



# International Women's Day and working women's struggle

Len Waster

Since its origins in the socialist movement International Women's Day has focused on work conditions and labour laws, as vital to women's struggle for emancipation.

Women are now 40 percent of the global workforce. Half of women and three quarters of men of workforce age are in paid work. Yet, throughout much of the world, women generally work longer hours and are paid, on average, 25 percent less than men. They work in low productivity, low-paid jobs, without basic rights, or social protection and no voice at work.

In the world's export processing zones four fifths of workers are women. According to the International Labor Organisation (ILO) many developing countries' export-oriented industrialisation and international competitiveness is built on women's cheap labour.

Gender discrimination extends from education to the workplace. Nearly 70 percent of the world's poor and 65 percent of the world's illiterate are women. In poorer countries girls are likely to be denied schooling to attend to domestic tasks. This directly affects earning power, child bearing rates and the extent of violence they suffer.

All girls currently denied an education could be given primary schooling for about \$4 billion a year, equivalent to one day's global military expenditure. It is a matter of priorities!

More women than ever are in the global workforce, but the gender divide has hardly moved in most workplaces.

Says ILO Director Juan Somavia: "The workplace and the world of work are at the centre of global solutions to address gender equality and advance women in society. Decent work for women empowers society and advances economic and social development for all."

### Women and work in Australia

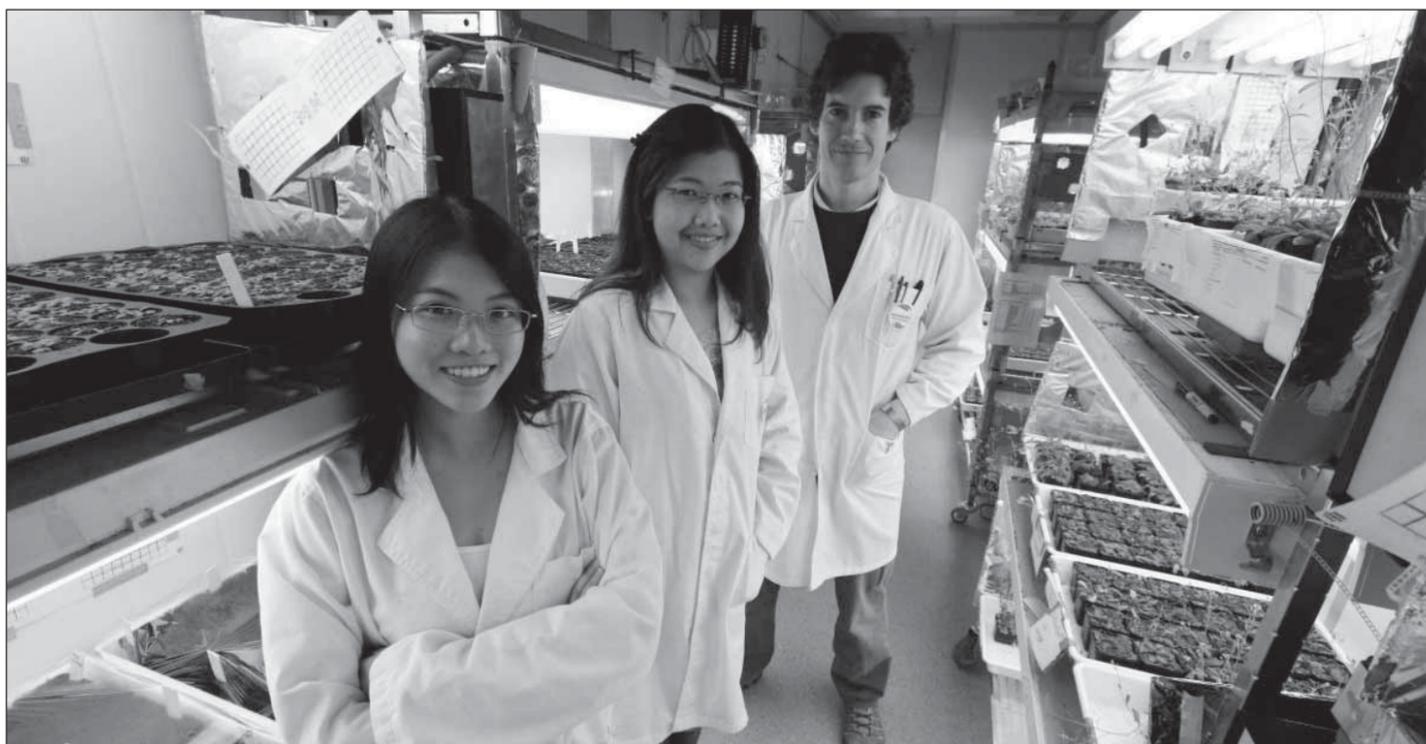
Australia slipped five places to 20th on the World Economic Forum gender gap index between 2006 and 2009. The gender gap is bad and getting worse in Australia.

Women workers in Australia earn, on average, 17 percent less than men in the same industry, a gap that has grown over the last 20 years.

Women's work is clustered in four or five industries and occupations, where unions are weak or non-existent. Women have low wages and little bargaining power and accumulate less superannuation because of lower pay.

Women suffer pay inequity in all industries and at all skill levels: graduate starting salaries average about \$3,000 less for women; women lawyers earn about \$7,000 less than their male peers in their first year. At lower incomes, to scrape together a weekly living, women may hold a number of casual, low paid, part-time jobs.

Women in Australia are more likely than



in any other OECD country to work in low paid, casual, part time jobs, with little legal or industrial protection. Nearly half of women's jobs are part-time, compared with 15 percent of men's. A third are casual – jobs with no access to paid sick leave, annual holidays or even paid public holidays.

The Rudd Labor government's new Fair Work law provides some gains for workers in Australia, but it greatly disadvantages some women workers, often those already in the most precarious and vulnerable jobs. Thousands of women in garment making for instance, face cuts in their casual loading from 33 percent to 25 percent.

The new law provides the right to seek redress, but casual employees who fear losing their jobs are less likely to be covered by unions and thus more likely to fear losing their jobs and less likely to mount a claim.

Poor childcare services and no paid leave drive women into casual, precarious work.

Among OECD nations, only Australia and the US have no comprehensive statutory, paid maternity leave. Less than one in six businesses in Australia have maternity leave agreements with their workers.

While nearly three quarters of high income women have paid leave arrangements, less than a quarter of the great majority of women in the workforce, those with lower incomes, have agreements.

The Rudd Labor government's 18 weeks post-natal leave, to start in 2011, will improve the lot of women in the lowest paid, most insecure jobs, but it compares poorly to Sweden's

75 weeks paid parental leave, or Britain's 39 weeks leave.

Australia ranks 23rd of 25 OECD countries for childcare services. Many parents cannot pay for childcare. Women disproportionately take on the task, usually by working part-time or dropping out of work for a time. Poor childcare helps drive women into casual work.

Australia's childcare system is in the hands of the government-funded, private sector. Recent collapses of for-profit childcare show commercially driven enterprises cannot be trusted with a vital and essential service like childcare.

The Rudd Labor government has committed to new childcare centres, and claims its new work laws make it easier for low-paid childcare workers to bargain collectively with employers.

However, the Rudd government supports "diversity", that is, a continuing role for government funded private corporations running the childcare system. Childcare is a vital service.

It should be government funded, affordable, universally available, providing quality care.

Capitalism combines formal equality with economic and, consequently, social inequality. The working women's movement fights for the economic and social equality of women. The women's struggle is an absolutely vital and essential part of the struggle for socialism, the struggle to create a new society.

We need to fight for:

- Job security and permanent work with full workers' rights: not casual, temporary and insecure work without protections;
- Comprehensive, free and universal public/community childcare and pre-school services; at least 12 months paid family leave;
- A shorter work week, to share work and free time more equally between men and women. ✪



See page 2 for International Women's Day activities around Australia!

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# The Guardian

Issue 1445

March 3, 2010

## Education and questions of trust

Education Minister Gillard and Prime Minister Rudd have for some time taken a belligerent stance towards teachers in the country's public education system. They have portrayed public school teachers as a closed-minded and defensive group seeking to avoid scrutiny of their work and, by so-doing, failing to uphold the welfare of the students they are instructing. The PM and his deputy have striven to rally the community and parents in particular behind their "education revolution" and to get their trust that a whole series of major changes to public education are in the best interests of students and their school communities. Teachers are "the enemy within", if Rudd and Gillard are to be believed. Unfortunately for the future of public education in Australia, it is the Rudd government that is betraying the trust placed in their hands at the last election and steering public education in a disastrous direction.

There have been many swipes and slurs along the way. The long-overdue national schools' curriculum announced this week was dumped on teachers without consultation.

Gillard's recent address to the National Press Club was full of references to "shining a light" on education and the national testing and benchmarks she insists will work to allocate resources to struggling schools and students. There is the clear implication that if a school or a child is struggling it is the fault of the teachers who are concealing their own mediocrity behind "closed doors". She cites examples of the new type of educator the government is promoting, like those entering teaching through "Teach for Australia". The US-inspired scheme allows higher education graduates to bypass the usual, rigorous teacher training and fast-track them into the classroom:

"...Shaun Isbister is teaching business studies as one of the first group of Teach for Australia associates. Shaun was the first person in his family to attend university. He ended up with first class honours in economics and was working as a business analyst before joining Teach for Australia.

"Now, after an intensive introduction to teaching, he is in his first weeks teaching kids with similar backgrounds to his own.

"Sean's class motto is 'results, not excuses'."

Most of the reasons for underachieving students are bound up with the decades of under-resourcing to public schools and failure to meet the needs of the communities from which they draw their student populations. These are dismissed as "excuses", however. Instead, teachers are to blame. According to this spin, their performance needs to be monitored with their results eventually posted to the *My School* website. Teaching is basic and easy, according to the government: you do not even need teacher training to do it.

Gillard and Rudd recognise that public school teachers and their union are major potential obstacles to their plans for the dismantling of public education as we know it in Australia. The extent of the changes and the ultimate goal of large scale privatisation would not be welcomed by the parents and students of the country either and the government has been forced to conceal its intentions. A noteworthy example of this was the introduction of the *My School* website from which name-and-shame league tables have been compiled. The data is drawn from national literacy and numeracy (NAPLAN) testing.

Gillard is now introducing a number for all Australian students that will go with them throughout their education. The reasons given for this step vary.

But at bottom, the idea of employers having a virtual dossier on a worker's whole life during his or her primary or secondary education is disturbing. They should not be trusted with that personal information. It is already a step too far. But it is the government's other, unstated motives in introducing a student number which need to be questioned. Could it be that students need a number to track payments made "across systems" when they qualify for an education voucher? Couldn't this initiative get around the fact that school children are too young to be stamped with a Centrelink client number?

It is the government that cannot be trusted on these burning issues in public education.

### PRESS FUND

The Rudd Government must be counting the political costs of its disastrous home insulation program, not to mention the enormous financial costs involved in halting the program in mid-stream, then restarting it in three months time. They should be, considering that the public is now counting the terrible emotional costs resulting from deaths or injuries during the program, plus the cost of the government's many broken promises and "imitation-Liberal" policies. But speaking of counting the cost, we rely on you, our supporters, to help us meet the costs of producing the Guardian, and right now we really need your help because contributions to the Press fund are very thin on the ground. So please, don't put it off, send us in something for the next edition of the *Guardian*. Many thanks to our two supporters this week, as follows:

"Round Figure" \$10, Mark Window \$10.

This week's total: \$20 Progressive total: \$320

Alberto Mollinelli worked on repairing the Party office's roof for over a month. Originally he thought it would take 10 days but with inclement weather and some surprises the job blew out to be much bigger and complex. Alberto brought his son up from Melbourne and also had the services of his cousin from the Blue Mountains, Juan Carlos Valenzuela. All three worked on modifying and improving our roof so that the leaks that have plagued us for a number of years can now be a thing of the past. We held a small thank you celebration for Alberto to honour his work. In the photo comrade Denis Doherty is handing Alberto a Party t-shirt and a small present as a token of appreciation for his great work. The Party is extremely grateful for the diligent work done by Alberto and his two companions on our building and we want to publicly thank him and his helpers.



### Correction

In *The Guardian* issue 1444 (February 24, 2010) in the article *The Chelmsford disgrace – no justice for Barry Hart* there is a passage that reads as if the victims could not get a doctor to go to court. This is not correct.

It should have read: "Dr.Herron could not get a doctor here or overseas to go to court in his defence."

Mr Hart was the plaintiff. Dr Herron and Chelmsford Private Hospital were the defendants.

## INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 2010

*Look for the CPA/Communist Alliance stalls and banners!*

### NSW: SYDNEY

#### International Women's Day march and rally

Saturday 6 March. Meet at Town Hall at 11am for rally, march starts at 12 noon.  
Theme 'Fair Go for Women, in Australia, around the World'.

#### International Women's Day Dinner & Cultural Evening – Lakemba

4 pm Sunday 7 March (not Saturday as previously advertised)  
Greek Orthodox Club, Lakemba St, Lakemba  
Contact: Dorothy Bassil on 0417 049 358 or Martha on 9740 6022  
For more detail see ad on page 9

### QLD: BRISBANE

#### International Women's Day Rally & March

6 March. Meet King George Square, 10:30am.  
Following rally march through city to  
Numberlie Tjadjin (All the Sisters) festival at  
Musgrave Park Cultural Centre.  
Theme "Women Demand Freedom"  
Kathy 0400 720 757 iwdbrisbane@gmail.com

### SA: ADELAIDE

International Women's Day Rally & March  
IWD Collective, 0419 825 845

### WA: PERTH

#### Sundowner

Monday 8 March, 4:30 - 6:30 pm  
Solidarity Park, Harvest Terrace and Parliament Park, West Perth  
Drinks and food provided  
RSVP to UnionsWA on 08 9328 7877 or unionsyes@unionswa.com.au

### WA:FREMANTLE

SAWA-Australia Women poets of and about Afghanistan  
To register: perth@sawa-australia.org

### VIC: MELBOURNE

#### Geelong Trades Hall IWD Breakfast

Friday 5 March, 7-9am, VTHC. Geelong Trades Hall  
Guest speaker: Bronwen Halfpenny  
More info, tel: 5221 1712, or www.geelongtradeshall.blogspot.com

#### One Just World – How Women Can Change the World

Wed 10 March, 6 - 8pm Federation Square  
Info/register: 03 9650 5574, jshaw@iwda.org.au, or www.onejustworld.com.au  
Free

# Rudd's closing the gap report blasted

Darren Coyne

**Indigenous leaders have slammed the federal government's progress in closing the gap following a yearly report from Prime Minister Kevin Rudd. Mr Rudd delivered his Close the Gap report card last week in Parliament, admitting that more needed to be done to tackle Indigenous disadvantage.**

Outlining details of the government's \$5.5 billion, 10-year Close the Gap policy, Mr Rudd said there had been improvements in areas such as child mortality rates, school attendance and Indigenous employment.

He conceded, however, that an absence of clear data had made it difficult to determine the success or otherwise of a number of new programs in Indigenous communities.

On life expectancy, Mr Rudd said revised figures now meant Aboriginal men were expected to live 11.5 years less than non-Indigenous men, and that Indigenous women would live 9.2 years less.

"This is less than the 17-year gap we thought existed a year ago," Mr Rudd said.

"This is good news – but it is the result of having more reliable data, rather than the result of any real improvement on the ground."

During his address, Mr Rudd announced a further \$9.1 million for a program aimed at giving Indigenous mothers and babies better access to health care, advice and support. He also announced that 17 sports academies would be established across Western Australia, Victoria and the Northern Territory in an effort to improve attendance and outcomes for Indigenous students.

Meanwhile, the Prime Minister urged Indigenous leaders to "step up and take responsibility for restoring social norms in their own communities".

"Governments are responsible for helping communities to develop the structures and leaders they need to restore social norms, recognising that change takes time," he said. "However, individuals also have responsibilities. To provide safe and secure homes for their children. To go to school or to make sure their children go to school.

"To pay rent, look for work,

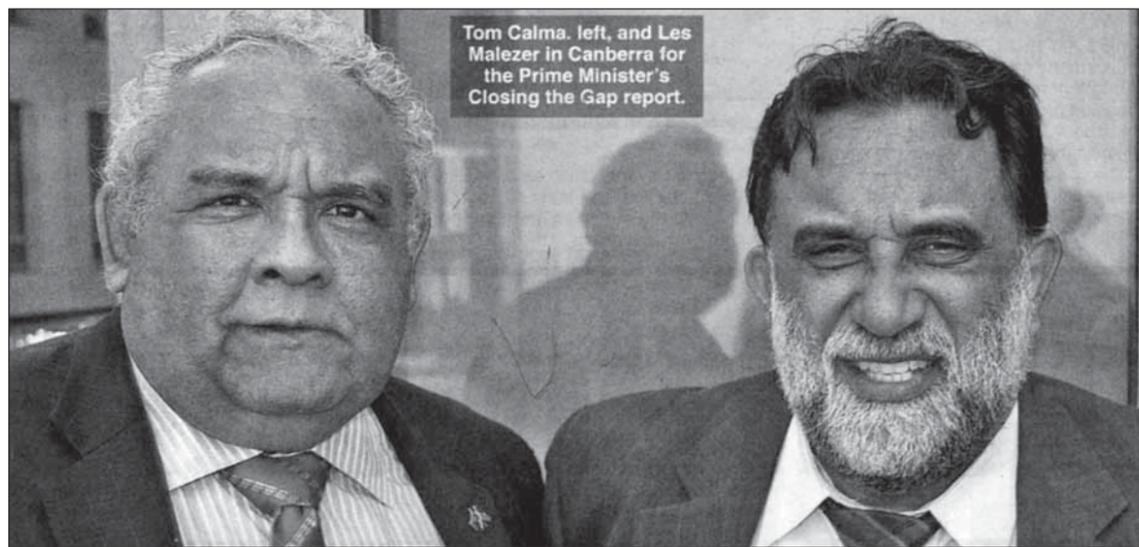
avoid self-destructive behaviour, and give the people in their care every opportunity to thrive. These are the foundations on which strong communities are built, and on which people can make the most of their natural abilities."

Close the Gap steering committee chairman Tom Calma told *The Koori Mail* newspaper the government should be commended for "taking significant steps forward", but he expressed concerns about the lack of relevant data to judge the success of projects on the ground.

Mr Calma released a shadow report on the government's Close the Gap progress, which warned "without an evidence-based and targeted plan, efforts to close the gap will simply fail".

Among the shadow report's recommendations was the development of a capacity-building plan for the Aboriginal Community Controlled Health sector, together with an injection of about \$150 million, scaling up to \$500 million over five years, then \$500 million annually.

The report also called for a national partnership agreement for



Tom Calma, left, and Les Malezer in Canberra for the Prime Minister's Closing the Gap report.

Photo: Koori Mail

**"Compared to nations like the USA, Canada and New Zealand, Australia falls behind in closing the life expectancy gap."**

the achievement of Indigenous health equality by 2030.

Human Rights campaigner Les Malezer told *The Koori Mail* he thought the PM's report was patronising, and showed that Labor had the same approach to Indigenous Affairs as the Coalition.

"It was more like a policy or budget statement ... there were no actual achievements in the areas of health or housing," Mr Malezer said.

"There is no real recognition of rights for Aboriginal people."

Meanwhile, National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO) chair Justin Mohamed welcomed the new funding for mothers and babies.

"Support for births and care for new mothers and babies has always been a high priority for all of our 150

Aboriginal community controlled health services nationwide. This new funding can build on what is already being done," he said.

"We look forward to the day when governments at all levels recognise meaningful engagement and equal partnerships with the Aboriginal community controlled health sector and at the national level through a partnership between NACCHO and the federal government and its agencies.

"Compared to nations like the USA, Canada and New Zealand, Australia falls behind in closing the life expectancy gap largely because Aboriginal peoples here have less control of the design and delivery of their health services."

*The Koori Mail* ☘

## ABC stirs commercials' ire

Bob Briton

**Plans by the ABC for a 24-hour TV news channel and a network of websites for rural Australia have upset the commercial media, prompted howls of "not fair" and drawn the most unlikely expressions of concern for quality at the national broadcaster. The announcements by ABC managing director Mark Scott are ambitious but reportedly involve relatively little additional federal government funding. Nevertheless, commercial operators are not welcoming this wave of innovation and competition.**

Regional newspaper giant APN News & Media is leading the offensive against the ABC Open project in regional and rural areas. The regional broadband hubs would greatly expand access to news and information in more remote centres as higher speed internet connections become available.

"I think Mark Scott and his team (are hiding) behind the purse strings of the taxpayer. There's got to be accountability," APN chief executive Brendan Hopkins told *The Australian* last week. "I don't see why politicians should be extending the purse strings to

enable the state broadcaster to compete with us."

Mr Hopkins spoke up on behalf of fellow regional stakeholders Fairfax, News Limited and West Australian Newspapers who fear loss of advertising revenue if rural and regional communities get to access news and are able to contribute content without being bombarded by ads. These players view the ABC as "state" media, not the independent national broadcaster and clearly do not appreciate the loss of control of the political agenda in this sector of the national media.

The ABC's fourth digital

TV channel will employ new journalists and production staff and operate out of the ABC's Ultimo headquarters. Plans include the hosting of interviews by putting cameras in the studios of AM, PM and Radio National Breakfast. The ABC has been encouraged by the success of ventures like the ABC2 Breakfast program to expand its news offerings. The thing that gets up the commercials' nose is that it will be a logical fit for the Australia Network, which brings an Australian presentation of the news to 44 countries.

Sky News and the ABC have both been trying to secure the running of the Australia Network for the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. A \$94 million contract is the glittering prize. "Australian taxpayers have a right to ask why more and more of their taxes are being spent on services that the nation's commercial media outlets already provide in greater depth, across more channels," Sky's Angelos Frangopolous said recently. He glosses over the fact that Sky is not a free-to-air service. He also raises the alarm about a downgrading of the rest of the ABC's content:

"Clearly, the money has to come from somewhere and that means further cuts for the ABC's core services, including possibly its flagship existing news and current affairs programs," Mr Frangopolous added.

The motives might be muddled by commercial self-interest but the

Sky CEO has a point. There is not a shortage of basic news coverage or outlets spewing out headlines with the occasional event-related piece. There is a lack of news analysis with depth, backed by research to deal with complex national issues. The Friends of the ABC share this concern which is exemplified by the very limited season and the increase of overseas-sourced content on the flagship *Four Corners* program.

In another development, a bill has passed the federal lower house banning former politicians taking up positions on the ABC's governing board. A panel will advise on future appointments to the board, which will once more include a staff representative. The Liberals strongly opposed the changes, claiming that the best person for any vacancy might be a former parliamentarian. They insist a staff representative would have a "conflict of interest" when considering pay issues. There is no such problem for federal parliamentarians considering their own pay rates, presumably.

The Libs were able to make some strategic appointments to the ABC during the Howard period; notably those of Michael Kroeger, Donald McDonald and Janet Albrechtsen. While the latest change, if enacted, would not have prevented any of those nominations, it does close off one access point for axe-grinding conservative politicians and should be welcomed. ☘

Pete's Corner



# Solidarity with jailed Philippine health workers

Denis Doherty

Forty-three health care workers and their instructors were at a conference and training centre in Morong, situated in the province Rizal when they were arrested by the Philippine military in the early morning of February 6. The Philippines military have since made false claims about finding explosives and other devices yet they have failed to make their "discoveries" public.

Since then, the Commission on Human Rights and family members have been able to visit some of the detained and discovered that they had been subjected to torture to force them to admit to being members of the New People's Army. The military defied an order of habeas corpus to produce the 43 arrested in court on February 12 and have still not released them. The military have brazenly demanded that they "prove their innocence".

On Thursday February 25

members of the Philippine community in Australia and local groups protested outside the Sydney Consulate of the Philippines. The groups included Philippines Australia Union Link, Migrante along with the CPA, Search and Anti-Bases.

The CPA has sent a strongly worded letter to President Arroyo of the Philippines and urges all our supporters and members to do likewise. Part of our letter stated: "For the sake of your international reputation and that of your government we call on you to immediately release the health workers who were illegally arrested and detained at Camp Capinpin, Tanay, Rizal."

Send your protests to:  
HE Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo  
President of the Republic  
Malacañang Palace,  
JP Laurel St., San Miguel  
Manila Philippines  
E-mail: [corres@op.gov.ph](mailto:corres@op.gov.ph) /  
[opnet@ops.gov.ph](mailto:opnet@ops.gov.ph) ✪



Protestors outside Philippines Consulate Sydney Thursday February 25.

Photo: Denis Doherty

## Minutes silence to honour tragic death

**Workers on wharves across Australia observed a minutes silence at 12 noon on Friday February 26 in a mark of respect for Brad Gray who died in a workplace accident in Brisbane.**

"Brad, 30, has been cut down in his prime and leaves a wife and baby," said MUA national secretary Paddy Crumlin. "This was a senseless waste of life and we are helping the family in whatever way we can. His workmates are devastated and the minute silence gives workers everywhere the chance to show their sorrow and send a message to his family.

"Workers are also making a statement about an unnecessary death that shouldn't and wouldn't happen if there was a proper safety code of practice on our wharves."

Brad was tragically killed just before 3pm in an horrific workplace injury while working the vessel the *Pacific Explorer* for the POAG stevedoring group. He was working in the gangway and struck by a forklift carrying a dunnage (waste) bin.

"Brad's death will mark a stepping up of the campaign to see that workplace safety is at last taken seriously. This is the fourth fatality

in little over three and a half years and the fifth since June 2003," Crumlin said.

"The Brisbane waterfront is tense following the death. Every workplace is different and without second guessing any formal inquiries, this sort of accident just shouldn't happen if set safety protocols are put in place. We have to ensure that workplaces achieve productivity goals, but not at the expense of fundamental safety," said the MUA's assistant national secretary Warren Smith.

"For the past two years we have been working for nationally coordinated regulation to underpin waterfront safety and we are now calling for the government to support a national safety code of practice for stevedoring and give it some legislative backbone."

He said that the stevedoring companies have not adequately responded as an industry to the previous deaths and serious injuries, that they have pushed for self regulation rather than prescriptive legislation but have not shown leadership in applying the Safe Work Australia guidance and the new performance-based approaches to improving safety (which requires

companies to address hazards and risks).

"The Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA) and State and Northern Territory OH&S agencies have failed to act in a coordinated way to improve waterfront safety given the dual jurisdictional responsibility.

"AMSA has also been slow in finalising revisions to cargo handling regulations (Marine Orders 32) and in settling on Memorandums of Understanding between AMSA and State and Territory OH&S agencies, and in rolling out an awareness campaign," said Smith.

Recent waterfront workplace fatalities include:

- Jeff Grey, Appleton Dock, Melbourne, June 03
- Dean Robinson, Port Adelaide, June 2006
- Peter Ross, Appleton Dock, January 2007
- Bob Cumberlidge, Westernport, March 2007

"The union will be monitoring work practices and campaigning to clean up the waterfront of unsafe work practices", said Warren Smith. ✪

## Innovation Councils – smart solution for major projects

**At a conference in Sydney late last month the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) said that establishing innovation councils for the offshore oil and gas sectors and the transport and logistics sector may be the smart way forward in planning the workforce for major future transport infrastructure projects.**

"Effective consultative arrangements will be key to arriving at the right industrial relations outcomes. A real option is the establishment of a transport and logistics industry innovation council and/or an offshore oil and gas innovation council", said MUA assistant deputy national secretary Mick Doleman.

"It's consistent with Labor Party policy for building competitiveness and lifting productivity in these key sectors", said Doleman, speaking at the Lloyds List Transport Infrastructure Workshop Conference on the "Importance of increasing the workforce for fundamental future transport projects".

"This consultative process has to be kicked off at the peak industry, union and government level to address these issues before Final Investment Decisions (FIDs) are made.

He said any negotiated

framework should address the full range of labour relations issues such as bargaining principles, bargaining units and project agreements, labour supply issues (and the qualifications and licensing of the labour that is required), the upskilling of the existing workforce to meet specific project requirements, the OHS issues and vessel safety/vessel management issues, procurement and Australian content, Indigenous employment and use of foreign labour.

Doleman said three high level strategic objectives should be in the mix in considering the workforce requirements of future major transport projects:

- Seeking to balance labour supply with labour demand.
- Ensuring that the supply of labour has the right mix of skills, qualifications and licenses to meet the requirements of the project.
- Ensuring that the labour relations framework under which the labour will work is well structured.

"Collectively we don't seem to be doing any of these things particularly well at present in major projects", he said. ✪

## Safer workplaces needed to fix WorkCover

**Communist Party candidate for Lee in the SA elections, Bob Briton, has criticised the Liberals' policy announcement of further cuts to South Australia's WorkCover scheme. Liberal leader Isobel Redmond has announced that a Liberal government would carve up the body, adopt measures to assist employers to self-insure, open the door to private competitors for claims management and reduce the employer levy.**

"Ms Redmond is right in saying WorkCover is failing the workers and taxpayers of SA but she can't duck her share of the responsibility," said Mr Briton. "The Liberals voted with

the government to reduce workers' entitlements under the scheme and have not sought to toughen occupational health and safety standards that could deal with the problems at their source. They have resisted moves for legislation to deal with industrial manslaughter and have in every way put the employers' interests first."

He said that the Liberals are strong backers of the Australian Building and Construction Commission which makes the job of unions to ensure safe workplaces in the dangerous construction industry extremely difficult. "They are also supporters of industry self-regulation and we have seen where this has led

with the disastrous home insulation saga of late.

"If the Liberals think having private companies compete in a so-called 'free market' for workers' compensation is in the community's interests, could they explain why the privatisation of utilities like electricity has reduced services and led to higher charges?"

"We don't need here today, gone tomorrow private operators in this essential area of income support for sick and injured workers. Get tough on unsafe workplaces, not the victims of substandard practices," Mr Briton added. ✪

# Privatisation, greed, opportunism Behind the insulation crash

Peter Mac

**The Rudd government's disastrous \$42.5 billion home insulation program was supposed to reduce the nation's heavy consumption of energy in order to help meet the threat of climate change. However, many of the firms allocated to carry out the work had very little experience, just a determination to take maximum advantage of the \$12,000 grant that the government was offering direct to them for each home insulated.**

The number of insulation firms ballooned out to 7,000, as they scrambled to complete the greatest number of projects in the shortest possible time, and in many cases with little regard to safety. Brian Tikey, head of the Aluminium Foil Insulation Association, complained that the industry had become "awash with untrained installers" with the program "a free-for-all" in terms of installers and their expertise. He said: "It's every man and his dog. There is no duty of care".

The program was finally terminated after the death on the job of one young worker from heat stroke and four others from electrocution, which was blamed on the penetration of electrical conduits by steel staples used to fix metal foil insulation.

There have now been 93 house fires associated with the insulation program, resulting from short circuits or from insulation batts being

given its method of implementation. However, the government magnified the problem by attempting to utilise the program to help pump-prime the economy after the financial crisis.

Interviewed recently on ABC TV, Rudd proclaimed defiantly: "We didn't want the economy to collapse". However, this approach led to the government ignoring several warnings from the insulation industry, and from its own legal advisers about the dangers of hasty implementation.

In April last year the legal firm Minter Ellison warned that the program should be deferred until September to avoid a \$145 million cost blow-out, and that the government should give rebates to the householders, rather than direct grants to the firms involved. It also warned about the risks of house fires, fraud and "major political fallout" resulting from the method and timing of the program.

Nevertheless, the government commenced the program on July 1.

## Little or no supervision

The second major factor in the collapse of the program was the lack of trained personnel to inspect and supervise the work. One insulation firm has expressed astonishment that its performance was never audited, whereas they expected at least the first five to ten percent of their projects to be subject to close scrutiny.

Rudd has stated that the Commonwealth government does



Relieved Minister for the Environment, Peter Garrett.

reassuring, given that approximately one million homes have now been insulated. At an estimated cost of \$60 million, some 160,000 homes will now be inspected to ensure that there is no risk of fires from insulation batts installed, as well as another 40,000 homes that have received foil insulation. Questions have also been raised about solar electricity panels installed in a previous subsidised installation program.

Up to 30,000 insulation workers could now lose their jobs. The government has offered the industry \$41 million to keep their employees on the books, but given the lack of supervision to date many bosses will probably pocket the money and dismiss their employees anyway. The government also faces legal class actions from householders who have suffered fires or other damage from the program.

Last week Rudd relieved the wretched Minister for the Environment, Peter Garrett, from any further responsibility for insulation programs. But the problems didn't arise because of the Minister's competence, or lack of it. They arose from the government's haste to subordinate the insulation program, so that it became an instrument for the government to use in dealing with the financial crisis. They also arose from the government's own lack of supervisory personnel, which led to the work being carried out with chaotic "laissez faire". And, of course, they arose from the greed of capitalism, unfettered and urged into feverish activity at the government's behest.

Those are the problems that have to be dealt with in any future insulation program. And in any other government works program, for that matter. ☹

**At an estimated cost of \$60 million, some 160,000 homes will now be inspected to ensure that there is no risk of fires from insulation batts installed, as well as another 40,000 homes that have received foil insulation.**

positioned in contact with electrical installations. An estimated 240,000 houses now have unsafe or substandard installations, and 1,000 are at risk of short circuiting.

The government has banned the use of foil insulation. However, the problem does not lie with the product, but rather with the way it was used. In many cases the foil was laid over the top of horizontal ceiling joists, rather than under the rafters. Fixing to the joists is often the quickest way to get an insulating job done, but it is also potentially hazardous, because the joists usually carry the electrical conduit and light fittings.

## Haste makes waste

The chaotic response to the government's insulation grants program was only to be expected,

not have the personnel to carry out the supervision. It certainly did at one stage. The works supervisors of the former Commonwealth Department of Housing and Construction could have easily have supervised the work. However, they were the first to go in a twenty-year mass retrenchment process that ended in 1998.

## Where to go?

The government has now cancelled the insulation program, having spent about half the funds allocated. It will start a new program in June, with rebates to the remaining 900,000 householders instead of direct grants to insulation firms.

Rudd recently declared defensively that "92 percent (of the home insulation projects carried out to date) have no risk". That's not very



Later this year Australia is planning to introduce biometric testing on visitors from ten countries which are supposed to be high risk in regard to terrorism. The 10 countries were not named which led to ferocious speculation as to which ones would be or should be included or excluded. The government was criticised for allocating \$69 million for the scheme while concluding in its white paper on security that the main threat for Australia is domestic. Amnesty International spokesperson said: "Any counter-terrorism strategy that targets a particular group of people based on nationality, ethnicity or any other similar grounds is profiling by another name".

Residents of the inner Sydney suburb of Redfern /Waterloo are seeking an interim heritage order to stop demolition of the fence on which a local Aboriginal teenager became impaled during a police chase. Six years ago Thomas "TJ" Hickey sustained fatal injuries and died the next day after being pursued by the police. Hundreds gathered to commemorate TJ on February 14, the sixth anniversary of his death and to call for justice. TJ's mother Gail Hickey used the anniversary to lodge a complaint with the United Nations human rights committee seeking a finding that Australia breached its human rights obligations in failing to independently investigate her son's death.

The Resources Minister, Martin Ferguson, has left open the possibility of a nuclear waste dump in the Northern Territory, causing a rift between the government and Indigenous groups. The Howard government's legislation which allowed the imposition of a nuclear waste dump on the NT would be replaced by a new protocol in which Indigenous land councils and other groups voluntarily nominate a site anywhere in the country. Following this the site will be scientifically and environmentally assessed. The government is under pressure to find a site for nuclear waste, which will be coming from Scotland and France in 2014 and 2015. Despite the changes, Muckaty Station in the Northern Territory remains the preferred site for a nuclear dump.

The government has been criticised for lifting a ban on beef imports from countries with mad cow disease. Consumption of BSE (bovine spongiform encephalopathy) contaminated food can cause a disease which has been responsible for more than 200 deaths, mainly in Britain. With labelling laws being what they are, a "made in Australia" meat pie could be a mystery bag containing meat from suspect countries. Trade Minister Mr Simon Crean promised a review of labelling laws to exclude the possibility of contamination. One can review everything - the question still remains - why should Australia even contemplate importing a product which can be harmful?

## Bob Briton for Lee

The Communist Party in South Australia has endorsed Bob Briton as candidate to contest the seat of Lee. Running a campaign is expensive so please help Bob with a donation. You can be sure it will be put to good use in presenting the working class alternative to the voters in Lee.

Check out his campaign web site: [vote1communist.org.au](http://vote1communist.org.au)



# Abbott's agenda for women: Exploitation, sexism, paternalism

Anna Pha

When asked about sex before marriage, federal Coalition leader Tony Abbott responded: "I would say to my daughters, if they were to ask me this question, I would say ... it is the greatest gift that you can give someone, the ultimate gift of giving and don't give it to someone lightly, that is what I would say." In other words, women should save themselves and offer up to their husbands the sacred gift of virginity.

Not surprisingly this answer did not go down well with many Australian women – or men for that matter! Nor have some of his other remarks about women over the years.

His references to housewives doing the ironing raised many eyebrows, harking back to the 1950s or '60s when women were expected to manage all domestic matters while their husbands attended to the important tasks of paid work and worldly affairs.

The gift of virginity is not the only aspect in which Abbott seeks to deny women ownership and control of their bodies.

## Abortion

"Abortion in Australia has been reduced to a question of the mother's convenience," Abbott said back in 2004, demonstrating his ignorance and paternalistic attitude towards women. He was the Health Minister in Howard government at the time.

"Even those who think that abortion is a woman's right should be troubled by the fact that 100,000 Australian women choose to destroy their unborn babies every year ... I fear there is no satisfactory answer to this question ... Governments can't legislate for virtue but shouldn't be indifferent to it either."

Then two years later: "Every abortion is a tragedy and up to 100,000 abortions a year is this generation's legacy of unutterable shame."

Abbott is anti-IVF, anti-stem cell research and wants to ban no-fault divorce.

## Divorce

No-fault divorce was one of the great achievements of the Whitlam Labor government in the 1970s. Prior its introduction, divorces were fought out in the Supreme Court – the Family Court was part of the Whitlam reforms. Those were the days when being born out of wedlock meant being labelled as "illegitimate".

Amicably agreeing to part ways was not grounds for a divorce, let alone where one member of the couple refused to agree to a divorce. One party had to be at fault, their behaviour sufficiently bad to provide grounds for a divorce.

For example, producing public evidence in court that your spouse had committed adultery might be grounds for divorce. Twelve months separation was required before an application could be made and then several years spent on the waiting list. During that period, a woman with custody of the children seen with another man could risk losing them when it came to the divorce hearing. Her "immorality" could be used by her husband as grounds for custody. If the spouse opposed the divorce, then the wait was seven years before making an application.

Private eyes were used to spy on partners, sometimes couples colluded – one of them would spend a night in a motel room with someone of the opposite sex while the other one hired the private eye to get the evidence.



Tony Abbott.

Constructive desertion was also possible, for example, if a woman could prove she had to leave the family home for her or her children's personal safety. But before that there had to be a serious life-threatening incident or incidents which were then placed on the public record in the Supreme Court.

The Supreme Court judge determined questions of custody, access and child maintenance payments. It was a torrid and expensive business, with no certainty in outcome. If you struck a religious, Catholic judge, divorce could become even more difficult.

I personally witnessed a case in which the couple had been living apart for a number of years with new partners they wanted to marry. The two older children lived with the father and attended a Catholic secondary school. The two younger ones lived with their mother and attended the local state primary school. The judge first asked the father to take all four to keep the children together and send all four to Catholic schools so that they were raised with the same faith. The poor father refused, saying they wanted to continue with the present arrangement and that he could not manage the younger ones with his job. The mother was then asked the same question; she could not do it. The judge refused to grant the divorce.

These are the days that Abbott would like to take the women of Australia back to, to a humiliating and adversarial system which saw many women and children locked into abusive and unhappy marriages.

Abbott's thinking harks back to some of the biblical statements of St Paul: "Wives submit

yourselves unto your husbands as it is fit in the lord."

## Maternity Leave

Abbott has the dubious distinction of winning a Silver Ernie Award in 2002 for sexist political comment for saying paid maternity leave would happen "Over this [former Howard] government's dead body". The annual awards, instituted by Labor MLC Meredith Bergmann, are named after a former union official notorious for sexist comments. (It is not Abbott's only Ernie award!)

Since then Abbott has done a forward somersault, with a plan for six months paid maternity leave, but not necessarily for the right reasons. Paid maternity leave in his eyes is the old "homemaker's allowance" for women, to keep them at home and enable them to produce large families – no contraception, no abortion and let the husband be the breadwinner. Abbott is a cunning politician, knows he has put many women offside, and that paid maternity leave could be a vote winner. Australia and the US are the only two OECD countries where women do not have the right to paid maternity leave.

## Santamaria boy

The former seminarian has taken his faith into Parliament and seeks to impose it on secular Australian society, women, in particular. His faith reflects that of the most conservative strands of the Catholic Church. He was a great admirer of B A Santamaria, a rabid anti-communist and clerical fascist who supported Franco's forces in the Spanish Civil War and Mussolini's regime in Italy.

In the early 1940s he founded the Catholic Social Studies Movement, referred to as the Movement or Groupers, which recruited Catholic activists to rid the trade union movement of communists and others on the left. At the time a number of trade unions were lead by communists. They strongly opposed abortion, condoms, the pill and came from the Catholic school that judges the morality of sex by its most fundamental purpose of producing offspring.

Abbott's outlook is very much in line with Jansenism, a trend dating back to the 17th century and imported to Australia by Catholic immigrants from Ireland where it was very prevalent. Jansenism stressed the corruptibility of human nature, identified its sinful, evil tendencies and associated the body and emotions with evil. It glorified the denial of all "worldly" desires. The attitude towards women, linked to the cult of the Virgin Mary, can be seen in the words of "The Kitchen Prayer", one of the best selling prayer cards at the Marian Shrine of Knock in Western Island:

*Lord of all the pots and pans and things...  
Make me a saint by getting  
Meals and washing up plates.*

## Reincarnation of WorkChoices

Another of Abbott's Ernie Award winning statements was on bosses: "A bad boss is a little bit like a bad father or a bad husband – notwithstanding all his faults you find he tends to do more good than harm." At the time he was the Minister for Workplace Relations in the Howard government.

WorkChoices hit all workers – men and women – hard, but it hit women hardest as they tended to be in the least unionised, lowest paid and least secure areas of employment.

The Howard government's individual contracts – Australian Workplace Agreements (AWAs) – along with removal of unfair dismissal protection in most workplaces made a deadly combination.

The report, *Women and WorkChoices: Impacts on the Low Pay Sector\**, found that the most vulnerable workers were the ones to be most affected by WorkChoices.

*Women and WorkChoices* found that some

**Australia and the US are the only two OECD countries where women do not have the right to paid maternity leave.**

# lism

# World Federation of Trade Unions' "new course"

Jim Donovan

**The presidential council of the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) had a recent meeting held in Cyprus. Representing Friends of WFTU from Australia were Garry Kennedy, secretary Newcastle Labour Council and myself, retired secretary of Sydney Branch Maritime Union of Australia and national president of the MUA Retired Members Association.**

The WFTU founding congress was held in Paris in October 1945 and some hundred countries were in attendance, including Canada, Jamaica, Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), Palestine, New Zealand, Switzerland, Bolivia, Brazil, Australia, Soviet Union, Bulgaria, Norway, Netherlands, Romania, Ecuador, Spain, South Africa, Luxembourg, Nigeria, Ireland and Italy just to name a few.

They represented hundreds of millions of workers and their aim was to bring workers into unity against Fascism and the domination of world capital and imperialism. This new body was of immediate concern to the ruling powers in the United States and Britain and capitalism world-wide. For that reason a vicious campaign was launched to undermine and destroy this new world trade union body.

America and Britain using the Cold War set up another body, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) which, sad to say had the desired effect on some, as many left the WFTU.

Their threats, mainly directed at those who were left, was that the WFTU was communist and dominated by the Socialist countries.

If there was enough space to name all of the countries who were founding members of the WFTU and those we have mentioned it can and would be seen that the vast majority of countries were not from the Soviet Union and other Socialist countries.

What these unions on behalf of their members were doing was to unite against the further rise of Fascism and against further wars, against impoverishment that war brings, wars that had seen 75 million people killed in two world wars, with the overwhelming majority lost in the wars being workers.

Another reason this body was set up was to improve workers' wages, living conditions, human rights, women's rights, peace and many more issues. These ideals of the WFTU were worth struggling for, and yet America, Britain and others spread lies, intimidation and fear to destroy this body.

Let us say to this day (even though the CIA still provides millions of dollars in funds to ICFTU, they haven't succeeded. In spite of the demise of the Socialist countries and continued attacks by the right wing organisation on the WFTU it still remains in the international arena as the body truly representing workers in their fight against war, globalisation and workers' rights.

We say this: the WFTU is on a "new course" to build and support workers and their organisations in the present day demands of the working class, struggle for the rights of workers and their modern needs, for peace and progress, solidarity with nations who are under threat of interference and attacks from the USA and its allies.

For health, education, against discrimination, for equality between women and men, trade unions freedoms, jobs for all workers, against privatisations, an earth free from pollution.

Many meetings, conferences and international gatherings all over the world are taking place on a weekly and monthly basis. This comes about by the new direction of the WFTU under the leadership of George Mavrikos.

George Mavrikos is the Secretary General of WFTU. Its headquarters are in Athens which, when Barry and I visited on two occasions, was a hive of activity. Many meetings were taking place with many visitors attending.

The Presidential Council meeting we went to saw many countries attending and many from the emerging nations seeking help and assistances. They came from South America, Africa, India, previous socialist states, including the previous states of Yugoslavia.

These countries, many of which were not previous members of the old WFTU, are now experiencing global capitalism and

imperialism and its attacks on governments which oppose the US, Britain, and Germany. As these attacks continue their main aim is to ensure global capitalism maintains its grip on those countries' resources, their oil, minerals, gold, iron ore, and more importantly their financial structures.

Out of all this it is pleasing to say that many of the countries mentioned who had little or no trade unions representing workers now have many, and many of those are embracing the WFTU as their guiding light, to assist in ways to combat global capitalism.

In many instances workers' representatives are standing up under enormous pressure, including intimidation and brutal bashings and there are many instances of trade union officials being murdered. Against all of this, these countries that continue to organise on behalf of their members, workers, farmers have now joined WFTU and are participating in its activities. It is pleasing to report these actions in defence of workers rights now being achieved due to the "new course" adopted by all participating members of WFTU and is bearing fruits under the leadership of its George Mavrikos.

As this article is being prepared the country for the next full congress of the WFTU is being decided upon and at this time it looks likely it will take place in 2011 in Athens. It will be our endeavour to have unions and individuals attend this very important gathering.

Garry and I would like to thank friends of the WFTU who made it possible for us to attend the Presidential Council in Cyprus.

I would also add that this body, Friends of the WFTU from Australia, was formed with the express purpose of ensuring the continuation and the further building of the WFTU, needed more than ever with the economic crisis now facing workers. It will be of the utmost importance to have an international body truly representing workers' interests and we welcome interested participants to join us in continuing to build a genuine international union body representing the true interests of workers around the world. ✪



women in lower paid industries are losing \$100 a week and that there was an increased fear of being summarily dismissed. In 2006, median earnings for female (non-managerial) employees on AWAs were 18.7 percent less than those of women on collective agreements.

Women in lower skilled jobs such as retailing and aged care were even more disadvantaged. Those on AWAs were paid 26 percent less than similar women on collective agreements and 20 percent less than the average of women on award wages (the legally binding minimum)!

National Foundation for Australian Women spokeswoman Marie Coleman commenting on the *Women and WorkChoices* study which surveyed women on their experiences, said the legislation had contributed to a climate of fear.

"Right across the board [you] saw not one person who felt able to negotiate," she said. "Quite a number reported having been summarily dismissed because they asked the questions or attempted to argue about their work times or other conditions."

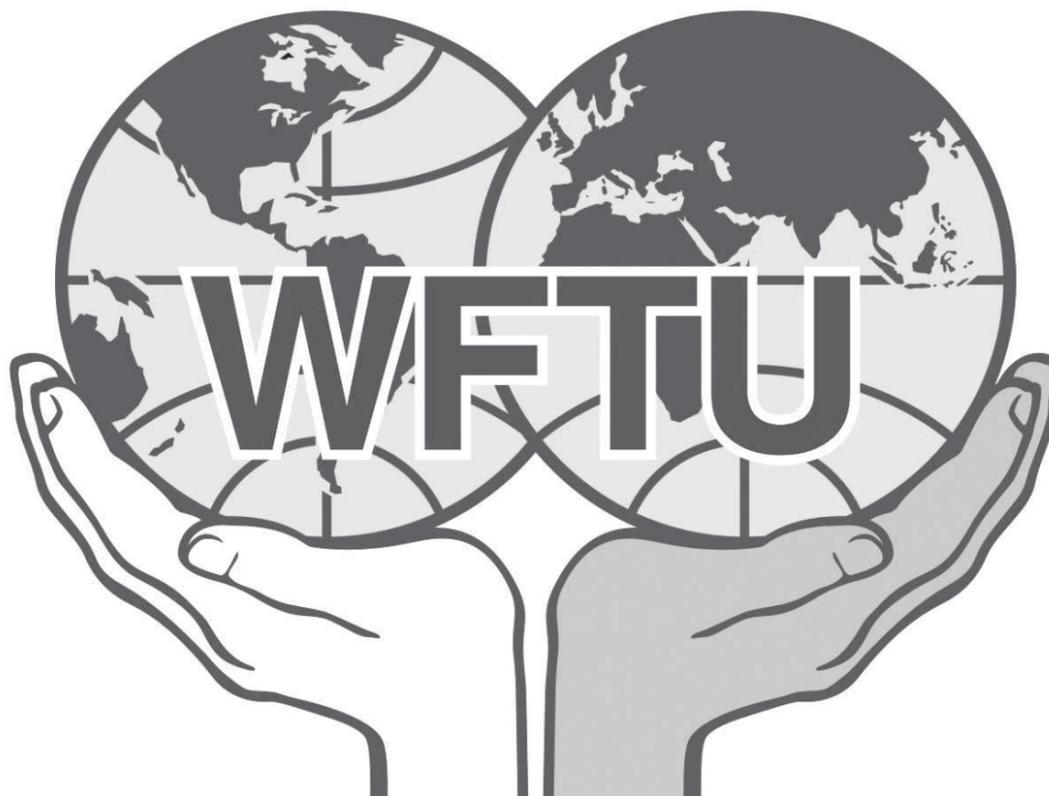
Australian Bureau of Statistics figures reveal that women's average weekly earnings as a percentage of men's fell from 66 percent to 64.5 percent during the Howard years. Abbott was Workplace Relations Minister for some of that time. There are a number of factors behind that gap:

- the higher percentage of women in casual and part-time work;
- men work more overtime and women;
- women's average ordinary time earnings are 80 percent of men's.

WorkChoices, which Abbott wants to bring back dressed in new clothes by the spin doctors, will further roll back the many gains women have won towards economic independence.

Australia is a secular, multi-cultural country where religious freedom and tolerance are important. Tony Abbott has every right to be a male, practising Catholic. What he has no right to do is inflict his narrow fundamentalist outlook on the women – and men – of secular Australia.

\* *Women and WorkChoices: Impacts on the Low Pay Sector*. Published by the Centre for Work + Life  
Hawke Research Institute for Sustainable Societies ✪



# The Mossad hit and Israel's path of self-destruction

Hasan Abu Nimah

**The assassination of Mahmoud al-Mabhouh, a Hamas official in Dubai, almost certainly by a death squad dispatched by Israel's Mossad, is by no means the first such aggression against the sovereignty of another state. While Israel has literally gotten away with murder thousands of times, was this one killing too far?**

Israel has a long, bloody history of murder, sabotage and outright terrorism all over Europe, in Beirut, Tunis, Amman, Damascus and now Dubai. And that is just what we know about. All of this is allegedly in "self-defence" against "terrorism" even though the Zionist movement in Palestine invented the sort of modern terrorism for which the Middle East became known.

It started with countless Zionist bomb attacks on Palestinian civilians from the 1930s, often in markets and cafes, the bombing of the King David and Semiramis hotels in Jerusalem in the 1940s claiming dozens of innocent lives, and the murder of UN mediator Count Folke Bernadotte.

These crimes, on top of the long history of massacres of Palestinians, Lebanese and other Arabs over the past six decades, were all worn as badges of honour by Zionist leaders including Menachem Begin and Yitzhak Shamir who later became prime ministers.

Current Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who according to reports personally approved the killing of al-Mabhouh, must have thought it would be a great achievement celebrated by the "civilised" world that is engaged still in a "war on terror." The so-called "international community," after all, has helped Israel isolate Hamas and labels it a "terrorist" organisation despite Hamas' diplomatic overtures, repeated offers of truces and

ceasefires, and the mandate it won at the ballot box.

But it is not working out that way this time. Counting on the usual international complicity was not that unrealistic on Israel's part. Indeed there has been no clear condemnation of the act of extrajudicial execution of al-Mabhouh, in a hotel room, apparently by electrocution and smothering with a pillow according to *The Daily Mail* (UK). What has been greeted with indignation is the forging of passports and identity theft.

Meeting in Brussels, EU foreign ministers strongly condemned the abuse of passports, but did not have the courage to publicly name Israel even though several governments including the UK and Ireland had already summoned their Israeli ambassadors. The British and Irish foreign ministers even directly confronted their Israeli counterpart Avigdor Lieberman, who was also in Brussels.

Mossad, the Israeli intelligence and international murder agency, has a long history of using fake and stolen passports of countries including Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Ireland and Germany (and now Australia). It notoriously used fake Canadian passports during the attempted murder of Hamas leader Khaled Meshal in Amman in 1997. Countries view their passports much like their currencies -- their credibility and value must be defended. The lives of their citizens may well depend on it; an Irish, British or German citizen has to be able to travel all over the world without fear that he or she will be suspected of being a Mossad assassin.

Several years ago, New Zealand, a country of three million people, broke off diplomatic relations with Israel over the use of its passports by Mossad. But apart from that example, most countries have been too timid to confront Israel. That Lieberman



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, according to reports personally approved the killing of al-Mabhouh

refused to provide any additional information or even acknowledge an Israeli role in the Dubai attack when he met with the European foreign ministers is a sign that Israel still feels safe displaying arrogance and lawlessness, because it knows the "international community" has never dared to hold it accountable.

This time, however, Israeli arrogance may have exceeded the limits of what has been tolerated so far, and turned what was supposed to be an "heroic" act into a scandal with far-reaching consequences. There are some specific and general factors that contribute to that. First, the crime was committed on the territory of a moderate Arab country whose support for peace with Israel has been practically translated into unofficial bilateral relations.

A high-level Israeli delegation had been in the country only days before the Mossad hit squad arrived. Showing so much contempt for a leading moderate Arab state gives a very bad example for any other state that might consider softening its position toward Israel (as the United States had been demanding as "confidence-building measures" for the "peace process").

A second factor is that Israel mostly used stolen identities of living people, whose very public shock and fear at waking up to find their names splashed over the newspapers and linked to a murder, could not easily be hidden.

A third factor is that the Israeli adventure in Dubai carries the traits of just the kind of terrorist act the world has been mobilising to fight. Improvements in passport security were introduced in recent years to stop terrorism, but here is a country violating and sabotaging these security measures in order to commit murder.

We cannot assume that the assassination in Dubai will be the straw that breaks the back of Israeli immunity and impunity, but we can be sure that the general erosion of Israel's standing as a result, particularly of its aggressive recent wars on Lebanon and Gaza, means that what was tolerated by the world more easily five or ten years ago, is less tolerated now. Global public disgust at Israeli actions has reached levels that may require governments who normally prefer complicity and silence than action.

And when there was a "peace process," Israel's crimes particularly against Palestinians were ignored in the interests of not damaging relations or slowing momentum toward the hoped-for successful conclusion. But no one today -- except the most naive

or delusional -- believes that there is any peace process. Despite Israel's efforts to blame the Palestinians, only the most pro-Israel extremists deny that Israel's aggressive colonisation in Jerusalem and the West Bank, as well as the siege on Gaza, is what killed any prospect of a negotiated solution for the foreseeable future.

Consider that just days before the passport affair broke out, Israel was once again pressuring Britain to change its laws to protect Israeli officials from arrest for war crimes should they visit London. Although British officials had publicly expressed shameful enthusiasm to tailor British law to meet Israeli needs, they may now face real public opposition if they attempt to change it. What interest does the UK have to protect the likes of Tzipi Livni from arrest if the facts and evidence make it necessary?

The truth is that as it becomes desperate, Israel is turning ever more wild and dangerous, not only for its neighbours but for world peace, security and prosperity. Without constant pressure from the Israel lobby, there may have been no invasion of Iraq. Today, it is Israel and its apologists who are constantly inciting confrontation and war against Iran when most of this region wants peace and good relations.

Even if the countries harmed by Israel's latest brazen act do not hold it properly and adequately accountable -- as they must and should -- it appears that it is on a path of self-destruction. The great fear is how much more harm it will do to others on the way.

Hasan Abu Nimah is the former permanent representative of Jordan at the United Nations.  
*The Electronic Intifada* ✪

## General strike paralyzes Greece

Guy Rundle

**ATHENS: Greece has been brought to a standstill by a general strike, with key union groups GSEE, ADEDY and PAME leading up to two million workers in a 24-hour stoppage against the government's austerity program.**

Tens of thousands of protestors filled Syntagma Square in the centre of Athens and spilled out beyond, led by unions, activist groups, the Greek Communist Party (KKE) and Syriza, the smaller left coalition.

Beginning in the northern inner area of Athens around Omonia Square, the march came down Stadiou Boulevard, taking more than an hour to reach the city centre.

More than 40,000 protesters chanted "We won't pay for their crisis" with radical songs blaring from speaker vans coming behind. The strike shut down the entire public-sector infrastructure, including schools, airports, transport and government offices.

Hospitals were operating with skeleton crews, and many large shops and commercial enterprises closed. Journalists also came out on strike, as did a wide range of self-employed people such as taxi drivers.

Though police fired tear gas at a separate anarchist contingent near Parliament, the event was largely peaceful and orderly. However sources said the prospect of separate anarchist action later could not be ruled out, especially as an anti-fascist rally was planned in Amerikis Square, a neighbourhood dominated by supporters of the anti-immigrant LAOS party.

The strike and protests came as officials from the EU, the IMF and other financial bodies arrived in Athens at the invitation of Prime Minister Georgios Papandreou to advise on further efforts to impose austerity measures on the country, in a bid to restructure its economy in line with EU requirements.

Financial rating agency Fitch downgraded the ratings of the four

major Greek banks, in response to what it said was the banks' "weakening asset quality due to anticipated fiscal adjustments in Greece."

The decision will in turn raise yields on Greek bonds, further increasing the deficit. "We don't deny there is a crisis," KKE MP Yanis Ghiokas told the *Morning Star* newspaper.

"However it is not our crisis and we shouldn't pay for it.

"While Papandreou has talked about tax evasion, the corporate tax rate has been lowered from 45 percent to 25 percent. We want it raised back to make up the shortfall, and reduce reliance on indirect taxes."

Ghiokas also rejected widely publicised claims that Papandreou enjoys up to 70 percent support for the measures.

"People are polled and they are asked 'does something need to be done,' and they say Yes. That is then taken as support," he laughed ruefully.

*Morning Star* ✪

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# Repression continues under new Honduran government

Emile Schepers

**Death squads appear to be operating freely in Honduras, in spite of claims by the United States and Honduran leaders that the election of President Porfirio "Pepe" Lobo of the conservative National Party on November 29 would produce peace and normality.**

Unions and peasant and other popular organisations have stayed mobilised to be able to respond to efforts to roll back progressive changes instituted by former president Manuel "Mel" Zelaya, such as increases in the minimum wage, labour and women's rights and land reform.

On February 25, parties unknown murdered an activist of the left wing resistance movement that arose after the April 28, 2009 coup d'état that overthrew Zelaya.

Claudia Larisa Brizuela Rodriguez was shot to death in front of her home in the northern city of San Pedro Sula. The killing happened in broad daylight and in full view of her children, ages 2 and 8.

Ms Brizuela Rodriguez was an active member of the National People's Resistance Front (FNRP) and the daughter of the host of pro-Zelaya Radio UNO, Pedro Brizuela.

The radio station and its staff have been the target of numerous threats because of their opposition to the coup.

She is the third resistance leader to be murdered in this fashion since Lobo was sworn in as president on January 27.

On February 3, FNRP activist Vanessa Yaneth Zepeda was kidnapped and later found murdered, her body thrown from a moving vehicle by unknown parties. She too was a mother of three children. At the time of her murder Zepeda was 29 years old and was considered to have great potential as a future mass leader in her country.

The third person to be murdered, on February 15, was Julio Funes, a labour leader in the Water and Sewage Workers Union and also a resistance activist, was shot down by four unknown men who came up to him in a taxi, in the town of Comayagua.

There are numerous other reports of threats, beatings, rapes and other attacks on people associated with pro-Zelaya and anti-coup unions, civic organisations and media entities. The FNRP says that the total number of such incidents is now in the hundreds just since Lobo took power. The Committee of Relatives

of Detained and Disappeared People in Honduras says that several hundred people have had to flee the country because of persecution. However, Honduran police sources claim that there is no proof that any of these incidents are politically motivated; pointing out that the crime rate in the country is very high.

Most countries in the region are still not affording diplomatic recognition to Lobo's government because of the dubious way the election was carried out, with a coup regime in power and troops in the streets repressing its opponents. The US government has been focusing on getting the Lobo regime recognised as well as promoting a "truth commission" headed by former Guatemalan Vice President Eduardo Stein to find out why the coup happened. Yet, many organisations oppose this, pointing out that the reasons for the coup are hardly a secret, and that the coup leaders have already arranged pardons for themselves while continuing to demand prosecution of Zelaya and several of his cabinet members. The resistance is focusing on the fight for a constituent assembly to rewrite the Honduran constitution to allow for much more mass participation in governance.

*People's World* ✪



Honduran President Porfirio "Pepe" Lobo.

## Mexican Summit for Unity

**Cuban President Raul Castro participated actively in the sessions that took place on last month at the Summit for Latin American and Caribbean Unity, at the Mayan Riviera in Mexico. The Cuban president held bilateral meetings with other heads of state and attended others of consultation and exchanges on matters of vital importance on the event's agenda.**

After travelling from the airport to the Grand Velas Hotel - the Summit's venue, located in the municipality of Solidaridad, in the state of Quintana Roo - Raul was officially welcomed by Mexican President Felipe Calderon.

President Calderon announced the creation of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States at the Summit, underway in Cancun.

By acclamation, the leaders of the nations participating in the Summit approved the establishment of a regional integration bloc that will take on the heritage of the Rio Group.

In his speech after the announcement, President Castro described the creation of the regional mechanism as a historical event.

The Community establishes as its principles respect for democracy, natural resources, sustainability and sovereignty of all countries, among others. Calderon stressed that the goal of the new body will be to globally project the region based on the respect for international law, equality of states, respect for human rights and cooperation.

After a discussion, described as very intense, there has been consensus on the establishment of the mechanism, whose charter will be drafted in order to be discussed in the first instance, during the next summit to be held in July 2011 in Venezuela, said Calderon.

The decision was contained in the Declaration of the Summit of Unity, one of the central documents of the meeting that gathered 25 heads of state and government.

*Granma* ✪

## Canada-US procurement deal condemned

**The determination of the Harper Tories to press ahead with "deep integration" with the United States has been revealed again by the new Canada-US procurement (Buy American) agreement, and the impending Canada-European Union trade agreement.**

The "Buy American" agreement would bind the hands of present and future provincial governments, in return for access to a mere US\$4 billion in potential US government contracts. This agreement would accept World Trade Organisation rules that restrict or even ban policies that encourage local development, such as "buy local" or domestic content rules, or investment requirements.

The WTO's Government Procurement Agreement (signed by only 40 countries) explicitly forbids governments and agencies from including any condition or undertaking on government contracts. By signing Harper's deal, the premiers may surrender important economic and social policy tools

used by provinces, cities, universities, school boards, social service entities and hospitals.

According to CUPE Ontario president Fred Hahn, under terms revealed in leaked copies of the deal, Ontario will become the only province allowing unrestricted access to countries who have signed onto the WTO's Government Procurement Agreement for publicly-funded contracts supplying schools, universities, social services and hospitals.

Appearing with the Council of Canadians at a joint news conference, Hahn said, "This is a bad deal for Ontario and Ontarians should be aware of what their government is giving away before it's too late. We are concerned that, in the long term, Ontario will be the only province required to give permanent and unfettered access to these vital sectors in the new trade deal when most of the other provinces and territories have exempted them and Quebec has protected itself with a clause exempting anything that pertains to culture."

Hahn is worried about local food procurement policies in place in the City of Toronto, and bottled water bans in cities and regions across Ontario. Fair wage policies in place in Hamilton or Greater Sudbury's "Made in Canada" policy may also come under attack from American and foreign corporations. He points to Appendix A of the Agreement which lists the permanent commitments being made by Canada under the WTO's GPA as a major area of concern. He is also sceptical that the "interim" commitments on "enhanced access" that

are being made directly to the US in Appendix C will ever come off the books.

Other Ontario labour leaders also fear that the deal gives away far too much in return for far too little and say that Premier Dalton McGuinty should refuse to sign on.

"This deal would limit the power of the provincial government to harness all the possible economic levers at its disposal to deal with the economic crisis," said Hahn. "The race to sell off or give away our province needs to end and the Premier should not sign this deal."

Meanwhile, secretive negotiations are underway for a Canada-European Union trade agreement, which would give Canadian corporations better access to European markets in exchange for access by European corporations to Canadian services contracts amounting to as much as US\$200 billion annually. Such an agreement would put even further pressure on provincial governments to privatise public services such as utilities, transportation, child care, education and public health care.

Delegates at the recent Communist Party of Canada convention, held on February 5-7 in Toronto, warned that if Canadian and transnational capital succeed in imposing these deals, the result would be yet another critical blow against Canadian sovereignty. The final document adopted by the convention stresses that "everything possible must be done to mobilise the labour and democratic movements to expose and block these treacherous sellouts."

*People's Voice*, Communist Party of Canada. ✪

Sydney  
Greek Orthodox Community of NSW - Women's Committee

### Invitation

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Refreshments will be served  
All Welcome

Letters to the Editor  
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## Of sex, astrology and the material world

After reading Rob Gowland's *Culture and Life* (Guardian February 24), I was reminded of similar experiences that I have had.

I recall being told that in the Soviet Union, personal papers were checked every ten minutes night and day, but this practice was stopped while I was there. Considering the millions of tourists that visited Russia every year, it would have been flattering to think that I was regarded with such importance, but I very much doubt it.

I also remember that back in the 60s I used to take a *Tribune* to a bloke who was a staunch Maoist and a believer in astrology. As my birthday is December 15 that makes me a Sagittarian but according to

this worthy I shouldn't be fair haired of the quiet type. I was also told by another believer that Sagittarians are crusaders. Well there could be some truth in that, certainly in my case.

I've also been asked whether they have sex in Russia. I usually replied, going by the number of kids I saw there, unless they have found another way of doing it, it's a pretty safe bet they have sex in Russia.

Seriously, all this tells us that capitalism in its death throes is relying more and more on idealism and superstition, so there needs to be a concerted campaign to foster and strengthen materialism. We need to stress as Lenin said that there is nothing in the universe but matter, and that the state of the material world must be the starting point of all our thinking.

Ron Barrett  
Mt Druitt

## Skating on thin ice

I enjoy watching figure skating and was looking forward to the Winter Olympic Games in Canada. Some programs were quite good and while there has not been anything world-shattering the general level was quite high.

As in every sport figure skating fans usually have their favourites.

For a long time the former Soviet Union and other European socialist countries were leaders in figure skating. Some years were better than others and from time to time somebody very exceptional would appear and move the sport just that little bit further forward. So it was sad to watch a Russian pair to use what they regarded as an Aboriginal dance in their program.

There were several aspects in this very bad decision. First of all it was not an Aboriginal dance. It was an ignorant and crude attempt to do something they had no idea about. The costumes were vulgar, the choreography was poor and the general impression was disgusting.

It is a shame that nobody had bothered to find out more about real Aboriginal culture and discover what is and isn't allowed to be done within the context of that culture. I have an impression that the dancers still do not understand that Aboriginal dances are not folk dances you can interpret freely. There is a bit more to them than that and great respect is necessary to deal with such sensitive issues. Let us hope that this unhappy episode will teach them some good lessons.

Mati English  
Sydney

## Where there is a political will ...

The refusal by either major party to take responsibility for and provide a universal, affordable health system for all is highlighted by inaction on the crisis in the public hospital system and the continuation of subsidies of hundreds of millions of dollars to the private sector.

An example of what can be done if the political will is there can be seen in Cuba, where, for example, over 78 million doses of anti-polio vaccines have been administered since 1962, when the island began its immunisation campaign against polio, under the direction of the Public Health Ministry.

This guarantees that the population under 62 years of age is protected against the disease, eradicated from the island four months after the carrying out of the first campaign of the national immunisation program.

Also eradicated have been neonatal tetanus, the congenital rubella syndrome and the post-mumps meningo-encephalitis, while tetanus and the haemophilus influenzae, a bacterial agent responsible for meningitis and pneumonias in children, have stopped being a health problem in Cuba.

Before 1959, the island reported 500 deaths due to measles, tetanus, whooping cough or diphtheria annually; as well as 300 cases of paralysis due to polio and tens of thousands of deaths due to other preventable diseases.

At present, children in Cuba are protected against 13 diseases with 11 vaccines, including eight produced nationally, thanks to the scientific and technological development achieved, which places it among countries with the lowest indicators of infant mortality rate in Latin America.

T Southern  
Brisbane

HAVE YOUR SAY

Write a letter to the Editor

# Culture & Life

by Rob Gowland

## Corporate defeat

By now, there are probably few *Guardian* readers who have not seen the 3D sci-fi fantasy adventure blockbuster *Avatar*. It is technically brilliant, setting new benchmarks for computer-generated sci-fi and fantasy effects in movies.

Computers, provided they are being used by people with real artistic vision, have immeasurably enhanced the quality of fantasy films. Fantasy was one of the earliest genres of cinema: *Voyage To The Moon* by Georges Méliès, a charming little piece of cinema whimsy, appeared in 1902. Willis O'Brien's painstaking model work with stop-frame animation in the 1933 classic *King Kong* is justly famous and set a standard for realistic effects that was not surpassed for decades.

In recent years, however, beginning with *Star Wars*, the use of computers has made images of unreal worlds, fantasy creatures and impossible adventures not only credible but downright commonplace.

Thanks to the naturalism of computer-generated imagery (cgi), audiences for *The Lord Of The Rings* film trilogy are transported not to New Zealand where the scenes were shot, but to Middle Earth itself. Thanks also to cgi, Edward and Bella in *Twilight* frolic precariously with awesome credibility at the very top of a huge pine tree.

In *Avatar*, not only is the story convincingly set on another planet with its own remarkable scenery and wildlife, but many of the characters are three metre-tall blue-skinned natives with tails. In most cinemas, the film is shown in 3D, which adds significantly to its impact. (Not everyone can watch a 3D film without adverse visual reactions, so some venues must be kept for 2D presentation.)

The quality of the computerised special effects is not the only reason to watch *Avatar*, however. It also has an interesting and topical storyline.

The film is set among a large team of US Marines who, together with a small group of scientists, have been sent to another planet to help a US corporation "persuade" the local natives to move elsewhere on the planet so the company can mine a very profitable mineral that is located right under the natives' most sacred site.

If the scientists cannot persuade the locals to move, the Marines are there to do the job by force. The natives resist, but are routed by the US forces' superior firepower. Sickened by what is happening, some of the scientists and a couple of the marines go over to the natives' side. Resistance begins in earnest.

In the end, despite heavy losses, the natives and their local animal allies win, forcing the US Marines and the corporate "suits" whose interests they serve to leave the planet in scenes reminiscent of the fall of Saigon.

Not long after the film premiered, I saw an episode of the US panel discussion show *The View* (which runs here on Channel Nine) on which the subject was *Avatar*. The only member of the all-women panel that I know by name is Whoopi Goldberg, but on this occasion it was one of the other women who caught my attention.

She complained, in shocked terms, that by the end of the film the US Marines were being portrayed as (shudder) "the enemy". Well, duh!

Her outburst is instructive, however, for it is indicative of the awesome power and influence of US ruling-class propaganda. This propaganda is so effectively researched, prepared and executed – and above all so all-pervasive in the USA – that an incredibly large number of Americans turn a blind eye to (or at least excuse) both the glaring iniquities in US society and the criminality of the USA's brutally violent and aggressive foreign policy.

It is not for nothing that the Right in the US wraps itself in the flag, shelters behind the Bible and talks so much about "freedom and the rights of the individual".

There would be few parts of the world where US Marines would be seen as anything but a threat (Israel perhaps?). Everyone except propaganda-befuddled Americans themselves knows that the US military's role is to coerce foreign governments into doing the bidding of powerful US corporations.

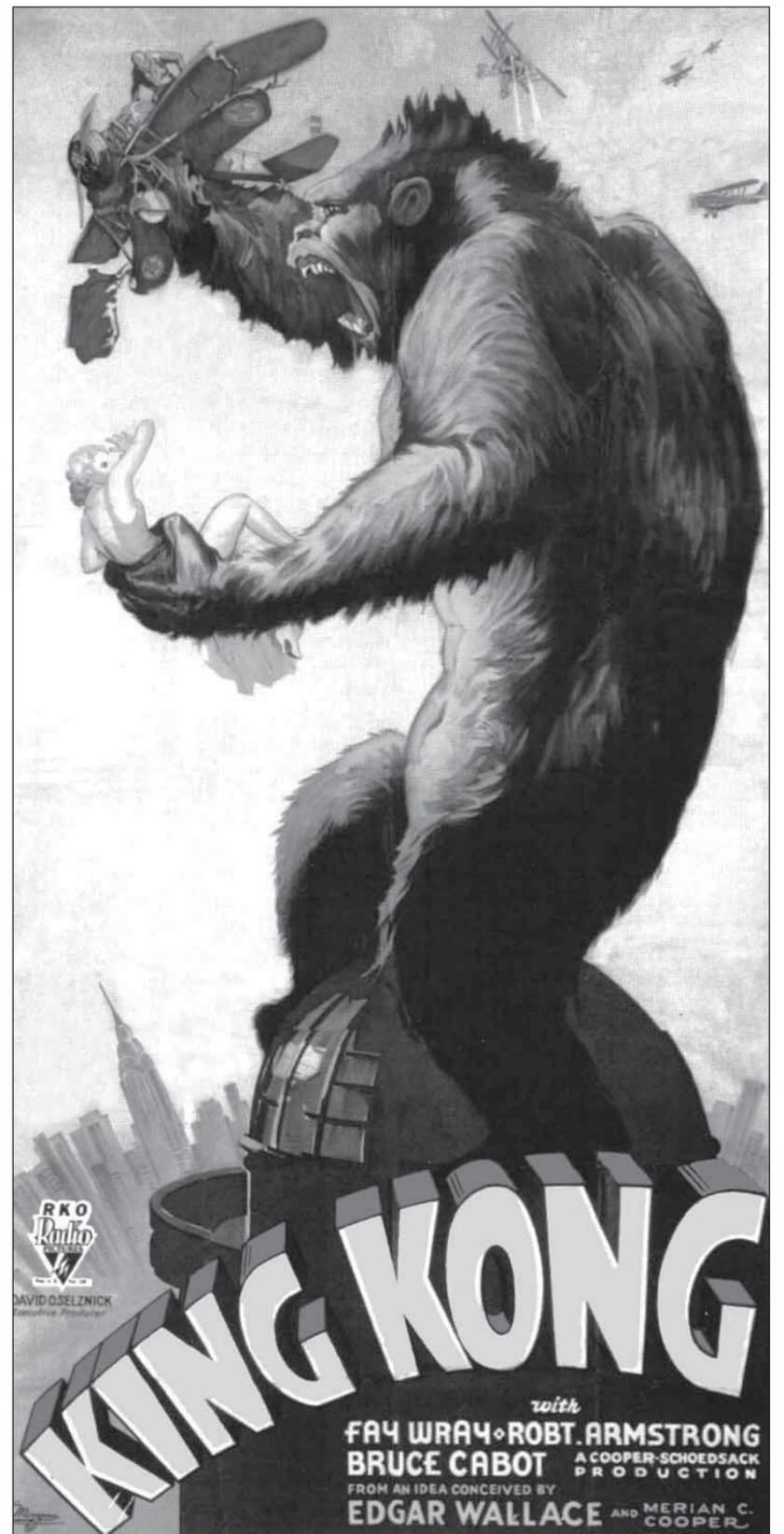
The heads of the big capitalist corporations did not get where they are by being honest and upright. They are – they have to be – scoundrels. And what do scoundrels resort to when all else fails? Yep, patriotism, with a hefty helping of religion.

But patriotism and the church can only work for so long. More and more people in the US are asking why the county's government and institutions are despised or hated by so many people in other countries.

And people in other countries are also asking why the citizens of the richest country on Earth cannot afford universal health care, while tiny, impoverished Cuba not only enjoys it but exports health services to scores of other countries.

Not to mention those other blots on the Empire's copybook: extraordinary social inequality, complete lack of job security, widespread poverty and homelessness, an incredible crime rate, especially for violent, gun-related crimes.

*Avatar*'s implicit criticism of corporate, militarised America is merely a symptom of the growing awareness even in Hollywood that rampant capitalism is not the answer to the world's problems. ☺





Sun 7 March –  
Sat 13 March

The ABC's cultural event of the week is the first episode of the period serial *Desperate Romantics* (ABC1 Sundays from March 7 at 8.30pm). It was shown last year in Britain in six parts, but these have been doubled up here to make three feature-length episodes.

Set in the 1850s and '60s, it is a not-altogether accurate account of the artistic group known as the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. In fact, each episode begins with the rather disingenuous disclaimer: "In the mid-19th century, a group of young men challenged the art establishment of the day."

"The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood were inspired by the real world about them, yet took imaginative licence in their art. This story, based on their lives and loves, follows in that inventive spirit."

The series is based on the book of the same name by Franny Moyle, a former commissioning editor for the arts at the BBC. She says of selling her book to the BBC: "I pitched it as a big emotional saga, a bit like *The Forsyte Saga*". Unfortunately, it is not nearly up to the standard of that legendary series.

The BBC is I think more accurate in their own description of it

as "marrying the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood to the values of *Desperate Housewives*."

The only actors in it that I recognise are Aidan Turner (the vampire from *Being Human*) as Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Tom Hollander (Mr Collins in the Keira Knightley version of *Pride & Prejudice*) as John Ruskin.

The series did not fare well at the hands of most British television critics: Tom Sutcliffe in *The Independent* called it "an off-day" for writer Peter Bowker, pointing to "moments in the script that seemed more like a spoof of an artistic biopic than a genuine attempt to rise above its limitations."

Serena Davies in *The Daily Telegraph* made the pertinent observation that the series "sadly didn't go far enough in conveying to the viewers how much the Pre-Raphaelites' art contrasted with what had gone before it." Caitlin Moran, in *The Times*, really stuck the knife in, calling it "so bone-deep cheesy that it appears to have been written with Primula, on Kraft Cheese Slices, and shot on location in Cheddar."

*The Times* review is a tad harsh, but the British *Guardian* was spot on: "a rollicking gambol through a fictionalised Victorian London with a narrative as contemptuous of historical reverence as its rambunctious subjects were."

The five-part series *Human Journey* (ABC1 Thursdays from March 11 at 8.30pm) presents the latest scientific thinking on the migration of early humans out of Africa and around the world.

Climate change looms large in this account of human-kind's early history, but one could wish for more information at times. An American scientist describes the southern shore of Arabia 70,000 years ago as "a paradise" and says the local name for the area then was "Eden". How do they know that?



San woman, Namibia – *Human Journey* (ABC1 Thursdays from March 11 at 8.30pm).

I have always understood that early human migration out of Africa came in a series of waves, but this program says there was only one migration and it was by only a few hundred people, from whom everyone in the rest of the world descended.

This appears to contradict other recent programs on this subject, such as *Neanderthal Code* two weeks ago. Unlike that program, this new series does not seem to regard Neanderthals as human at all.

Next week's episode examines how humans came to Australia, which apparently they did *before* they reached Europe, not via a land bridge however, but only after "a perilous ocean crossing".

This is at the very least a stimulating series likely to provoke debate. I, for one, would like to

know what other scientists in this field think of it.

Jack Charles is an Aboriginal actor, whose life to some extent exemplifies his people: dispossessed, uprooted and oppressed. He joined New Theatre in Melbourne in 1960 and remained there for most of the decade.

In 1971, with fellow actor Bob Maza, Jack founded Nindethana, the first Aboriginal theatre company in Australia.

The following year, John Romeril wrote and performed a play based on Charles' life. The title of the play, *Bastardy* is also the title of an award-winning documentary about Charles screening this week (ABC1 Thursday March 11 at 9.30pm).

The documentary film was made over seven years by director Amiel Courtin-Wilson, whose friendship towards his subject is obvious. Intelligent and articulate, Jack Charles nevertheless spent much of his time in more recent decades homeless, sleeping in a disused toilet block or similar locations.

Frequently in jail, Charles is a heroin addict and also seemingly

addicted to burglary, which he rationalises as an act of black rebellion: "collecting rent", he calls it. And it might seem like a revolutionary act at first sight, until one realises that such acts have absolutely no effect on the white capitalist power structure and do little to advance the Aboriginal cause.

Charles' cosy view of his burglarious activities is given the lie in the film when one of their mutual friends phones the filmmaker to complain that Charles has burgled her place and stolen a ring of her husband's. She will not tell the police but she wants her ring back.

A shame-faced Charles admits the theft and, after going to see the man he sold it to, brings the ring back and gives it to the film-maker to give to the woman. But, despite the fact that stealing from a friend is clearly not an act of rebellion by anybody's definition, an unabashed Charles continues to proudly refer to his burglaries as "collecting the rent".

One is left with the sense of a life of great promise that has been blighted and largely wasted by capitalism's racist officialdom. ★



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**AFGHANISTAN: SHOULD AUSTRALIA WITHDRAW?**  
Phil Glendenning, Director, Edmund Rice Centre  
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March 26  
**THE NEW NUCLEAR DEBATE**  
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April 9  
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# The struggle for Brisbane's urban transport

## Gains and successes in the fight against privatisation

### Part 2

David Matters\*

No sooner had Wayne Goss been elected then we found ourselves greeting the new Transport Minister David Hamill. Our first meeting took place with him in the old office of none other than Don Lane, the former Transport Minister under the Nationals who had defected from the Liberals to Nationals to help them to form a National Party government.

A notable feature of the office was the wallpaper: it was all leather. Seeing the extravagance of the office I remarked to David, "This place must embarrass you a bit." It was his reply that made us realise that we were not amongst fellow workers. He said "why" then moved on to question me on the size of our union.

He then said, well you're too small to worry about, and the interview ended very shortly after. He was obviously too important a man to talk to workers like us and we were not overawed enough by his luxurious surroundings. It recalled phrases about ministerial leather getting to the most principled of men. Obviously Don Lane was still getting value for money from that leather. David Hamill later had to leave parliament but he played a role in trying to privatise us during his term.

At one stage he announced a plan to franchise the council buses into 12 franchises and thereby break up the service for sale.

The 1989 Branch secretary's report made the following observation: "The election of Queensland's first Labor government for 32 years capped off what has been a very busy year for our union. The removal of the reactionary National Party government has opened the way to some serious reforms which can benefit all workers in this stage. Whilst we are still feeling many of the shackles that the National Party government has left behind, we must be confident that we can change many of the wrongs that have been done to us over the years".

The report then went on to outline the injustice of the state wages system and its inherent lowering of wages under the Bjelke-Petersen era.

The call by the union, "It is the responsibility of our union to persuade the Labor state government to set up a publicly owned Transit Authority in South East Queensland, running its own fleet of buses incorporating the council service but significantly advanced enough to run to Bayside, Inala, Pine Rivers and Logan City.

"Consideration should also be given to the Gold Coast. We have prepared petitions; letter etc to launch a public campaign."

So we launched and promoted our campaign for a South East Queensland Transit Authority, a struggle that continues even today over the future and present nature of public transport in our region.

As part of our campaign and in response to our efforts the state government established the South East Queensland Passenger Transport Study (SEPTS). I was the union's enthusiastic representative but things were not alas as we would have wanted them and we were to remark to our members in 1990:



David Matters (centre) with fellow unionists.

"We have been involved in the South East Queensland Passenger Transport Study and from here we have learnt of government's plans to try to privatise our service for the limited aim of attempting to reduce the amount of money the government is putting into public transport. It has become clear that the Minister for Transport is seeking to try to reduce the subsidy he pays to the council from 60 cents to the revenue dollar down to 30 or 40 cents per dollar as a means of achieving economic revision.

"We have an important task to defend the public sector of our industry and we must convince the politicians of all parties that privatisation is not an option when it comes to public transport and (in) the interests of both the public and our members, are better served by a publicly owned transport system."

It was at this time that the then Victorian state Labor government under the influence of the Labor Right attacked our Victorian branch with the proposal to remove tram conductors. On this occasion the Left leadership under Jim Harper were successful in defeating the proposal.

Within the industry the first contract managers in the depots arrived and the depot masters were put second in charge to three new managers each with their own budgeted cars and new flashy furniture. Air conditioning in the depots was put in place. Meanwhile, we were still arguing for ventilation in those buses that were not air-conditioned.

After successful campaigns to extend council bus services the union was able to proudly announce new services to the Inala and Bayside areas of Brisbane. Inala was a housing commission area set up in bushland with no

public transport. Both it and the adjoining suburb of Acacia Ridge had no night bus services and Inala only had a private bus company running to the Oxley railway station.

Having lived in Acacia Ridge and experiencing the hardship of no transport in this area there was a sense of personal satisfaction at the result achieved by the union. It is fundamental to democracy that all citizens have the right to mobility in their cities. Bayside was also a large long standing working class area that had been served by a private operator. The owner of Bayside Buses had declared bankruptcy as a result of Sunline being the company involved in the Grafton bus smash and had upped camp and gone to Western Australia.

We thought that this departure was a benefit in that the state government had been pursuing privatisation discussions with the owner.

Privatisation was further complicated by attitudes in the socialist countries where the collapse of socialism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe was making public ownership seem a thing of the past. On top of this a private bus company was loudly proclaiming its success in winning the contract for bus services in socialist Vietnam. We certainly seemed to be out of step with developments through-out the world.

We faced down at this time; proposals to sell the buses and lease them back (a scheme that led to privatisation in Victorian public transport under Jeff Kennet Liberal government).

Also service cuts and part-time cleaning staff along with an attempt to privatise some of the recently publicly operated services in the Bayside area.

We felt we were not making the ground that we wanted to in the regional studies into public transport.

Our relationship with the Labor Party was still mixed with the local branch at Inala an enthusiastic supporter of the Inala expansion. The new Labor Lord Mayor Jim Soorley becoming a vocal supporter of expansion of public buses to Logan City, a large residential area for low income families on the southern outskirts of Brisbane between Brisbane and the Gold Coast. The limitation of the public buses being council owned rather than state government defeating the expansion.

During this campaign we were able to send the transport minister back into his bunker with the release of information showing that funding of private buses was hidden in the Education Department funding.

The other Labor interference being the Deputy Premier Tom Burns who in his Bayside electorate thwarted our full acquisition of the services by introducing a reactionary bus company, AWON, into some of these services. It was on rumours that he was again assisting their expansion that we made a phone call to Burns.

After listening to the impressive list of titles I was put onto him and was able to ask him if he was, as government bureaucrats reported, behind attempts to contract out our work. He assured us he was not so we said, can we quote you, he said "yes" and thus was put a stop to work being contracted out.

\*David has been secretary of the Bus Union in Brisbane for over 20 years. Part 1 appeared in *The Guardian* on February 17. ✚



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