panel has failed to factually satisfy its terms of reference. It displays complete ignorance of serious threats to public water resources and potential environmental problems in the proposed Wallarah 2 coal mine zone.

"The report is misleading, contradictory, scientifically deficient and was a complete waste of public funding.

"It would seem that it has deliberately ignored condemnation of the adverse impact of longwall mining, the recurring damage being recorded throughout NSW coal zones, and the lack of supervisory and regulatory control over an industry repeatedly destroying our environmental heritage."

Environmentalists, global warming activists, people in communities threatened by expansion of existing coal mines or by new ones, people opposed to the unbridled exploitation of our natural resources by rapacious, greedy corporate interests, were

jobs" appeared to override all other considerations.

To destroy the environment because it means jobs now, is like people on a wooden steamship who, told that they are running out of fuel, set about breaking up the ship and burning that: it may keep them going for a while, but their long term prospects are indisputably diminished.

Posing jobs against the environment is a favourite tactic of the employers anxious to disable support for the environment. In fact, however, jobs and the environment are not separate but inextricably linked. What good are jobs if the environment goes up in smoke, or down the tube?

The days when workers could be made to destroy their health to enrich their employer are not yet gone altogether, unfortunately, but they are going none the less. The union movement has led that struggle and needs to continue to do so. But it also needs to widen the scope of that struggle, to fight not just for jobs but for sustainable jobs, non-polluting jobs, jobs that do not diminish people's quality of life or harm their health, jobs that do not destroy or even diminish the future for our children and our children's children.

Just as the environment is a single entity that cannot with impunity be divided into exploitable segments, so



The privatisation of education takes a number of forms at both state and federal level. In Queensland the Bligh government has announced a deal with a consortium that includes construction giant Leighton, the Commonwealth Bank and the Broad Group, which is majority-owned by Leighton anyway. The consortium will begin building public schools in the south east of the state in a public private partnership deal. Of course the public part of that set up is the part that hands out the money, while the private part takes the profits. For example, the consortium will also do the major maintenance projects at the schools over 30 years at a cost to taxpayers of \$1.1 billion.

After Australia and a few other countries boycotted the UN forum on racism to essentially defend Israel's racist atrocities against the Palestinian people, federal Race Discrimination Commissioner Tom Calma went to the forum anyway, with a delegation from the Human Rights Commission. "This is an opportunity to address a whole range of issues on racism and discrimination," he said, noting that criticisms of the forum were "partially informed and partially ill-informed". "If any head of state fronts up to these UN forums they get a platform, so if our prime minister came, he'd get a platform and have an opportunity." In New Zealand – one of the boycotter countries – Mr Calma's counterpart clashed with the New Zealand government over the issue.

The Rudd government has tried to get in China's ear about its aid to Fiji, saying it is undermining efforts to apply pressure on the regime there. China has increased its aid not only to Fiji but is a major aid donor across the Pacific. This is in strong contrast to the colonial stick being wielded against Pacific island nations by Australia. That is the Rudd government's real concern: not only China's aid but also its respect for the independence and sovereignty of those countries.

One of the national broadcasters, SBS, is set to cut jobs and programming because of a \$9 million shortfall. SBS's important role as a multicultural, multi-language broadcaster has been constantly undermined by governments, firstly by underfunding so it had to take advertising. SBS has requested an extra \$70 million in the coming federal budget but managing director Shaun Brown warned staff hoping the budget "will bring substantial relief for SBS" to brace for disappointment.

CAPITALIST HOG OF THE WEEK: is the NSW government. The developer state is living up to its name with Planning Minister Kristina Keneally last week revealing she has approved \$12.3 billion worth of major projects since her appointment last September. That's 240 projects, 50 times more than the bloke she succeeded, the abhorrent Frank Sartor. But there's more, of course. More developments will be fast-tracked over the next couple of months and the body overseeing them, the Planning Assessment Commission, will have its membership increased from eight to 15, and for the first time will include developers.

Govt wins praise, but also warns Australia supports UN Declaration

Kirstie Parker

Australia has won Indigenous and international praise for finally supporting the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. But it has been warned that it risks being viewed as hypocritical unless it acts swiftly to ensure its policies and initiatives such as the Northern Territory intervention reflect its international obligations.

Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's Labor government fulfilled a pre-election commitment and shook off part of the legacy of its predecessor to back the non-binding document, which campaigners consider the most comprehensive tool to advance the interests of Indigenous peoples the world over.

The move earned congratulations from the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) and, while regarded with scepticism by some Northern Territory intervention opponents, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people largely welcomed it.

With Mr Rudd away in London attending the G20 Summit, the task of expressing the government's support for the "landmark" Declaration fell to federal Indigenous Affairs Minister Jenny Macklin.

At a ceremony in Parliament House, Ms Macklin told guests, including Opposition representative ACT Liberal Senator Gary Humphries, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner Tom Calma, UN agency representatives and members of the diplomatic community, that the government hoped its support would help "re-set" its relationship with Indigenous Australians.

More than 20 years in the making, the Declaration sets out basic standards for the recognition and protection of Indigenous peoples' rights worldwide, including identity, land and resources, self-determination, freedom from discrimination, culture, traditions and language.

It was formally adopted by the UN General Assembly on September 13, 2007, with the support of 143 member states and the opposition of just four – Australia, Canada, the United States and New Zealand.

At the time, the then-Howard government claimed the Declaration would elevate customary law above national law. In recent weeks, Shadow Attorney-General Liberal Senator George Brandis has labelled the Declaration "deeply flawed" and said it would be a grave error for Australia to support it.

However, no such fear was evident on Friday when Ms Macklin said Australia joined the international community to affirm the aspirations of all Indigenous peoples.

"Today, Australia changes its position," Ms Macklin told those gathered. "Today, Australia gives our support to the Declaration."

Ms Macklin said the Declaration would not affect existing Australian law, but the universal aspirations contained in it could help build understanding and trust.

"This will take time. Relationships will be tested and will evolve," she said.

"The Declaration gives us new impetus to work together in trust and good faith to advance human rights and close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians."

Ms Macklin said the Declaration recognised the legitimate entitlement of Indigenous people to all human rights, based on principles of equality, partnership, good faith and mutual benefit.

Article 1 of the Declaration states: "Indigenous peoples have the right to the full enjoyment, as a collective or as individuals, of all human rights and fundamental freedoms as recognised in international law."

Ms Macklin also acknowledged Articles 8 and 10 of the Declaration which say that "Indigenous peoples and individuals have the right not to be subjected to forced assimilation or destruction of their culture" and "Indigenous peoples shall not be forcibly removed from their lands or territories".

"Today Australia takes another important

step to make sure that the flawed policies of the past will never be re-visited," Ms Macklin said.

The Minister reiterated the government's intention to introduce legislation in the Spring session of Parliament to reinstate the Racial Discrimination Act 1975 in "prescribed communities" in the NT.

The legislation was suspended to enable particular measures under the intervention including welfare quarantining which, along with planned compulsory acquisition of land, has earned the government bitter and ongoing criticism.

Speaking after Minister Macklin was Australian of the Year Professor Mick Dodson who has expressed concerns with aspects of the intervention.

Professor Dodson passed on the congratulations of the UNPFII, of which he is rapporteur, and thanked the many Indigenous and non-Indigenous people who had been part of the Declaration's almost 25-year drafting process.

He said it would be easy to raise anxieties by taking particular articles of the Declaration out of context, but the document should be viewed in its entirety.

"All of its parts make this document one; it has to be approached in this way," Professor Dodson said.

Embrace

"No state needs to be concerned of its contents but should embrace it as a framework for public policy, law and practice in a partnership of good faith with Indigenous people within their territories."

Professor Dodson said the existence of human rights and human rights standards was not the source of indigenous disadvantage.

"Human rights do not dispossess people," he said. "Human rights do not marginalise people. Human rights do not cause their poverty and they don't cause the gaps in life expectancy and other life outcomes."

"It is the denial of rights that is the largest contributor to these things. The value of human rights is not in their existence; it is in their implementation. The standards have been set. It is up to us to meet them."

The 16-month delay between the 2007 federal election and the Rudd government's support for the Declaration had frustrated many in the Indigenous communities.

And there had been suggestions the government would temper its support for the Declaration with riders or qualifications to some of the Declaration's 46 articles, so the straightforward support generated some relief amongst those gathered in Canberra.

Social Justice Commissioner Tom Calma said it was a watershed moment that built on the government's Apology and commitments to Closing the Gap and establishing a new national Indigenous representative body.

He said the government's support for the Declaration firmly re-established Australia's leadership role in the international human rights system and the government should now build understanding of the Declaration "so we can give meaning and content to its provisions".

"It should be clear that on any measure, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples remain marginalised in Australia and face entrenched poverty and ongoing discrimination on a daily basis," Mr Calma said.

Standards

"The Declaration could be put to immediate use in Australia by providing guidance and articulating minimum standards to help the government in addressing some of the discriminatory elements remaining in the NT intervention."

Lawyer and Director of the University of NSW Indigenous Law Centre Megan Davis said she was thrilled about the support for the Declaration.

"I think it's a great step forward for Australia," Ms Davis told The Koori Mail newspaper, although she added that the challenge

remained for the Declaration to become a "living document".

"This is the great conundrum of international human rights law because when you nominally give recognition or protect a human rights law, it's a very different thing to the implementation of it."

Former Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission chairperson Lowitja O'Donoghue was also positive, but declared that the support had come "not before time".

"Basically, I've been around this stuff for over 20 years," Professor O'Donoghue said. "This support is good but of course we have to deal with the suspension of the Racial Discrimination Act (RDA) in the Northern Territory and the like. The Minister did mention that that's coming, but it must be sooner rather than later."

Co-Chairperson of the Stolen Generations Alliance Deb Hocking said the government's support for the Declaration was "a bit like the Apology".

"They said it would never happen and it has happened," she said. "Even though the Declaration is not legally binding, I think it is morally binding... I think we're going to see some progress in this country, especially for the Stolen Generations."

Tasmania's Rodney Dillon, an Indigenous rights campaigner for Amnesty, said that while it would take generations to fix some of the problems facing Indigenous Australians, support for the Declaration had brought Australia into line with other countries on an international law that "we should have already been in line with".

National Native Title Council Chairperson Brian Wyatt said the statement of support was "very conciliatory and something we can work with" but warned the RDA would need to be reinstated in the NT if it was to mean anything.

"You can't have that sort of contradiction," he told The Koori Mail.

"We need to look at things like the intervention, restoring rights in the community – people's rights to determine their rights in their communities without intervention – and the issue of free, prior and informed consent."

Supporters

Others who threw their weight behind the government's support for the Declaration included the UN Refugee Agency UNCHR, Reconciliation Australia, National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO) chairperson Dr Mick Adams, chairperson of the Indigenous Land Corporation Shirley McPherson, and South Australia's Aboriginal Legal Rights Movement (ALRM).

However, ALRM CEO Neil Gillespie said Labor had yet to honour a pre-election commitment to increase Aboriginal legal aid to the same level as mainstream legal aid in order to address the appalling discrepancy in funding and Aboriginal incarceration.

There was also some very adverse reaction to the government's support for the Declaration, including from the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre whose state secretary Nala Mansell-McKenna described it as a "cynical exercise" and "nothing but a con job".

"Jenny Macklin is trying to fool the public into thinking that by endorsing the Declaration now, Aborigines will be somehow better off," Ms Mansell-McKenna said.

"For any real outcomes to be made for Aboriginal people, the Declaration must be legislated and passed through Parliament so that it can be made a law of Australia. Ms Macklin, however, understands that if she was to do this, she would be liable to be sued for policies such as the NT intervention and the lack of land and fishing rights given to Aboriginal people as well as the lack of an Aboriginal government."

The Stop The Intervention Collective Sydney (STICS) said the government's support for the NT Intervention and its insistence that Aboriginal communities sign over the land in exchange for a human right such as housing, rendered its support for the Declaration "a joke".



Adelaide, February 2008 – a big show of support for the Declaration

"As stated in the UN Declaration, First Nations Peoples have the right to live on their ancestral lands free from racist government policies that aim to dispossess, centralise and assimilate Aboriginal populations," said activist Monique Wiseman.

"Tokenistic"

"Signing the UN Declaration is nothing less than a tokenistic gesture like the Apology was," said STICS member and Alice Springs town camper Barb Shaw. "The government must make action on the articles of the UN Declaration. Actions speak louder than words."

While welcoming the government's support for the Declaration, the Darwin Aboriginal Rights Coalition said "glaring hypocrisy" between it and the continuation of "explicitly racist policies such as the NT Intervention" made the occasion almost impossible to celebrate.

Within hours of the ceremony marking its support for the Declaration, the government was brought back down to earth by the release of the UN Human Rights Committee's concluding observations after a review of Australia's compliance with its international obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

While the review earned the government kudos for its current national human rights consultations, the Apology and anti-violence measures, the committee also recommended the government redesign NT intervention measures in consultation with Aboriginal Territorians

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Rudd's apology to the Stolen Generations.

to ensure compliance with the RDA and the Covenant.

It also pushed the government on a new national Indigenous representative body and reparations, including compensation, to members of the Stolen Generations.

Amnesty International has called on the Rudd government to react promptly and positively to all UN Human Rights Committee findings on Australia.

"The Committee's findings are a timely reminder that while the Rudd government is making some important moves in the right direction, there are significant respects in which Australia fails to meet its obligations," said Dr Robyn Seth-Purdie, Amnesty's Government Relations Adviser.

Also, Opposition spokesperson on Indigenous Affairs Tony Abbott admitted the former Howard government should have apologised to the Stolen Generations while in government.

"It was a mistake for us not to apologise to Aboriginal people," Mr Abbott told an Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) conference in Sydney to impromptu applause.

"And I'm pleased that when Kevin Rudd did decide to apologise that he was strongly supported by the Coalition."

About turn

It was an about turn by Mr Abbott who once described the Apology as a "sop to the Left" that would reinforce a victim mentality.

However, Labor Party stalwart Warren Mundine welcomed Mr Abbott's comments.

"I'm pleased to hear this, it shows bipartisan support is building," said Mr Mundine, who also described the government's support for the UN Declaration as a fantastic opportunity to redefine relationships.

"It builds on last year's Apology and is a major step towards building trust and understanding and should have been done two years ago by the previous government."

Many of those who spoke paid tribute to Indigenous and non-Indigenous people who worked for years to help draft the Declaration, including chair of the International Indigenous Peoples' Caucus Les Malezer, Professor O'Donoghue, Professor Dodson, Mr Calma and his predecessor Dr Bill Jonas, and Megan Davis.

The ceremony also featured a traditional welcome to Ngambri country, the first public screening of a new documentary Apology (It's Time) by WILL.IAM of the US RnB outfit Black-Eyed Peas and Perth director/photographer Russell James, and a joint performance by the Young Wagilak Group of Ngukurr in Arnhem Land and the Australian Art Orchestra. The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples can be found at www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/en/drip.html Also online are factsheets on the Declaration produced by Australia's Human Rights Commission (HRC) and Reconciliation Australia.

The Koori Mail ✪

Germany: In case of a crisis, reach for outmoded laws



The happy face of Kaisers.

Victor Grossman

BERLIN – She's called Emmely; her real name is Barbara E – with the family name omitted in line with legal practice here. All over Germany people are talking about her, most frequently with anger in their voices. For Emmely, a cashier in East Berlin, was sacked by her discount store employer for allegedly filching €1.30 (AU\$2.40).

The boss insists that she took two coupons left by customers for the deposits on bottles and kept the money for herself. Emmely emphatically denies this charge. And the company – a chain of stores called Kaisers – cannot show any evidence against her. But it seems that they do not have to prove anything.

According to age-old German law, the mere suspicion, if it violates their trust and confidence in an employee, is sufficient. They say that she took the money – barely enough for one subway ride – and that suspicion alone is enough cause to fire her. Emmely, who is 50, has worked in this store for 31 years. At her age the loss of a job, even without the added suspicion of stealing money, would condemn her to almost certain joblessness, with the resultant descent into poverty.

Emmely and her union feel certain there was a definite reason for the icy position of her bosses. Two years ago there was a brief strike in the company, which it was quickly able to put down. Emmely, one of the organisers, was the last one to give up in her demands for better working conditions. Most people are convinced that the bosses were waiting for a chance to take their revenge and frighten off any further rebelliousness. Many also believe they planted the alleged evidence against her.

This kind of autocratic rule is nothing new in German discount stores, where working conditions are often intolerable, with long, late and irregular hours at low pay, and where nearly every effort to form unions is stopped up short by all kinds of pressure. The trick with the alleged theft is not new by any means.

The employees at such stores are mostly women, often single mothers, and fearful of losing their jobs. A simple threat is usually sufficient to suppress any rebelliousness. If some employees are stubborn, they are often "suspected" of swiping a pack of cigarettes, a bottle of soft drink, or a small sum, as in Emmely's case. And the companies have

a corps of clever, well-paid lawyers just in case.

Emmely was more courageous than most and went to court. The judge decided in favour of Kaisers. So did the appeal court in Berlin. And that is when the pot boiled over and the case got national attention.

The economic crisis is hitting Germany harder every day. More and more people are being thrown out of work and, after a year at unemployment compensation, into a status resembling welfare in the USA or the dole in Britain, with minimum money, the enforced loss of all savings, insurance, items of any value and even their apartments. People are worried, fearful and emotionally more involved than in the "better years".

In addition, they cannot forget a whole series of scandals involving executives in huge companies who were either acquitted of their wrongdoings or got off with easily manageable fines and perhaps a sentence on immediate parole, which could only make them laugh. Siemens, the Deutsche Bank, Volkswagen, the partly privatised postal and railroad systems – all faced scandals.

Some top executives, most recently in the railroad system, were guilty of illegal spying on the personal affairs, conversations and even bank accounts of all its employees. In every case the millionaires involved – even when they were convicted of bribery, tax evasion, misuse of funds and other crimes, got away with murder and returned to their stylish ways of life. Emmely, on the other hand, was fired for the unproven theft of 1.30 Euros.

The anger in the land made some people think and even mention the words "class justice" – perhaps more often in the former East Germany and East Berlin than elsewhere. One leading politician, the Social Democrat Wolfgang Thierse, who now represents an East Berlin district, hastily called the court decision "barbarous".

Immediately a swarm of indignant lawyers and jurists attacked him for his words. The judge involved had kept strictly to the law, they insisted. Thierse retreated and toned down his earlier angry vocabulary. Emmely, who broke down in tears after the decision, has decided to take her case up to the highest court in the land and is demanding a new law to prevent further trials where the victim is considered guilty until they can prove their innocence – and often sacked anyway.

People's Weekly World ✪

Step towards arms embargo on Israel

Yasmin Khan

It came as no surprise to campaigners in the United Kingdom to hear the British Foreign Minister David Miliband reveal last week that components supplied by Britain were “almost certainly” used by Israel in its recent military assault on Gaza. Despite Israel’s continued human rights abuses, the UK government has licensed millions of pounds worth of military equipment to Israel over the last few years including components for tanks and combat aircraft, in direct conflict with its own arms policy.

The British government’s announcement that it will be reviewing arms sales to Israel in light of the atrocities committed in Gaza earlier this year was, however, surprising. The move represents a real victory for the Stop Arming Israel coalition, which began its campaign for a two-way arms embargo against Israel during its invasion of Lebanon in July 2006 and serves as a potent example of public pressure forcing governments to review their policies towards Israel.

The Stop Arming Israel campaign revealed a detailed analysis of export licenses approved from Britain to Israel, including components for combat aircraft, electronic warfare equipment, helmet mounted display equipment, military aero-engines, naval radars, surface-to-air missiles and equipment for the use of weapon sights and military communication.

A significant number of UK components are also used for missile triggering systems for American-made Apache helicopters and “head-up displays” for the similarly US-made F-16s. Israel has repeatedly used F-16 fighter aircraft and Apache combat helicopters to bomb Lebanese and Palestinian towns and villages. In recent years, the UK has licensed arms exports to Israel worth between 10 million and 25 million pounds a year. However, figures available for the first nine months of 2008 show that military equipment worth more than 27 million pounds had been approved.

The campaign in the UK highlighted on exposing how the licensing of military equipment to Israel contradicts the UK government’s very own arms export policy. Since October

2000, the government has used the Consolidated EU and National Arms Export Licensing Criteria to judge whether arms export licenses should be granted. These set out a series of considerations, including whether the country of destination is in breach of international law or is involved in armed conflicts and respects human rights. On each of these counts Israel is seriously wanting, yet the number of arms licenses applications which have been denied has actually decreased (from 84 in 2002 to 17 in 2007) as the number of Palestinian deaths continue to increase.

In 2006, Foreign Office Minister Kim Howells reaffirmed that it was British government policy not to allow the export of equipment or components which could be “deployed aggressively” in occupied Palestinian territory. Speaking before the UK’s Parliamentary Quadripartite Committee, Howells also acknowledged that “almost any piece of equipment, I suppose, could be used aggressively.” Thus, Howells confirmed the campaigners’ long-standing argument that given that aircraft and tanks for which UK companies make components are regularly used against Palestinians, the government’s practice has made its own export standards meaningless.

Israel has its own arms industry which is well integrated into the global arms trade, so an effective and credible arms embargo needs to operate in both directions. Israeli companies such as Israel Aircraft Industries, Israel Military Industries, Rafael and Elbit Systems built their businesses selling arms to regimes which other countries refused to supply, such as apartheid-era South Africa and Burma today. Military exports are a key part of Israel’s economy and Israel Aircraft Industries is the country’s biggest private employer. Europe is now also an important market for Israeli companies, and the UK is no exception.

During Israel’s recent invasion of Gaza, UN special rapporteur Richard Falk challenged “those countries that have been and remain complicit, either directly or indirectly, in Israel’s violations of international law. That complicity includes those countries knowingly providing the military equipment including warplanes and



The US government provides Israel with over \$2 billion each year to fund arms research and manufacturing. One of Israel’s products is the Kfir fighter jet (pictured) – of which the US Air force was a major buyer.

missiles used in these illegal attacks.” By selling arms to Israel, the UK is giving direct material support for Israel’s aggression and sending a clear message of approval for its actions.

The bombing and invasion of Gaza intensified calls for an arms embargo. Members of parliament from across the political spectrum signed an Early Day Motion (a type of parliamentary petition) condemning British arms sales to Israel. In addition, The Liberal Democrats, the third biggest political party in Britain, and Amnesty International joined the call for an arms embargo. Furthermore, Amnesty International produced a damning report on the assault on Gaza and called for an arms embargo. And the Palestinian human rights organisation Al-Haq launched legal proceedings with Public Interest Lawyers in

the UK to judicially review British policy of engaging in “business as usual” with Israel.

Meanwhile governments all over the world have actively supported the continued subjugation of the Palestinian people by providing Israel with the military means to enforce and entrench its increasingly brutal occupation. With many countries including human rights clauses in their arms exports policies, campaigning on arms exports to Israel is a highly effective tool with which to expose the hypocrisy of governments in implementing their own ethical standards.

As the global movement for boycott, divestment and sanctions grows, an arms embargo strategy is a key element of the wider sanctions call. Refusing to trade weapons with

Israel sends a powerful message of disapproval for its actions, and the current review being undertaken by the British government demonstrates how grassroots campaigning can make a real difference in forcing governments to justify their actions.

In the UK we will now be putting pressure on the government to ensure this review leads to concrete action and a binding decision to stop arming Israel. This should be stepped up globally and all governments that reward Israeli aggression with military support should be exposed.

Yasmin Khan is the Senior Global Justice campaigner at War on Want, a UK-based charity that fights global poverty and a co-coordinator of the Stop Arming Israel Coalition. *The Electronic Intifada* ✪

The book Chavez gave Obama

WT Whitney

A few national security partisans realise now there’s more to worry about than guns, bombs and rogue states. That would be ideas, and last week, a book. It’s a “really dangerous one that can put the White House at risk,” warned a not-very-serious David Brooks, the Mexican daily La Jornada’s Washington correspondent. He was referring to the book Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez gave Barack Obama during the recent Summit of the Americas.

Open Veins of Latin America, written by Uruguayan author Eduardo Galeano in 1971, is a famous, superbly written account of 500 years of Latin American distress under colonialism and

imperialism. The notable Chilean author Isabel Allende writes that on going into exile following the 1973 Pinochet coup in her country, she took along clothes, family pictures, “a small bag of dirt from my garden, and two books: an old edition of the “Odes” by Pablo Neruda and the book with the yellow cover, *Open Veins of Latin America*.”

“That book has a power that scares many,” Brooks notes. One is Otto Reich, former State Department official under Ronald Reagan and both Presidents Bush. Quoted on *Newsmax.com*, Reich opined that the presidential staff “should not have put President Obama in that embarrassing situation because this is very much an anti-US book. Anti-Europe

as well.” Galeano is “a far-left Latin American, a very unknown author,” he claimed.

For *Miami Herald* columnist Andrés Oppenheimer, the book is “a diatribe whose underlying theme is that Latin America’s poverty is caused by US imperialism.” And Obama showed misplaced appreciation for the gift “considering that Chávez’ gesture was the equivalent of presenting Adolf Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* to an Israeli president.”

Meanwhile, an Air France flight was proceeding from Paris to Mexico City. Writer Hernando Calvo Ospina was on board, citizen of Colombia and resident of France. Calvo Ospina was heading for Nicaragua on behalf of Le Monde Diplomatique. His books

include *Bacardi: The Hidden War*, *The Cuban Exile Movement: Dissidents or Mercenaries* and most recently, *Colombia: Laboratorio de Embrujos [Laboratory of Curses]*, which analyst James Petras sees as “the most important study of Colombian politics in recent decades.”

Over the North Atlantic, passengers heard the captain’s voice announcing their Mexico City arrival would be delayed five hours, because US air space was off limits. One of their fellow passengers, he explained, “was not welcome because of national security reasons.” Calvo Ospina learned later from the co-pilot he was the offending party.

The airliner took on extra fuel in Martinique. Flight crew

members said restrictions on overflying the United States were new for Air France.

The traveller later caught a flight to Managua, after questioning by immigration officials in Mexico City. Asked about experience with weapons, Calvo Ospina, writing on *Rebellion.org*, indicated his “only weapon was writing, especially in denouncing the US government which I regarded as terrorist.” His interrogator commented, “That weapon is often worse than rifles and bombs.”

As if in confirmation, Amazon sales rankings of *Open Veins of Latin America* vaulted overnight from number 54,295 to second place.

People’s Weekly World ✪

Victory for ANC in SA elections

Dennis Laumann

Workers across South Africa are celebrating the ruling African National Congress' decisive victory in April 22 elections. With about half the ballots counted, the ANC stands at 67 percent of the vote, sweeping all regions of the country.

The sole exception is the Western Cape, where a white-dominated opposition party, the Democratic Alliance (DA), was leading by a small percentage. The DA may end up ruling the province alone or in an alliance with another party.

The rest of the country, stretching from desert areas around the Orange River to subtropical Zululand on the Indian Ocean coast, delivered a solid win to Jacob Zuma, the ANC's leader and the next President of the Republic of South Africa.

At ANC headquarters in Johannesburg on April 23, supporters cheered Zuma as he danced in celebration and then declared, "We went to the voters of this country, talked to them and put across our policies, and they have understood what we are saying."

In a blow to allies of former President Thabo Mbeki, the recently-formed party called the Congress of the People (COPE), led by a small group of defectors from the ANC, secured only 8 percent of the vote, according to early results.

Despite the corporate media's preference for negative reporting on Africa, such as the recent obsession with piracy off the Somali coast and the International Criminal Court's indictment of Sudan's president, the world's attention this week was focused on the peaceful and joyous elections in South Africa as millions of men and women stood in long lines waiting to cast their ballot.

Newspapers featured moving photos of blacks and whites, who less than two decades ago were strictly segregated by the violent system known as apartheid, voting together at polling stations. Websites posted

video clips of famous anti-apartheid leaders dropping their ballots in election boxes. A frail former President Nelson Mandela, walking slowly with the aid of a cane, was greeting with shouts of "Viva Mandela!" at his polling station while Archbishop Desmond Tutu was visibly giddy after voting.

Voter turnout was high, estimated at 77 percent, in the fourth elections held in South Africa since the end of apartheid and return to majority rule in 1994.

Commentators have described these elections as the nation's most competitive, mainly because of controversies surrounding Zuma stemming from past rape and corruption allegations.

The ANC leader was acquitted of rape charges in April 2006 and only two weeks ago the corruption case against him was completely dismissed by the nation's chief prosecutor. The prosecutors' investigation revealed that Zuma's political opponents manipulated and interfered with the case hoping to derail his presidential campaign.

While the opposition has threatened to push to reinstate corruption charges against Zuma, the South African people have spoken in a loud and unified voice at the polls in support of their new President.

Most South Africans identify with Zuma, whose life story is similar to their own. Born in 1942, just six years before the formal institution of apartheid, Zuma was raised by his widowed mother who worked as a maid.

Like most South Africans under apartheid, Zuma was unable to attend school but he taught himself how to read and write. When he turned 17, he joined Umkhonto We Sizwe, the military wing of the ANC.

After spending 10 years imprisoned with Mandela and other anti-apartheid leaders on the infamous Robben Island, Zuma went into exile in Mozambique and Zambia. He rose to a position in the ANC executive

committee and returned to South Africa when the party was un-banned in 1990.

After voting in his hometown, Zuma observed "Never did I think as I was growing up here that one day I would cast my vote here as I am doing. It must be great, feeling the difference from the olden days to where we are today, when we can decide our own fate."

While Zuma is often described as a "traditionalist" who strongly identifies with his Zulu ethnic background, his revolutionary credentials as a liberation fighter and the early influence of an uncle active in the trade unions place him firmly on the political left.

In fact, beyond his own party base, his strongest support in the campaign came from the South African Communist Party (SACP) and the Congress of South African Trade Unions, which form the ruling Tripartite Alliance with the ANC.

South Africa continues to face many challenges, most a legacy of the decades of underdevelopment and inequality under apartheid. Unemployment is rampant, many South Africans lack decent housing and access to water, and the AIDs epidemic continues. The Tripartite Alliance has made significant progress tackling these problems over the past 15 years and its accomplishments clearly were endorsed by voters this week.

In a message issued during the final days of the campaign, SACP General Secretary Blade Nzimande declared the party "calls upon all our people, especially the workers and the poor, to come out in massive numbers to vote for the ANC and ensure an overwhelming ANC victory in the elections."

South Africans heeded that call and look forward to continued progressive leadership by the ANC and its communist and trade unionist allies. Zuma is expected to be sworn in as the new president in early May. *People's Weekly World* ★

58 countries to attend May Day celebration in Cuba

More than 1,450 participants from 58 countries had confirmed last week their attendance at the celebration of the International Workers' Day in Cuba. Of them, 777 come representing 200 trade unions, and 719 are members of solidarity movements.

According to the announcement made by the Cuban Workers Federation (CTC), the larger number of foreign participants, 688, comes from 25 countries of the Americas, and includes trade union and social leaders; 560

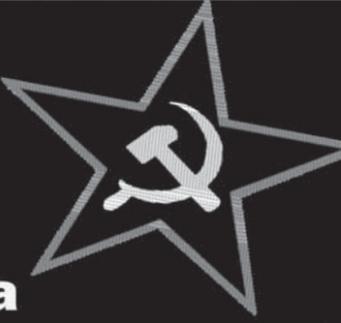
participants from 19 countries come from Europe; 100 from five Asian countries; 76 from seven countries in Africa and the Middle East; and from Oceania, 68 Australians and 4 New Zealanders.

Some of the largest delegations are those from France, with 178 participants; Uruguay 163; United Kingdom 112; Canada 102; Japan 87; Brazil 69; Australia 68; Belgium 53 and Argentina, 50.

According to the figures confirmed in the last few days, the number of foreign participants in

this May Day celebration is already larger than last year's (1,300), and it may be even larger, taking into consideration that many organisations the world over want to attend this celebration in Cuba, since it coincides with the 50th anniversary of the 1959 revolution and the 70th anniversary of the foundation of the CTC.

Approximately 1,000 of these visitors will also take part in the traditional Solidarity Meeting with Cuba on May 2 at the Palacio de las Convenciones. ★



The SACP's message to the people of South Africa

Vote ANC

Defend and deepen our democracy!

Inside: The six reasons why we South African communists say: Vote ANC on Election Day, 22 April



Global Briefs

VENEZUELA: The 7th Summit of the Bolivarian Alternative of the Peoples of Our America (ALBA) met on April 15-17 in Venezuela. Member nations Cuba, Venezuela, Nicaragua, Bolivia, Dominica and Honduras fashioned a declaration aimed at the Summit of the Americas, already gathering in Trinidad and Tobago. The alliance condemned capitalist solutions rendering a majority on the planet jobless, hungry and vulnerable to climate change. It denounced Cuba's exclusion from the Organisation of American States and both the US blockade and Cuban Adjustment Act. ALBA called for cultural diversity, recognition of migration as a human right, and "peace based on social justice, not on imperialist politics and wars." Plans were announced to create the Sucre, a "virtual currency" aimed at freeing regional commerce from dollar dependence. Ecuador's foreign minister and Paraguayan President Fernando Lugo attended as guests. Urging "reparations" for US-imposed suffering, Lugo commended "the grand solidarity Cuba has shown us over a half-century." Saint Vincent and the Grenadines became the seventh ALBA nation.

GREECE: The rightwing "New Democracy" government last month imposed new security measures. They included a special police unit for "coordination," Scotland Yard advisers, added surveillance equipment and penalties for insults against on-duty state officials and for hoods worn during protests. Inter Press Service said the measures were in response to a general strike that closed down public services on April 2 – a repeat of one in December after police killed a teenage protester. With support from leftist political parties including the Greek Communists, the General Confederation of Greek Workers and public employee unionists, the strike was called to protest against new taxes and a public worker salary freeze. The European Commission recently ordered Greece's deficit to be brought below 3 percent.

JAPAN: Japan's House of Representatives on April 14 approved a 2006 treaty calling for that country to pay US\$2.8 billion to relocate 8,000 US Marines stationed in Okinawa to Guam, and build a new base there. Parliamentary critics had protested the expected arrival of US troop replacements in Okinawa. They also inveighed against US demands that Japan supply US\$3.5 billion for building a new US base in Nago, Okinawa. Opponents claimed Japan was having to pay for the release of land illegally seized to build bases in 1951.

IRAQ: The Iraqi Oil Ministry last week indicated nine companies from eight countries – the United States not included – had signed service contracts to develop 11 oil fields jointly with state oil companies. Working with two Chinese oil companies, special case Royal Dutch Shell is negotiating a joint venture with Iraqi companies to extract oil from Kurdish controlled areas near Kirkuk. The government is now offering 20-year service and investment contracts after two-year deals had failed to entice oil companies. In Iraq, possessing the world's third largest reserves, 65 of 80 oil fields are undeveloped. Oil exports provide 95 percent of the government's revenue.

Sydney



MAY DAY FUNCTION

Sunday 3rd May at 6pm, the Greek Community Club, 206-210 Lakemba St, Lakemba NSW.

\$20, includes Greek buffet dinner and music from around the world. All welcome.

For more information contact the Sydney District Committee of the CPA on 02 9699 8844.

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



email: tpearson@cpa.org.au

like a sensible idea – dust will be kept down and people who work nearby could use it. So far there has been no response from the developers on this issue.

Mati English
Sydney NSW

Wind power is free and plentiful

The Rudd government, like previous governments, have their head firmly planted in the ground when it comes to alternative power sources. Howard allowed the sell off of the greatest breakthrough in solar power of the past century. Now Rudd pampers to the coal industry ignoring the overwhelming advantages in wind power technology. Wind power has now reached a level of technology where it is more competitive on price than conventional sources of energy.

In 2006, a report by Emerging Energy Research revealed that land-based wind power is only marginally more expensive than electricity from a new coal-fired power station – and its cost is equal to electricity from a new natural gas-fired plant. That does not take into account the cost of CO2 emissions and other damaging wastes to the environment.

Since the first wind turbine went into production in 1976, they have improved output 100 times over. The V90-3.0 MW turbine from Vesta,

inner Mongolia, has been rethought to reduce the cost per kWh. It's lighter and more efficient because of Praseodymium and Holmium, two rare earths of which Australia has the world's second largest known supplies.

This makes the new turbines cheaper to produce, transport and install. It takes only three hours for this generator to supply the average family with electricity for an entire year. Two thousand of these generators would produce enough power to supply every household in Australia. Good value is enhanced as wind generators will pay themselves back over 35 times at present energy costs.

The price of oil, natural gas and other materials fluctuates as does the reliability of supply. The price of wind is predictable and it's free. This creates a strong business case for the Rudd government to take control of our energy and environment needs instead of pampering to big corrupt businesses.

The line that wind turbines can't run at full capacity 365 days a year is an old ploy to discredit wind power. In countries like Denmark, wind already meets one-fifth of the population's total energy needs – and Denmark has achieved this using less than 20 percent of its actual wind resources. On very windy days, Denmark gets all of its electricity, including industry, from the country's 5,000 wind turbines.

Andi Mellis
Grafton NSW

Call for city green space

The Carlton brewery site near Central Station in Sydney was to be a huge development. But with the financial crisis in progress the developers decided to freeze it. At the moment it is being levelled and only a few buildings are left standing – the ones that are heritage-protected.

The site is fenced off, of course, while the work is in progress. One of the proposals for the use of this huge empty space was to put some plants in and turn it into a green space, at least for the time being. The NSW government did the right thing for once and did not allow the excavation of some parts of the site – they evidently still remember (as we do) the huge hole that used to scar Sydney for years when World Square development halted because of the crisis then.

A green space, however sounds

WA May Day 2009

From 12pm Sunday May 3
at the Fremantle Esplanade Reserve



The theme for day is "Unity for Job Security".

Come down with your family and friends to the labour movement's biggest social event of the year. There's fun for the whole family including bouncy castles, rides, live music and more. And best of all it's FREE! There will also be plenty of opportunities to meet the people who protect your rights at work – your union.

For more information please visit: www.unionswa.com.au

Good relations between Australia and China benefits both

There was quite an interesting opinion piece in the Sydney Morning Herald (23.4.2009) written by Hu Shan, the Consul-General of the People's Republic of China in Sydney. The article pointed out the benefits of cooperation between Australia and China, and tried to allay fears about the increasing presence of Chinese investments in Australia.

The Consul-General pointed out that it was Australian companies who had initiated negotiations about the Chinese investments. He also pointed out that in the present financial circumstances Chinese investments would help shore up Australian companies.

I did not know for instance that

trade between China and NSW was \$19.2 billion last year. It was fascinating to discover that companies from NSW helped train Shanghai Expo's 180,000 staff members.

You can't but agree that nowadays things are globally interconnected and ideally countries should be cooperating in a much friendlier manner. China and Australia may be economically complementary but it's goodwill and respect for each other that will bring good results for both countries.

One should be aware that there will be attempts to undermine good relationship between Australia and China. It is good to know that the Consul-General thinks that "the strategic cooperation of sharing risk and profits through investment is in the long-term and short-term interest of each country".

T Southern
Brisbane Qld

Culture & Life

by
Rob Gowland

Rich and poor

I see the Australian Ombudsman's latest report cites telcos as the worst industry as far as complaints are concerned: a record 15 thousand were lodged against them in the last 12 months. The telecommunications industry's response was to proudly announce in their defence that they had decided on a policy of 98 percent compliance with the code of laws governing the industry.

The logic of this escapes me: does announcing that you are complying with 98 percent of the road rules exempt you from the other 2 percent? Somehow I think not.

Talking of industries that are a law unto themselves, have you seen the ads and notices advising people to check the on-line regulators for advice on which private health insurer is good value, sound, reliable etc. These "independent regulators" are in fact paid by the private health insurance industry, so no *Guardian* reader will be surprised to learn that it has now emerged that these regulators are also paid more if they give an insurer a good report.

It's called "self regulation" and it is capitalism's preferred system – now I wonder why that would be?

Did you see where the Business Council of Australia (BCA) put forward its own proposals for dealing with the financial crisis: eliminate welfare for the working class and middle class. What would be the benefit of this? They were very frank: it would "boost profits". Now think about that for a moment: how would giving the poor and the unemployed etc less income help business to make

more money? I can think of only one way: by providing a pool of very poor people who would work for extremely low wages rather than face starvation.

The BCA represents big business. Like we have said before, they are all heart, aren't they?

Have you noticed that packaged food products seem to have shrunk in size lately? The prices may have stayed the same, but you get less for your money. Standard capitalist practice you might say, except that a considerate government, in anticipation of the impending introduction of unit pricing, has apparently advised food companies to downsize their products now so that the smaller amount you get for your money is already established when the new pricing system arrives.

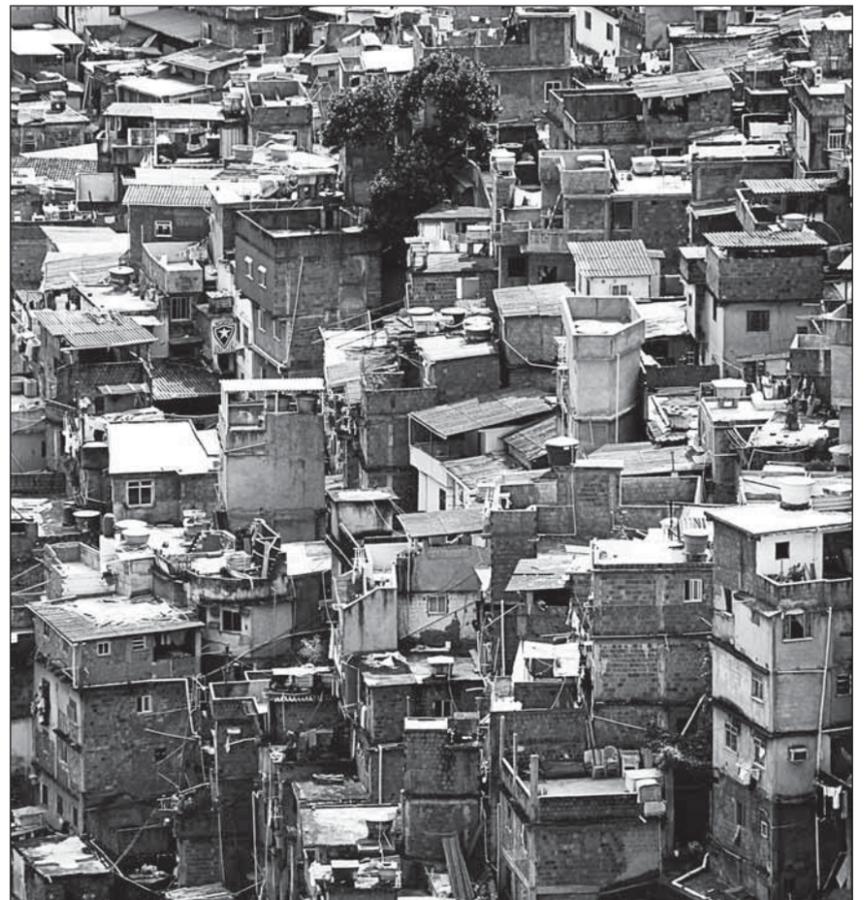
And some people still think Labor governments are on the side of working people!

Bourgeois governments that nevertheless claim to represent the people must be getting a little jittery as the economic crisis deepens and workers' anger grows: in France employees of US company Bridgestone Tyres pelted their bosses with eggs as management arrived at work. And French workers involved in renegotiating benefits for laid off workers actually took the bosses of Sony and 3M hostage.

In Brazil, in capitalist terms one of the world's bigger economies, there are now so many living in the favelas (appalling collections of slums on the outskirts of Brazil's towns and cities) that conservationists have been moved to point to the depredations the slum dwellers are making on the surrounding forest as they seek firewood, roofing materials and anything else that might improve the comfort of their shelters.

The response of the Brazilian government has not been to provide decent housing, or even fuel, but to erect high walls around three sides of the favelas, effectively giving people access only to the urban streets, and to the legal and illegal "businessmen" who operate there.

The favela Rocinha claws its way up a hill side on the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro.



Somehow I don't think turning the slums into huge prisons was quite what the environmentalists had in mind.

Mind you, there are people to whom the idea of imprisoning the poor would be quite appealing. During the recent G20 summit in London, some of the city's rich showed their true colours by flaunting their wealth at the throng of protesters: the nobs actually waved wads of cash at the protesters from their balconies. This goading of the crowd so enraged the protesters that the nobs had to go about subsequently in mufti or face a fierce kicking as an arrogant rich pig. Serve them right, too.

This behaviour is not new, of course. Flaunting your wealth and even throwing coins to the very poor has always been a favoured activity of the filthy rich. The same rich people will fight tooth and nail to prevent

the same poor from gaining an extra penny an hour in their pay. There is no benefit to the rich in pay rises to the poor!

The rich are always contemptuous of the way the poor are so concerned for one another. Proportionately, the have-nots have always been far more generous than the haves, and with much less self-interest in their generosity. Sentiments and actions the rich will never understand.

Meanwhile the rich go about their pleasures secure in the knowledge that they are specially privileged people and that that is how it should be. In Britain they have just opened a branch of a world-wide chain of super-exclusive stores for the super rich. Here, after discrete screening (to weed out common type people), the rich can shop for luxury goods,

exclusive designer items and the like, free of the prying eyes of the envious multitude.

It reminds me of the days when rich passengers on ships or even on trains, travelled in first-class compartments while the common herd travelled in second or more commonly third-class parts of the vessel or train. There is a famous Punch cartoon showing a London underground Tube carriage full of rich folk returning from the opera, men in silk top hats, women in evening gowns, jewels glittering – and two very grimy workmen on their way home from a hard day's graft in a factory.

"Blimey, Fred", says one of them. "We've got in a first-class carriage by mistake!"

"Cor!" says a soot-begrimed Fred. "And me wiv odd socks on!" ★



Sun 3 May –
Sat 9 May

Anthony Horowitz' intelligent, enthralling drama series *Foyle's War* was something of a revelation when it first came to our screens on November 8, 2002. Ostensibly, it was yet another detective series, albeit with an unusual setting (the south coast of England during the first half of WW2). But it soon revealed itself to be so much more.

Horowitz' densely-written scripts took a refreshingly honest look at the period, dealing with subjects more commonly swept under the carpet and ignored for the last half century or so. Subjects such as the way so many of the British "upper classes" looked fondly towards Hitler to save them from Bolshevism and persisted in their pro-German attitudes well into and in some cases right through the War.

In episode two Horowitz showed this explicitly, as Charles Dance's impressive Mosely-like character (Spencer) declared that "Britain's enemy" (by which he meant the upper-crust's class enemy) was "the Bolshevik and the Jew", not Hitler.

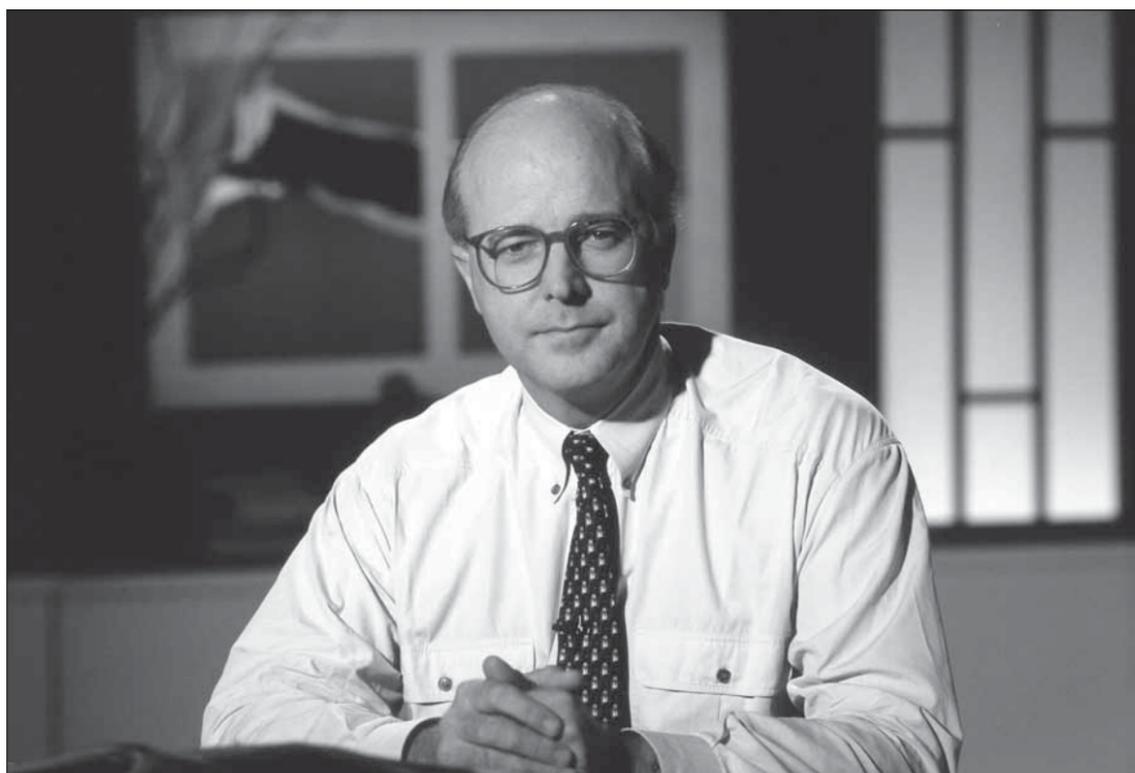
If the scripts were intelligent and original, the period atmosphere was impeccable. Costumes and characterisations were also spot on. Only four episodes were produced each year, so Horowitz was able to devote time to getting them just right.

He was helped by the casting. Michael Kitchen as Detective Chief Superintendent Foyle was admirably terse, firm yet understanding; his somewhat rumpled three-piece suit, his ties and his hat looked as though they were his and not something from the wardrobe department.

His driver, Sam, played by Honeysuckle Weeks, looked like she actually came from that period. Later repeats of episodes of *Midsomer Murders*, in one of which a much younger Ms Weeks played a psychotic child who led her two companions on a vicious murder spree and in another of which a slightly older Honeysuckle played an abused child who killed the bullying martinet who had abused her, made us realise that despite her youth she had had a career before *Foyle's War* and that she had been cast for the series in part because her looks, voice and manner were so right for a young woman of the 1940s.

The series opened with Foyle anxious to quit the police so he could join up and be useful in the War. However, Assistant Commissioner Summers (played by Edward Fox), insisted that he would still be needed as a copper. Summers left the series after a few episodes. An actor who stayed, to good effect, was Anthony Howell who played Paul Milner, a former police sergeant who had lost a leg in the British army's botched attempt at Trondheim to stop the Nazi invasion of Norway and whom Foyle selects as his assistant.

The ABC is repeating *Foyle's War* from the beginning (ABC1 Saturdays at 10.05pm), starting last week with episode one. This week, in episode two, The White Feather, Milner for a while comes under the influence of Spencer and his British fascists impatiently awaiting Hitler's invasion. A weakness of the episode is that Milner does not discover Spencer's ideological weaknesses,



Stuart Littlemore was the longest-serving host – *Media Watch 20 Years: Stuff Ups, Beat Ups & Barneys* (ABC1 Thursday May 7 at 8.30pm).

becoming disillusioned instead with his personality.

Media Watch has been running on the ABC now for twenty years. There was a brief hiatus in 2001 when a cringing ABC Board took the program off air, apparently in reprisal for a "grilling" *Media Watch* presenter Paul Barry had given the Board's Chairman Donald McDonald about the extensive criticism being levelled at the ABC's managing director, Jonathon Shier.

Barry's contract was not renewed, but shortly afterwards Shier departed and it was not long before *Media Watch* was back.

For a short little program that lectures to the seemingly all-powerful mass media about what does and does not constitute quality journalism, its high standing and popularity with more informed viewers is a tribute to its integrity and to its own quality.

To mark the anniversary, the ABC has issued an hour-long commemorative program *Media Watch 20 Years: Stuff Ups, Beat Ups & Barneys* (ABC1 Thursday May 7 at 8.30pm).

The program has had seven presenters over the years, and all seven are interviewed here, together with some of the program's most dedicated critics, like Melbourne radio "personality" Derryn Hinch who thinks the program's original and longest-serving host Stuart Littlemore was "a bit supercilious, a bit holier than thou".

Another critic is Chris Mitchell, editor-in-chief of *The Australian*, who repeats the right-wingers' mantra that the program's hosts were all "left-wingers". John Laws would only agree to an interview if it were unedited, so that is what he gets. What we get is the spectacle (unedited) of an arrogant, petulant braggart who even tries to claim that "what Media Watch does is not new; we did it years ago".

In fact John Laws tries to tell us that his version was actually better,

because "it was funny". That he can confuse what Media Watch does with the small but venerable (long before Laws) genre of magazine columns and TV programs that look for amusing misprints and other boobos in the media simply confirms for us how shallow is Laws' understanding. That he and fellow critic Alan Jones were morally bankrupt had been amply demonstrated by *Media Watch* itself in their exposure of the leading parts these two radio pundits played in the "cash for comment" scandal, when *Media Watch* revealed that they would spruik for anyone's point of view in return for cash payments.

Finally, very briefly, the six-part drama series *Dirt Game* (ABC1 Sundays 8.30pm) is dedicated to the idea that, whether you are a worker underground in a mine or a member of the mining company's Board, you are all "part of the team".

The idea that boss or employee, we're all in the same boat, is the essence of class collaboration (the disastrous Hawke-Keating employer-union "accord" was based on the same thinking). Naturally, in a script where the characters' main concern is "saving the company", we are not going to see any realistic scenes of bosses trying to do over their employees or of workers standing up to the bosses' schemes. ☹



Cuban Story

This revolutionary documentary is certainly the only film in history to star both Errol Flynn and Fidel Castro! Back in the 1950s, Errol Flynn and producer Victor Pahlen owned a movie theatre in Havana. They happened to be there when Castro's revolution broke out around them, so they took to the streets with their cameras to document history as it happened, at ground zero. The result was a unique documentary of Castro's entry into Havana, hosted by Flynn, featuring unrivaled footage of the conflict and Castro himself. After its world premier screening in Moscow circumstances outside Flynn's control shelved the film until 2001.

ALSO: Unchained Memories

In the 1930s, at the height of the Great Depression, hundreds of interviewees fanned out across the USA armed with a list of questions. Writing down the testimonies of thousands of aged African Americans about their recollection of their lives under America's so-called "peculiar institution", slavery in the antebellum South. As incredible as it may sound to us today, this ambitious undertaking is now known as the "Slave Narrative Collection of the Federal Writers' Project", and nothing does more to breathe life into these thousands of pages of testimony than this HBO documentary.

Presented by Whoopi Goldberg, narrators include Oprah Winfrey, Angela Bassett, Robert Guillaume, Samuel L Jackson and many others.

Sydney film night

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The Guardian

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Published by
Guardian Publications
Australia Ltd
74 Buckingham St, Surry Hills, 2010

Printed by Spotpress
24-26 Lilian Fowler Place
Marrickville 2204

Responsibility for electoral comment
is taken by T Pearson,
74 Buckingham St, Surry Hills, 2010

POLITICS in the pub

May 1

AUSTRALIA – US WAR GAMES A MOST DESTRUCTIVE FORM OF DEFENCE

Hannah Middleton, Sydney Peace Foundation
Denis Doherty, Australian Anti-Bases Campaign Coalition
David Bradbury, Award Winning Australian filmmaker – most recent films
Blowin in the Wind and *A Hard Rain*

8th of May 2009

WORKPLACE BULLYING : A SERIOUS & GROWING OCCUPATIONAL HAZARD

Anne Wyatt, Senior Lecturer, School of Risk and Safety Sciences, UNSW and
Director of Beyond Bullying
Carlo Caponecchia, Lecturer, School of Risk and Safety Sciences, UNSW

May 15

WILL NEO-LIBERALISM GO ON REGARDLESS?

Michael Pusey, Sociology, UNSW
Bob Howard, Dept of Government, University of Sydney.

Every Friday 6pm 'til 7.45

Gaelic Club

64 Devonshire Street Surry Hills

Pat Toms 02 9358 4834
patandbruceatoms@gmail.com
www.politicsinthepub.org.au

Anger mounts at NSW public assets sell-off

“...this government stands alone in its determination to flog off everything that's not nailed down”

Leon Waster

Less than a year ago the then NSW Labor Premier Morris Iemma and his much reviled treasurer Michael Costa were driven from office by the union led resistance of the NSW people to the government's plans to lease out and sell off NSW's electricity generation and supply system.

Iemma's successor, the “left” Labor Premier Nathan Rees is now creating the same possibility for himself, as anger mounts over his determination to sneak through, not just the privatisation of NSW's electricity assets, but a whole range of further public asset sell-offs, to build up his government's war chest for the next election.

This desperate gamble is predicated on the “battle fatigue” of the Australian Labor Party's own base – its rank and file branch members and the union movement – who, the government hopes will hesitate to take out yet another Labor premier when the government already faces a drubbing at the polls in early 2011.

The NSW government has fine tuned its electricity privatisation plans – for instance, leases to operate power stations are now for 20 years instead of 50, as previously proposed – but also ferry services, jails, the NSW state lottery, waste management services and management of public sector superannuation funds are also up for sale.

What plans for privatisation lie beyond this, in a state where public school playgrounds are already being flogged off to developers to pay teachers' salaries, depends on what a desperate government and its ideologically driven Treasury can get away with.

The government hopes its fire sale of public assets is a done deal by the time the NSW ALP holds its Annual Conference in October. It was at this conference that Iemma and his then treasurer Michael Costa came to grief in 2008, after defying a 702–107 vote against their plans to privatise electricity.

The first shots in the renewed war between the politicians and the people over privatisation came in February, after the government axed the public Jetcat ferry service to Manly and tendered the service to a private operator. The operator used as a guide the federal WorkChoices laws to impose cuts in wages and safety conditions on the new service. It shut the covering union, the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA), out of workplace negotiations. Had it succeeded, it would have created a strong incentive for private operators to tender for the entire ferry service on the basis of non-union wages and conditions, but a week-long community picket supporting the MUA's efforts to protect the workers' rights and passengers' safety forced the employer to enter into a union protected enterprise agreement with its employees. Nevertheless, the threat of privatised ferry services remains.

The next stoush has come out of the government's attempt to contract out management of Cessnock and Parklea jails to the corporate sector. John Robertson, ex-secretary of Unions NSW, who led last year's campaign against privatising electricity – for which he was rewarded with a seat in parliament and a portfolio as Minister for Corrective Services and Public Sector Reform – now has the task of forcing through the sale of prisons, as well as other privatisations in waiting, such as the sale of NSW Lotteries announced just before Easter.

The NSW branch of the Public Service Association (PSA), which covers prison officers



An action outside last year's state NSW ALP Conference.

and other staff in NSW jails, is strongly opposing the “Cell Off” – with considerable community support in the case of Cessnock, already hard hit by the recent closure of the Pacific Brands factory in the town, with the company exporting its manufacturing jobs to China.

These battles are only the start of what promises to be a bitter struggle for the PSA and other unions covering public sector services, as the government starts to play out its privatisation gamble at the very time the global financial crisis is precipitating sackings across industries and joblessness grows.

At a “Power to the People” forum held at the Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union Tom Mann Theatre on April 18, to defend the public sector and raise people's awareness of the NSW government's current plans to sell of key public assets, union leaders expressed their anger and dismay at the government's almost suicidal drive to privatise, despite a strong and constant opposition to such plans in the electorate.

They also expressed their commitment, at the union level, to take up the fight on behalf of their members and the communities affected by the government's actions.

Warren Smith, secretary of the MUA Sydney branch, referred to the recent fight to protect ferry workers' wages and safety conditions and the ongoing struggle to maintain ferry services in public hands. He declared that “It doesn't matter who you are – Labor, Liberal or anyone else – if you are going to attack workers then we are ready to pull you on.”

Steve Turner, assistant general secretary of the PSA, questioned the logic of a government that could sell two jails to save just \$16 million a year, then turn around and announce it was selling off NSW Lotteries, a “cash cow” that delivers more than \$400 million to the government annually.

“At a time when governments around the world are nationalising assets and services, this government stands alone in its determination to flog off everything that's not nailed down,” he declared.

United Services Union officer, Scott McNamara, whose members work in call centres servicing the energy retail sector, spoke of his concerns for their jobs, calling the government's privatisation plans “irresponsible”.

“Not only will any sell-off of the state's energy retailers in a global financial crisis result in a loss of profit for taxpayers, it will also put thousands of jobs at risk at a time when unemployment is on the rise,” he told the forum, adding that workers, particularly in regional areas, where the energy retailers' call centres were located, faced “unacceptable” threats to their futures, and the economic viability of their towns, as jobs are cut, or moved off-shore.

Mr McNamara added that though he was an Australian Labor Party member he would find it hard to give a first preference vote to the ALP at the next election while ever it was determined to carry through its privatisation agenda.

Unions NSW campaign officer, Paul Doughty, spoke of the need to build a campaign over the next three years to ensure neither Labor nor Liberal would risk going to the 2011 election with a privatisation agenda, or dare to carry out a privatisation agenda in their term in office.

Brett Collins of the Prisoners Action Group pointed out from the floor that for the first time both prisoners and prison officers were on the same side in a fight. He said the takeover of prisons by global operators like Wakenhutt Corp was turning prisoners into slaves, whose exploitation generated super-profits in privatised prison factories.

He argued that a campaign against the ransacking of the public sector needed to focus its message and start to get traction immediately, not just two or three years down the road.

“Unions can declare a black ban on any products coming from the slave labour of private prison factories and stop materials for prison factories from getting in now,” Mr Collins stated.

The 2007 Rights at Work campaign ran an effective “marginal” seats strategy in the federal election, one so successful that Liberal-National

seats with margins of up to 20 percent were pushed to the wire. This was because the campaign went deeply into the community in effectively delivering a focused message.

As well as ridding Australia of its most reactionary government in a hundred years, the campaign created expectations that a Labor government, hoping to come to office with minimum commitments, has found difficult to evade.

An “anti-privatisation” campaign needs to not only defend the public sector, but advocate its extension, in a way that ensures stronger community management and control.

A central aspect of such a campaign, when its target is an ALP government on the nose with the electorate, is to ensure that the campaign finds its electoral expression in a shift to the left, not the right, that is, as a result of the campaign voters do not give preferences to the Liberals to punish Labor.

Left candidates, able to clearly project an alternative voice for working class and progressive voters need to run in as many ALP held seats as possible.

Rather than a marginal seat strategy, as used by the Rights at Work campaign to shift the electorate left from Liberal-National to Labor, a campaign for the public sector needs a Labor heartland strategy that allows disenfranchised Labor voters in “safe” ALP seats to move beyond Labor, rather than be forced back on to the Liberals or scattered independents, thus reinforcing the monopoly of the two-party system.

However, an effective electoral strategy can only emerge when a deeper, ongoing grassroots campaign directly connects with organised labour, workers and communities to build a movement that goes beyond laborism and demands fundamental changes in society. This requires engaging with the people and setting out with them on a socialist pathway, where people not profits and cooperation not exploitation will determine how society shapes its future. ★



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