



# ALP no future for workers

Anna Pha

**Delegates at the triennial Congress of the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) in Brisbane from June 2-4 were in for a rude shock when Workplace Relations Minister Julia Gillard addressed them. Gillard treated delegates and the unions they represent with utter contempt, telling them there would be no more reforms to the industrial relations system and that they were not welcome in the corridors of Parliament. Adding insult to injury, she attempted to justify the continuation of the work of the Australian Building and Construction Commission (ABCC) under another name, implying workers in that industry are violent, balaclava-wearing thugs.**

On July 1, "we will be able to proudly say to each other we have cleansed the stain of WorkChoices from the history or modern Australia", she told delegates. July 1 is the date that Labor's Fair Work Act comes into operation. The Act removes WorkChoices from the books, but not all of the Howard government's other repressive laws. The Act and earlier legislation to phase out Australian Workplace Agreements (individual employment contracts) fall far short of providing basic trade union rights and restoring a centralised system for negotiating and protecting wages and working conditions.

Trade unions are particularly angry that the ABCC, the repressive, secretive building industry police force, will be transferred to the new Fair Work Australia umbrella with a few largely cosmetic changes.

The ABCC has been as busy as ever under Labor, pursuing trade unions and officials in the courts and workers on the job, as evidenced by the most recent allegations against a construction worker in South Australia. Ark Tribe was due to go before the Magistrate's Court in Adelaide as

*The Guardian* went to press for allegedly failing to attend interrogation by the ABCC. If found guilty Ark faces a six-month jail sentence (see story below).

In his speech on the first day of Congress ACTU secretary Jeff Lawrence told delegates: "In recent years we have achieved a lot but there is so much more to do. Unionists and activists should be proud."

"We have fought a hard fight...."

"Unions must continue to campaign to improve the rights of workers and their families."

Lawrence outlined the achievements so far under Labor and went on to say: "I believe that further improvements to IR legislation and workers' rights are necessary, and that it is our job to make sure they are on the federal government's agenda for the remainder of this term, and into their next."

"Improvements to workers' rights should ALWAYS be on a Labor government's agenda," Lawrence said, and went on to list a number of actions required from government. Amongst these important demands, was "equal rights for construction workers". This, Lawrence said, "is our number one industrial issue."

"We cannot allow laws to continue that can jail a unionist for refusing to discuss a union meeting. Or fine workers \$22,000 for taking industrial action," Lawrence warned.

Gillard in her address to Congress responded to such concerns: "I read that some are asking what next in relation to further legislative reform."

"My reply is to ask, what now? ... What will this Congress [do] to ensure Australia working people enjoy the full benefits of the new Fair Work system?"

"Pacing the corridors of Parliament House in Canberra is no substitute for pounding the pavements bringing the Fair Work Act to life for working people. The future of Australian



ACTU secretary Jeff Lawrence.

trade unionism will not be determined by further lobbying in Canberra, it will be determined by bringing Fair Work to working people in their workplaces," said Gillard.

In other words, "Nick off, make what you can out of what we have given you, that's all you are getting from us".

Gillard's contempt did not stop there. She raised the question of the ABCC, and shamelessly attempted to justify the transfer of its functions to a new body under Fair Work Australia. The Act setting up the ABCC was arguably the most repressive of all the anti-worker, anti-union pieces of the Howard government legislation.

"Like me, I am sure you were appalled to read of dangerous car chases across Melbourne City involving carloads of balaclava wearing people, criminal damage to vehicles resulting in arrests, threats of physical violence and

intimidation of individuals, including damage to a private residence," Gillard said.

"Balaclavas, violence and intimidation must be unreservedly condemned as wrong by every unionist, every ALP member, every decent Australian."

"And the Rudd Labor government will do everything necessary to ensure that we do not see this appalling conduct again."

What has that got to do with the thousands of hardworking, law abiding building and construction workers around Australia? They are no different to workers in any other industry. Yet, they have been singled out and subjected to a form of collective punishment for the alleged behaviour of a handful of workers. They are not balaclava-wearing, violent thugs who can be dealt with by the police and courts.

Continued on page 3

## Union to fight new ABCC charges

**The CFMEU Construction and General Division have pledged to fight fresh charges laid by the Australian Building Construction Commission (ABCC) against South Australian construction worker, Ark Tribe.**

At a meeting of the union's executive in Sydney, all branches closed ranks around Mr Tribe, who allegedly failed to attend a compulsory interrogation by the ABCC in 2008.

Under the federal government industrial relations laws, construction workers like Mr Tribe can be fined up to \$22,000 each for stopping work or jailed for up to 6 months for refusing to answer questions about a union meeting.

CFMEU Construction Division

national secretary, Dave Noonan, said the union would fight the charges and the IR laws that singled out construction workers for harsh treatment.

"... The CFMEU has pledged to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with Mr Tribe in the fight against these charges and the offensive IR laws that single construction workers out for harsh treatment," Mr Noonan said.

"We will enlist the support of the ACTU and the Australian trade union movement in this fight and intensify our public campaign against the Australian Building and Construction Commission."

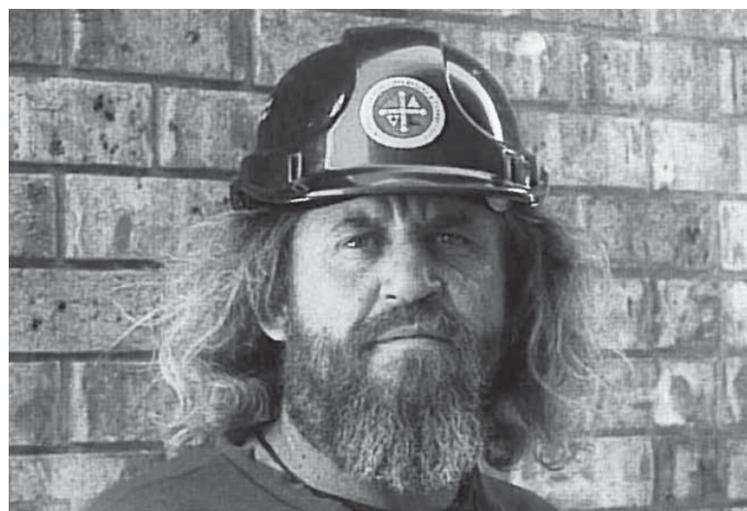
Mr Noonan also condemned the Rudd government for its failure to repeal the laws that underpin the power of the ABCC.

"It is also a shameful reflection

on this Labor government that an ordinary construction worker now faces the possibility of 6 months imprisonment because the government has not removed the most extreme laws left behind by John Howard," Mr Noonan said.

"We condemn the ongoing political role being played by the ABCC and will continue to campaign for its complete abolition. We will not accept a re-badged version of the ABCC under the 'Fair Work' system."

As *The Guardian* goes to press, Ark Tribe is due to appear in the Magistrates Court in the Adelaide suburb of Elizabeth. Local unions have been gathering support for Ark and called on members to attend the hearing on Tuesday June 9 at 9am. ☘



Ark Tribe.

3  
page   
**Fire sale of state assets**

5  
page   
**The recession is real**

6  
page   
**The DPRK and nuclear deterrent**

8  
page   
**Israel destroying Gaza's farmland**

12  
page   
**India's Swiss connection**

## The Guardian

Issue 1414

June 10, 2009

### Remembering Tiananmen

The 20th anniversary of the events that took place in Tiananmen Square in Beijing on June 4, 1989 has been and gone. Much of the media in Australia and elsewhere in the capitalist world launched into the predicted outpouring of mock concern for democratic and human rights in China – that special brand of “concern” reserved for perceived inadequacies in socialist countries. For them the tragic events had an extra significance – a missed opportunity to turn back the clock on social development in the most populous nation on earth and bring it back under the control of imperialist powers.

It is well to remember the whole context of those days. The socialist countries of Eastern Europe were under the most extreme pressure and would shortly cease to exist. Capitalism would soon be restored and the world subjected to an intensification of the US’ military drive for resources and markets. The grab back of workers’ rights and conditions in capitalist countries was also intensified. The ideologues of capitalism felt themselves to be on the verge of total victory over their enemy.

China was emerging from the economic and social setbacks suffered during the Cultural Revolution. The methods used to modernise the economy and open it up to the world brought some negative features with them. Corruption had increased and eliminating it has remained a top priority to this day. Income inequality between workers and entrepreneurs, between city dwellers and farmers and between regions had widened. The students and academics involved in the mass demonstrations had legitimate grievances.

But the movement was targeted by enemies of socialism from all over the world; ultra-leftists and the sorts of professional destabilisers who would later get to work in Yugoslavia and the various pro-US “colour revolutions” in former Soviet republics had descended on Beijing. The visit of Mikhail Gorbachev, who oversaw the dismantling of socialism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, encouraged these forces in the early stages of the protests. Meetings with leading Chinese government figures and agreement over a number of issues did not placate the protest instigators. A figure resembling the US Statue of Liberty was fashioned and erected in Tiananmen Square and the challenge to the government was thrown down.

A TV advertisement put to air recently by WA businessman Ian Melrose in opposition to investment in Australia by Chinese company Chinalco invoked the memory of Tiananmen. The ad maintained that the “military government” of China was responsible for the deaths of “thousands” of students and workers on June 4, 1989. Former Prime Minister Bob Hawke was moved to tears by their plight and granted Chinese students asylum in Australia. If we truly wish to pay respect to the memory of those who lost their lives on that day, we owe it to the public and ourselves to respect the truth also.

The Chinese government might not be to Mr Melrose’s tastes but it is not a military government. The official figures for the number of deaths, including police and soldiers, was 241. Other less well-documented estimates put the figure at several hundred. “Thousands” is an embellishment used by sources hostile to the government of China. Contrary to many of last week’s recollections, the earliest reports from sources such as the BBC were of attacks by youths on police and army vehicles, including firebombing. Workers and peasants did not support the protests in large numbers.

The incident that appeared to cause Hawke to break down in tears – involving an armoured personnel carrier that allegedly ran over a group of students and then reversed over them to finish the job – was acknowledged to be a complete fabrication in the days that followed. Leaders like Hawke may have been hoping that large bodies of Chinese students outside China would form themselves into organisations opposed to the government of the Peoples Republic and act as a support for opposition forces in China. This did not eventuate.

The death of hundreds of students, academics, soldiers and police is tragic in any circumstances. Their loss will be felt by families, friends and communities for a long time to come. It is right that we should reflect on the circumstances that led to such an awful confrontation. Unfortunately, the anniversary will continue to be a rallying point for anti-Communists to distort the history of those times, to attack the national government of China and absolve those who pushed events to such a terrible conclusion.

#### PRESS FUND

General Motors has been nicknamed Government Motors, after the US government prevented it going out of business with a \$60 billion investment. This makes the government the biggest shareholder, but President Obama has now announced that it will have no place on the company’s board of directors, which will remain entirely a private affair. Despite the company’s disastrous situation, the president appears to agree with conservative politicians that government control would ruin the company’s prospects. And we all thought he was on the ball! But now to more serious matters. Unlike GM, the Press Fund has avoided sinking in the financial mire. Nevertheless, it still needs extra financial help from its supporters, so if you can, please send in something for the Fund, for the next issue. Many thanks to this week’s contributors, as follows:

Max A \$10, S Cooper \$10, C R Greer \$40, “Round Figure” \$15, Mark Window \$10

This week’s total: \$85 Progressive total: \$5,790

# Comrade Pedro P Baguisa (January 31, 1952 – May 29, 2009)

The Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas (PKP-1930, the Philippine Communist Party) sadly announces the death of its General Secretary, Comrade Pedro P Baguisa, at a hospital in Antipolo City, Rizal Province, yesterday, May 29, 2009. He succumbed to renal failure and other complications while undergoing his first dialysis treatment.

Born in Cabanatuan City, Nueva Ecija Province, on January 31, 1952, he joined in 1969 the local chapter of the Malayang Pagkakaisa ng Kabataang Pilipino (MPKP, the Independent Association of Filipino Youth, which was banned under martial law). He joined the Party in 1970, and was a delegate to the 6th Party Congress held in Sta Maria town, Bulacan Province, in January 1973.

He was the founding president of the Samahan sa Ika-uunlad ng

Kabataang Pilipino (SIKAP, the Association for the Advancement of the Filipino Youth), which was organised in June 1976. While leading this progressive national youth organisation, he finished his collegiate studies in economics at the University of the East in Manila.

He was elected to the Central Committee at the 7th Party Congress held at Malolos City and Quezon City on July 30-31, 1977. At the 9th Party Congress held in Cabiao town, Nueva Ecija province, on December 30, 1986, he was elected to the Political Bureau of the Central Committee.

Comrade Baguisa was elected General Secretary at the 10th Party Congress held at the campus of the Araullo Lyceum in Cabanatuan City on November 7, 1993. He was re-elected to this position at the 11th Party Congress (San Isidro town,

Nueva Ecija Province, November 7, 1998), the 12th Party Congress (Quezon City, November 7, 2003), and the 13th Party Congress (Malolos City, November 7, 2008).

His leadership of the PKP-1930 has been marked by his avid propagation of Marxism-Leninism, his indefatigable efforts to lead the masses, his bold initiation of Party activities, and his constant optimism in the victory of the struggle for National Democracy and Socialism. The PKP-1930 will keep alive his spirit of Communist valour and self-sacrifice.

Comrade Pedro Baguisa is survived by his wife, Comrade Liwayway Baguisa, and their three children. Necrological services will be held on Thursday, June 4, 2009, immediately before his funeral at Cabanatuan City. ☘

## Nice park but not what was needed

Lartelare – a park named after the last Kurna elder to live in the traditional manner on lands in Port Adelaide – was officially opened last Friday. It contains sensitive interpretations of traditional implements and a wodli – the shelters used by the Port River people before they were sent to missions at the turn of the twentieth century. The CSR plant stood on the Glanville site until the early ’90s when the disused sugar mill burnt down. Hopes were high the land would be handed back to the traditional owners but the South Australian government handed it over to a consortium of developers instead. Lartelare Park sits amidst blocks of luxury apartments and marinas. It is of little practical use to the local Aboriginal community.

Lartelare’s great grand daughter, Auntie Veronica Brodie, fought for years to have the land returned to the traditional owners for use as an aged care facility or a Kurna cultural centre. Neither proposal received official backing. Auntie Veronica passed away in 2007 with her wishes unfulfilled. Her family were at the opening this morning. Daughter Margaret (pictured) spoke



emotionally about her mother’s vision; how it was thwarted by reports of land contamination and lack of government support. She thanked designers, artists and council staff for producing such a pleasing park. SA Minister for Aboriginal Affairs Jay Weatherill recalled a discussion with Auntie

Veronica in hospital before she died and the commitment he made to her to build a cultural centre in Port Adelaide.

The Lartelare Glanville Land Action Group founded by Auntie Veronica will be meeting soon to discuss the next steps in their long-running campaign. ☘

Sydney

### US FORCES BRING SWINE FLU

don’t allow 15,000 US forces into Australia!  
cancel the Talisman Sabre military exercises!

please join us for a

PROTEST VIGIL

Wednesday 17th June

12 - 1.30pm

Defence Plaza 270 Pitt Street

(next door to Pitt Street Uniting Church)

*masks supplied*

The Federal Government is risking Australian lives and health from Swine Flu by allowing thousands of US military personnel into the country to take part in a massive military exercises. The operation will see 15,000 US troops and 8,000 ADF personnel converging central Queensland during July.

With Swine Flu spreading rapidly between human beings, and the United States one of the main points of contagion, the Federal and Queensland Governments must not allow thousands of US troops to enter Australia.

### The Federal Government must cancel the Talisman Saber 2009 military exercises!

Organised by Australian Anti-Bases Campaign Coalition.  
www.anti-bases.org

Inquiries: 0418 290 663

# Fire sale of state assets

Peter Mac

**Across Australia state governments are selling off important public assets. In Western Australia the government is considering privatising a number of assets, which will probably include the port authorities, the state Lotteries Commission and the state betting agency. The government also wants to increase the use of private-public partnerships in state hospitals, schools and prisons.**

The New South Wales government wants to sell off NSW Lotteries, the electricity sales and marketing organisations, Waste Services NSW, and the state's superannuation organisation, Pillar Administration.

Unions have warned the government that they will resist the privatisation of Sydney Ferries in the same way as they resisted, and defeated, the sale of the state's electricity generators last year, which eventually led to resignation of the former premier, Morris Iemma.

But the biggest sale of public assets is in Queensland. If implemented, this will result in a massive takeover of the state's public services by the private sector.

As Andrew Detmar, state secretary of the Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union commented, it will leave companies like Rio Tinto and BHP Billiton in charge of regional economies "from the pit to the port".

## The Queensland shock

Last week Queensland Premier Anna Bligh announced that the Brisbane Port Authority, the Queensland lotteries and betting

agency, the state's coal rail freight services, the Abbot Point coal terminal, Forest Plantations Queensland, and Queensland Motorways, are all to be sold. The state's fuel subsidy will also be scrapped.

Premier Bligh admitted that there had been cases where privatisation had failed, but claimed that there had also been many success stories. Unfortunately, she chose Qantas as a good example, despite its recent poor economic and safety performance, job cuts and the outsourcing of maintenance overseas.

She also ignored the importance of the state's ports, motorways and timber plantations, and trivialised the sell-off, noting that the state once owned a string of shops to sell meat and fish.

In an exquisite display of rationalisation, Rachel Nolan, Queensland Minister for Transport, has denied that she deceived the electorate three weeks ago, when she stated there would be no privatisation of the state's rail network. She declared that her statement was true at the time, and that's what mattered. "I have given you a specific answer, with a specific timeline, which specifically refutes ... the notion that I misled this parliament," she stated with satisfaction.

Unions and other organisations have protested furiously. The ACTU says that privatisation of state assets is short-sighted, and that rail privatisation in particular has always resulted in failure.

The Queensland Council of Unions has stated:

"The QCU rejects, as a matter of principle, the sell-off of public assets. Public services are operated

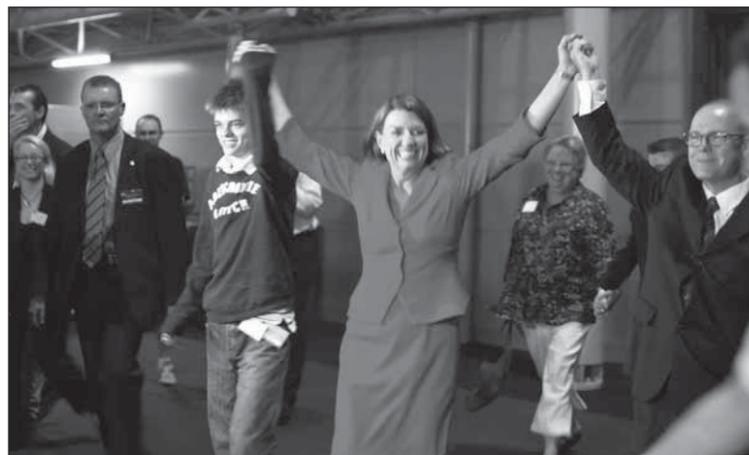
primarily in the interests of the people of Queensland rather than in the interests of the shareholders' returns.

"The executive notes that the history of privatisation has resulted in the abrogation of responsibility by governments to provide vital services and long-term income streams to support these public services into the future."

The Council has also noted that the sale of Vicrail in Victoria led to higher costs, (while the operator still receives a handsome payment from the Victorian government), the sale of the Commonwealth Bank led to the public losing record profits and the imposition of record fees for customers, and the sale of Telstra led to a loss of profits for the public and a fall in standards of service.

On the other hand, big business is delighted. The Australian Industry Group says that the privatisation initiatives will shore up Queensland's position with the "investment community". However, in the same breath their representative demanded financial relief from the removal of the fuel subsidy by way of a two-year reduction in payroll tax and vehicle registration, equal to the anticipated cost of the loss of fuel subsidy, "to ensure that industry doesn't suffer an increase in its cost base at a time when it can least afford it," as he put it.

Not to be outdone in terms of greed and ingratitude, the Queensland Resources Council has recommended that the money derived from the sale of state assets should be used to invest in more state infrastructure for the benefit of the coal-mining industry. "I'm thinking here of areas such as the north-west of the state which has



Anna Bligh savours her recent election victory – her raft of privatisations revealed only weeks later.

struggled for a number of years with the adequacy of energy and transport infrastructure", he declared earnestly.

## Where's the fire?

State premiers have maintained that the asset sales are necessary because the world economic crisis has reduced Australian government income. But that's a poor excuse. In fact, the beneficiaries of the asset sales will be the purchasers, because most of the sales involve extremely important government services, for which there will always be a strong demand, and because during a depression prices for such facilities fall to rock bottom. It's the worst time for government to sell, but the very best for purchasers.

As Curtin University Professor of Economics Peter Kenyon commented:

"The government should be looking at ... economic efficiency.

And economic efficiency would say that what we need here is a pretty careful cost-benefit analysis about in which hands would we get the most efficient outcome. Is it in the public sector's hands, or in the private sector's hands?"

"Now that's a very different type of analysis that is required than (whether) we need a boost to Treasury finance now because we're short of cash. That's not really an argument for privatisation – it's the worst possible case, in fact, for privatisation."

The real solution to the privatisation epidemic was demonstrated in the defeat of the attempted sell-off of the Snowy-Hydro authority and the NSW electricity generators, by the combined opposition of the union movement and concerned community organisations. That's surely the way to go. ☘

# ALP no future for workers

Continued from page 1

Their only "crime", in the eyes of the government and employers, is that they are unionised, militant and not afraid to stand up for their rights and protect the health and safety of workers in an industry with an appalling rate of workplace-related deaths and injuries and employers who run off with their entitlements.

The real criminals are the employers who cheat workers of wages and other entitlements and take the short cuts that cost lives. This is not the focus of the ABCC, nor was it ever intended to be. It is not the focus of the Rudd/Gillard government with its plans to keep the industry police force and its powers of interrogation of innocent workers.

Another source of union anger is the government's failure to consult with the movement. It had no place on the Henry Taxation

Review panel which recommended the raising of the pension eligibility age to 67. The employers are represented by Heather Ridout from the Australian Industry Group. Heather Ridout, in particular, seems to have a chair at almost every policy discussion table with the government, but workers are denied a voice.

The Rudd government is not pursuing the tripartite, "togetherness" model of the Hawke/Keating days where the ACTU had a voice at the government table alongside the employers. The extent to which this really gave the ACTU more power and influenced policy direction is questionable. In practice, the ACTU became bound to government policy and the conveyor and enforcer of government decisions. This was particularly the case in regard to restraining wages, accepting Labor's program of privatisations, economic deregulation, and

decentralisation of wages and working conditions, etc.

PM Kevin Rudd addressed the Congress dinner at the Brisbane Convention Centre. He concluded his long speech by saying, "we value our partnership with the Australian trade union movement" in developing and implementing its reforms.

"As Australians, we're all in this together.

"In this together – as business and unions; as communities right across our vast land," Rudd said.

Not all delegates were convinced about partnership or togetherness with Rudd or Gillard.

Gillard's blunt rebuttal of demands for further reforms made it clear to the movement that its future does not lie with being tied to Labor.

In his address to Congress Jeff Lawrence, which preceded Gillard's

contribution, raised the question of the union movement's relationship to the Labor government.

"On our relationship with the Labor government, I assert that we must be strong and we must be independent..."

"We must continue to vigorously engage with the government and to be activist in our outlook and to campaign and lead the debate for what is right.

"We have differences of view with Labor on a number of issues, including OHS and the ABCC and we must continue to strongly prosecute our case on behalf of our members..."

"If we are to succeed however in ensuring our voice is heard by government we must be unified and disciplined in our approach", Lawrence said. "We must never retreat from the need for growth and activism."

The ACTU secretary spoke about the importance of building the trade union movement and building consensus around a new union agenda. "We cannot forget our strength comes from the workplace and our delegates."

When militant action was replaced by sitting around the table during the Hawke days, the trade union movement was seriously weakened. Employers upped their attack on the working class and trade unions. Trade union membership declined, working conditions went backwards and real wages fell. The Howard government followed with its anti-union offensive.

The power of the trade union movement lies in its work on the ground, its level of organisation, its unity and preparedness to take action, and on retaining an independent position that puts the interests of its members first. ☘

Pete's Corner



Perth

The Deaths in Custody Watch Committee (WA) Inc.

## PUBLIC RALLY

Saturday 20th June 12:00 - 2:00pm  
Forrest Place, Perth

**Don't let Mr Ward's death be in vain,  
join the public rally for justice & human rights**

- Protest Mr Ward's death!
- Demand that people will be safe in custody!
- Demand the State Government take immediate action to reduce Indigenous imprisonment rates in WA!
- Demand the State Government do something real and substantial!

Contact the DICWC for further info :Ph: (08) 9444-1930 E: dicwc@inet.net.au

[www.deathincustody.org.au](http://www.deathincustody.org.au)

# Green Light for first ambo strike in 36 years

The Australian Electoral Commission announced last week 94 percent support for strike action in a ballot of Victorian paramedics on protected industrial action. The historic vote, conducted over the previous two weeks, clears the way for paramedics to dramatically ramp up their campaign against fatigue.

Year-long pay talks with the state government are deadlocked and a major sticking point is its refusal to support minimum 10-hour rest breaks between shifts. Ambulance Employees Australia state secretary Steve McGhie said he hoped last-ditch crisis talks currently underway in the Industrial Relations Commission could still avert strike-action.

"Paramedics don't want to go on strike," Mr McGhie said. "They voted almost unanimously to take this extreme action because they are dedicated professionals, determined to providing a safer ambulance service. Whatever happens paramedics will ensure the

health and welfare of the Victorian community is not put at risk.

"But every day our paramedics are forced to make life and death decisions in a fatigued state because of insufficient fatigue breaks. That is unacceptable.

"For an entire year we've negotiated in good faith for proper breaks and fair wages. We have got nowhere," Mr McGhie continued.

"Whether this strike goes ahead is now entirely in [Health Minister] Daniel Andrews' hands. He can step in and make Ambulance Victoria Australia's safest and best ambulance service."

Paramedics have voted to enforce 10-hour fatigue breaks between shifts, along with 17 other types of industrial action. This action is aimed at ensuring they are properly rested and that any risk to the Victorian community from fatigued paramedics is reduced.

The action will force Ambulance Victoria to find other paramedics to cover the additional two hours of

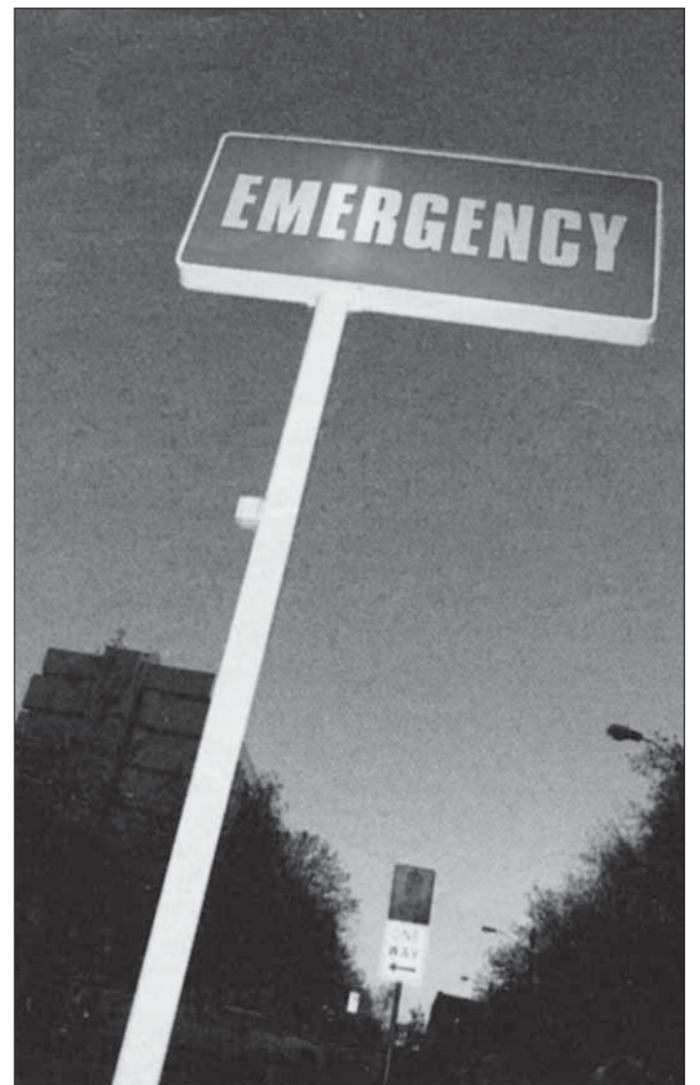
fatigue breaks that paramedics require to be properly rested for their next shift.

There are also stop-work meetings and various other bans, such as refusing to collect patient billing data, which would make Victoria's ambulance service free.

"Victorian ambos face extreme workloads," said Mr McGhie. "Many work more than 15 hours straight, often without meal breaks, and then need to be back working eight hours later.

"Our survey found many paramedics get just five hours sleep between shifts and are falling asleep driving and making clinical errors because of this relentless workload and lack of sleep between shifts."

Only Victorian and Western Australian paramedics still have 8 hour minimum breaks. In 2007 Coroner Peter White held an inquest into the death of a 78-year old cardiac patient after paramedics accidentally administered morphine instead of adrenaline. He found the paramedics were fatigue-affected. ❖



## New report: vocational education and training pivotal to economic renewal

Vocational education and training (VET) will be pivotal to Australia's economic renewal, according to a new report commissioned by the Australian Education Union (AEU). The union said that prior to the global financial crisis, Australia's skills shortage was pronounced.

"This was partly created by neoliberal policies preoccupied with 'contestability' and 'market design' – policies represented by

a low quality quick fix approach," said AEU federal president, Angelo Gavrielatos. "The success of Australia's recovery will rely on a strong education, training and skills base.

"However, we will be doomed to repeat the failures of the past if we persist with the same policies that contributed to the massive skills shortage."

He said that Australia needs new policies which ensure that it

comes out of the global financial crisis in a stronger position than before.

"We need to create a new approach to VET to ensure that future generations of workers have adaptable education and training skills in an ever changing economy," said Mr Gavrielatos. "That is critical to meet the demands of economic renewal.

"Well supported and resourced TAFE colleges are central to this new approach. Innovative and responsive, TAFE colleges can support the development of a modern, adaptable and sustainable labour market."

According to the author of the report, Dr John Buchanan, current education and work arrangements did not cause the economic crisis. However, they must be central to its solution: any serious economic renewal will be overcoming deep-seated fragmentation in flows of learning and labour which is caused by insufficient recognition being given to the depth and complexity of vocational knowledge.

"Policies that only focus on restoring growth will merely entrench deep-seated problems," said Mr Gavrielatos.

Prime among these are an

ecological unsustainable growth path, deepening wage inequality, retarded productivity growth and the paradox of "skill shortages" co-existing with "wasted skills".

"Improved flows of labour require overcoming profoundly unbalanced systems of work-force development. The modern obsession with short run performance and work intensification leaves little time for the development of labour.

"Current policy has embraced a system which atomises skills into literally thousands of units of competence." ❖

## All industrial action to be unlawful for a month

The federal government is effectively outlawing all industrial action throughout Australia for over a month as a result of an error in drafting the transitional arrangements to the new Fair Work Act, said National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) Victorian secretary, Matthew McGowan.

"The government needs to fix this. We wrote to the Minister weeks ago and we have had no response. Not even a return phone call."

The NTEU will be required to re-ballot its members engaged in industrial action with several Victorian universities despite receiving over 83 percent support for its industrial campaign in a recent ballot conducted by the Australian Electoral Commission just weeks ago.

The most recent ballot was declared on May 20, meaning the union will be required to conduct a second ballot just 6 weeks later.

"Orders of the Commission requiring unions to cease industrial action will remain in force from July 1, why won't orders providing for industrial action be treated the same" he said.

In a letter to federal government parliamentarians, Mr McGowan stated that "The effect of this will be to create a period of over a month where all industrial action by any union throughout the country will be unlawful. Given there is no impact on the operation of the Fair Work Act created by resolving this problem, we do not understand why the government appears intent on persisting with this anomaly.

"I have written to the Minister, Julia Gillard, seeking a review of the transitional arrangements. To date, I have had no reply and have not even had my phone calls returned from her office." ❖

## MUA calls for urgent change to handle future freight task

Australia would face an impossible task to meet a national freight target tipped to double by 2020 and triple by 2050, without making a new national shipping policy an urgent priority.

"The prediction is that post 2020 coastal shipping will experience significant coastal shipping growth with the need for greater use of efficient and low-carbon methods of transport but the establishment of a competitive Australian shipping industry must begin right now," said Paddy Crumlin, national secretary of the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA).

Speaking at the Natship09 conference in Sydney last week, Mr Crumlin launched a new platform for the revitalisation of shipping, *Time for a Sea Change in Australian Shipping*, calling for the federal government to adopt a comprehensive package of regulatory reforms and fiscal support without delay.

The Minister for Transport Anthony Albanese recognised the need for revitalising shipping by commissioning an inquiry into coastal shipping. Mr Crumlin was part of a Shipping Policy Advisory Group appointed by the Minister to turn the inquiry's recommendations into a new national shipping policy.

"*Time for a Sea Change* is probably the most important initiative adopted by the MUA. Shipping is a vital part of an integrated national freight solution and can be a great contributor to the economy," Mr Crumlin said.

Key recommendations that the MUA is looking for the Government to act on include:

- The promotion of Australian flagged and crewed ships in the domestic transport sector;
- Effective tax incentives for the industry to invest in new ships;
- Training for new seafarers to

fill the skills shortage including a national maritime skills strategy;

- Tighter regulations for coastal shipping to promote transparency and fairness of competition and guard against labour exploitation and tax avoidance by international operators;
- A tonnage tax common in major shipping nations where shipping makes an essential economic contribution;
- PAYE Tax reform for Australian crew on international voyages;
- A Shipping Industry Taskforce to see policy is converted into action.

"Seafarers have and will continue to deliver flexible labour relations arrangements and crewing to ensure commercial success and productivity," Mr Crumlin said. ❖

# Never mind the economic spin The recession is very real

Anna Pha

**“What we have done today is avoid a technical recession,” a very relieved Prime Minister Kevin Rudd told the media pack following the release of the March quarter gross domestic product (GDP) figures by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). Australia might not be having a technical recession according to capitalist economists and government officials, but the domestic economy is in a very real recession. The recession is as real as it gets for the people of Australia.**

The GDP rose by 0.4 percent in the first three months of 2009, following a contraction of 0.6 percent in the last quarter of 2008, according to the ABS statistics. The “technical” definition of a recession, according to capitalist economists is a contraction of the economy in two successive quarters. So, as far as capitalist economic theory goes, we are not technically in recession.

Reality tells another story. Unemployment is rising, working hours have been slashed, wages are going backwards, corporate profits are in decline, companies have cut production and are winding down an over-supply of stock, business investment has collapsed, bankruptcies are rocketing and retail outlets are holding yet another round of sales. The domestic economy is in recession.

The rise in GDP (a measure of national income) came as a surprise to the PM and his Treasurer Wayne Swan as well as big business and media commentators. They know that on the ground the domestic economy is in recession. So where did this figure reporting economic growth come from? Why were the statistics so much better than expected?

There are a number of reasons for this outcome. The government’s stimulus packages combined with low interest rates have clearly played an important role in holding up consumer demand for goods and services. The recession would have been far deeper without them.

A trade surplus of \$2.3 billion contributed 2.2 percentage points to the GDP. The surplus owes a great deal to a decline in imports (lack of demand) and socialist China’s stimulus package. A partial recovery in rural exports, after years of drought conditions also helped make up for the decline in exports of minerals and other commodities. The volume

of rural exports increased by around 18 percent but income from them rose by only four percent because of the huge fall in commodity prices on international markets.

So what does the future hold? Will the economy be on the path to recovery next year?

The second stimulus package still has some way to go, with most people receiving their \$900 handouts from the government during April and May. To the extent that they are spent, they will increase demand during the second, June quarter of 2009.

The increase in approvals for new housing resulting from the government’s first home-buyers’ grant have still to be realised in terms of jobs and increased demand for building materials. The budget’s stimulus spending on infrastructure on schools, roads, ports, rail and other projects likewise will act as a stimulus. The \$6 billion increase in military spending will result in some additional jobs, but could have done much more for people and job creation if redirected to public housing, employing doctors, nurses and teachers, public transport and the renewal energy projects.

Australia still has some way to go before it feels the full impact of the global recession. The government’s measures can only be expected to reduce the severity of the recession which is set to deepen.

## Wages fall

Workers’ incomes fell by 1.1 percent in the March quarter, a direct result of wage cuts, shorter working hours and sackings. They look set to shrink even further with predictions that unemployment will continue to increase. The social consequences are felt by working people who lose their jobs, homes, and cannot make ends meet. In narrow economic terms, lower incomes mean workers spend less on goods and services. This means more cuts in production, more sackings, more bankruptcies and job losses, more suffering as workers and their families bare the brunt of the crisis.

At some point, when a balance is reached between what is produced and what people can afford to purchase, recovery can begin. When this occurs, industry will be operating from a smaller base. New investments will be made to increase productivity (output per worker). Employers are determined not to restore wage rates and working conditions to pre-recession

levels, and they appear to have the support of the government.

The government’s stimulus packages and job creating infrastructure projects are short-term in nature, to bring about a recovery in private profits. The jobs that are created will be temporary. After that, the intention is to leave it to the “markets” – the corporate sector.

The government will be under considerable pressure from the financial sector and the ratings agencies to wind back its debt and restore budget surpluses as quickly as possible. Massive cuts in public sector jobs, welfare benefits and public services will be on the agenda. The very same economic rationalist (neo-liberal) policies that got us into such a mess will come to the fore again.

The pressure will be on workers and trade unions to suppress wage and other demands. Employers will argue that they cannot afford them, that wage rises will hinder recovery. Already Workplace Relations Minister Julia Gillard has asked the Industrial Relations Commission to hold down the wages of workers in restaurants and cafes during the award restructure process.

Further reductions in workers’ incomes will hamper recovery and bring about further, needless hardship and unemployment. It should not be forgotten, that following the 1981-83 recession it took almost 20 years for unemployment levels to drop to their pre-recession level. There was a rapid recovery in profits at the expense of wage rises and jobs.

Under the social contract between the Hawke Labor government and the Australian Council of Trade Unions in the 1980s-90s, called the Accord, unions restrained wage rises and co-operated with employers to reduce labour costs and restore profitability as quickly as possible. The promise was that increased profits would bring new investments, which in turn would bring jobs. The profit part of the equation was very successful. The investment step saw companies going offshore, carry out takeovers, restructurings, downsizings and investment in new labour-saving technology. The jobs did not materialise as promised.

There is a real danger of history repeating itself if trade unions are not successful in fighting for a rapid recovery in wages and jobs. The choice is between a people-led or profit-led recovery. ✚



Photo: CommonCause

Workers’ incomes fell 1.1 percent in the March quarter due to wage cuts.



Australians as a rule seldom bother about things like phone bugging. Many think that things like that apply only to “totalitarian regimes”. So it came as a surprise for many that Australian authorities are bugging the telephones of Australian citizens at a rate of more than 20 times that of their American counterparts. About 3,000 Australian had their telephone calls intercepted according to a federal parliamentary estimates hearing. As Greens senator Scott Ludlam said, there was something “rather peculiar happening in Australia”.

“A sneeze can travel at up to 45m/second!” shouts a big headline of a full-page colour advertisement for a miracle boost to your immune system. Pharmaceutical companies are greatly heartened by the panic created by the swine flu. One can understand their satisfaction with growing profits – it was only recently that they were counting their losses because the bird flu panic had come to nothing and they could not shift their goods. But now life is sweet again.

In 2004 there was a huge controversy about Australia’s knowledge of torture techniques used by the US on their prisoners in Iraq. The Howard government denied it but it turned out to be true. The nature of military operations nowadays may involve contingents from different countries. What they do and how they do it may or may not constitute criminal offences when it comes to torture, for instance. This is more than a theoretical question and the Australian military want very clear guidelines on the issue. Legislation on torture laws will be introduced to Parliament at the end of the month. There are fears that the torture laws can be drafted in such a way as to allow officials to cover up actions they should not have been involved in the first place. “There should not be any ambiguity in the legislation that might enable some unfortunate compromises,” commented George Williams, the Anthony Mason professor of law at the University of NSW. It’s only quite recently that Australia signed the United Nations Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture – a move the Howard government had refused to take because it permits international inspections of detention centres and prisons.

More than 400 jobs are at risk in Victoria after a discount supermarket chain, Not Quite Right, called in an administrator. The chain has 26 stores across the state and sells groceries that are near or past their use-by date. The company has already cut about 130 jobs in the past 18 months. Most of the stores are in regional and lower-income suburbs.

**CAPITALIST HOG OF THE WEEK:** is former US vice-president Dick Cheney. Cheney has now admitted that intelligence he once cited as proving the then Iraqi president Saddam Hussein collaborated with al-Qaeda to carry out the September 2001 terrorist attacks in the US was a lie. Last week he said that admitted that the information “turned out to be not true”.

Public Launch – Sydney

## Industrial Relations for the Future *a Communist Party IR Policy*



Speakers: Peter McClelland State President CFMEU

Colin Drane AMWU Official and Convenor Power to the People

Warren Smith CPA CC Chairperson and MUA Sydney Branch Secretary

Friday 12th June, 6 PM CFMEU building 12 Railway Parade, Lidcombe

*Supper and drinks available*

For information please contact: Tony Oldfield on 0449 211 970 or CPA office on 02 9699 8844

# The DPRK and the nuclear deterrence

Dan Margolis

**North Korea's (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) recent nuclear and rocket tests have ruffled many feathers. Nations – both sworn enemies and allies alike – have voiced displeasure at the tests, and so have many peace and democratic activists. At the same time, many are saying that the Korean actions are, at the very least, understandable.**

Tad Daley is no friend of nuclear weapons. In fact, he's a writing fellow with International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War and author of the forthcoming book "Apocalypse Never: Forging the Path to a Nuclear Weapon-Free World." Nonetheless, like a number of other anti-nuclear activists, he's refused to jump on the bandwagon of anti-North Korea sentiment.

"We need to acknowledge that, from a pure perspective of rational national security grounds," Daley told the *People's Weekly World* newspaper, "it can make sense to the North Korean planners to acquire a small nuclear deterrent."

But why is this?

## Long history of conflict

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), has a long history of conflict over nuclear weapons with the United States, and has long been a victim of US broken promises, threats, and, as in the Korean War, invasion and occupation.

The Korean War technically never ended; only a truce was declared. Since then, tens of thousands of US troops have remained in South Korea, aiming at the North.

In the 1990s, the US threatened Korea over its construction of a nuclear reactor aimed at supplying the state with electricity, saying, without evidence, that the reactor would be used to build nuclear bombs. After a crisis, negotiations produced results, and the US agreed to help construct a light water reactor in the DPRK, not capable of producing nuclear weapons, in exchange for the North abandoning its own reactor.

However, Republicans in the US Congress during the Clinton administration put the brakes on construction.

## Recent history of threats

Relations took a turn for the worse after George W Bush was inaugurated. He declared North Korea part of an "axis of evil" and threw out any previous agreements. Bush further announced a new doctrine of "pre-emption," which stated that the US could and would launch a war against any country that could potentially be a US threat.

"Finally," Daley added, "[Bush] pulled the trigger on the pre-emption doctrine against one of the three [members of the 'axis'], Iraq, decapitated the regime, and sent its leaders to the gallows."

Just before the Iraq war, a DPRK general said, in explaining the DPRK nuclear program, "We see what you are getting ready to do with Iraq, and you are not going to do it to us."

## Six-party talks

The Bush administration, after accusing the North of intending to build nuclear weapons, refused to meet with the DPRK. Instead, Bush opted for a less direct method: talks between the US, the DPRK, China, South Korea, Russia and Japan; the North reluctantly accepted.

There were six rounds of talks. Initially, the US was intransigent, but, after periods of stalemate, a push from the peace movement, and the first DPRK nuclear test, there were breakthroughs, most notably in the final round of talks

in 2007. During these talks, the DPRK agreed to give up its nuclear capabilities and verify that it had done so. In exchange, the US would take Korea off the list of state terror sponsors, the DPRK would be provided with humanitarian assistance and negotiations towards a full peace between the two states would be held.

The US took the DPRK off the terrorist-state list, and provided some fuel and food assistance. The North blew up its main nuclear reactor, sealed the rest, and submitted nearly 20,000 pages worth of documentation of its nuclear programs. The process was stalled, however, when the US refused to agree that the DPRK had declared all of its programs, and insisted that it was hiding a secret stockpile.

"I don't even know what the US position is," said Cristina Hansell of the James Martin Centre for Non-proliferation studies. She suggested that the DPRK might be wondering, after thousands of pages of documents, why the US is still not satisfied, whether, no matter what the DPRK does, "they're still not going to say that we've done enough and meet the rest of their obligations."

## Why now?

It would seem, to the casual observer, that, with the Obama administration, this is a strange time for the nuclear issue to flare up.

According to the Korean-American community organisation Nodutdol, some reasons the situation flared up now include the ongoing "efforts by the US to demand further concessions from North Korea outside of the talks" and "a basic contradiction between the US wanting denuclearisation of North Korea first before peace and normalised relations, and North Korea's wanting peace and normalised relations before fully denuclearising."

John Feffer, editor of *Foreign Policy in Focus*, told the *World*, "Really it was a question of the details and the bigger picture." The US simply was worried about the nuclear issue, but Korea is interested in peace, in ending the state of war altogether.

The DPRK may have decided it cannot wait any longer to see if the US will reach out and fulfil its agreements. Many have predicted a bad harvest, and the DPRK is likely worried that the assistance agreed to in the talks, delayed, may never fully arrive.

"They have only managed to get any kind of concessions or any kind of a deal from the US when they've conducted such tests or engaged in such behaviour," Feffer said. "It's logical for them to do it again to see if they can get a better deal."

## The Obama administration

"From Pyongyang's point of view, I don't think they would just overnight say 'oh, Bush is gone, so all this is gone away,'" says Daley.

According to Feffer, moving forward will be difficult. The Obama administration has many problems on its hands – Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and so on – and the Obama administration is under extreme pressure from the extreme right to appear "tough."

Nonetheless, Daley says, "He hasn't identified states as an axis of evil, he hasn't said that we intend to pursue a doctrine of pre-emption, and he hasn't launched any pre-emptive wars. To me that is very encouraging."

## The region

Japan's war hawks have seized on the missile tests to push forward their agenda, which includes either changing that nation's constitution, which prohibits an offensive army, or "reinterpreting" it, so that the military can play a more active role outside Japan's borders. General Nakatani, a member of the Diet, Japan's

parliament, even suggested that Japan should be able to conduct pre-emptive strikes.

There are opposition voices, however. Shii Kazuo, the chair of the Japanese Communist Party, told Prime Minister Taro Aso that "the Japanese government is called upon to take the lead in the international community to completely ban nuclear weapons without delay. Once this is achieved, it will greatly help to dissolve the North Korea issue."

The DPRK is extremely suspicious of Japan overall. Japan, which occupied Korea during WW2, committed horrific atrocities and went so far as to systematise rape, has never officially apologised or made reparations to Korea.

Relations between the DPRK and South Korea have frosted over. There is a long history of animosity on the peninsula: After the Korean War, South Korea was a military dictatorship under the tutelage of the United States, and it followed a policy of confrontation with the North. The DMZ, the line between North and South, is one of the most heavily militarised areas of the world.

South Korea's succession of military dictatorships ended in the 1980s, and the social forces that comprised them are now represented in the far-right Grand National Party. It lost power in the 1990s to Kim Dae-jung's Millennium Democratic Party. Kim implemented a "Sunshine Policy" of détente with the North. Under the policy, the two states became friendlier, and began dialogue and economic exchange. The policy's culmination came when President Roh Moo-hyun walked with his wife across the border and shook hands with Kim Jong Il, leader of the DPRK.

However, Roh's government collapsed under the weight of economic problems, and was replaced with the GNP, which quickly began undoing, as much as possible, the progress towards reunification that had been made.

According to Kim Dae-jung, in an interview with Korea's leading liberal newspaper, the *Hankyoreh*, current President Lee Myung-bak, of the GNP, is surrounded by Cold War thinkers and "the fundamental cause of the worsening of inter-Korean ties was mutual distrust." Kim called on Lee to say whether or not he would honour past agreements with the DPRK – something the North has long urged – as well as to reopen tourist areas that the south had unilaterally closed. These tourist areas were in the North, but run by cooperation from both sides.

Sympathy for the DPRK has grown in the south since the 1990s, and moving too harshly against the DPRK had been a political minefield for Lee. However, his government seized on the nuclear tests as an excuse to do what it has said for years it wants to do – join the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI).

## PSI and US nuclear hypocrisy

The PSI was announced by George W Bush in 2003, and designed by former US Undersecretary of State John Bolton. The stated aim of the PSI, which has a core of 15 countries, is to stop the illegal trafficking of nuclear materials. The initiative would allow inspections of any ships suspected of carrying illicit nuclear materials.

The PSI has proved controversial, as it aims to search the ships of sovereign states, but is not a United Nations agency. China refused to participate in the initiative, among other reasons, because the leadership believes the PSI to be illegal.

South Korea's joining has infuriated the DPRK.

According to Daley, something like the PSI would be beneficial to the cause of denuclearisation of the world – if it applied to all states equally.



Signing the Truce of the Korean War on July 27, 1953

"That would be a fair and impartial regime, but right now that's not what PSI is," said Daley. "If the thinking just is 'oh, we've got to make sure that there is no illicit going into or out of North Korea,' that just reinforces the nuclear double standard."

The North has long feared that the US was storing nuclear weapons inside of South Korea, and has emphasised that it wants denuclearisation of the entire peninsula.

"The North Koreans, at one point, said we'd be happy to let you do that as long as you let us do inspections inside South Korea," Daley added. "I don't think that sentiment is crazy! I think that sentiment is eminently appropriate and legitimate, and a fair and just request."

The key to the region, says Feffer "lies with the US. Though the Lee Myung-bak administration of South Korea is antagonistic to the North, a better relationship between the US and the DPRK would change the entire dynamic."

## Is the DPRK a threat to the US?

While the North has used some provocative rhetoric, an examination of its official news source, the Korea Central News Agency, shows that its statements are entirely defensive: Its threats are not to attack anyone, but to respond if attacked.

**Just before the Iraq war, a DPRK general said, in explaining the DPRK nuclear program, "We see what you are getting ready to do with Iraq, and you are not going to**

ent



at the border town of Panmunjom.

Rodong Sinmun, the newspaper of the north's ruling Workers Party of Korea said of its nuclear program, "the DPRK is left with no option but to bolster up its nuclear deterrent and take strong counter-measures."

On June 2, the same paper said "To the Korean people, self-defence capability just means their sovereignty and right to existence and fundamental guarantee for defending socialism. We will further increase our military capability for self-defence to cope with the US imperialists and their followers' more arrogant moves to isolate and stifle the DPRK."

While most are opposed to the north's nuclear tests, there has been no evidence presented that the DPRK is acting in anyway that directly threatens the world. On the contrary, its military has never fought a war outside of its borders, and even then it only fought for independence.

### What now?

According to Nodutdol, the only solution is a total solution that would wipe out the root cause of the problems. As long as there is no peace treaty, there is no real incentive to fully denuclearise, they say. "The root problem is that the Korean War never ended. As North Korea's threatened abandonment of the 1953 Armistice indicates, it's time to for a real Peace Treaty to End the Korean War."

Daley says that there are several steps to resolving the nuclear issue. It is, he says, important to "acknowledge that they have rational security grounds, and consequently to try to ameliorate them, to assure them that we have no intention of attacking them, to assure them that we intend to abide by the world rule of law, to assure them that they have nothing to fear from us."

Progressive forces, he said, should send the message that "even if your narrow national security interests might be served by a nuclear arsenal, the world as a whole, including [your broader security interests], would be much safer in a world where no state has nuclear weapons, rather than in a world where you have nuclear weapons, but so too do a lot of other states."

Finally, Daley says, "We need to confront, initially rhetorically, then later in policy action the nuclear double standard. America's nuclear hypocrisy. We need to acknowledge that there is something fundamentally unjust about some states being able to have nuclear weapons and other states not being able to have nuclear weapons."

"We need to say that we know, ultimately, we can't engage in non-proliferation unless we engage in disarmament." ❖

# Obama admits US role in 1953 Iran coup

**President Barack Obama has admitted US involvement in the 1953 coup in Iran which overthrew the democratically elected government of Premier Mohammad Mossadegh.**

"In the middle of the Cold War, the United States played a role in the overthrow of a democratically elected Iranian government," Obama said during his keynote speech to the Muslim world from Cairo University in the Egyptian capital.

It is the first time a sitting US president has publicly admitted American involvement in the coup.

The CIA, with British backing, masterminded the coup after Mossadegh nationalised the oil industry, run until then by the British-owned Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. The oil company had been for many decades the largest single financial asset of the British government.

For many Iranians, the coup demonstrated duplicity by the United States, which presented itself as a defender of freedom but did not hesitate to use underhand methods to get rid of a democratically elected government to suit its own economic and strategic interests (something the British were to note bitterly after Anglo-Iran's operations were taken over by an American consortium in the immediate post-coup years).

The 1953 Tehran skulduggery was the first time the CIA was directly involved in this type of action and its success fed into a long string of such involvements around the world, the democratically-elected government of president Jacobo Arbenz

Guzman in Guatemala being the next victim in 1954.

That same year, the Muslim Brotherhood was banned and decapitated in Egypt, with the Nasser regime being assisted by the guiding hand of Kerrmit 'Kim' Roosevelt, the same CIA operative who ran 'Operation Ajax', the code-name of the 1953 Iran coup.

The meat of Obama's words on Iran-US ties frankly noted, "For many years, Iran has defined itself in part by its opposition to my country, and there is in fact a tumultuous history between us."

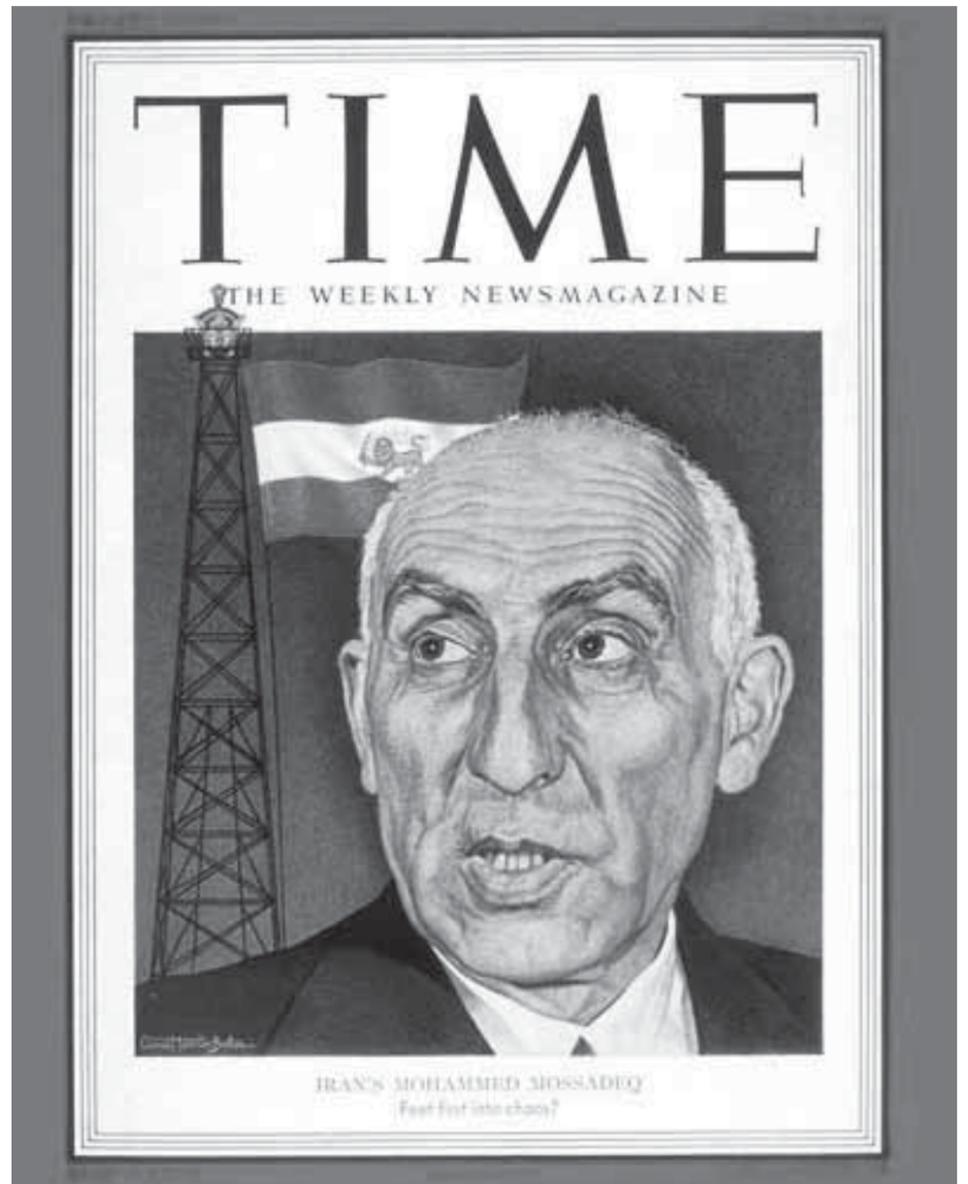
"Since the Islamic Revolution, Iran has played a role in acts of hostage-taking and violence against US troops and civilians. This history is well known.

"Rather than remain trapped in the past, I've made it clear to Iran's leaders and people that my country is prepared to move forward. The question now is not what Iran is against, but rather what future it wants to build."

Shortly after Obama's inauguration on January 20, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad demanded apologies for "crimes" he said the United States had committed against Iran, starting with the 1953 coup.

Ahead of Obama's speech, leader of the Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei had said, "Nations in the region hate the United States from the bottom of their hearts because they have seen violence, military intervention and discrimination (from that country)."

Press TV ❖



Mohammed Mossadeq was Time Magazine's "Man of the Year" in 1951.

'you are do it to us.'

# Israel destroying Gaza's farmlands

Eva Bartlett

**On the morning of May 4, 2009, Israeli troops set fire to Palestinian crops along Gaza's eastern border with Israel. The Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR) reported that 200,000 square metres of crops were destroyed, including wheat and barley ready for harvest, as well as vegetables, olive and pomegranate trees.**

Local farmers report that the blaze carried over a four-kilometre stretch on the Palestinian side of the eastern border land. Ibrahim Hassan Safadi, 49, from one of the farming families whose crops were destroyed by the blaze, said that the fires were smouldering until early evening, despite efforts by the fire brigades to extinguish them.

Safadi says he was present when Israeli soldiers fired small bombs into his field, which soon after caught ablaze. He explained that "The Israeli soldiers fired from their jeeps, causing a fire to break out on the land. They burned the wheat, burned the pomegranate trees... The fire spread across the valley. We called the fire brigades. They came to the area and put out the fire. But in some places the fire started again." According to Safadi, he lost 30,000 square metres to the blaze, including 300 pomegranate trees, 150 olive trees, and wheat.

In the border areas it has long since become nearly impossible to work on the land due to almost daily shooting from the Israeli soldiers. The crops that were burned on May 4 were dried and ready to harvest, meaning that they were extremely flammable.

"It took only three minutes for the fire to destroy 65,000 square metres," said Nahed Jaber Abu Said, whose farmland lies a few kilometres down the road from Safadi. He added that "It was nearly 9am. I was here when the Israeli jeeps came. An Israeli soldier at the fence shot an explosive into our field of wheat. It went up in flames immediately."

Safadi said that the arson attack was the third major time his farm has suffered from an Israeli attack. In previous attacks over the last decade, he explained, Israeli soldiers bulldozed his land, razing his lemon, olive and clementine trees as well as demolishing greenhouses.

## Army base shuts after rise in suicides

**The commander of Fort Campbell army base in Kentucky last month ordered a three-day suspension of regular duties to focus on a spike in suicides among his troops amid concern over a wider trend across the armed services.**

The "stand-down" at Fort Campbell, which is home to the famed 101st Airborne Division, has recorded the highest rate of suicide in the army, with at least 11 confirmed or suspected suicides.

The trauma of combat combined with the effect of repeated tours has led to a record rise in suicides across the armed services and – particularly the US Army – which has carried the heaviest burden in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Last year 128 US soldiers took

their lives, up from 115 in 2007, as tours of duty since 2001 have come ever more frequently and last longer.

With 64 confirmed or suspected suicides so far this year, the army looks likely to surpass last year's record numbers.

The 20.2 per 100,000 suicide rate among US soldiers is above the national record of 19.5 per 100,000 in 2005 in the United States.

In May a US soldier, Sergeant John Russell, allegedly sprayed his comrades with lethal gunfire at a mental health clinic at a US base in Baghdad, and he has been charged with five counts of murder. The case has underlined concerns about the psychological well-being of those serving in the military.

A Gazan farmer shows his burnt crops.



"We've suffered great losses. The Israeli soldiers have destroyed so much of our land, trees and equipment. They've cost us a lot of money," he said, citing cumulative losses of US\$330,000 since 2000 when the heightened invasions began. In the last attack, Safadi said that US\$130,000 worth of crops, trees and irrigation piping was destroyed. On top of the destruction, Safadi complains of not being able to replace destroyed items like the plastic hosing used to irrigate his fields. These, along with fertilizers and machinery replacement parts, are banned from entering Gaza due to the Israeli-led and internationally-backed whole-scale siege of the territory.

Abu Said reports losses of US\$2,000 on one patch of his land alone. "This isn't including the land closest to the border fence," he said. "I'm so sad now, what can I do?"

His experiences also extend beyond the May 4 attacks, and beyond the loss of land. In 2008, Israeli soldiers shot and killed 11 of his sheep and seriously injured a 15-year-old

cousin, Jaber, by shooting him in the mouth.

Attacks by Israeli soldiers occur on a near-daily basis along Gaza's borders with Israel. Nearly a decade ago, Israel unilaterally imposed a "buffer" or "no-go" zone solely on the Gaza side of their shared borders. According to the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) and the Palestinian Agricultural Relief Committee, the initial 100-metre "off-limits" area has now extended to one kilometre across much of Gaza's eastern border and two kilometres along the Strip's northern border. FAO further reports that roughly one-third of Gaza's agricultural land lies within the confines of the "buffer zone."

Since the January 18 ceasefire, three Palestinian civilians, including one child, have been killed in the "buffer zone" area from shooting and shelling by Israeli forces. Another 12 Palestinians have been injured, including three children and two women, due to Israeli fire along the border.

In addition to the physical threat

and the destruction of agricultural land and equipment, Gaza's farming sector is further devastated by the destruction of what is believed to be hundreds of wells and sources of water and the contamination of farmland due to Israel's invasion of Gaza at the beginning of the year. As reported by the British *Guardian* newspaper in February 2009, these attacks have left nearly 60 percent of Gaza's agricultural land useless.

The consequences of the active destruction of Gaza's farming sector are amplified within the context of Israel's siege and the stagnant state of rebuilding efforts since the ceasefire. With only a trickle of aid entering Gaza and poverty and

malnutrition rates soaring, the ability to produce food is all the more vital to Palestinians in Gaza.

Eva Bartlett is a Canadian human rights advocate and freelancer who arrived in Gaza in November 2008 on the third Free Gaza Movement boat. She has been volunteering with the International Solidarity Movement and documenting Israel's ongoing attacks on Palestinians in Gaza. During Israel's recent assault on Gaza, she and other ISM volunteers accompanied ambulances and documented the Israeli attacks on the Gaza Strip.

The Electronic Intifada ☪

## Venezuela targets private banks

**Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez has threatened to sanction private banks which fail to co-operate with his administration's drive to construct a socialist economy.**

Mr Chávez said that banks should facilitate exchange by providing credit to people buying houses or producing food, rather than generating massive profits for their owners.

"If private Venezuelan banks don't follow the path, comply with the constitution and the laws, they'll have to be sanctioned," he said.

"The only way this government and this socialist project will accept private banks is if they fulfil their duty to intermediate and join the government to promote economic development," Mr Chávez warned.

Caracas has stepped up its role in the banking sector since it reached an agreement with Spain's Santander to purchase its local unit Banco de Venezuela last month.

Once it formally assumes control of the bank on July 3, the government will become the nation's top financial player.

"We will have more economic power," Mr Chávez observed.

This is not the first time that his administration has threatened to go after banks that fail to abide by state regulations.

In January 2008, he threatened to seize private banks that neglected laws requiring them to set aside nearly a third of all loans for agriculture, mortgages and small businesses at favourable rates.

He has threatened to nationalise commercial banks before but has not followed through on most of those threats.

Mr Chávez has alleged that US intelligence agencies were behind a purported assassination plot that prevented him from visiting El Salvador to attend the inauguration of fellow left-winger Mauricio Funes last week.

"I don't doubt that the intelligence organisations of the United States are behind this," he charged, accusing them of plotting with Cuban terrorist Luis Posada Carriles to murder him.

*Morning Star* ☪

# Afghans need peace, not war

Pierre Williams

**WASHINGTON: "The people don't want 30,000 more troops, but instead 30,000 engineers, teachers and scientists," said Dr Roshanak Wardak, a member of the parliament in Afghanistan.**

She made the statement at an "issues briefing" on the war in Afghanistan that was held here during last week's "America's Future Now" Conference.

The panel was moderated by Robert Greenwald of Brave New Films. In addition to Wardak, Ann Jones, author of *Kabul in Winter, Life Without Peace in Afghanistan* and Anand Gopal, a writer for the *Christian Science Monitor*, presented.

All the panellists agreed that there are important questions about the war to which Americans are not receiving answers. The questions include the number of troops that might be sent there, the length of time for which they will be deployed and even what is the nature of the "end game" itself.

Greenwald said he was struck by three things during his trips to Afghanistan. First, he noted, was the extreme poverty in which most people lived, second was the extent to which the people were armed ("There are guns everywhere") and third is everyone in the country has some connection to the Taliban. "The Taliban," he said, "includes everybody because the Taliban are among everyone's friends and relatives. Everybody knows someone who is in the Taliban."

He said the implications of this situation are that the sending of additional troops will not "win" the

conflict. The people have to be won over, he said, by winning their "hearts and minds."

He said there are several "myths" that "must be disposed of."

The first of these, according to Greenwald, is that US troops bring security. "So far violence is up and there is no security," he said.

The second of these is that additional troops are needed to prevent civilian casualties. He noted that because the Taliban is so entrenched, the ground troop increases have done little to deliver any kind of final defeat to them. In fact, he noted, there has been additional use of "air support" because of this problem and the "air support" has caused more civilian deaths.

Jones discussed the role of women and the struggle for women's rights in Afghanistan.

She said that progressives should disavow themselves of any notion that the US defeat of the Taliban government was a victory for women's rights. She said that only some minimal "token" improvement for women had occurred in Kabul, the capital city itself.

"Women in the rural areas saw no change and in fact it got worse," she said, "because thousands of women are now displaced and widowed because of the war. Under the US-installed government women don't have the same constitutional rights as men. Their only rights are to obey their husbands and they have the right to pray, as long as they don't try to go into the mosques, where they are forbidden entrance."

Jones said that another problem with the presence of foreign troops

is that it makes Islamic husbands hold their wives and daughters more closely to home. "Women are already second class citizens and they have a US occupation that is helping reinforce the doctrine of male superiority."

When asked what Afghan women want, Jones said "Health, education and an adequate food supply is what women want."

Jones and Wadak discussed the Taliban at some length.

They said the Taliban is imbedded in Afghan society and that some of them were well educated. They said they gain support from the people, in part, because each member is "a brother, a husband or a son to someone who is not in the Taliban."

They said, also, "There are different types of Taliban and they cannot be all lumped together."

All the panellists noted that the United States bears responsibility for the growth of some of the worse elements of the Taliban, beginning with the time that the US supported the Taliban as a means to defeating left, progressive and Communist governments in Afghanistan and continuing today with the occupation, which breeds popular resentment.

The panellists said that some of the problems revolve even around the way in which non-military aid is delivered to the country. Use of private contractors, they said, has been a disaster because the contractors siphon off the aid.

"Then you have people who were promised help getting no help. Now they believe the US has lied to them and that we are really just there to occupy them and destroy their



"Privileges which women, by right, must have are equal education, job security, health services, and free time to rear a healthy generation for building the future of the country ... Educating and enlightening women is now the subject of close government attention." Editorial from the *Kabul Times* in 1978 during the years of the People's Democratic Republic of Afghanistan.

religion. Use of private contractors helps fuel the Taliban."

The solution, the panellists agreed, lies along several fronts.

First, there should be a halt in the air raids. Entire villages of innocent people are being killed, creating a bigger refugee problem and fuelling a larger Taliban.

Second, an Afghan Peace Corp should be developed to convert military aid into real economic assistance that goes directly to the people.

Third, negotiate settlements with the insurgents. Since they cannot be dislodged from the population

by military means, there must be negotiations.

Fourth, support the progressives in Afghanistan who will back this approach.

Fifth, set up timelines for withdrawal of military troops.

The Reverend Pierre Williams is a part-time chaplain at Baltimore's Harbour Hospital. He is a Vietnam War veteran and a member of the national board of Veterans Against the War. He attended last week's "America's Future Now Conference."

*People's Weekly World* ✪

# Vietnam develops world's best cholera vaccine

David Pena

**Vietnam's Vaccine and Biomedical Product Company No. 1 (VaBiotech) has developed a new cholera vaccine that is superior to others currently in use. "The new vaccine offers 90 to 100 percent protection after two oral doses in comparison with 60 to 70 percent with the current vaccine," said Dr Nguyen Tran Hien, director of Vietnam's National Institute of Hygiene and Epidemiology.**

Registered under the trademark MORACVAX, it produces a strong immune system response in

children, who are most susceptible to cholera, as well as adults. Killed *Vibrio Cholerae*, the bacterium that causes cholera, serves as the vaccine's antigen. This is safer than using a live antigen, which can cause severe adverse effects.

Besides safety, cost is a major concern with vaccines, particularly in developing countries where cholera poses a serious health threat. At US\$1.25 per dose, MORACVAX is the world's first cholera vaccine that is inexpensive enough for widespread use in the developing world. Sweden is the only other country that produces a vaccine

with an equally high success rate, but it costs US\$10.00 to \$30.00 per dose, and is used primarily by travellers from developed countries.

Cholera is a bacterial infection of the intestinal tract that results in severe diarrhoea followed by death from dehydration. One of the swiftest killers known to medicine, patients can go into shock and die in as little as three hours unless treated immediately with oral rehydration therapy. Cholera is usually transmitted through ingestion of water contaminated by faecal matter harbouring cholera bacteria.

The disease is thought to have originated in Asia, with the earliest recorded epidemic occurring in India in 1563. In the 19th century, cholera killed millions as it spread throughout the world in a series of six pandemics, the last of which ended in 1923.

The world is now in the midst of a seventh cholera pandemic that began in Indonesia in 1961. This pandemic, largely unknown to the Western public, brought new strains of cholera to Bangladesh, India, the former USSR, North Africa, Italy, Japan, Mexico, South Africa and the South Pacific. Recent years

have seen outbreaks in Iraq and Vietnam, but the majority of new cases (approximately 130,000 infections in 2008-09) have been reported in sub-Saharan Africa, particularly in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Angola, Mozambique and Zimbabwe. It is estimated that 100,000 to 200,000 people will die from cholera every year.

Vietnam has long been at the forefront of cholera prevention through public vaccination programs, challenging the practice, promoted for years by aid organisations, of de-emphasising vaccinations due to high costs, low success rates, and safety concerns. The routine practice was to provide stockpiles of oral rehydration solution and chlorine tablets to at-risk populations while stressing development of clean water supplies.

It was in the mid-1980s that Vietnam began working on its first oral cholera vaccine for use in its public health program. The resulting vaccine had a 66 percent success rate, a good safety record, and a production cost as low as 20 cents per dose. Since 1997, over nine

million doses of this first-generation vaccine have been used in Vietnam.

In 2001, due to cholera's persistence and the apparent failures of the established preventive measures, the World Health Organisation (WHO) began advocating worldwide use of oral vaccines. In response to the call, Vietnam began working with WHO and the International Vaccine Institute – the world's only international organisation devoted exclusively to the research and development of new vaccines for developing countries – to create a new version of the Vietnamese vaccine that would meet WHO regulations for worldwide distribution. MORACVAX is the result of this project.

Last February, the vaccine was licensed for production in India and is undergoing trials. In May, VaBiotech produced the first batch of MORACVAX for distribution in Vietnam. The company is capable of manufacturing 10 million doses per year. MORACVAX and the Vietnamese bio-tech industry are poised to play a decisive role in ending the seventh cholera pandemic.

*People's Weekly World* ✪

Dec 27 '09 to Jan 20 '10 \$1000\*

**>>> Cuba**

**... be more than a tourist!**

Join the 27<sup>th</sup> Southern Cross Work/Study Tour and support Cuba in the most direct manner by working alongside Cubans for a few days picking fruit or pruning fruit trees and then visiting schools, hospitals, urban agriculture projects, etc. You will experience at first hand the cultural, political and social conditions in socialist Cuba. This year's program will give participants an insight into how the Cuban people have triumphed over past 50 years of revolution. [robert@conceptis.com.au](mailto:robert@conceptis.com.au)  
0408624629 or visit our website for further information:  
\*International airfares not included

**www.cubabrigade.org.au**

Sydney

**Another anniversary 97 years with the people Communist Party of Chile**

We invite you to share a political/cultural tribute to the martyrs and heroes of our people

Thursday 11 June 2009 7.00pm  
Cyprus Community Centre, 5-76 Carlingford Rd, Stanmore

**POSTPONED**

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



email: tpearson@cpa.org.au

## A Request To comrades & friends

I have started sorting out Peter Symon's archives. You may remember that a lot of historic archives were lost during the fire at the 65 Campbell Street party offices. Still, quite a lot of material survived. Among the newspaper cuttings, leaflets etc were a number of letters written before the formation of the Socialist Party of Australia plus other documents. Sometimes I come across copies of Peter's letters which may reflect on some political events or contain general remarks. As an example, the following is an excerpt from a letter written in 1992 and addressed to Bill James, Peter's long-time correspondent in SA.

"... You do me something of an injustice. I have never memorised Marxist tracts except, perhaps some of the briefest phrases. It is much more important to understand the essence and meaning of Marxism, of dialectical materialism, and be able to

apply it to each daily circumstance. Mechanical memory is dangerous as it will almost certainly turn a living science into a dogma. Many have done just that and greatly disserved socialism..."

This is by way of a request to those of you who may have Peter's letters or other correspondence to share them with us. Photocopies of originals are fine. The purpose is to collect all possible material while we can as much as get lost or thrown out over time. Please ask around and don't hesitate to get in touch if you need some help in either picking up or sending the material.

Correspondence should be sent to: Natasha Symon,  
74 Buckingham Street  
Surry Hills 2010.  
Phone: (02) 9699 8844.  
Thank you.

Natasha Symon

## As GM slashes, where to from here?

With General Motors filing for bankruptcy and announcing it will close 14 plants in the US, throwing thousands of workers on the scrap heap, what is the way forward for autoworkers and their communities? A few quick thoughts.

The closing plants should be placed on stand-by status with the workers receiving full pay while being trained now to build fast trains, solar cells or wind turbines.

If there are no American-based companies ready to convert the plants

to the new production, Canadian companies like Bombardier and European companies like Gamesa should be invited to bid to take the plants over and build the high-speed trains and wind turbines they have been producing for years.

Same goes with solar cell (Electronic Conversion Devices in Troy, Michigan) and plug-in hybrid battery (Sanyo from Japan) production, if US companies are not ready to move in immediately.

I also understand that hybrid buses are mostly made outside of the US, as well. In any case, cities like Detroit will need tax credits to buy them no matter where they are made.

Tax credits will also be needed to motivate buyers to trade in their gas-guzzlers for plug-in hybrids (the Chevy Volt is going for US\$40,000).

Stimulus money needs to go into constructing fast-train tracks and not just into road construction.

The biggest causes for the current crisis, of course, are the state of the economy and the credit crisis. Both of these need to be fixed or nobody will be buying any cars, foreign or domestic.

I was struck by how easy it was to get the Detroit Three to accept the higher federal fuel-efficiency standards after attacking them for 20 years. It makes me wonder what would have happened if the United Auto Workers had bargained for a concession from General Motors and Chrysler – namely their endorsement of a public health care plan and use of executive bonuses to pay UAW

members' way to march in DC and lobby for it.

My main reaction, though, comes from seeing the contrast in how the worldwide crisis in auto was treated in different countries. When France and Germany gave public money to their domestic manufacturers, it was with the understanding that no jobs would be lost or plants closed.

It's looking like GM and Chrysler are using bankruptcy to wage the biggest union-busting campaign ever.

I also don't believe GM will ultimately be smaller worldwide. They will merely supplement their reduced US production with even more imports from low-wage countries, particularly China.

Finally, the Detroit Big Three need to be held to the same standard Toyota has set for itself. Jim Press, its former VP, once said that whatever Toyota sells here, it intends to build here.

Sam Stark  
United Auto Worker retiree

## Work for the Dole – Injured for Life

What happens when Work for the Dole results in serious injury?

In the 12 months since my Work for the Dole injury, the following organisations and individuals cannot help me:

The job network and community work co-ordinator who sent me out to the Work for the Dole program where I sustained the injury and have returned the unpaid medical accounts

to me despite their assurance that the expenses would be paid;

The host organisation where I participated in the Work for the Dole program, public liability doesn't cover Work for the Dole participants because they are not considered to be part of the public or volunteers;

Workcover cannot help me because I am a volunteer;

The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations and their insurer, who deny my claims at every turn, and are reluctant to reply to my inquiries;

The Federal MP for DEEWR and my local Federal MP who can't seem to reply to me at all;

The MP for Employment Participation who believes I should be working with DEEWR to resolve my complaint with DEEWR;

The Commonwealth Ombudsman who believes I should work with DEEWR to resolve the situation;

Legal Aid who will not take the case because it is compensatory in nature, and because the law is unclear in the area of Work for the Dole injuries;

Legal Advisers who are not willing to take the case without payment of fees;

Centrelink who have stopped accepting my medical certificates in relation to the injury;

Continued prompting by the Job Network to return to work despite my injury being left untreated because I cannot afford the medical expenses.

Who can help me?

Jillian Marchant

# Culture & Life

by Rob Gowland

## Buried in a plastic coffin?

Plastic, a by-product of coal and oil, first appeared at the end of the 19th century, but really took off in the mid 20th century, helped along in a big way by the Second World War. During the War the US developed a tremendous productive capacity making cheap, flexible and disposable products for the war effort. After the War it sought other outlets to maintain its profit flow, and plastics were applied to all manner of uses and products.

By 1979, the US was making more plastic than steel.

So what's wrong with that? One small but significant fact: there are almost no micro-organisms that can degrade plastic. Except for what has been incinerated, most of the plastic that has been made since the end of the 19th century is still around. And burning it, bear in mind, generates toxins and a large amount of CO<sub>2</sub>.

"For anyone who's wondered what eventually happens to all the plastic in water bottles, packaging, and hundreds of other everyday uses, the feature-length documentary *Addicted to Plastic* offers a visually compelling, entertaining, ultimately frightening explanation", says Jeffrey L Meikle, Professor of American Studies at the University of Texas

in Austin. Meikle is the author of *American Plastic: A Cultural History*.

*Addicted to Plastic* is screening on the ABC next week (ABC1 Thursday June 18 at 9.25pm). It should be essential viewing for anyone concerned about the environment and the future of the planet.

As Meikle says of this Canadian film: "*Addicted to Plastic* is an absorbing, shocking, only partially reassuring odyssey. Candid interviews, especially a particularly revealing one with a representative of the industry's American Plastics Council, permit viewers to form their own opinions."

Erroneously deemed to be disposable, plastic is dumped in landfill or simply thrown away, to be washed – or flushed – down drains and gutters to the ocean. The film starts in the heart of the Central gyre in the northern Pacific. In the five large areas of ocean in the world (the north and south Atlantic, north and south Pacific and the Indian Ocean) the weight of atmosphere pressing down on the ocean surface causes a shallow depression around which currents rotate, rather like a slow but gigantic toilet bowl. These are called gyres.

Sea-borne rubbish accumulates in the gyres. The one in the northern Pacific is actually known as the Eastern Garbage Patch. And it's not a small problem: the UN estimates that there are 46,000 pieces of plastic in every square mile of the ocean. And only half of all plastics float.

But won't the action of sun and sea get rid of the problem? No. Sea water and sunlight break up the pieces of plastic into small particles (like confetti or plankton, eventually) but that's all. In fact, research has found that there is now ten times more plastic in the ocean than there is plankton.

But when plastic is broken down to that size it becomes indistinguishable from food for small fish and other sea creatures. Additionally, there is the problem of "nerdles".

All plastic products start out as tiny nerdles that resemble fish eggs in size and shape. Nerdles make up ten percent of the plastic waste floating in the ocean. They accumulate chemical



Director Ian Connacher of *Addicted to Plastic*

pollutants like pesticides that wash down from farms and from factory drains. Not unexpectedly, they also get eaten by fish and other sea creatures, which are in turn eaten by bigger fish and so the pollutants accumulate in the food chain until they end up on your plate.

Ocean-borne plastic waste is not confined to the middle of the five gyres, however. In Holland, for example, seven to eight kilos of it washes ashore on every kilometre of beach every day.

Plastic was sold to the consumers in developed capitalist countries with advertising that declared the throw-away economy would free people from household drudgery and give them "more leisure time".

Today, this disposable life-style is being foisted on India, changing its labour-intensive repair economy into an industry-dependent throw-away one. As one of the country's environmental activists points out in the film, India is already the second-most polluted country on Earth. "We will drown in plastic waste if business is left to do what it wants" she complains.

But won't recycling fix the problem? It depends how it's done. One hundred billion pounds of plastic is produced in the US each year, but only five percent of it is recycled. And most recycling specialises in only a few types of plastic, but, as the film shows, there are ways of recycling that can use it all. However, private enterprise alone will not be enough.

The afore-mentioned American Plastics Council, for example, tries to sheet the blame for plastic pollution home to the consumers rather than producers and retailers, but it is clear that governments need to regulate industry and industry in turn must adopt the new products and methods that have been developed to deal with this problem specifically: use bio-plastics, vegetable-based plastics that degrade into water and CO<sub>2</sub>; the Japanese have developed a system that turns plastic back into oil, for use in heaters, cars, etc.

A company in Texas takes any plastic, uses it to make carpets for airport terminals and the like, and fuels the production process with methane from a nearby landfill. The company spokesperson anticipates that in future

landfills will be "mined" for plastic waste with which to make products. Another US company exports railway sleepers made from recycled plastic (off all types) all over the world.

But they are the exception: capitalist corporations in the main are still too interested in making money from plastic to be bothered about changing to other methods or other products. Only governments backed by popular pressure can change that.

And change it we must, or else eventually our only option could be to choose to be buried in a plastic coffin, if there is anyone left to bury us. ☘

Gremlins at work again: last week's Culture & Life was beset by the gremlins that bedevil newspapers everywhere. The caption to the photo of a "blighted" or boarded up house that accompanies that particular Culture & Life was meant to say "Around 31 percent of residential properties in New Orleans are either unoccupied or blighted."



Sun 14 June –  
Sat 20 June

I never cared for the detective stories of Australian author Arthur Upfield. His outback settings were authentic enough but he imbued his detective, Napoleon Bonaparte, with semi-mystical abilities and prowess that supposedly derived from his part-Aboriginal descent.

It seemed to me that this was too unreal, that it worked only with the sort of people who believe that Indigenous people have “powers we know nothing about”. However, there are apparently a lot of such people around, for Upfield’s books sold very well, not only here in Australia but also in Britain and the US.

The feature-length telemovie made by the ABC, Taylor Media and Screen West, *3 Acts Of Murder* (ABC1 8.30pm Sunday June 14), tells the true story of how, in 1929, a young stockman, Snowy Rolls, murdered three people and disposed of the bodies using a method derived from one of Upfield’s “Boney” stories.

At the time, Upfield was one of the men working on the up-keep of the rabbit-proof fence in rural WA. Written by Ian David, the telemovie captures not only the look but also the feel of the outback at the time.

Disturbed veterans of WW1 still

wandered the country, unable to settle back into civilian life after the carnage of Gallipoli or Flanders. The country was very unforgiving, and survival often depended on having a mate (a relationship rather like having a diving buddy today) and men were loath indeed to distrust or believe ill of a mate.

Upfield, seeking a difficult conundrum for “Boney” to solve, canvasses his few acquaintances for ideas for a “perfect murder”. One of his listeners, Snowy Rolls, puts the resultant method into practice, in order to acquire first a utility truck and then a rifle.

But Upfield has written the method into his new book, and when the book is published the solution is there for all to see.

I think Ian David has written one of the best – and most authentic – Australian dramas I have seen in a long time. It makes the phoney melodrama of *Australia* look particularly weak. Some may find the pace, especially in the early stages, a little slow, but I thought it was just right.

Robert Menzies plays Upfield with tremendous realism, getting right under the skin of his character. Luke Ford makes Snowy Rolls plausible and credible.

The scene where Snowy sells his old car to an Aboriginal trapper after giving him one lesson in driving might seem unreal, but when my father-in-law used to sell cars in Queensland to farmers, he too turned them loose on the roads with their new machine after just one lesson.

The six-part series *Nature’s Great Events* (ABC1 Sundays at 7.30pm) is another high-quality wildlife program from the BBC, narrated by David Attenborough of course, and marked by stunning photography.

The first episode, *The Great*

Irrepressible police officer Gwen Cooper (Eve Myles) jumps ship to join a covert “Special Ops” team led by the enigmatic Captain Jack Harkness (John Barrowman). *Torchwood* (ABC2 Fridays at 8.30pm)



*Melt*, features marvellous time-lapse sequences showing the melting of the Polar seas, but it also makes you painfully aware of just how precarious is the position of the Polar Bear in a time of global warming.

*Ben’s Zoo* (ABC2 Wednesdays at 8.00pm) is an observational documentary series that follows the struggle of writer Ben Mee and his family after they mortgage everything to buy the run-down Dartmoor Wildlife Park in Devon to save it and its hundreds of animals from being put down.

Ben has no experience of animal care and the park has huge problems to overcome before it will be allowed to re-open, but Ben and the few remaining keepers are keen to try. Some of the keepers have been buying

food and medication to keep the animals alive out of their own pockets.

Ben is clearly a sentimentalist and from the first episode you feel that he should take more notice of his experienced keepers, but he’s risked a lot for this venture and certainly has plenty of dreams for the park’s future, assuming it has one.

*Torchwood* (ABC2 Fridays at 8.30pm) is a spin-off from *Doctor Who*, and ran on late-night commercial HD here some while ago. It has not enjoyed anything like the kind of popularity that *Doctor Who* has been blessed with, but that is only to be expected: it is made exclusively for adults.

Where the adventures of the good Doctor are always to some extent light-hearted, even when the future of all life in the universe depends on a successful outcome, *Torchwood*’s tone is that of a regular adult-oriented thriller: blood flows copiously when monsters kill, government agencies conspire, and people blow their brains out from despair.

The series fluctuates in quality, depending on the originality and imaginativeness of the script for each episode, but at its best this is a splendidly exciting and engaging adult romp, with all the conceits of modern science-fiction casually embodied in the fabric of the show. (*Torchwood* is located in Cardiff, its headquarters directly on top of the “rift in time and space” created in the *Doctor Who* episode

“Boom Town”; lethal aliens infest the sewers; *Torchwood*’s leader, Captain Jack Harkness, cannot die; etc).

I found Harkness (played by John Barrowman and usually described in the publicity as “charismatic”) to have little charisma, but perhaps he will improve with time. Much more charismatic is Eve Myles as Gwen, the female copper who invades *Torchwood* in search of the truth and stays to become part of the team.

And finally, there is the new drama series *Being Human* (ABC2 Fridays at 9.20pm), which clearly owes a huge debt to Stephenie Meyer, creator of the *Twilight* series of books about vampires and werewolves, and their interaction with humans.

*Being Human* adds one extra non-human in the form of a melancholy young woman’s ghost. These three misfits live together (and two of them work together in the same hospital too), while trying – like Stephenie Meyer’s vampire hero’s family – not to be monsters.

The werewolf here has the traditional characteristics, changing into his wolf form at the full moon (unlike those in *Twilight*), but the ghost is very three-dimensional in the modern manner of US television shows (which is also curiously the manner of Japanese traditional ghost depictions).

How the series develops will be interesting to watch. ☼

## Harvest Time and other poems

### Vic Williams

\$12.50 (p&p \$2.50)

Vic Williams was brought up on a farm. As a boy, he enjoyed working with his father, blowing the forge, harnessing and feeding horses. With his dog he hunted and trapped rabbits, and roamed the bush. His father gave him books of Australian bush poets writing at the time, Lawson, Ogilvie, Patterson and he felt that poetry was close to the life he led.

One of the many books available at **Shop@CPA** 74 Buckingham Street, Surry Hills, NSW 2010 Ph 02 9699 8844  
Payment by Cheques, Money Orders (Make out to “CPA”) Credit Cards (include type, name, number & expiry date)

**Special offer subscription to The Guardian**

10 issues: \$10    12 MONTHS: \$88 (\$80 conc.)    6 months: \$45 (\$40)

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

POSTCODE: \_\_\_\_\_

Pay by  Cheque  Money order (Payable to “Guardian Publications”)

Send to: Guardian Subscriptions  
74 Buckingham St, Surry Hills, NSW 2010, Australia

or by credit card:  Mastercard  Visa

Card# \_\_\_\_\_

Amount: \_\_\_\_\_ Expiry Date: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

## The Guardian

Editorial Office  
74 Buckingham St, Surry Hills, 2010  
Ph: 02 9699 8844 Fax: 02 9699 9833  
Email: guardian@cpa.org.au

Editor: Tom Pearson

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

Sydney

# POLITICS *in the pub*

**June 12**  
**What is Driving the Nsw Government’s Privatisation Agenda – What Should Be Stopped?**  
Bob Walker, Prof, Accounting, Sydney Uni  
Betty Walker, Dr, Economic Consultant  
John Kaye, Dr, Greens, MLC, NSW

**June 19**  
**THE G20 – WHAT WILL IT DELIVER?**  
Stephen Long, ABC journalist  
Ross Buckley, Law School, UNSW, Policy Adviser to Jubilee Australia

**June 26**  
**Feminism – The Unfinished Revolution!**  
Anne Summers, writer and author *The End of Equality*,  
*The Lost Mother – Art & Love*, publication July 2009  
Emily Maguire, writer and author *Taming the Beast*,  
*The Gospel According to Luke, Princesses & Pornstars: Sex, Power, Identity*  
Catherine Fox, journalist *Financial Review*, co-author (with Jane Caro)  
*The F Word and how we learnt to swear by feminism*

**Every Friday 6pm ‘til 7.45**  
**Gaelic Club**  
64 Devonshire Street Surry Hills

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

# India's Swiss connection

CP Chandrasekhar

**With the final phase of the Indian elections over and the complex process of government formation under way, it is inevitable that many issues that surfaced during the campaign will not receive much public attention. One such is the debate over the large volumes of money that have allegedly been taken out of the country and put away in banks in Switzerland and other locations where secrecy regarding those accounts is assured.**

Money of that kind is tainted; it is a drain of wealth from the country; and the sums involved are large. Not surprisingly, the issue of monies stashed away by India's rich and powerful in numbered accounts in Swiss and similar banks is periodically raised, provokes controversy and then enters a period of hibernation.

This periodic revival is understandable for a number of reasons. Most often the transfer of money to Swiss bank accounts involves a violation of tax, foreign exchange and/or other laws of the country, and therefore is illegal and morally repugnant. To boot, the sums involved are not small. Finally, these reflect surpluses that could be used to finance much needed development initiatives in the country, but are now being kept idle abroad to facilitate illegal accumulation.

Their existence is symbolic of an elite that places self before nation. This is even truer in the case of alleged payoffs for award of defence contracts. The moral and nationalistic indignation this generates leads to the correct demands that the violations of law that permit the accumulation of such wealth abroad need to be investigated, the offenders must be prosecuted and the money brought back and directed towards pushing growth and improving welfare. Morality aside, equity demands that the rule of law should prevail for all.

Currently, three factors have combined to revive the controversy in India. First, early this year, in a major breakthrough, prosecutors from the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) investigating violations of tax laws by American citizens, managed to force UBS – Switzerland's largest bank – to reveal the names of 250 nationals who were suspected of evading payment of about \$300 million (all amounts in US dollars) in taxes by using offshore accounts. The bank also agreed to pay the US government a sum of \$780 million to settle the issue.

These sums are indeed small. But this decision on the part of a banking system that thrives because of the country's secrecy laws was a huge concession with major ramifications. Even in the case of the US, the 250 names involved were a small proportion of the 19,000 accounts that are allegedly held by Americans in Swiss banks.

The sums held by these 250 would only be a small fraction of the \$20 billion that the IRS suspects was illegally ferreted away between 2002 and 2007. Pressure on the Swiss banking industry to reveal more was bound to increase. That pressure is yielding results and threatens to have implications beyond a spat between the IRS and the Swiss banks.

If secrecy laws were being relaxed to accommodate the US because it is an important economic player, it would become difficult for the system to resist pressures to reveal the names and details of account holders from other

countries, including developing countries like India, which need the money to raise low per capita incomes and reduce poverty. On the other side, the pressure on governments to demand, obtain and act on similar information increases. Thus, the possibility that the sums involved could be tracked and investigated was bound to revive the issue in India.

## Strong case for repatriation

The second factor leading to a revival of the debate was the release of estimates of how much money could be illicitly flowing to accounts abroad from developing countries in general and India in particular. Provided by Global Financial Integrity, a program of think-tank Centre for International Policy, these estimates based on accepted methodologies suggest that illicit flows from developing countries amounted to between \$858.6 billion and \$1.06 trillion in 2006.

India ranked fifth among developing countries with illicit outflows of around \$22 billion to \$27 billion a year during 2002-2006, following Russia (\$32-\$38 billion), Mexico (\$41-\$46 billion), Saudi Arabia (\$54-\$55 billion) and China (\$233-\$289 billion).

If a quarter of that could be recovered as tax it could go a long way to finance the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme each year. And if the whole amount is spent within the country it would amount to a demand stimulus of close to three and a half percent of GDP, which could help reverse the current slowdown in growth. If there is so much money that could be kept back at home the issue is bound to be controversial, even if the figure is just an estimate.

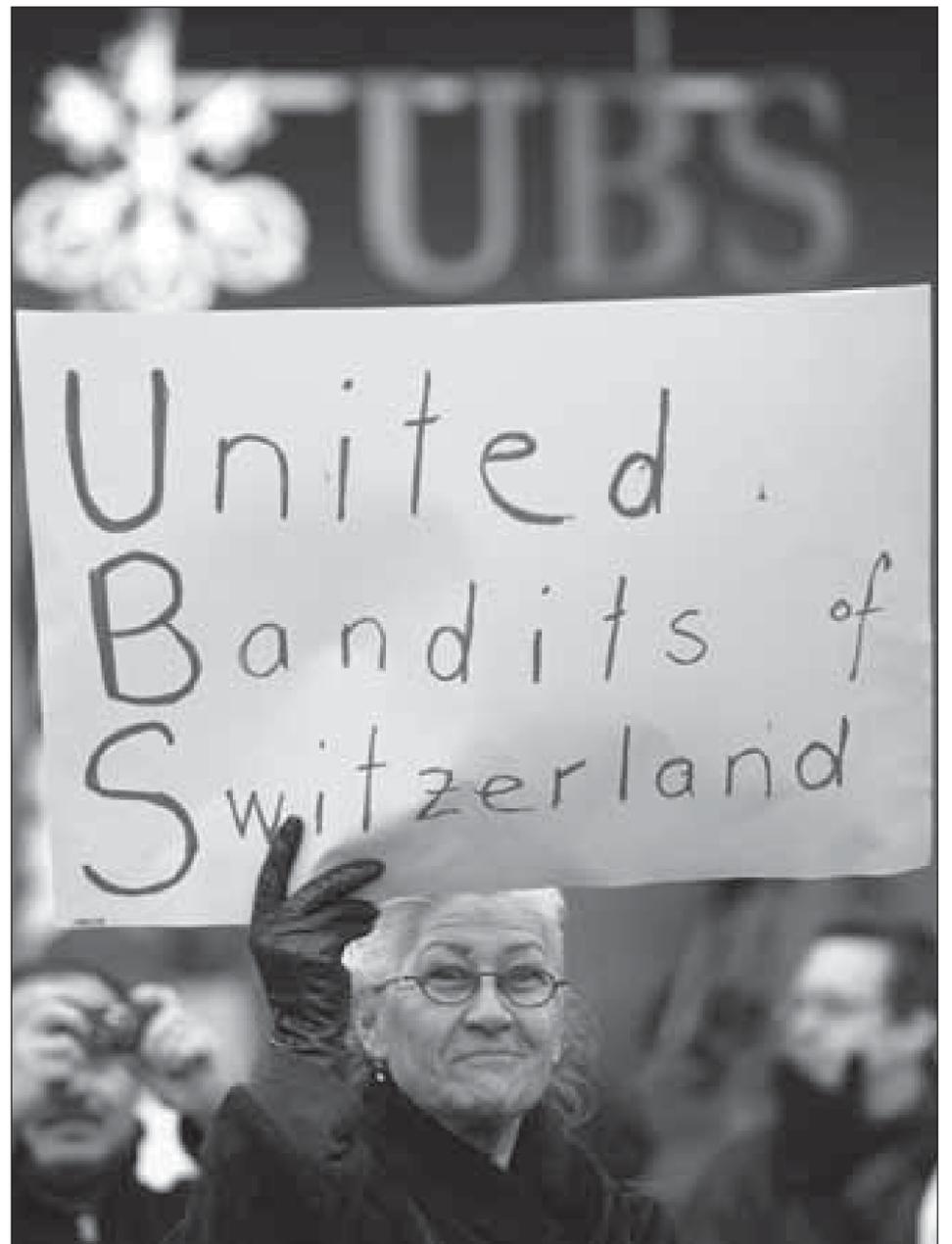
Finally, all this occurred when India was in election mode. With an issue at hand which can provoke moral indignation and fuel nationalistic sentiment, it would be too much to expect the opposition to let it be – never mind the fact that flows of this kind were occurring even when the principal opposition party, the BJP, was in power.

Whatever the combination of circumstances that have brought the issue to the fore once again, the case for exploiting the opportunity is strong. Domestically, tax and foreign exchange laws must be implemented more stringently. And internationally, the government must exert itself to obtain the information that could reduce, even if not put an end, to this menace.

One route to take would be to use the opportunity afforded by the hole in the Swiss banking wall created by the recent limited success of US law makers to suck out information on Indian offenders as well. The other is to work towards a better global environment for obtaining information that can help reduce this form of accumulation of black money. With increasing concern the world over regarding the role of tax havens in promoting tax evasion and money laundering, there is an opportunity now.

## Tax evasion and tax avoidance

All this having been said, however, a few words of caution are in order. First, the concern with illicit outflows should not divert attention from the larger issue of tax evasion and avoidance which plague developing countries like India. Illicit outflows to Swiss and other foreign banks are only one part of the black money



A woman protests out the front of UBS headquarters during the European bank crisis last year.

generated in the system. Much of it remains in the country.

Such domestically retained illicit wealth can be more easily identified and taxed and the generation of new illicit wealth (that may or may not go abroad) more easily plugged. And estimates on the size of the black economy, the volume of tax evasion, and the amount of disputed and unresolved claims on Indians by the tax department are all as mind-boggling as the figures on illicit outflows of wealth.

Moreover, the issue is not just of tax evasion but of tax avoidance facilitated by the loopholes present in and concessions afforded by the tax laws. Examining the revenues foregone because of tax concessions is a first simple lesson on what can be done to find the money to do a lot that remains undone for "want of resources".

Second, concern with illicit outflows should not divert attention from the licit flows that are on the rise because of financial liberalisation. Till the early 1990s Swiss accounts allegedly held by Indians were seen not just as the result of ill-gotten wealth. They, it was argued, were the result of regulation of foreign exchange use that placed limits on accessing foreign exchange.

What the more recent estimates show is that even after the substantial liberalisation of rules relating to accessing and using foreign exchange, monies are being transferred and held abroad. Through a variety of illicit and licit means, funds are being transferred abroad to acquire assets and hold balances.

The point to note is that this transfer of foreign exchange abroad is not linked to the earning of such foreign exchange. Nor is it accompanied by an increase in the ability of India to earn a positive surplus of foreign exchange through trade in goods and services and incomes generated from investment abroad. India records a deficit in its current account, so that any excess foreign exchange it possesses has not been "earned" but has been "borrowed".

It is a part of that borrowed foreign exchange that is being transferred abroad with no likelihood of return. It could happen that there could be occasions where demands to fulfil commitments on past debt substantially exceed current earnings and inflows, leading to instability and crises of a kind that are now common in the developing world. At that point of time, the burden of adjustment falls on all, not just on those who have ferreted away foreign currency in the past. This too is unacceptable.

Preventing such an outcome requires restricting unnecessary and restrictive inflows and unwarranted outflows in countries where a historically determined subordinate position in global trade and investment flows makes foreign exchange a valuable resource. This should not be forgotten either by parties or individual politicians when they vent their moral outrage at illicit outflows. Unfortunately that is what many of them tend to do.

*People's Democracy*, Communist Party of India (Marxist) ★

**These estimates suggest that illicit flows from developing countries amounted to between \$858.6 billion and \$1.06 trillion in 2006.**



Communist Party of Australia

Website: [www.cpa.org.au](http://www.cpa.org.au)  
Email: [cpa@cpa.org.au](mailto:cpa@cpa.org.au)

**Central Committee:**  
**General Secretary:** Dr Hannah Middleton  
**Party President:** Vinnie Molina  
74 Buckingham St, Surry Hills, 2010  
Ph: 02 9699 8844 Fax: 02 9699 9833  
**Sydney District Committee:**  
Tony Oldfield  
74 Buckingham St, Surry Hills, 2010  
Ph: 02 9699 8844 Fax: 02 9699 9833

**Newcastle Branch:**  
303 Hunter St  
Newcastle NSW 2300  
Ph: ah 02 4926 1752  
**South Coast Branch:**  
Janice Hamilton  
16/26-30 Hutton Ave  
Bulli NSW 2516  
Ph: 02 4283 6130

The Guardian

**Riverina Branch:**  
Allan Hamilton  
2/57 Cooper St Cootamundra 2590  
Ph: 02 6942 6728  
**Melbourne Branch:**  
Andrew Irving  
PO Box 3 Room 0 Trades Hall  
Lygon St Carlton Sth 3053  
Ph: 03 9639 1550 Fax: 03 9639 4199

Website: [www.cpa.org.au/guardian/guardian.html](http://www.cpa.org.au/guardian/guardian.html)  
Email: [guardian@cpa.org.au](mailto:guardian@cpa.org.au)

**West Australian Branch:** Vic Williams  
5B Jemerson St Willagee Perth 6156  
Ph: 08 9337 1074  
**Brisbane Branch:** David Matters  
PO Box 33, Camp Hill, Qld 4152  
Ph: 0419 769 129  
**South Australian State Committee:**  
Bob Briton, PO Box 612, Port Adelaide BC,  
SA 5015 Ph: 0418 894 366