



World Food Summit on Food Security Rich nations turn backs on one billion hungry

Anna Pha

The refusal of the rich nations to commit to firm targets and make the required financial commitments at the World Food Summit held in Rome from November 16-18 has strong parallels with the recent climate change negotiations in Barcelona (see Guardian 18-11-2009). At both conferences the industrialised nations hindered progress and undermined the authority and role of the United Nations.

The Rome summit, held under the auspices of the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation's (FAO), failed to establish a target for eradicating hunger or to make a firm commitment in dollars on the urgently required funds for agricultural aid, rejecting specific proposals from the FAO's director general.

The ETC Group* summed it up: "The declaration coming out of the World Food Summit for Food Security in Rome is even worse than the 'shameful' document adopted by world leaders in 1996, so famously criticised by Cuba's Fidel Castro. Governments won't promise anything to anybody. The only issue really being debated in Rome is whether control of the UN's Department of Agriculture will be wrested from the UN's Rome-based agencies and surrendered to an amorphous, G8 conjured, public-private compact called the Global Partnership for Agriculture, Food Security and Nutrition. If the Partnership prevails, national sovereignty fails, and civil society's hopes for Food Sovereignty will suffer."

Most nations were represented by their presidents, prime ministers or deputy leaders, but the leaders of the rich nations snubbed the conference. The one exception was a short appearance by Italy's Berlusconi, whose office was a short drive away. The US was represented by someone from USAID and Australia sent along Tony Burke, Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry.

Undermining the UN

In Barcelona the aim of the industrialised nations was to put the G20 in charge, and at the FAO summit it was, as pointed out by the ETC Group, to shift the decision-making to the G8's (the group of eight richest nations) Global Partnership and other organisations such as the World Bank where the voices of the majority of (poor) nations are either not heard or not listened to. The G8's priorities are not based on guaranteeing the world's poor eat but on ensuring their corporate masters are not starved of their sacred profits.

"To carbon traders, agriculture is a money-maker. To food negotiators, it is a billion people hungry with more on the way due to global warming. The food/climate summitry obscures a critical battle over the future governance of global food and agricultural institutions," the ETC Group said.

FAO director general Jacques Diouf had proposed the year 2025 as the target date to eradicate hunger. He also called for a commitment of US\$44 billion per annum in aid for agriculture, primarily to enable small-holder farmers in developing countries to feed themselves. As well as needing funds for such basics as irrigation systems, modern machinery, seeds, fertilizers and rural infrastructure, there is the additional burden of adapting to climate change which is already hitting the poorest countries the hardest.

Without such funding it will also be impossible to boost global food production by 70 percent by 2050 – the amount required to meet the extra demands of an increase in the world's population to an estimated 9.1 billion by then.

"It is a small amount if we consider the US\$365 billion of agriculture producer support in OECD countries in 2007, and if we consider the US\$1,340 billion of military expenditures by the world in the same year", Diouf said.

A G8's summit last July dealing with a number of issues, launched an initiative on food safety and security, committing the totally inadequate amount of US\$20 billion over three years. The G8 summit was a smaller, select gathering of relatively rich countries including Australia.

Australia, in its contribution to the FAO Summit ignored the propositions for concrete commitments, instead getting behind the US in its attempts to bypass the authority of the UN and its international bodies. It promoted the undemocratic G8 as the way forward to solving hunger in much the same way as it promoted the equally undemocratic G20 at the climate change conference in Barcelona.

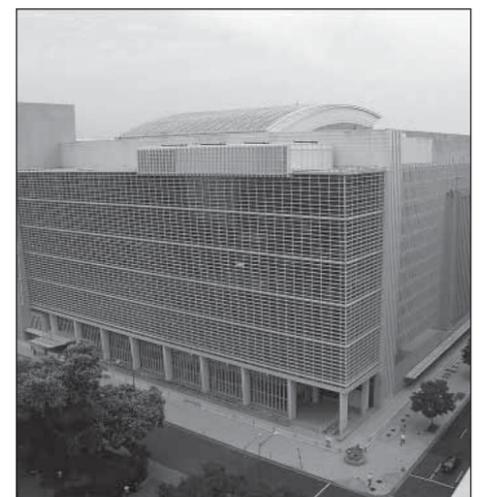
Urgent action required

The world's hungry now stands at over one billion, an alarming figure requiring urgent action. The 1996 Food Summit, when the world's hungry stood at 825 million, set a target of halving hunger by 2015. The prospects of achieving this look even slimmer following the Rome meeting.

The Rome Summit adopted a declaration of fine-sounding generalities: "... we agree to undertake all necessary actions required at national, regional and global levels and by all States and Governments to halt immediately



IMF HQ



World Bank HQ

In two soulless buildings in Washington DC, tens of thousands of grey soulless economists in grey suits on mega-salaries (no doubt left untouched throughout the financial crisis) will be left to make all the decisions regarding food security for the world's one billion chronically hungry people.

the increase in – and to significantly reduce – the number of people suffering from hunger, malnutrition and food insecurity.... We commit to take action towards sustainably eradicating hunger at the earliest possible date.

"We are alarmed that the number of people suffering from hunger and poverty now exceeds one billion. This is an unacceptable blight on the lives, livelihoods and dignity of one-sixth of the world's population...." And so the declaration continued, avoiding the concrete commitments required for agricultural aid.

The situation is an indictment on industrialised nations who first as colonisers, then through such outfits as the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, their structural adjustment programs and unfair terms of trade have destroyed centuries of sustainable agricultural practices and led to today's global food crisis.

Food is a basic human right. China reported on the many measures its socialist government and people have taken to feed its population and to assist other developing nations. It cannot do it all on its own.

Failure on the part of rich countries to provide the necessary agricultural aid, sky high rises in food prices in 2007-08 due in part to market

speculation, and the diversion of farming land from food to biofuel crops only serve to deepen the crisis. The potential exists to feed the world's population now, but the political will by those with the means and power is lacking.

"Hunger is the most cruel and concrete sign of poverty. Opulence and waste are no longer acceptable when the tragedy of hunger is assuming even greater proportions," Pope Benedict XVI told the Summit, calling for international action to eliminate hunger.

The one billion hungry, the hundreds of thousands who die every year of starvation, are victims of capitalism's economic, food and climate change crises. As with climate change, capitalism has yet again in Rome proved incapable of taking the action required to save the lives of hundreds of millions of people.

*The ETC is an NGO which researches and lobbies on global socioeconomic and ecological issues. <www.etcgroup.org> For a copy of the declaration and to read or listen to speeches at the Summit, visit <www.fao.org>

More reports on the Summit can be found at: <www.twinside.org.sg> and <www.ipsnews.net>. *

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Damage of cultural globalisation

The Guardian

Issue 1437

November 25, 2009

School against school, teacher against teacher

The Rudd government's proposed publication of league tables, a set of comparative summaries on the supposed performance of individual schools, is posing a direct threat to its stated aim of boosting the nation's education opportunities. As Federal Minister for Education, Julia Gillard, has stated: "League tables based on raw test scores can create a misleading picture and make the job of principals and teachers that much harder."

Nevertheless, the government now proposes to publish league table results. The Australian Council of State School Organisations (ACSSO), representing five peak education organisations, has called on the government to reverse this decision. ACSSO has cited experience in other countries, which indicates that publication will result in "the narrowing of curriculum, a deepening inequality across schools and school systems, an unhealthy segregation of schools, or all of these."

The government's league tables would be derived from NAPLAN testing, which aggregates scores from annual literacy and numeracy tests of 40 questions undertaken by some students in years 3, 5, 7 and 9.

However, Melbourne University's Professor Margaret Wu, an expert in educational statistics, has warned that the league table plans go beyond the accuracy and validity of NAPLAN results. NAPLAN tests are not designed to measure school performance, let alone year-to-year student performance. They involve large margins of statistical error, and the combination of individual results into a school average is not a sound basis for comparing schools. Moreover, reasonable comparative data cannot be obtained using one or two brief tests covering a small part of the curriculum, especially because of social, economic and other complexities within school populations.

Moreover, as Angelo Gavrielatos, federal president of the Australian Education Union, has noted with regard to misuse of the data: "Any organisation ... can take the results of schools from the new website and turn them into misleading and simplistic league tables." This has already happened. When league table results were published in Tasmania earlier this year, the *Hobart Mercury* immediately described them as evidence of the state's best and worst schools.

Mr Gavrielatos commented: "This may sell extra papers, but the effect is negative and long-lasting. The schools at the bottom of the league tables are often in the most disadvantaged areas. To go with the social and economic issues with which these communities battle, children, parents and teachers face the humiliation of their local school being unfairly branded as one of the worst in the state, territory or nation, based on a single test."

The government's claim that it will limit information published, to prevent direct comparisons between different schools, is highly dubious. Publication will almost certainly result in stigmatisation of disadvantaged schools.

The government also claims that league tables are necessary to identify schools requiring extra funding to improve poor performance. However, these schools can already be identified using currently-available data.

It's also entirely possible that the government may succumb to pressure for funding from the more successful schools, rather than the other way around. After all, the government already provides huge funding to the nation's most wealthy private schools.

The Victorian government wants to use league tables to introduce a controversial performance-based pay system. Peter Hodge, a teacher from Victoria's Kilmore International School, commented: "... A performance-based pay system significantly dependent on tests results could potentially destroy the collegiality exhibited in many schools, as the quality of class lists becomes a divisive issue and teachers feel reluctant to share resources.

"Teachers will have a strong incentive to teach whatever test(s) influence their pay, and a strong disincentive to challenge students and teach beyond the minimum standard."

However, he added, "... if the base pay of teachers is raised to genuinely reflect their expertise and experience, gifted people would be attracted to the profession, fewer good teachers would leave and there would be no need for bonus pay."

And that's the point. The Rudd government's high-sounding declarations about boosting the quality of primary and secondary education will be achieved by maximising the funding and hence the opportunities for schools, teachers and students to realise their full potential.

The government should improve its own remarkably poor performance score by dropping this odious proposal.

PRESS FUND

A group of 13 Australian scientists has issued a statement that reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 25 percent by 2020 will only give the Great Barrier Reef a 50/50 chance of survival, because of the enormous threat posed by climate change. So far, the Rudd government is sticking to its current commitment to reduce Australian emissions by only 5 percent. That commitment signals, quite clearly, a willingness to write off the Reef in order to safeguard the vested interests of polluting corporations! But now to some more encouraging statistics, by way of contributions to the Press Fund. We thank this week's contributors for their generous support, as follows:

Alice Johnson, in loving memory of Peter Douglas Johnson, 1957-2009, \$500 (See obituary on this page).

R Girvan \$9, Brian Griffin \$20, "Round Figure" \$11, Mark Window \$10,

This week's total: \$550 Progressive total: 13,110

In Loving Memory of Peter Douglas Johnson 1957-2009

Son of the late Phyllis and Johno Johnson

Peter died suddenly at age 55, at home in Padstow, only two months after the death of his mother Phyllis Johnson.

Peter held many of the values of Phyllis and Johno and had a strong sense of social justice and love of his family, neighbours and friends. He was always willing to help others in need and held out his hand in friendship.

Peter spent many hours of his time caring for Phyllis and Johno in the final years of their lives. He was a

dedicated carer and a very loyal family member, and he always stood up to protect his family when it mattered.

He gave Phyllis and Johno many loving and happy memories as their first born son. They always remained very close.

We thank Peter for his love, kindness and dedication. He will be sorely missed.

Vale Peter. ☘

Message from Cuban Five

Five seats were left vacant at the opening night of the CPA's Congress held in Sydney last month. They were for the Cuban Five who are being held as political prisoners in US jails on trumped up charges. A special message was sent from Congress to them. *The Guardian* is happy to report the receipt of the following letter from our Cuban comrades addressed to the Party's President:

"It was an honour to receive your letter on behalf of the Communist Party of Australia and to know about the five seats left vacant during your 11th National Congress last month. The solidarity we receive from our brothers and sisters in Australia is a source of inspiration to continue our struggle for justice. The Supreme Court decided to 'sweep under the rug' our case, and now your support will be even more important to let more people know about this injustice.

"On behalf of the Cuban Five I would like to express our appreciation for your solidarity and wish a happy holiday season and a very successful 2010 to all our comrades in Australia."

"Hasta la Victoria Siempre!"

Gerardo Hernandez ☘



PERTH

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**155th Anniversary
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[Monty Miller Committee]
Hsien Harper
[C.P.S.U./C.S.A. Organiser]
Charlie Isaacs
[One of the 107]

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BBQ/Drinks & Donations Welcome
for info contact: Dave Fox 0410 410 592

Organised by the Spirit of Eureka W.A. Committee
Endorsed by Unions W.A., C.F.M.E.U., A.M.W.U., Communist
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PERTH

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Next step "vital to closing gap"

Mahala Strohfeldt

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation has a long and arguably arduous road ahead. But its co-chair, Greg Phillips, believes the next step of the nation's healing is critical to closing the gap.

The federal government has steadfastly refused to consider paying compensation to members of the Stolen Generations, as recommended in the 1997 *Bringing Them Home* report from the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families (see separate story on this page).

On February 13 this year, on the first anniversary of the 2008 Apology to Indigenous people, it announced the development of a healing foundation to address the cycle of trauma and grief in Indigenous communities, particularly those relating to the Stolen Generations.

The development team has now finalised a round of community consultations that took them across the country to help inform on the roles and responsibilities of the foundation.

Core activities will include support for holistic and innovative healing but will also aim to provide education and evaluation services. Addressing Monash University's public lecture series in Melbourne, Mr Phillips said the Foundation had the potential to not only help heal families and communities but also to have a significant impact on all other areas of Aboriginal disadvantage.

He also said that if not effectively addressed now, the cost to Indigenous people's health and social emotional well-being would be great.

"Healing is the missing link to closing the gap. There's evidence to suggest mental health interventions are not always appropriate because the healing paradigm doesn't fit our people's needs," he said.

Funded over the next four years by \$26 million, Mr Phillips said the Foundation was only in its very early stages, but he expected it would support community healing initiatives that mainstream funding couldn't cover. "We also want to focus on health promotion and health education and empower communities," he said. "An Elder in a remote community taking a young bloke out to teach fishing or hunting may not look like

an intervention, but there is important work going on."

With an interim board assisting the initial phase of the Foundation, Mr Phillips said the national nine-member board would be in place by the end of the year, and interested people could attend healing forums that would be held in every state and territory.

He said the foundation would draw on the success of the Aboriginal Canadian experience, where the healing foundation is 80 percent indigenous and utilises traditional methods of healing alongside the western model.

"It has been estimated that the cost of domestic violence against Aboriginal women will be \$2.126 billion by 2022 if nothing is done now. The business case for the Foundation is simple – it is cheaper to heal someone than to jail them," Mr Phillips said. "We don't need paternalism, but we do need support."

"Our core business is healing our wounds. And we all need to heal together as a nation. Sorry was the first step and the Foundation's work is the next step."

The Koori Mail ☼



Centre in push for reparation tribunal

The Public Interest Advocacy Centre (PIAC) has renewed calls for a tribunal to oversee reparations for members of the Stolen Generations. PIAC has released a draft Stolen Generations reparations tribunal bill in support of the call.

The establishment of an Indigenous Reparations Tribunal is the key recommendation of a PIAC updated report. The bill details the functions and powers of such a

tribunal and provides eligibility criteria for compensation. Reparations would be funded by contributions from state, federal and territory governments and from church organisations involved in administering forcible removal policies.

The updated report, *Restoring Identity*, addresses the failure of governments and churches to provide reparations as previously recommended by the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal

and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner Tom Calma launched it last week.

PIAC chief executive officer Robin Banks said Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's apology to the Stolen Generations recognised the injustices perpetuated against children, and gave renewed optimism for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

"All Australian parliaments have now made formal apologies to the Stolen Generations," she said. "This is an important first step. Other essential features of reparation are guarantees against repetition, measures of restitution and rehabilitation, and monetary compensation."

Ms Banks said an agreement between the Canadian government and its indigenous citizens ended many years of damaging litigation. "PIAC's Reparations Tribunal

model provides a way to avoid the harm to claimants and waste of public money that accompanies litigation," she said.

"The Reparations Tribunal model provides a comprehensive response to the needs of all members of the Stolen Generations, their families and communities and enables the Australian community to take the next step toward reconciliation."

The Koori Mail ☼

NLC fears over mine

Kirstie Parker

The Northern Land Council (NLC) wants Northern Territory legislation changed to make mine management plans public, after an independent environmental review of the controversial McArthur River Mine found leaking sediment ponds and seepage of tailings into

a nearby creek. These "urgent" issues and others deemed less serious were identified in a report by Independent Monitor Environmental Earth Services, giving a snapshot the zinc mine's environmental performance over the year to September 2008.

The Xstrata-owned mine, which includes an open-cut operation, is

about a 1,000 kilometres south-east of Darwin.

The Independent Monitor's findings were presented at a community meeting in nearby Borroloola last week.

The Resources Minister Kon Vatskalis said on that, given the time that had passed since the period covered by the report, the issues

identified in the report had either been resolved or were in the process of being addressed by Xstrata and his own department.

But the NLC wants the government to amend its Mine Management Act to make mine management plans public, so mining can no longer operate in "virtual secret".

"The NT government must make the MRM Mine Management Plan a public document because neither Aboriginal traditional owners nor the general public knows whether MRM is actually complying as stipulated in their Mine Management plan," NLC Chief Executive Kim Hill said. "We all have a right to know what's going on. We need transparency in this process not a closed door – this report raises important issues of compliance, or the lack thereof."

Mr Hill said the information in the report was now 14 months old. "Where has this report been for all this time?" he asked. "MRM was given this report on 10 September 2009 and we are only now finding out about it. "And now the next Independent Monitor's report is not due until September next year. This is far too

late for any of us to know whether MRM is complying with its Mine Management Plan because it's secret."

Traditional owners and others have raised concerns about environmental damage to the McArthur River and surrounding environs, and Mr Hill said it was incumbent on the NT government and MRM to provide certainty that these concerns were being thoroughly addressed "which currently does not happen".

The Independent Monitor expressed an opinion that while McArthur River Mine had demonstrated an "adequate" level of procedural conformance in relation to its commitments, evidence confirming full compliance with these commitments was sometimes not supplied or incomplete. The Independent Monitor noted three "significant procedural non-conformances" on MRM's part relating to: accelerated salt leaching, revegetation, and annual vegetation surveys at its Bing Bong Port facility; quality assurance testing of the Overburden Emplacement Facility clay liner; and mosquito monitoring procedures.

The Koori Mail ☼

Pete's Corner



HAVE YOUR SAY
Write a letter to the Editor

Forty-eight hour strike in offshore oil and gas industry

"Maritime workers in the offshore oil and gas industry took 48-hour protected strike action from November 17-18, on 17 of Farstad Shipping's vessels operating in the Bass Strait and around the Northwest Australian coastline. Paddy Crumlin, national secretary of the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA), said the action was taken as a last resort after 12 months of attempting to negotiate a new enterprise bargaining agreement (EBA) with the company. The action is the first in what could be a series of strikes at 12 shipping companies.

The employers did everything they could, except seriously negotiate with the union, to stave off the strike action. They attempted to have the action halted in Fair Work Australia and used the mass media, in particular *The Australian*, which was only too happy and oblige by repeating their lies and gross distortions.

Farstad Shipping is based in Norway. It is the operator of offshore support vessels and has 21 vessels in its Australian fleet. Some were exempted for various reasons such as to enable emergency work to continue on the anchors of the rig *Stena Cyde* or for safety reasons including the clean-up of the oil spill from the stricken *West Atlas* rig. Significant pay rises awarded to non-marine crew over the past decade had widened the wage gap between seafarers and other workers undertaking construction work in the development of the booming offshore sector.

The MUA is asking nothing

more than for its seafarers engaged in offshore rigging to earn the same as riggers doing the same work. Crumlin said it was a matter of equity. These are highly skilled and qualified workers who at present are being short-changed by hundreds of dollars a week. The work they do is not easy and requires additional skills. For example, some are working on 400-tonne cranes that move parts of platforms around and assemble the platforms.

Their claims for increased allowances and wage rises were met with hysterical claims from employers and their organisations. They condemned the action. The Australian Shipowners Association called the claim "outrageous" and their colleagues in the Australian Mines and Metals Association described it as a "destructive grab for cash". They totally misrepresented the nature of the claim, giving the impression that granting parity would lead to the demise of the offshore oil and gas industry and bring down the maritime industry with flow-ons to all maritime workers.

"The idea being perpetrated that this is a grab for cash is a cheap shot. On construction projects, which operate 365 days a year, the standard working day is 12-15 hours and the weekly hours are on average around 84. So in fact, the seafarers are working the equivalent of two weeks every week. The workers are away from family and friends for lengthy periods and have very limited lifestyle options during the periods they are on these facilities for the duration of a swing.

The work has a high occupational health and safety risk and is generally hazardous given the working environment," said Crumlin.

"Construction work is tightly defined in the proposed agreement, and the allowance can't flow on to seafarers and workers in related occupations who are not engaged in construction work – even within the wider offshore oil and gas sector."

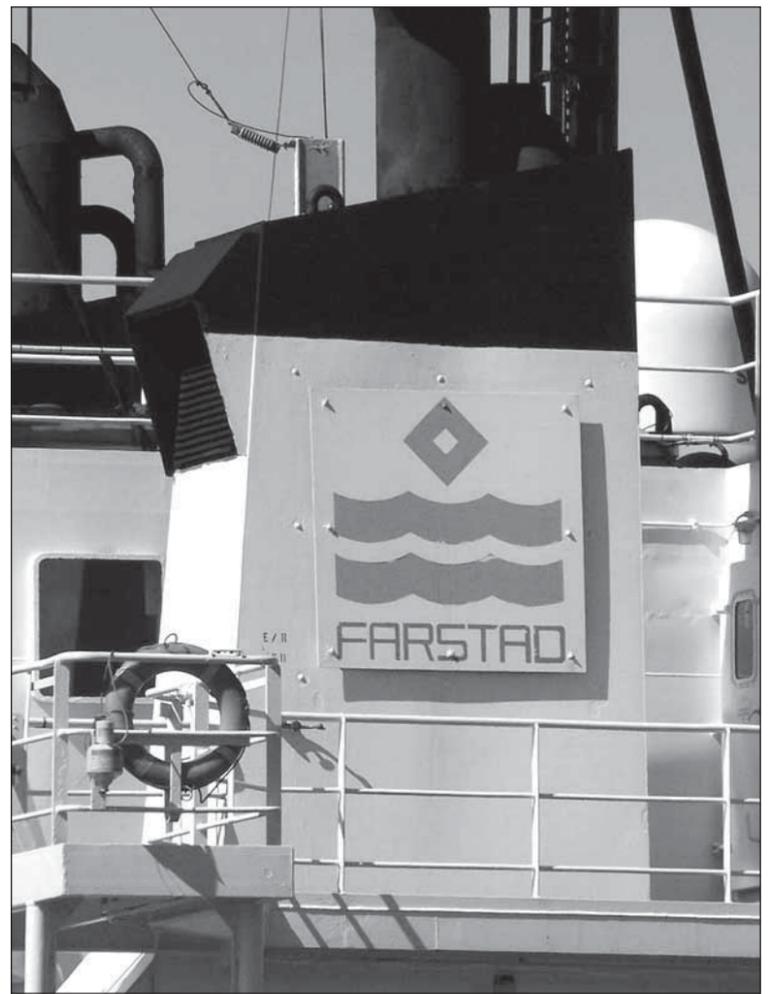
A conciliation meeting at Fair Work Australia was held on Thursday November 19 with parties from the MUA, Farstad Shipping and representatives, chaired by Commissioner Raffaelli.

Following the meeting, MUA deputy national secretary Mick Doleman issued a statement indicating that the parties had met in a constructive atmosphere and progress had been made on a number of outstanding issues but there was still more work to be done before an agreement is reached.

Further dates have been set for negotiations of the EBA involving Farstad including November 30, and December 7 and 14. There was also agreement after a suggestion by the Commissioner that they would not debate the matter in the media and would continue to work towards an agreeable outcome.

The MUA has not set down any new dates for further industrial action. That will depend on the outcomes of negotiations.

The prospect of industrial action against other shipping companies remains. ✪



More beds without enough nurses doesn't make sense

The future care of vulnerable elderly residents in nursing homes rests on an increase in qualified staff - more people in beds without more nurses will equal chaos and misery.

Australian Nursing Federation (ANF) federal secretary Ged Kearney said recent threats by aged care providers who are demanding \$500 million in government funding to provide more places for residents needs to be balanced against the need for more nurses and personal carers.

"While we endorse a call for more beds the idea of increasing the number of residents without tackling staff shortages is frightening," she said. "We trust that the federal government will address the current shortage of aged care nurses as stipulated in the Because We Care campaign as a first priority towards improved quality of care for senior Australians."

The ANF will submit its 2010 budget proposal. This will address

the need to attract more aged care nurses into the sector by ensuring they receive fair pay and conditions – many are now earning up to \$300 less than nurses in other sectors.

The union says that the right balance of skills and nursing hours is required to care for the 70 percent of aged care residents who are high-need.

"It is vital that the public gets a guarantee that taxpayer funding provided to aged care providers is transparent and used to improve wages and provide enough nursing and care staff for each resident," said Ged Kearney.

Background

Australia today has some 2,800 residential aged care facilities providing care to more than 160,000 elderly people, 70 percent of whom receive high-level care and 55 percent of whom are 85 years of age or older.

By 2020 the number of

residents is projected to reach more than 250,000 – a 56 percent increase. And the highest area of growth will be among residents aged 95 or over who will need the highest level of care we can give them. The high-care proportion of residential aged care is going to need to almost triple in the next 25 years to keep up with demand.

The Because We Care campaign is aimed at raising awareness and recognition of Australia's highly skilled and dedicated aged care nursing and care workforce.

Throughout 2009 the ANF has been asking community members, nursing home staff, friends and relatives of residents to sign the "Charter for Quality Aged Care". The Charter calls on the federal government to properly fund aged care and support the campaign's four key objectives;

- 1) The right balance of skills and nursing hours so that nursing and care staff can provide quality care for every resident.
- 2) Fair pay for aged care nurses and care staff who are paid up to \$300 per week less than nurses in other sectors.
- 3) Recognition of the professional skills of Assistants in Nursing and care staff through a national licensing system.
- 4) A guarantee that taxpayer funding is used for nursing and care staff for each resident. ✪

Early and extreme fire danger here to stay – firefighters

For the first time Australia has issued a "catastrophic" or "code red" fire danger warning with extreme temperatures forecast for South Australia, Victoria, ACT and New South Wales.

"Those senators who don't believe in global warming need only step outside Parliament House to experience the reality of 37 degree heat weeks before summer has even begun," said Peter Marshall, national secretary of the United Firefighters Union.

Mr Marshall, who represents 13,500 professional firefighters, said politicians still threatening to block or weaken crucial climate change laws were putting lives and properties at risk.

"Firefighters are extremely concerned about the effect of climate change on their work. Even under a low warming scenario, Australia can expect a major increase in catastrophic fire events. We are the people on the front line who will have to deal with the consequences." (See page 5)

Mr Marshall said the Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre recently warned of "above normal" fire frequency this summer, with Monash University scientists early this year confirming the link between drought and rising carbon emissions.

"We need to tackle climate change as quickly as possible if we are to have any hope of mitigating or reversing the extreme weather patterns that are becoming commonplace in Australia.

"Fires, storms and floods not only cost lives, they will also cost the nation dearly in social dislocation, as well as the economic cost of rebuilding, rising insurance premiums and compensation claims," said Mr Marshall.

"Most Australians understand this and they want action. It's time for the Australia's politicians to get real and pass these laws without any further watering down. Let's get on with the job of protecting the community and ensuring fire fighter safety." ✪

Brisbane

Fund Raising Party for the Children of Guatemala and El Salvador

Enjoy a Dancing Night and bring smile to the face of poor children of Guatemala and El Salvador.

Saturday 12 December 7pm to 12am

Spanish Centre 244 Mortimer Rd, Acacia Ridge Sports Complex

\$10.00 entry. Bookings are recommended. Contact phone 0447 612 509

All funds will go to the children of "Viveros De La Paz" in Guatemala and to the Pediatric ward in the San Francisco Gotera Hospital in the Department of Morazan, El Salvador.



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Official blog of the CPA South Australia

Fire danger rising at home and around the world

“Decisions by the Australian and the Victorian governments, together with those of other governments around the world, on reducing greenhouse gas emissions will have a direct influence on increases in the risk of very high and extreme fire danger days in Victoria due to anthropogenic climate change.”

– Prof. David Karoly, Professor of Meteorology, School of Earth Sciences, University of Melbourne. Submission to the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission.

In 2007, The Climate Institute released groundbreaking research that showed fire danger increasing as emission levels rise. To make sense of the data in recent years, the researchers had to create two new categories of bushfire conditions: “very extreme” and “catastrophic”. This summer, for the first time the latter category is now in use as “catastrophic” or “code red” conditions.

Since this research, Australians have been hit with the most shocking fires in our history, and we are not alone. Around the world, wildfire patterns are shifting, with increases in frequency and intensity of fire in many parts of the world as carbon pollution levels rise and the planet continues to heat up.

Climate change does not start bushfires by itself, but it is clearly stirring the cocktail of conditions necessary for the sort of catastrophic fires that devastated Victorian communities in February 2009.

In September 2009, the Bushfire CRC (Cooperative Research Centre) warned of the potential for “above normal” fire activity across southern Australia for the 2009/10 summer. This warning takes into account a range of factors, including fuel load, the long drought, and below average winter rains in inland eastern areas.

Earlier in the year, Monash University scientists confirmed the link between rising carbon pollution and the trend towards more intense and more frequent drought in southern Australia.

As Australians prepare for yet another bad bushfire season, with fires already affecting communities in parts of Queensland, and South Australia and Victoria labouring under spring heatwaves, it is crucial that action is taken now – to reduce emissions and reduce the risk of catastrophic fires.

A weak response to climate change will condemn Australians to worsening bushfire conditions.

The response must be two-fold: Australia and the world must cut emissions if we are to avoid the worst scenarios. At the same time, we need to prepare communities and emergency services for some, now inevitable, worsening of fire danger.

Fire and climate change

The International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) concludes – with high confidence (i.e. at least 90 percent certainty) – that heatwaves, fires and other extreme weather events are likely to become more intense and more frequent as the globe warms. This means a decreasing capacity for fire authorities to prevent and manage fires, and a higher likelihood of fires spreading more quickly.

In 2007, the Bushfire CRC, the Australian Bureau of Meteorology and CSIRO Marine & Atmospheric Research produced the report *Bushfire Weather in Southeast Australia: Recent Trends and Projected Climate Change Impacts*.

A key conclusion of the report is that there has been a general trend towards more fire weather over the last 30 years or so, with the majority of the most intense fire weather seasons occurring since the late 1990s. Moreover, fire seasons are starting earlier and finishing later.

The report included modelling of near-future fire weather risk in the southeast with the following results:

- The number of “very high” or “extreme” fire weather days is projected to increase under all scenarios developed by the report’s authors. If the rate of global warming is low, the number of extreme days increases 5-25 percent by 2020 and 10-50 percent by 2050. If the rate is high, however, the number of extreme days rises as high as 65 percent by 2020 and 100-300 percent by 2050. In other words, the number of very high or extreme fire weather days is projected to be 16-24 by 2050, compared to only 15 today. Very extreme fire weather days now occur on average once every 2 to 11 years at most sites in the study. By 2020, they may occur twice as often; by 2050 four to five times as often.
- At a high rate of global warming, by 2020 the incidence of

catastrophic fire weather days nearly doubles, and by 2050 the risk of such fires is substantially more commonplace. For the Melbourne region, for example, this means catastrophic fire days will occur not once in every 33 years as at present but once every 2.4 years on average.

It is important to understand that, consistent with recent changes in global temperature and sea level, contemporary climate models may well be underestimating future fire risk. Indeed, the strength of the recent jump in fire weather in the southeast of the continent is equal to or exceeds the changes estimated to occur by 2050 in the modelling.

The recent observed rise in fire danger may be due to a mixture of natural variability and anthropogenic climate change. The relative importance of these two factors is not known at this time, but evidence for a human signature in rising fire danger is becoming clear.

Black Saturday

The meteorological conditions that precipitated Victoria’s horrific “Black Saturday” fires were extraordinary:

- In the fortnight preceding February 7, Victoria was hit by a record-breaking heatwave with, for the first time, the capital experiencing three days in excess of 43°C in a row.
- On the day itself, record high temperatures were observed by weather stations across the state, including those in and around Melbourne, together with 120km/h winds and a relative humidity (RH) of around 6 percent. Indeed, the city had had no measurable precipitation from January 3 – the driest start to the year in more than 150 years. Elsewhere, the RH ranged between 20 percent in Orbst to 4 percent in Shepparton.
- These staggering temperatures were, in turn, preceded by 12 years of well-below average rainfall over much of southeastern Australia. Since 1950, average temperatures on the Australian continent have increased by between 0.4 and 0.7°C, with less rainfall in the southeast and an increase in the intensity of droughts.
- The Forest Fire Danger Index (FFDI) for February 7 reached unheard of, definitively catastrophic levels, ranging from 120 to 190 – surpassing the FFDI



The Tarkine Forest in Tasmania is unique as a temperate forest ecozone containing Antarctic flora and habitat for endangered species such as the Tasmanian Devil. After surviving decades of heavy mining and logging it they will be further greatly diminished through dramatic climate change in the decades to come.

readings for either the 1939 Black Friday or the 1983 Ash Wednesday fires.

The fires killed 173 people, injured 414 and displaced more than 7,562. Insurance companies received over 8,000 claims worth more than \$1,000 million.

In the week following the fires, Dr David Karoly, Professor of Meteorology at the University of Melbourne and Head of the Victorian Government’s Climate Advisory Group was reported as saying:

“The risk of increased intensity and increased frequency of fires is real, it is already occurring and it will get worse under climate change.”

Similarly, the Bureau of Meteorology’s former Principal Scientist, Prof Neville Nicholls remarked:

“The really crucial thing linking this to climate change is the three-day heatwave rather than the really hot temperatures on the day of the fires. By then, the situation was already primed... I think it is beyond reasonable doubt that global warming and the enhanced greenhouse effect has exacerbated the severity of the tragedy.”

And Dr Blair Trewin, Director of the National Climate Centre said:

“We have a fair degree of confidence that some of [the] long-term drying is consistent with climate change.”

In other words, Victorians were, in all likelihood, brutally confronted with the consequences of past policies. **These were the fires of climate change. Climate change is no longer a matter for the future; it is already here.**

Fire danger rising

Climate change is bringing about dramatic and very fast shifts in fire danger worldwide, according to a recent study by the University of California, Berkeley and Texas Tech University. While some regions may experience reduced fire danger, others – such as Tibet and California – will suffer worsening conditions. In announcing their findings, the researchers made specific reference to the recent Victorian fires, pointing out the consistency between what the science is saying and this dreadful

event. In their 2007 research, CSIRO and the CRC for Bushfires predicted an exponential growth in total fire risk once global warming rises above 2 degrees.

Recent reports of increasing fire danger in southeastern Australia are consistent with scientific reports from other fire-prone parts of the world, such as Spain, the western United States and Canada.

Global warming and increasing concentration of CO₂ in the atmosphere are predicted to lead to an increase in woody vegetation and changes in the mix of trees and shrubs, making large parts of the landscape more fire-prone.

United States: In a 2004 paper in the journal *Science*, researchers reported a “sudden and marked” increase in wildfire activity in the western US in the mid-1980s. Fires became more frequent, lasting longer through a longer wildfire season.

Canada: Over the past four decades, fires have burned significantly larger parts of the forested landscape of British Columbia, the Yukon and other western parts. At the same time, the summers are getting hotter, according to a 2004 report published in *Geophysical Research Letters*.

Spain: An analysis, published in *Climatic Change*, of fire records and the records of 350 weather stations covering the eastern Iberian Peninsula for the second half of the 20th Century shows a “clear pattern” of increasing summer and average annual temperatures; 0.35°C higher every decade on average.

At the same time, fire records suggest a “clear increase” in the annual number of fires and area burnt over the last century. Also, a slight increase in average summer rainfall seems to be promoting higher fuel loads. The role of fire as a cause of global warming is still not well understood. A recent paper in the journal *Science* suggests that more and bigger fires seem to be setting in motion a feedback effect.

In particular, fires associated with deforestation – such as those in the Amazon and Indonesia – are adding substantial amounts of carbon to the global burden, fuelling global warming and raising the fire danger worldwide.

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Reflections by comrade Fidel

The Bolivarian Revolution & Peace

I know Chávez well, and no one could be more reluctant than him to allow a showdown between the Venezuelan and Colombian peoples leading to bloodshed. These are two fraternal peoples, the same as Cubans living in the east, centre and west end of our island. I find no other way to explain the close relationship between Venezuelans and Colombians.

The slanderous Yankee accusation that Chávez is planning a war against neighbouring Colombia led an influential paper of that country to run a story on November 15, under the headline "War Drums." It was a pejorative and insulting editorial against the Venezuelan President asserting, among other things, that "Colombia should take very seriously the gravest threat to its national security in more than seven decades as it comes from a President with a military background..."

It goes on to say that: "The reason is the growing potential for a provocation that can go from an incident along the border to an attack on civilian and military facilities in Colombia."

Further on the editorial claims it is likely "... that Hugo Chávez intensifies his attacks against the 'scrawny' – the sobriquet he applies to his oppositionists – and tries to remove from regional and local governments those who contradict him. He already did it with the Mayor of Caracas ... and now he wants to try with the governors of the states sharing borders with Colombia who refuse to be under his rule ... a clash with Colombian forces or the accusation that the paramilitary plan to conduct actions within Venezuelan territory could be the pretext required by Chávez's regime to suspend constitutional rights."

Such words can only serve to justify the United States' aggressive plans and the blatant treachery of the Venezuelan oligarchy and counter-revolution to their Homeland.

Coinciding with the release of that editorial, the Bolivarian leader had published his weekly column known as "Chávez's lines," where he analysed the shameless concession of seven US military bases in Colombia, a country that shares about 2,000 kilometres of border with Venezuela.

In his article, the President of the Bolivarian Republic was very clear and brave in explaining his position.

"... I said it this Friday at the rally for peace and against the US military bases in Colombian territory: It is my duty to appeal to all of you, men and women, to defend Bolívar's Homeland, our children's Homeland ... Our Homeland is free today and we shall defend it with our lives. Never again will Venezuela be anybody's colony; never again will it kneel down before any invader or empire ... the extremely serious and transcendental problem in Colombia cannot be overlooked by the Latin American governments..."

Later on, he added some important concepts: "... the entire 'gringo' war arsenal included in the agreement responds to the concept of extraterritorial operations ... it turns the Colombian territory into an enormous Yankee



The Colombian Communist Party in a demonstration against US military bases. The banner calls for "Sovereignty and Dignity." Underneath is inscribed a quote by Simon Bolivar: "The United States seems destined by divine providence to plague America with misery in the name of freedom".

of the 'new colonial power' envisioned by our Liberator cannot offer such guarantees."

Chávez is a true revolutionary, a profound and sincere thinker, a courageous and restless worker. He did not win power through a coup d'état. He rebelled against the repression and genocide unleashed by the neoliberal governments that surrendered the country's huge natural resources to the United States. He endured incarceration; he matured and developed his ideas. He did not win power with weapons despite his military background.

It is to his merit to have taken the difficult path of a profound social Revolution starting out from the so-called representative democracy and an absolute freedom of expression, at a time when the most powerful media resources of the country were – they still are – in the hands of the oligarchy and at the service of the empire's interests.

In just 11 years, Venezuela has achieved the greatest educational and social progress attained by any country in the world, despite the coup d'état and the destabilisation plans and smearing campaigns implemented by the United States.

The empire did not decree an economic blockade on Venezuela, – as it did in the case of Cuba – after the failure of its sophisticated actions against the Venezuelan people because

China, Russia and numerous countries of Asia, Africa and Europe. Large segments of the population in every continent sympathise with the Bolivarian Revolution whose relations with Cuba are especially upsetting for the empire which for half a century has sustained a criminal blockade against our country. Through the ALBA, Bolívar's Venezuela and Martí's Cuba are promoting a new type of relationship and exchange on rational and fair basis.

The Bolivarian Revolution has been particularly generous with the Caribbean countries in times of an exceptionally grave energy crisis.

In the current new stage, the Venezuelan Revolution is facing entirely new problems which did not exist almost exactly 50 years ago, when our Revolution triumphed in Cuba.

At that time, drug-trafficking, organised crime, social violence and the paramilitaries were barely known. The United States had yet to become the huge drug market that capitalism and the consumer society have turned it into. It was not so difficult for the Revolution to fight drug-trafficking in Cuba and to prevent the country from being drawn to its production and consumption.

Today, such scourges have brought to Mexico, Central America and South America a growing tragedy which is far from beaten.

The incompetence of that imperial and wealthy nation to prevent drug-trafficking and abuse has paved the way for the cultivation in many parts of Latin America of plants whose value as raw material for drug production often exceeds that of the rest of the farm products, thus creating a very serious social and political quagmire.

In Colombia, the paramilitary is today imperialism's frontline force to combat the Bolivarian Revolution.

It is precisely thanks to his military background that Chávez knows that the struggle against drug-trafficking is a vulgar pretext used by the United States to justify a military agreement that fully responds to the US post-cold war strategic concept of extending its world domination.

The air bases, the means, the operational rights and total impunity granted to the Yankee military and civilian personnel by Colombia in its own territory have nothing to do with fighting drug cultivation, production and trafficking. This is currently a world problem spreading not only to South American countries, but also to Africa and other regions. It already prevails in Afghanistan despite the massive presence of the Yankee troops.

Drugs should not be used as a pretext to set up bases, invade countries and bring violence, war and plundering to Third World nations. This is the worst environment to sow good qualities among the people and to bring education, healthcare and development to other nations.

Those who think that division between Venezuelans and Colombians can lead to the success of their counter-revolutionary plans are deceiving themselves. Many of the best and most humble workers in Venezuela are Colombians; the Revolution has given them and their immediate family education, healthcare, employment, the right to citizenship and other benefits. Together, Venezuelans and Colombians shall defend the great Homeland of the Liberator of the Americas; together, they shall fight for peace and freedom.

The thousands of Cuban doctors, educators and other collaborators carrying out their internationalist duty in Venezuela shall be with them!

Fidel Castro Ruz ✱

It is my duty to appeal to all of you, men and women, to defend Bolívar's Homeland, our children's Homeland ... Our Homeland is free today and we shall defend it with our lives.

military enclave ... the greatest threat to peace and security in the South American region and in Our America."

"The agreement...prevents Colombia from offering anyone security and respect; not even Colombian men and women. A country that has lost its sovereignty and become an instrument

it would have meant blockading itself given its foreign energy dependence. But it has not abandoned its purpose to do away with the Bolivarian process and the generous support this gives the Caribbean and Central American peoples in terms of oil resources. Also its extensive trade relations with South America,

The unequal terms of trade, protectionism and the plundering of their natural resources has been compounded by drug-trafficking and the violence of organised crime that underdevelopment, poverty, unemployment and the huge US drug market have created in the Latin American societies.

Framing the children

Teachers across the West Bank were on strike and Bil'in village school was shuttered, so 14-year-old Mohamed Salem Abu Eid and his mates decided to have a kick-about.

The youngsters were aware that the night before some kids had been throwing stones at the seven-metre-high separation wall that strangles the village and walls off land around the domineering, illegal Giv'on Hahadasha settlement. But they were not prepared for what happened next.

Seconds after clocking the plain-clothes Israeli soldiers bearing down, Mohamed was blasted with a faceful of teargas. Then he felt the butt of a gun clunk against his head, opening a gash above his eyebrow. As he collapsed into the dust a boot stomped his leg.

Hours later at the Atarot interrogation centre, Mohamed was informed that he had been seen throwing stones at the separation wall, a crime punishable by a prison sentence of up to 20 years under Israeli law.

Mohamed denied it, at which point his interrogator brandishing some documents in Hebrew, saying: "Go ahead and sign. Then you can call your father to come and pick you up." As soon as the traumatised youngster did as he was told, the Israeli officer informed him that he had signed a confession and that he was now going to be thrown in prison.

At no point was a lawyer or a family member present.

Mohamed was locked up for four months after a brief spell in hospital.

The extensive Israeli checkpoint system served to prevent his family from visiting and he fell behind with his studies because there was no schooling inside.

Mohamed is just one of around 700 Palestinian children who will be locked up by Tel Aviv this year. There are currently 326 Palestinian children in Israeli prisons – the overwhelming majority for throwing stones.

Although Israel has ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which clearly stipulates that the detention of children must be a measure of last resort, 91 percent of these children are denied bail and remain in pre-trial detention.

Mohamed's case is different only because, shortly after his release, he was fortunate enough to come to the attention of a distinguished British legal team on a fact-finding mission to probe Israel's West Bank military commissions.

The team's independent report will be published shortly.

Helena Kennedy QC, Baroness Kennedy of The Shaws, has visited Palestine and Lebanon on a number of occasions, often in her capacity as president of the Medical Aid for Palestinians charity.

So she was confident that she knew most of what there was to know about the conditions endured by Palestinians in the occupied territories.

Addressing a public meeting organised by the Palestine Solidarity Campaign at the NUT HQ in central London last week, she said that what her team discovered "disabused me of that notion."

Kennedy, with Mohamed and his mother Somaya sitting at her side, stressed that Palestinian children are tried not by judges but by military personnel.



Nowhere left to go – two boys in Gaza surrounded by concrete and razor-wire playing amongst the rubble.

"Some of the people who sit in judgement on these Palestinian youngsters are settlers," she said. "It came as something of a surprise to hear some of them talk in American accents – they were Americans who had taken up Israeli citizenship before settling illegally in the West Bank."

Kennedy and her eminent team, which included Michael Mansfield QC and former British bar council chairman Roy Amlot, found that 95 percent of cases involving children led to conviction due to confessions.

"This came as no surprise to any of us who had worked on the big terrorist trials of Irish people in the '70s and '80s," said Kennedy. "Then we became all too familiar with confessions which arise out of interrogations where there are no lawyers present, behind closed doors, leading people to confess to things they are not guilty of."

Kennedy explained that many of the lawyers she spoke to, including some Israelis, "told us of their horror at seeing that their young clients had been physically abused, that torture had been inflicted to extract confessions."

The hardened British human rights lawyers were shocked to see how these courts dealt with children, who in this country would be dealt with in special juvenile courts.

"Children as young as 12 appearing before the courts, preponderantly because they had thrown stones at the wall."

Was the problem that the stones would rebound off the wall and hurt people? The team

ascertained that it was nothing to do with that.

According to Kennedy, "stone-throwing was simply deemed an affront to the state of Israel. It didn't matter that there was no-one in the vicinity at all."

Gerard Horton, an Australian lawyer who works in Ramallah as international advocacy officer for the Palestine section of Defence for Children International, explained that almost all children facing the military commissions plead guilty.

A child convicted of throwing stones can usually expect a sentence of three to four months.

"If they plead guilty they can expect to be sentenced within a month and released three months after that date, but if the child wants to profess their innocence and fight the case, they will be held in detention and the case may not heard for between five and 12 months," Horton said.

The prosecution tends not to bring all witnesses to court at the same time so as to drag out the hearing. And then there is the real prospect that the child will be found guilty in any event and "face a sentence two or three times greater than if they had pleaded guilty."

Once sentenced the children are bundled off to one of five prisons inside Israel, in contravention of article 76 of the fourth Geneva Convention. Like Mohamed, most do not get any family visits. There is rudimentary education provision in two of those prisons and none in the other three.

Kennedy observed that Tel Aviv is effectively "criminalising" a whole new generation. "It is through the lens of their experience at the hands of the Israelis that they see their future."

Abdelfattah Abusrour, who was born in the Aida refugee camp and now directs a theatre training centre to inspire youngsters in the camp with "the beauty of non-violent resistance," insisted that "nobody has the right to say all is hopeless."

"In Palestine, as in every place in the world, we do not have the luxury of despair."

Mohamed and the hundreds of other Palestinian lads who endured abuse and injustice at the hands of the "only free democracy in the Middle East" this year are unlikely to forgive and they certainly won't forget.

As well as sitting for hours in West Bank military "courts," Kennedy and the other members of the fact-finding team also visited "lecture theatres packed with hundreds of enthusiastic young people, informing themselves about international conventions and humanitarian law."

"Those young people will be tomorrow's leadership and they will go on with the struggle, giving voice to the wrongs that are being inflicted on their communities," she observed.

After his ordeal Mohamed has been throwing himself into his studies with a renewed sense of purpose. When asked what he wanted to do after school, he answered simply: "I want to be a lawyer."

Morning Star ✪

Mohamed is just one of around 700 Palestinian children who will be locked up by Tel Aviv this year. There are currently 326 Palestinian children in Israeli prisons – the overwhelming majority for throwing stones.

Trade unions: taking the fight across frontiers

Paul Haste

More than 3,000 Canadian members of the United Steelworkers Union (USW) who have been on strike against a vicious multinational mining corporation since July are taking their fight where their bosses fear most – across frontiers.

The members of USW Local 6500, nickel miners in the small mining community of Sudbury in the heart of Canada are fighting Brazilian owned Vale's attempts to tear up their pensions as part of a co-ordinated attack on the corporation's workforce throughout the world.

"Vale's strategy is to gut its best collective bargaining agreements and to set a precedent for deep cuts in wages, pensions and worker rights worldwide," USW Canadian national organiser Ken Neumann said.

"Vale will use the savings extracted from workers to finance the company's ambitious plans for expansion, and its campaign to weaken unions and workers' rights wherever it operates."

Despite raking in a massive CA\$14 billion profit last year (AU\$14.3 billion) – with CA\$3.94 billion earned for the company by the Sudbury miners alone in just the last two years – Vale has chosen to pick a fight by taking on its best-organised workers.

Stepping up the global assault, executives provoked further strikes at the firm's huge iron mines in the Brazilian Amazonian state of Para

last week, taking advantage of their workers' precarious "contract status" to threaten mass sackings unless they accepted cuts to benefits during pay negotiations.

Brazilian CUT union confederation leader Artur Henrique da Silva Santos explained that the law allows Vale to "immediately terminate workers without cause," but he declared that such insecurity "hasn't stopped thousands of miners organising."

Brazilian National Metalworkers Federation president Carlos Alberto Grana added that "transnational corporations like Vale that have profited like never before in the last few years through downsizing and outsourcing think they've found the excuse they were praying for – the global financial crisis.

"Of course the workers know how serious it is, but they also know that they need to fight to prevent being made to pay for this," he added.

The president of Brazilian miners' union Metabase Paulo Soares de Souza also made it clear that "the USW's concern over the savagery of Vale's attacks on the working class in all the countries where it operates is the same concern of our union, and should be the concern of all workers everywhere.

"We demand that the corporation stop its attacks on foreign workers, and we reaffirm our position of unconditional solidarity for the strike being waged by our Canadian brothers and sisters in Ontario," he said.

"They are fighting to defend their rights and what they have won with

the power of their union, and we condemn the company for trying to deny these rights and weaken these gains," Soares de Souza said.

Brazilian connection

Vale is controlled by wealthy financiers that include Previ, the pension fund of the state-controlled Banco do Brasil. The Brazilian government also holds a significant amount of voting capital in the mining corporation through the country's BNDES development bank.

The miners' unions in both Canada and Brazil have not been slow to use these government stakes in the firm to make a connection with former car workers' union leader and now president Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva.

The president has pressured Vale to invest billions of dollars in opening up new nickel, copper and iron mines in Brazil to boost the country's steel, construction and shipbuilding industries. The USW has been encouraged by Lula's demands that all Brazilian corporations treat their foreign workers with respect.

"Lula has said to his country's multinationals that, 'if you're moving into other countries, you're representing Brazil in these countries and the reputation of Brazil is at stake with everything you do'," Steelworkers' union organiser Wayne Fraser said.

"But Vale is cutting thousands of jobs – not just in Canada but in Brazil and elsewhere. That's not going over too well with the president. It's their disrespect for their employees, be it in Brazil or Canada or South Africa, that is the issue here, and at least the president of Brazil appears to think that's important," Fraser said.

The corporation has begun to crack under the pressure, not just threatening the Brazilian union negotiators in Para, but also cancelling its meetings with financiers on Wall Street and in the City lest its

United Steel Workers Union activist hands out campaign material during a demonstration.



Liam Richards

executives have to face the ignominy of being confronted by striking workers' picket lines.

In London, USW members from Sudbury were joined by Unite union leaders in a protest that succeeded in running Vale's chief financial officer Fabio Barbosa out of town when he tried to attend a stockbrokers' meeting in the heart of the capital's financial district.

"They had no problem forcing us out on strike, and they have no problem lying about what's going on, but now they are clearly starting to get nervous, beginning to hide their faces like this," observed USW Local 6500 member Patrick Veinot.

African unions affiliated with the international ICEM confederation of chemical, mine and energy workers have also tightened the screws on Vale by urging the governments of South

Africa and Mozambique not to grant the mineral exploration permits that the multinational is seeking in the two countries.

Zambia mineworkers' union leader Rayford Mbulu said, "the time has come to challenge these global mining giants and Vale will be a test case for us because of the company's anti-union and anti-worker policies.

"We don't want Vale to come here and bring these practices to our countries," Mbulu said, warning that "its executives must improve their labour policies or stay out of Africa.

"This corporation must realise that no longer can it act against workers in a single country – or even in a single mine – without unions all over the world coming to the aid of our brothers and sisters."

Morning Star ☘

California Uni staff and students take action

Marilyn Bechtel

Thousands of students, faculty, campus workers and community supporters gathered on November 18 in historic Sproul Plaza on the University of California's (UC) campus to demand that UC regents not pass an expected 32 percent fee increase that would bring yearly undergraduate tuition above US\$10,000 for the first time.

The protests coincided with a two-day regents' meeting in Los Angeles. They were organised by the faculty/staff/student Solidarity Alliance, the General Assembly, Graduate Student Organising Committee, Student Worker Action Team and the University Professional and Technical Employees union (UPTE). The rally and other actions also supported UPTE's two-day unfair labour practices strike. The UPTE took strike action on November 18 and 19 over sackings including members of UPTE's bargaining committee.

The 10-campus, 220,000 student UC system has been up in arms fighting cutbacks, layoffs, the proposed "fee" (tuition) hike, and furloughs – all supposedly justified by California's budget crisis – while at the same time already highly-paid top administrators have received big salary hikes. Protests centred on the need to keep the system public and effectively serving

the state's economically, racially and ethnically diverse population.

Meanwhile, in Los Angeles, as the regents' finance committee voted for the fee hike, student protests forced the regents' meeting into recess three times. Police arrested 14 protestors.

"It is not business as usual when students face fee hikes, when workers are laid off, when faculty are told to shut up and put up!", Ananya Roy, professor of city and regional planning and a Solidarity Alliance leader, told the cheering crowd.

"It is not business as usual when in Sacramento, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger talks about deeper and deeper spending cuts and refuses to consider increases in taxes, when our so-called leaders in the UC system wrap themselves in defeatism and fail to make the case for public education."

Noah Stern, a student senator, invoked the history of Sproul Plaza and the 1960s Free Speech Movement as he emphasised that "any single victory, any single battle, and freedom for anyone, is inevitably intertwined with that of all students, all faculty and all staff. We will fight to protect the strength, diversity and character of this university," he concluded.

People's World (Abridged)

For full text visit

<www.peoplesworld.org> ☘

"Cynical whitewash" of Afghanistan's black hole

Paddy McGuffin

The US government has been accused of attempting a cynical whitewash over its Bagram airbase "black" detention facility in Afghanistan. The accusation followed a press tour of what has been dubbed "Guantánamo's more evil twin" organised by the US military.

The tour allowed journalists to inspect the newly expanded facility but, crucially, not those incarcerated there without trial or legal representation. It was apparently organised in an attempt to claim a new era of "openness and transparency," but this was dismissed by legal action charity Reprieve as a sham.

Several British residents including Binyam Mohamed and Omar Deghayes were held in Bagram during which time they say they were beaten and tortured. At least two men were beaten to death at the centre and there have been widespread reports of abuse.

Reprieve spokeswoman Clara Gutteridge told the British left newspaper, *Morning Star*: "As far as we're concerned this was

entirely cosmetic. The issue here is about how the detainees are treated, not where they are held.

"The wider issue here is that the Obama administration is doing with Bagram what the Bush administration did with Guantánamo. It says that prisoners will receive tribunals. But the tribunals in Bagram are actually worse than those at Guantánamo, which were found by the Supreme Court to be inadequate.

"By inviting the media into an empty prison, it is attempting to whitewash the whole issue."

The claim of transparency was pure myth, Ms Gutteridge said. "It is claiming a new era of transparency but it won't even tell us how

many detainees they are holding there or who they are."

Mr Deghayes recounted his ordeal at Bagram: "The camp looked like the Nazi camps that I saw in films.

"Lying on the floor of the compound, all night I would hear the screams of others in the rooms above us as they were tortured and interrogated," he said.

Currently, it is estimated that around 700 detainees are held at Bagram, but exact numbers are impossible to establish.

The expansion would mean a further 300-400 could be held there indefinitely without trial.

Morning Star ☘

Slipped Through the Net:

The story of Melrose Desmond Donley

by Elly Inta

Taken from his mother at the age of six months, Des Donley became a ward of state. At 15 he was farmed out to a family as virtual slave labour, working from 3.30 in the morning until 9 at night, sleeping in a shed with a prickly straw pillow. Only at the age of 18, he ended his isolation, entered the paid workforce, found girls, dancing, music and had a few drinks. He became a union delegate, joined the Communist Party and spent a life fighting for others. Des was in his 60s when he learnt of his Aboriginality. He is still fighting, at the age of 94, for his stolen wages. \$25 including p&h within Australia.

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CP of Canada condemns govt inaction over flu outbreak

The Communist Party of Canada's Central Executive Committee has condemned the Harper Conservative government's inaction on the H1N1 (swine) flu outbreak, and called for vastly improved sick leave laws and for placing Big Pharma under public ownership. The CEC statement says:

The current swine flu outbreak reveals that after many years of underfunding by the federal and provincial governments, privatisation, contracting out of services, P3s [public private partnerships], and attacks on health care unions, Canada's universal Medicare system has been stretched to the breaking point, lacking the capacity to handle any significant increase in the numbers of people needing medical care.

The Harper government has failed to deal effectively with this outbreak. Relying on one, private and unaccountable pharmaceutical corporation – GlaxoSmithKline – to produce the swine flu vaccine is a giant abdication of responsibility by the Harper Conservatives. It has proven to be a mistake that may cost the lives of many Canadians.

Big Pharma's investments and production are based on profitability, not the health and well-being of the majority of Canadians. The swine flu vaccine shortfall is thus no accident, but a predictable outcome of the profit-driven interests of the industry.

This failure brings into sharp relief the need for public ownership of the entire pharmaceutical industry, especially the removal of the profit motive from the production of drugs and vaccines.

The government is failing to take other obvious steps that would reduce the spread of the swine flu and other infectious diseases.

Workers who are paid to stay home when they are sick cannot spread disease through the workplace. Vastly-improved sick leave provisions are needed for all workers, a measure that would help the large majority of people.

The giant increase in military spending is robbing the medical system of resources it could use to prevent and cure many diseases.

The profit motive has corrupted the priorities of researching and developing drugs to cure diseases and disorders that afflict the most oppressed

sections of the working class, such as tuberculosis and diabetes.

The Communist Party demands that the federal government create a comprehensive plan for the protection of people from epidemics, including:

- place the pharmaceutical industry under public ownership
- require employers to provide ten paid sick days per year, provincially and federally, an amount that could be extended by government decree based on expert medical advice in designated areas
- increase spending on research and development of drugs and vaccines to cure diseases that afflict – at epidemic levels – the most oppressed sections of workers, such as tuberculosis among Aboriginal peoples
- improve housing and eradicate poverty to remove the underlying causes of many diseases
- move agriculture and the food industry away from reliance on pesticides, herbicides, antibiotics and other substances whose long-term safety is not supported by reliable evidence.

People's Voice ✪



Communist Party of Canada in action.

Zelaya calls for Honduran election boycott

Honduran President Manuel Zelaya has called on his country's citizens not to participate in the presidential election on November 29. President Zelaya was deposed and exiled in a coup d'état on June 28. He also announced that he had called on US President Barack Obama not to recognise the results of the election, declaring that they have "no legitimacy if it is held under the gun."

Speaking from the Brazilian embassy in the Honduran capital Tegucigalpa, where he has taken refuge after secretly re-entering the country, Zelaya also rejected any further efforts to make a deal with coup leader Roberto Micheletti.

Mr Zelaya called on the US "lead by example," which so far it has failed to do. Instead it is supporting the elections being organised by the military junta, contrary to the wishes of the Honduran people and the demands of Latin American countries for

the restitution of democracy in the Central American state.

US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for the Western Hemisphere, Craig Kelly has been sent to Honduras to support the de facto regime's pretence that the polls provide a solution to the crisis.

The US Department of State also supported a decision by the Honduran Congress which is dominated by pro-coup forces, of holding over the debate about Zelaya's restitution until three days after the voting. "My term of office ends on 27 January, 2010," Zelaya declared, adding that neither the Honduran Congress nor the country's Supreme Court had the authority to depose the president.

Argentina's President Cristina Fernandez and Brazil's Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva last week signed a joint statement demanding the restitution of constitutional order which was breached by the military coup. Fernandez and Lula

categorically stated that they would not recognise the results of the November 29 elections if democratically-elected President Manuel Zelaya is not reinstated.

Most of the continent's nations share their stance, seeing the military coup in Honduras as a dangerous precedent for democracy in the region.

The presidents of Argentina and Brazil said in their statement that Zelaya's restitution is essential to restoring the constitutional order and democracy in Honduras.

The National Front against the Coup d'Etat, an alliance of social and political forces, rejected the legitimacy of the elections describing them as a farce to try to legitimise the military coup. Juan Barahona, general coordinator of the alliance said resistance demonstrations, which reached their 144th consecutive days of protests on Thursday, will continue until the putschists are defeated. ✪

Human Rights Watch: another attack on Cuba

The US-based Human Rights Watch (HRW) has again launched an attack on the Cuban Revolution in a vain attempt to sully the island's great achievements in defending the dignity and genuine human rights of more than 11 million Cubans.

Last week it accused the small socialist state of not improving its "conduct" in the context of human rights, and even lied that it has worsened in some cases.

The report is a deliberate attempt to rescue a diminished and discredited internal counter-revolution, elevated and funded by the anti-Cuban lobby in the US government – in particular the Miami mafia – which is stead-

ily becoming more irrelevant and dependent on US taxpayer funds.

HRW's long report attempted to depict the Cuban government as a systematic repressor and creator of an environment full of terror, as if its streets were occupied by military forces and its citizens, without any rights whatsoever, were being brutally lashed. Anyone who has visited Cuba will no that is pure fiction.

It is the same script that has been trotted out many times now over the last five decades, with the unwholesome purpose of justifying the failed and genocidal economic, commercial and financial US blockade of Cuba, a policy that the UN General Assembly condemned for the 18th consecutive time last October with 187 votes.

HRW has a history of targeting any nation that whiffs of independence from the United States – the governments of Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, and Nicaragua have also been subjected to the same lies. From time to time, giving it a veneer of independence, it reports on genuine human rights abuses.

Its attack on Cuba could better have been directed at the US – the millions who are denied roofs over their heads, are denied basic medical services or jobs. It could also have drawn attention to the treatment of the Cuban Five – the innocent, anti-terrorist fighters who have been locked up in US prisons for years on trumped up political charges. ✪



Global Briefs

IRAQ: Southern Iraq is so short of drinking water, according to Azzaman News, that the government has prevailed upon Iran to supply fresh water via tanker ships. Water Resources Minister Abdullatif Rasheed last week inaugurated a massive dam crossing the Khassa River north of Kirkuk, heart of a region afflicted by severe drought. Last month, he urged French businesses to invest and help manage Iraqi water resources. Speaking to the *Al-Arab Alyawm* newspaper last week in Jordan, University Professor Ghazi Al-Rabab'ah warned that water-short Israel would soon be waging wars over water, even against Egypt for access to Nile waters. He accused Israel of stealing water from Gaza, also from the Litani River in Lebanon, according to <Palestine-info.co.uk>.

KENYA: Surveys presented at the Pan-African Malaria Conference last week in Nairobi showed that only three percent of infected African children are receiving effective anti-malarial treatment. Africans make up 90 percent of 900,000 malaria deaths annually. Untreated children under age five will die, said Dr Desmond Chavasse. High costs block access to recommended combination therapy. Affordable drugs are generally ineffective against prevailing drug-resistant forms of malaria. A pilot subsidy program in Uganda and Tanzania, with treatment costing US\$0.25 rather than US\$11, put combination therapy into widespread use. Scientists reported that the world's first effective anti-malarial vaccine will be released soon.

CUBA: The director of the Center of Molecular Immunology (CIM) in Havana, Juan Felix Amador, has released information on the development of the world's first vaccine against advanced lung cancer. Forty-five clinical trials, 32 of them in Cuba, are under way for the new treatment. One in five lung cancer patients in Cuba are part of the trials which are in their last stages. Amador said that CIM has developed new humanised anti-bodies which could bring better results in the treatment of the disease. "Nearly 30 countries import products from our centre and we have four joint ventures in India, China, Canada and Spain," he said. Amador announced that, by the end of the 2009-2015 period, they expect that all Cuban patients suffering from cancer will benefit from innovations produced by CIM. CIM's main areas of research include structural biology, bioinformatics, and nanotechnology.

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



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Walls will not prevent the movement of people

The 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall did not do much to bring down the existing walls – the most notorious being the one that separates the West Bank from Israel and the wall that separates Mexico and the USA.

The United States started building a wall to prevent Mexicans from crossing into the USA in 1994, during Bill Clinton's administration. Since that time more than 5.6 thousand people died trying to cross over to the US side. These are official figures from a report by the accounting office of the White House. The causes of death have changed – before the wall was built deaths were mainly caused by traffic accidents, since the immigrants were running on highways in border areas. Now it is mainly drowning in the Rio Grande or deaths caused by hypothermia in the desert.

Human lives are lost because people are looking for a better life. The cost of maintaining the Mexican wall are also high – each time there is a hole made in the wall it costs

US\$1,300 to fix it. The maintenance of the 1,058 kilometre wall is expected to cost US\$6.5 billion dollars over the next 20 years. This is serious money and instead of wasting the US taxpayers' money on something that will fail anyway, would it not have been better to think about investing it in the Mexican economy and provide jobs and decent conditions for workers there?

It is mainly desperation that drives people from their native places to somewhere else where their lives might be better. No walls in the world are going to stop it. Business wants globalisation to work to its advantage by exploiting people and reducing their wages, conditions and entitlements.

The movement of money across the world and the movement of businesses across the world are lauded by economists. When workers start moving across the world artificial barriers go up. Political barriers and racial barriers should have no place in the contemporary world.

The same old sentiment – divide and rule – seem to find new application in the 21st century. It is outdated and new forms of cooperation are necessary. Will capitalism provide it? I doubt it. That's why it is important to understand the ideology and politics behind it and organise and resist attempts to vilify refugees and immigrants. If there is a problem there is a solution – but solutions should be made in favour of the majority of the people.

**T Southern
Brisbane**

Some are more equal ...

I appreciated the recognition of the systemic child abuse of thousands of children brought to Australia sometimes as late as the '70s. Many good words were said and the response was emotional and genuine. Last year the Prime Minister and the leader of the Opposition said "sorry" to the Stolen Generations. Again, it was good that it was done. But was it enough?

What do you DO after you say "sorry"? Evidently, nothing much. While Canberra was celebrating the latest in the "sorry" business, we were in the middle of an awful, messy refugee crisis of our own making. As a radio listener said – "would refugees be the next group of people we'll be apologising to in 20 years?"

And another story was unfolding – a 12-year old Aboriginal child had been charged with the criminal offence of receiving stolen property (a chocolate Freddo frog, price 70 cents). I am prepared to bet anything that a white kid from a middle class family living in a "nice" suburb would not get the same treatment. How come that on the one hand we are proud of our justice system and think that the rule of law applies equally to everyone and on the other we see in practice that some people are "more equal than others" and that systemic racism is alive and well.

**Mati English
Sydney**

Sydney Film Screening

Earth: The climate wars

A BBC2 production with geologist Dr Iain Stewart



6 pm Friday November 27

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All welcome

Recommended donation \$8/\$6

Refreshments available

The third and final part of the excellent BBC program about how the capitalist corporate world responded to the scientific news about climate change. The program's presenter Dr Iain Stewart examines the crucial issue: what effects will climate change have on the planet.

Culture & Life

by Jim Jepps

No-one is a non-person

BRITAIN: As soon as the financial crisis broke last year, up popped Immigration Minister Phil Woolas to tell us that it was time to start cracking down on immigration. Woolas is a man who is able to turn every issue, no matter how unrelated, into one about migrants. He was quoted last week as justifying the Afghan occupation because it kept immigration down.

Perhaps he spends all day mumbling about foreigners making his Coco Pops soggy, his shoes too tight and the clouds too dark, but he only comes to public attention when his ramblings coincide with something that also happens to be in the news.

Mind you, even Woolas hasn't gone as far as his Italian counterpart, who suggested last week that foods like kebabs be banned. If he threatened one of the nation's national dishes, that really would spark riots, so perhaps Woolas is not as far gone as I thought.

Give him time.

Sadly Woolas is just the most obnoxious example of a far more widespread tendency to regard immigration as a problem that has to be handled, rather than a freedom where every citizen of the world should have the right to come and go as they please.

Even Gordon Brown is toughening his rhetoric in response to the ever more shrill voices in the *Daily Mail* et al denouncing Britain's "open-door immigration policy," despite the fact

that we've had no such thing in living memory.

On Thursday Brown announced a new phase in policy with a keynote speech and draft immigration legislation. He said he wanted to introduce restrictions for migrant workers in accessing skilled jobs – this despite the fact that we have a massive undersupply in the skilled workforce of nurses and plumbers, for example.

He also declared his intention to make life even more difficult for asylum-seekers and refugees. The Refugee Council's head of policy Jonathan Ellis responded by saying the government has proposed "making refugees homeless and destitute. That was ruled illegal by the courts four years ago."

Not only that, the government proposes that families who are unable to return home will be refused cash support and forced to rely on a payment card.

"This makes a mockery of the government's claim to be safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children seeking asylum."

This government's treatment of asylum-seekers is a sickening disgrace. We force people to live in poverty then despise them for their terrible conditions. We lock up refugees and their children and then treat them like the criminals that we have made them resemble.

We should not prevent people from being treated as full citizens and then use their low status and poverty as evidence that they are less than us. Nobody is a non-person just because they were born in a different place.

One argument that has gained political currency is that the mainstream parties need to start addressing the immigration "problem" because of the threat of the British National Party.

But there is something fundamentally corrupting about the idea that in order to combat fascists you have to co-opt their most poisonous ideas. The idea that the [extreme right-wing] British National Party (BNP) can be countered by legitimising its core policies is just plain wrong.

We need to counter its ideas,



advancing arguments about why immigration is not the problem. Who is it that denies white working-class people council homes? Who lays them off when recession comes around? Who decides the levels of poverty pay that so many still exist on?

None of these issues is caused by immigration, yet it's immigrants that so often get the blame. There are specific issues, such as the use of immigrant and other vulnerable labour to undercut wages – but our answer has to be organising these workers in effective trade unions, not backing the state's right to keep those workers out.

Immigration controls actually help to entrench employers' ability to play one set of workers off against another. While migrants are more vulnerable it undermines their confidence to build or get involved in the fight for decent wages.

Where workers have come together, immigrants have played an invaluable leading role in trade union struggles. It's the employers who are

determined to avoid paying a decent living wage that are the problem, not those poor enough to be willing to be underpaid for the work they do.

What side of a line on a map you're from is not important.

But the free market has always meant free movement for capital but not for labour. The cards are habitually stacked against us when we allow artificial divisions like the colour of our passports to have real meaning.

Last week asylum seeker Rose-Jane Wanjohi and her British-born daughter Natale were saved from deportation by fellow passengers on the flight they had been due to be taken away on. A number of the passengers refused to allow the plane to take off and be a party to an injustice.

For them it was a small act, but for Wanjohi, who was returned to the relative safety of a detention centre, it meant everything.

It is not true to say that the majority of people are racist or that most of us are directly complicit in the

atrocious way that refugees are treated in this country.

But it is true that racist ideas have been allowed to seep into every aspect of our society and that even good people can sometimes be drawn into the idea that immigrants are a problem.

When government ministers, of all people, give credence to these ideas, particularly in an atmosphere when mainstream politicians are utterly despised by a large proportion of the population, it does not act as a bulwark against racism but shifts the consensus towards those who would divide us.

The BNP as an organisation is not staffed by tactical geniuses or electoral experts – it draws its vote from a pre-existing well of bigotry.

It is those ideas that we have to address not just because we want to combat the far-right but because it is capitalism that is the root of our problems not immigration.

Morning Star ☺



Sun 29 Nov –
Sat 5 Dec

The feature film *Stage Beauty* (ABC1 Sunday November 29 at 8.35pm) was made five years ago. It was adapted for the screen from his own play, *Complete Female Stage Beauty*, by American writer Jeffrey Hatcher.

I found it well made, well acted and good fun, a view shared by the audience at the Cambridge Film Festival who gave it the Audience Award for Best Film. America's National Board of Review also cited it for "Excellence in Filmmaking", and the Phoenix Film Critics Society named it "the Overlooked Film of the Year".

A not exactly authentic account of the moment in the history of Restoration theatre when the decision was made to stop using men in drag for the women's parts and to allow female performers to play those roles instead, the film is sometimes unsure whether it is a drama or a romp in the style of Tony Richardson's much copied adaptation of *Tom Jones*.

Nevertheless, its depiction of life in and around the theatre and the Court in the time of Charles II is always lively, richly decorated, and enacted with gusto. Billy Crudup plays 17th century actor Edward Kynaston, whose career is based on

female impersonation. He bitterly opposes the introduction of women into the profession.

His dresser, Mrs Hughes, played by Claire Danes, also wants to be an actor, but she has modelled herself on Kynaston's portrayal of female characters and as a result is hopelessly mannered. Kynaston, meanwhile, finds himself incapable of breaking his mould and playing a man on stage.

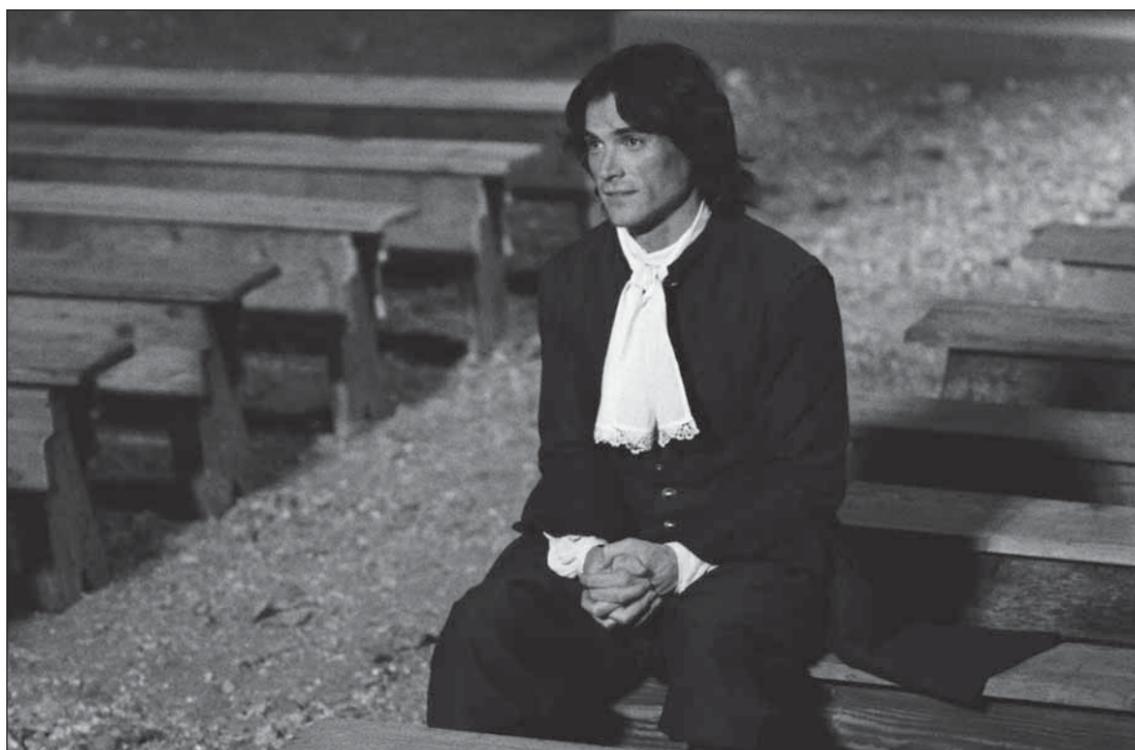
By luck, Mrs Hughes becomes the first woman to legally act in a licensed theatre in England. In a rousing and very satisfying finale, Kynaston comes to her aid when she is called on to play Desdemona before the King.

My only real quibble with the film is the way the actors in the theatre do not "project". To be heard over the constant chatter, socialising and hawking of wares in the aisles and boxes, an actor then would have had to project their voice quite loudly. Instead, in a sequence that is historically anachronistic but dramatically satisfying, Kynaston and Mrs Hughes discover naturalistic acting, a couple of hundred years too soon.

Rupert Everett plays Charles II, Zoe Tapper plays Nell Gwynn in the manner of Barbara Windsor, and Hugh Bonneville brings his usual sympathy to the role of Samuel Pepys.

Some of the critics were less than kind: *The New York Times* savaged it as did *The New Yorker*. On the other hand, *Variety* called the film "an intelligent and entertaining adaptation... skilfully acted, handsomely crafted", while *Rolling Stone* called it "bawdy fun... the gender role-playing puts spine in this period piece that is vital to the here and now."

The early masters of the Soviet cinema – Eisenstein, Pudovkin, Dziga Vertov, et al – showed that the process of editing was the real basis of the art of the cinema. This discovery that joining shot *a* to shot *b* created a new entity,



Billy Crudup as Edward 'Ned' Kynaston – *Stage Beauty* (ABC1 Sunday November 29 at 8.35pm)

not *a+b* but *ab*, fit very nicely into their Marxist philosophy and their understanding of dialectics.

The Canadian feature-length documentary *Edge Codes: beyond the cut* (ABC2 Sunday November 29 at 8.30pm, repeated ABC1 Sunday December 6 at 3.00pm) does not refer to dialectics, but it does pay tribute to the Soviet cinema's important contribution to film editing.

However, the program seems concerned mainly with advances over time in the *techniques* of film editing and rarely ventures an opinion as to the relevance of the film's content.

It is interesting, but is also very dry, and I found it overlong – and I am interested in the subject.

The six-part series *Make 'Em Laugh* (ABC1 Mondays at 9.35pm) purports to be an historical survey of the "funniest moments in American comedy". It isn't.

It is a scrappy collection of clips from TV shows over the years, grouped by themes. The first episode, *Nerds, Jerks and Oddballs*, is a poor introduction to the richness that is American humour, even American TV humour.

After a noticeable while, my wife commented: "I haven't laughed once yet." Nor had I.

Next week's episode, on domestic sitcoms, is better, because the extracts (especially those from Burns and Allen) are really funny.

The barrage of anti-communist propaganda from the European Union continues unabated, especially centred on countries that have recently joined or are trying to join the EU. Whether it is produced by EU member countries or by eager ultra-leftists in other parts of the world, the message is the same: the colour revolutions were all about "freedom" and anything anti-communist is automatically good and above criticism.

Sometimes, however, the filmmakers have to struggle a bit, such as in *The Power Of The Powerless* (ABC1 Thursday December 3 at 8.35pm). This one is all about the work of that great democrat Vaclav Havel, whose Velvet Revolution

brought the people of Czechoslovakia the joys of capitalism, including unemployment, housing insecurity, growing inequality, and participation in American military adventures.

The press sheet for the film manages to give the game away, apparently without realising it, saying that the film "contrasts the experiences of those who fought against the communist regime, with the silent majority who supported it".

The filmmakers are also apparently bewildered by the discovery that the "Velvet Revolution", having served its purpose, has been dumped by imperialism: "The film also looks at the relevance of the Velvet Revolution today and asks why the majority of young Czechs know nothing about it and why they are not being taught about their own history."

Finally, the 13-part children's series *My Place* (ABC2 weekdays from December 4 at 8.00pm), based on the award-winning children's book by Nadia Wheatley and Donna Rawlins.

The series, like the book, rather imaginatively tries to arouse young people's interest in their past, Australia's past. Its problem is that it simply tries too hard. Instead of getting its multicultural message of tolerance and embracing of differences across with some subtlety, it comes over as earnest.

And nothing is drearier and less convincing than an earnest film. ☹

Sydney Book Launch

How to Make Trouble and Influence People

Features hundreds of anecdotes and images as well as 14 interviews and a foreword from *The Chaser's* Andrew Hansen, plus documents, and celebrates hoaxes, graffiti and political mischief making from around Australia. The book will be launched at two events in Sydney.

Thursday the December 3 Book launch upstairs at the Berkelouw Cafe and Bookshop Newtown, 6-8 O'Connell St, Newtown, 6pm-8pm. Entry is free and speakers include the book's author Iain McIntyre as well as Dr Meredith Burgmann, Mother Inferior (Order of Perpetual Indulgence) and Simon Hunt (Pauline Pantsdown).

Saturday the December 5 Launch party at the Red Rattler, 6 Faversham St Marrickville, 8pm-midnight. Entry is \$10 and speakers will include Iain McIntyre, Rachel Evans (No To Pope Coalition) and Dave Burgess (who painted "No War" on the Opera House in 2003) plus projections, DJs and live music from Lee Memorial (Melbourne, ex Sodastream), Bare Arms and NinetyNine (Melbourne). The first 50 payers get a free Rock Against Bullshit XMas CD featuring Yuletide odes from the bands and more.

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Without revolutionary theory, there can be no revolutionary practice.



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The damage of cultural globalisation

Ramzy Baroud*

The term "globalisation" is usually associated with trade, foreign investment, capital flow and all the rest. But what about culture, identity, traditions and ways of life – do these things amount to anything?

Globalisation has various manifestations. If viewed strictly in economic terms, the debate delves into trade barriers, protectionism and tariffs. Powerful countries demand smaller countries break down all trade barriers while maintaining a level of protectionism over their own. Smaller countries, knowing that they cannot do much to hide from the hegemonic nature of globalisation, form their own economic clubs, hoping to negotiate fairer deals.

And the economic tug-of-war continues, between diplomacy and threats, dialogue and arm-twisting. This is the side of globalisation with which most of us are familiar. But there is another side of globalisation, one that is similarly detrimental to some countries and profitable to others.

The globalisation of Western culture creates an unbridgeable disadvantage for poorer countries, which lack the means to withstand the takeover of their traditional ways of life by the dazzling, well-packaged and branded "culture" imparted upon them around the clock.

What audiences watch, read and listen to in most countries outside the Western hemisphere is not truly Western culture in the strict definition of the term. It's a selective brand of culture – a reductionist presentation of art, entertainment, news and so on as platforms to promote ideas that ultimately sell products.

To sell a product, however, the media also sells ideas, often one-sided ones, and creates unjustifiable fascination with ways of life that hardly represent natural progression for many vanishing cultures and communities around the world.

Recently while visiting a Gulf country I saw a few Turkish teenagers begin a shouting match in an internet cafe as they engaged one another in a violent computer game. I tried to mind my own business, but their shrieks of victory and defeat were deafening.

"Kill the terrorist!" one of them yelled in English with a thick Turkish accent.

American cable television music channel MTV now has "local" channels and websites across the world – in English. Pictured here: MTV Arabia.



The Rs in "terrorists" rolled over his tongue unnaturally. For a moment he was an "American" killing "terrorists."

As I walked out, I glanced at the screen. Among the rubble there was a mosque – or what was left of it. The young Turkish Muslim was congratulated by his friends for his handiwork.

There is nothing wrong with exchange of ideas. Cultural interactions are historically responsible for many great advances in art, science and language, even the evolution of food and much more. But prior to globalisation cultural influences were introduced at a much slower speed. This allowed societies big and small to reflect, consider and adjust to these unique notions over time.

But the globalisation of the media is unfair. It gives no chance for mulling anything over, for determining the benefits or the harms, for any sort of value analysis. News, music and even pornography are beamed directly to all sorts of screens and gadgets. This may sound harmless, but the cultural contradictions eventually morph into conflicts and clashes, in figurative and real senses.

Young people grow, defining themselves according to someone else's standards, thus the Turkish teenager, temporarily adopting the role of the "American," blows up his own mosque. Globalisation is not a fair game.

Those with giant economies get the lion's share of the "collective" decision-making.

Those with more money and a global outlook tend to have influential media, also with a global outlook.

In both scenarios, small countries are lost between desperately trying to negotiate a better economic standing for themselves while hopelessly trying to maintain their cultural identity, which defined their people, generation after generation throughout history.

*Ramzy Baroud is an author and editor of PalestineChronicle.com. His latest book is *The Second Palestinian Intifada: A Chronicle Of A People's Struggle* (Pluto Press, London). www.ramzybaroud.net (Abridged) ✪

Companies cashing in on flu epidemic

John Wojcik

CHICAGO: Along with providing flu vaccines to the public, the government may have to step in to ensure companies are not using the swine flu epidemic to rip off those who come down with the flu.

It was reported after some experts said as much as 63 percent of the population could become infected with the swine flu virus before Christmas, that many pharmacies appear to be engaging in price gouging on the H1N1 drug Tamiflu. The reports say some drugstores are charging three times more than others for the scarce liquid form of the drug used by children.

A *USA Today* phone survey of 100 pharmacies in six states revealed that the out-of-pocket price to fill the same liquid Tamiflu prescription ranged from \$43 to \$130. There are indications also that others in the privately controlled health care delivery system may be jumping on the bandwagon.

Addressing price gouging by pharmacies, Connecticut Attorney General Richard Blumenthal said, "We're very concerned because there is a shortage and exploiting a shortage is unconscionable."

In Chicago, too, there is a wide range in the prices pharmacists charge for the same 50 ml dose. While pharmacists here say the liquid form for children is not available, Walgreens said it would charge \$94.49 for the drug. Leanna Trela, director of retail clinical services for the chain, said she was "surprised" that anyone was charging less.

Maria Lopez purchased Waltussin, a cough medicine at a Walgreens outlet on South Halsted Street, "I've been coughing and I don't even know if I have the flu," she said, "but I don't have insurance and the doctor down the street charges \$100 a visit. If what you say is true, that they are charging almost \$100 for that medicine, I think it's a disgrace. They don't have any morals to do that in a health emergency."

The manager at Voss Pharmacy, a small pharmacy a few blocks away in Chicago's Bridgeport section told the *People's Weekly World* newspaper that his price for the same dose "would not be higher than \$75 or \$80. I couldn't sell it for any less," he said, adding that the cost of 50ml of Tamiflu to small pharmacists was \$40. Walgreen's would not say what they pay for the same dose.

The local pharmacist at Voss said "the biggest chains always charge uninsured customers the most."

Having prescription drug insurance coverage does not mean that people will have an easier time getting the drug than people without such insurance. Many with coverage are reporting delays in getting approval for the medicine they need for their children as prescription drug benefit programs reject their claims.

According to Maria Palumbo, a spokesperson for Express Scripts, a large benefits company, "Inflated pharmacy charges are one

reason claims are being rejected. We are seeing claims for Tamiflu that are over five times the average costs for this product."

Advocates for health care reform say the situation provides yet another example of why the combination of private business, unregulated pharmaceutical companies and for-profit insurance outfits cannot be trusted to meet the urgent health care needs of the population.

To their credit, however, there are some small pharmacists who do appear to have a conscience and are charging as little as \$3 - \$9 above the cost of the dose to them. "We're dealing with a national epidemic," said Bruce Sneider of Hart Pharmacy in Wichita, Kansas, whose price was \$49. "If I want to sleep at night, I don't think I should be taking advantage."

* All dollars are US. *People's Weekly World* ✪



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