



Call to action for workplace safety

On this day, April 28, workers around the world commemorate those who have been killed or injured on the job. At the same time we fight for better safety laws to protect workers and ensure more lives are not lost.

According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO), across the world:

- Each year, more than two million women and men die as a result of work-related accidents and diseases.
- Workers suffer approximately 270 million occupational accidents each year, and fall victim to some 160 million incidents of work-related illnesses.
- Hazardous substances kill 440,000 workers annually – asbestos claims 100,000 lives.
- One worker dies every 15 seconds – worldwide. 6,000 workers die every day.
- Work kills more people than wars.

The carnage in Australian workplaces has vindicated unions who have warned about the poor safety laws of all federal and state governments.

The number of fatalities continues to rise. If workplace fatality rates had remained at 2004 levels 50 fewer lives would have been lost.

Workers put their trust in the Rudd government to restore basic rights lost under the Howard government. They have been sadly disappointed. On workplace health and safety the Rudd government continues to carry through measures directed against working people and in direct favour of the employers and big business. This is particularly so in relation to the continuation of the powers of the Australian Building and Construction Commission (ABCC).

Rudd's new "model" work safety legislation is designed to cut employer obligations and costs. The ALP's proposed legislation undermines the rights of elected OH&S reps to direct cease-works that avert workplace deaths and forces workers to first exhaust "resolution" procedures with management unless the risk is serious, immediate and imminent".

Often when productivity is impeded employers refuse to admit that issues are serious, immediate and imminent" causing seriously dangerous workplace activity. Unions need unfettered right of entry for union officials to avert the unsafe practices of greedy employers who place productivity before the lives of working class people.

History

In 1991 the Canadian government passed legislation declaring each April 28 "a day of remembrance for workers killed or injured at work." Recognition of this "Workers' Memorial Day" spread, and it was adopted internationally via the United Nations in 1996. Now the day is marked in countries all around the world. Unions are now calling on all Australian governments to give recognition and support to this day.

The horrendous toll in Australia

Every year in Australia around 440 workers are killed in work-related accidents (that equates to more than eight per week). Diseases such as cancer and asbestos related illnesses cause an estimated 2,300 additional deaths per year (or 44 a week). Road accidents in Australia claim about 30 lives per week.

End the horrendous toll

The Communist Party of Australia calls for:

- That all workers and their unions intensify the struggle against the ABCC until it is scrapped.
- That all workers and their Unions take industrial action if Ark Tribe or any other construction worker be jailed under the powers of the ABCC.
- That all workers and their unions fight for stronger OH&S laws including Industrial Manslaughter Laws.
- Workplace victims in all states and territories be able to initiate legal action and the onus should be on an employer to prove they provided a safe workplace.
- In the harmonisation process of all state and federal OH&S laws the best of each jurisdiction should be used to provide workers with the highest common denominator in safety not the lowest.

Call on the Rudd government to scrap the heinous Australian Building and Construction Commission ABCC, not just rename it!

The ABCC continues to harass all workers in the construction industry. They target Occupational Health and Safety representatives and union delegates in particular. Despite work related injuries and fatalities increasing, stopping work, even in unsafe workplaces, is illegal. Massive fines aimed at crippling workers and their unions remain a constant threat.

Construction is up with road transport, mining and maritime as one of the most dangerous occupations in the country. The carnage must stop and the targeting of the construction industry in particular must stop.

What you can do

By scrapping the ABCC construction unions will once again be allowed to act on the workers' behalf to ensure building companies are complying with mandatory safety requirements.

Go to www.rightsonsite.org.au where you can:

1. Send emails to Kevin Rudd and your local MP
2. Sign the petition
3. Email the campaign information to your friends and colleagues
4. Watch a series of short videos, including



stories by those who've been penalised under the unjust and corrupt ABCC processes.

Rights on site

Self-regulation does not work. Employers will not work in the interest of workers if it impedes profit. The bottom line is workers can die and lip service will be paid BUT the reality is employers will not concede safety without struggle.

Resolve to struggle for safe work.

Laws should protect building workers, not persecute them, said the ILO.

Unions have welcomed a new report that says the ABCC is in breach of international laws and fails to protect workers.

The annual report of the ILO Committee of Experts is an indictment of laws which discriminate against construction workers, the ACTU said.

"International industrial laws are intended to protect the rights of workers, not persecute them," said ACTU secretary Jeff Lawrence.

"Yet this is precisely what the ABCC does. Overwhelmingly, the ABCC has investigated and prosecuted workers rather than employers. This has wasted millions of dollars, while health and safety in the construction industry has not improved.

"There should be one set of laws for all workers, regardless of the industry they work in. We remain absolutely opposed to the continuation of coercive powers that impinge upon the

civil liberties and the right to be members of a union. Now the ILO has backed these concerns. Parliament needs to get its act together and abolish the ABCC and coercive powers for the construction industry," said the ACTU secretary.

In its report, the ILO's Committee of Experts said the ABCC was likely to be in breach of a number of international labour standards, including freedom of association, the right to organise and collective bargaining.

The report said:

"The Committee considers that the prosecution of workers does not constitute part of the primary duties of inspectors and may not only seriously interfere with the effective discharge of their primary duties – which should be centred on the protection of workers under Article 3 of the Convention – but also prejudice the authority and impartiality necessary in the relations between inspectors and employers and workers".

The ABCC was set up by the Howard government as an industrial police force to attack workers and until it is abolished, part of WorkChoice lives on.

"The ABCC undermines the rights of 900,000 hard working Australians who every day risk their lives on building sites around the nation and play a major role in driving the economy", said the ACTU.

"All government law enforcement agencies should be focused on policing safety and workplace rights, not prosecuting workers for exercising their workplace rights." ★

page **3**



Custodial killing fields

page **5**



Coal & power privatisation

page **6**



The wage-price myth

page **8**



Chicago water privatisation

page **12**



CPA statement on population

The Guardian

Issue 1452

April 28, 2010

The need for a human rights bill

Last week the Rudd government announced that it would not introduce legislation to establish a bill of rights, despite recommendations in support of such an initiative from a special government-appointed human rights consultation committee.

The committee invited submissions from the public on the issue. Of the 35,014 responses it received, 27,888 (about 87 percent) supported introduction of such a bill, while only 4203 opposed it.

In its written response to the committee, the Communist Party of Australia noted that various Australian governments have ratified the United Nations human rights treaties, but that none has ever been incorporated into Australian law.

Many basic human rights which have long been observed by convention are now under threat, or have actually been removed, by recent legislation passed by federal and state governments. These include, for example, freedom from indefinite detention, the presumption of innocence, the right to remain silent under questioning, the right of an accused person to information concerning evidence against them, and the onus on accusers to prove guilt.

The CPA has in its submission proposed that the following principles be guaranteed under a bill of rights:

- Democratic rights, including freedom from arbitrary and/or indefinite detention, the right to remain silent under questioning, the presumption of innocence, the onus on accusers to prove guilt, and the right to legal representation;
- Rights for Indigenous people, including recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the original occupiers and owners of Australia; as well as recognition and protection of their inalienable rights to their cultures and sacred sites, and to land and natural resources on and under that land and in adjacent seas;
- The right to vote, including a proportional representation system with double or triple member electorates to ensure adequate representation of views; and registration rules that recognise small parties and permit their participation in elections;
- The right to assemble and protest, in accordance with the UN Covenant on Civil and Political Rights;
- Trade union rights, including the right to employment in a safe workplace, to take industrial action, to join a union and to be involved in or remain silent on union activities without legal penalties, and the right for unionists to enter workplaces without restrictions.

The government has declared it will increase the degree of parliamentary scrutiny of legislation, with a view to safeguarding human rights. However, rather than agreeing to guarantee any of them in a bill of rights, the government has decided to reject the bill altogether.

There is no doubt that this is the government's last word on the subject, judging by Attorney General Robert McClelland's remark that: "The enhancement of human rights should be done in a way that, as far as possible, unites rather than divides our community".

The statement ignores the fact that bills of rights are actually introduced *because* of divisions in society, and that (among other things) they are supposed to protect individuals or classes from the oppression and exploitation that occur as a result of those divisions. The statement also implies that supporters of a bill of rights are just trouble-makers, intent on sowing the seeds of discord in the community.

Many right-wing Labor MPs have been particularly bitter opponents of a bill of rights. When NSW Attorney-General John Hatzistergos recently met Susan Ryan, former Labor MP and enthusiastic human rights campaigner, he is said to have sneered in triumph that he was "sorry for her loss".

The rejection of a bill of rights clearly demonstrates the political position of most Liberal/National Party members, and of the dominant right-wing faction of the ALP on this issue. There are certainly some supporters in each of these parties. However, the reality is that they are powerless to prevent the systematic destruction by the rulers of their parties of long-held conventions which until now have offered ordinary Australian people some protection for their human rights.

Part of the remedy is for left-wing and progressive representatives to be voted into parliament, and for the existing major parties to be dumped as unceremoniously as the Rudd government has dumped the bill of rights.

PRESS FUND

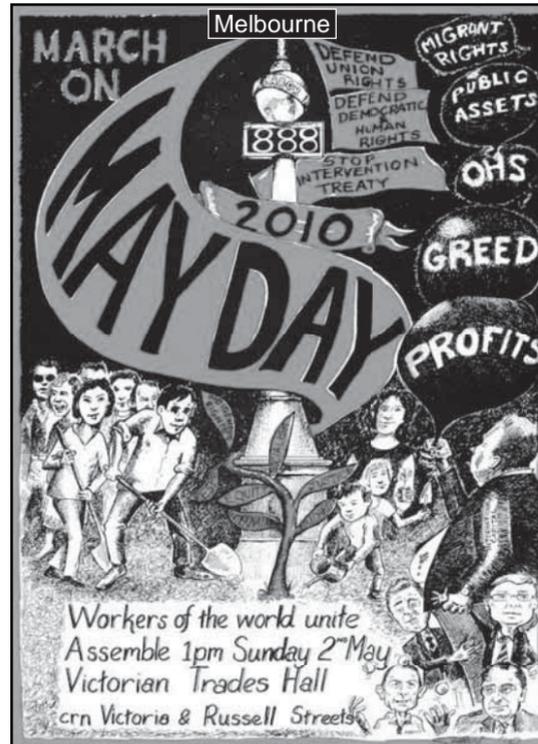
A special analysis prepared by the Grattan Institute "think tank" has concluded that the Rudd government's compensation for big polluters under its emissions trading scheme is an irrational waste of money, and will actually encourage higher greenhouse gas emissions. They're certainly right - but talk about wasting money! They could have saved themselves the cost of preparing the report by reading *The Guardian*, which drew the same conclusion when details of the scheme were first released. If you want to get ahead of the news, you should subscribe to *The Guardian*. However, you should really go a step further and donate regularly to the Press Fund, which helps us meet the day-to-day operating costs of production - like the following contributors, who have offered us their support this week, and to whom we offer our sincere thanks:

Mario Hilario \$20, N H \$50, "Round Figure" \$15, Dennis White \$5, Mark Window \$10.

This week's total: \$100 Progressive total: \$1,610

May Day 2010

March & Celebrate



Sydney

Celebrate May Day

5pm Sunday May 2
Greek Community Club
206 Lakemba St, Lakemba

Variety of Live Music
Mediterranean meal

A very affordable \$20

Organised by Sydney District Committee CPA & fraternal parties

Sydney UNITE - MOBILISE - FIGHT

MAY DAY SYDNEY MAY DAY COMMITTEE

MARCH ON MAY 1

ASSEMBLE 12 NOON HYDE PARK NORTH,
PARADE TO FIRST FLEET PARK

SPEAKERS INCLUDE:

ARK TRIBE - UNIONIST FACING 6 MONTHS IN PRISON
AT HANDS OF ABCC

LEE RHIANNON - NSW GREENS

ANDREW FURGUSON - STATE SECRETARY CFMEU

PAUL McALEER - SYDNEY BRANCH SECRETARY MUA

STRUGGLE FOR RIGHTS,
PEACE & SOCIALISM

Sydney May Day Toast

6.30pm Friday April 30

Cyprus Community Club 58 Stanmore Rd Stanmore

Enquiries: 02 9265 8438 | stuart.holt@mua.org.au

MC: Charmaine O'Sheades
NSW Teachers Federation
Mover: Mark Lennon Unions NSW
Guest Speakers & Live Band
\$35, Three Course Meal and Drinks

Adelaide

May Day

Saturday May 1

March

Assemble Victoria Sq 10am for 10:30am start
March to Torrens Parade Grounds

Family Picnic

Torrens Parade Grounds from 11am for: Speakers' Corner,
Children's entertainment, Food & Community Stalls

Sunday May 2

Workers Memorial

10am Black Diamond Corner, Port Adelaide.

BBQ & Beer

11.30am to 4.00pm Semaphore Workers Club

the struggle continues...

Perth

UnionsWA May Day Festival + March 2010

12 noon Sunday May 2
Fremantle Esplanade Reserve

Join us for the labour movement's biggest social event of the year. This year's theme is 'No WorkChoices in WA'. Come down with your family and friends to the labour movement's biggest social event of the year. Family fun rules supreme on the day with FREE live entertainment and performances, rides & slides, food and activities for the children. Join us for a fun day in celebration of the labour movement's past, present and future.

www.unionswa.com.au/mayday

Brisbane

Celebrate the International Day of the Workers

Paddington Workers Centre 2 Latrobe Tce

MAY DAY

5 pm Great food 6 pm Blackboard performances 7 pm guest artists

Absolutely Scandalous Jumping Fences Phil Monsour Robbie Dunn Combined Unions Choir Sincopao

Come along and join in singing the Internationale and Solidarity Forever

Saturday 1st May Admission: \$10 / \$5 conc. Fully licensed

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Custodial killing fields

From February 20 up to April 4, the custodial systems of Queensland, Western Australia and NSW became the Killing Fields. There have been six deaths in custody in jails and police watchhouses, as well as the triple shooting of an 18-year-old escapee on transit from Bathurst Jail to the Mental Health Unit at the Metropolitan Remand and Reception Jail at the Silverwater Complex.

Two outstanding cases have yet to reach a satisfactory judicial solution: the February 2004 death of TJ Hickey, whose family has sent a submission to the United Nations in an attempt to bring the Redfern Police to justice; and the death of Mulrunji Doomadgee on Palm Island in November 2004 at the hands of then-Sergeant Chris Hurley - which led to a community riot, three Coronial Inquests and a Supreme Court trial. Still justice has yet to be found.

Both families live in an everyday hell of despair while searching for justice.

The horror death of Mr Ward in 2008 in WA at the hands of two transport officers was by far the most callous death in custody for many years: Mr Ward was literally cooked to death in a transit van in temperatures of 56 degrees. Some 27 months later, charges against the officers are still pending but the WA government has been shamed into paying some interim compensation.

Three deaths in 2009 in the NSW

jail system highlight the lack of any duty of care that was also missing from all the deaths as outlined above.

After the 2009 Mardi Gras, Redfern Police arrested 34-year-old Veronica Baxter, a transwoman, and placed her at the MRRC, a male jail. Within days she was found hung in her one-out cell. Jail staff stated that she was able to mix with the male inmates and even to visit another pod within the gaol. Little beyond that is known as Commissioner Woodham has declared that no information is to be made public, not even to the family.

The second death took place in the back of a NSW transit van. Mark Holcroft, a non-Aboriginal inmate died of a heart attack during transit from Bathurst Jail to Mannus Jail in August 2009. Similar to the Mr Ward case, the transit van drivers considered their comfort to be more important than that of Mark. He had been dead for two hours when the van reached Mannus Jail. The family was informed five days later.

The third death, in early December 2009, was that of 21-year-old Terry Griffith Jnr who was found hung in his one-out cell at the John Moroney's Young Offenders Program at Windsor. Again, nothing is known as the cold hand of Commissioner Woodham has kept everything secret. The family was only informed of their son's death two days later.

The six deaths in custody in WA and Queensland in 2010 continue the



A rally against Aboriginal deaths in custody held in Brisbane earlier this year - rally organiser Sam Watson speaks to a police officer.

travesty of justice and the complete lack of any duty of care. What makes the custodial organisations - the police, the jails and the health systems - believe that inmates and detainees have no human rights? If we strip these from them, then what hope for

rehabilitation?

Our police and our jailers do not, and must never have, the power of an executioner. That is not their role. Why then do they hold sway over the "Killing Fields"? Why does society believe that the lives taken

are not worthy? It is because they are Aboriginal persons?

They must become more responsible and accept their duty of care: we must stop the Killing Fields. Indigenous Social Justice Association ✪

Action against anti-democratic laws in WA

Richard Titelius

Western Australia is one of the most over policed states in Australia and has more police per capita of population than Victoria or New South Wales. It matters not which conservative party of politics is in power Liberal or Labor, they respond with knee jerk reactions to perceptions of a runaway crime wave with laws that seek to increasingly repress the population of this state.

During the last Labor government, the parliament introduced mandatory sentencing legislation which has had the long term effect of tying the hands of judiciary who are paid over \$250,000 per annum to match up a sentencing grid on a plea of guilty. This has had the effect of increasingly

filling up the state's jails with people who are not put on programs while in jail and are ill prepared to re-integrate into the community.

The Liberals meanwhile are responding with proposals for laws which will give police the powers to declare areas of the state as designated areas where everyone and anyone can be searched and it becomes an offence to refuse.

On top of these laws the Liberal government is also proposing Prohibited Behaviour Legislation which would allow the prosecution once they have sentenced an offender before a judicial officer, to seek orders to prohibit certain behaviours and restrict access to certain areas.

Both these laws are based on laws which have been in operation in the United Kingdom and have been

found to interfere with a person's human rights and unnecessarily target certain ethnic/racial groups and socio-economic groups.

Against this backdrop the group "Search For Your Rights" called for a public lunchtime rally on April 20, on the steps of the state legislature to oppose the making of these laws and stimulate debate in parliament and amongst the masses as to the real reasons these laws are being made and what the real problems and solutions are.

Alex Cassie of Search For Your Rights told the rally that, "The Police Minister Rob Johnson, the Attorney General Christian Porter and the Premier Colin Barnett would have us believe that we live in a war zone, we have something to hide and that we

are criminals ourselves for opposing the laws."

Cassie called on the 200 people who had attended the rally "To be vigilant in the protection of our rights and that if one of us loses our rights we all lose our rights."

Amongst the speakers that followed was Dr David Indemauer, a criminologist who began his address by saying that whenever laws are made we should ask three questions; Why do we need these laws? What will they cost? Who will benefit from these laws?

Dr Indemauer noted that there is not a particular problem that these laws will address especially considering that most reported crime has actually fallen in Western Australia, except for a few of the more violent and serious crimes such as murder and armed robbery - which these laws would not address.

"There is no genuine concern for community safety demonstrated by these proposed laws," he told the rally and urged people not to give up their liberties lightly.

Greens Upper House member Giz Watson was the final speaker and told

the crowd that the only similar laws in existence were in the UK which were brought in under Anti-Terrorism provisions. The European Union's Human Rights Commission has since found that the UK laws infringed people's human rights.

Ms Watson reminded the rally that the judiciary itself has problems with the government's law and order agenda and quoted from retiring District Court Chief Judge Antoinette Kennedy who said on the ABC *Stateline* program on March 26, "Once you can have people more frightened of disorder than tyranny, it enables you to do almost anything you like so far as legislation is concerned."

To which Ms Watson added, "It is the worst law that I have been asked to consider in my 13 years as a politician and that is saying something!"

At the conclusion of the rally a petition of a 1,000 signatures was presented to the Opposition Police Spokesperson Margaret Quirk calling on the parliament "To withdraw its support for the legislation and consider more effective measures to reduce crime..." ✪

Pete's Corner



Sydney

Fund raiser for Ampilatwatja Walk Off Camp in Central Australia

Indigenous musicians & performers, plus the premiere of *Ampilatwatja Walk Off Protest vs NT Intervention*

Thursday April 29

Addison Rd Community Centre

142 Addison Rd Marrickville

6.30pm Food & drinks start 7:00pm Music starts

\$20 waged \$10 conc info: 02 9564 1277

Organised by Actively Radical TV

School communities latest casualties in quest for tough image

Bob Briton

Public schools, their teachers and students are the next targets in the federal government's quest for a tougher image. Asylum seekers from Sri Lanka and Afghanistan were recently singled out for harsh treatment with a lengthy halt being declared to the processing of their applications for refuge in Australia. Now public school teachers have been left exposed to sanctions by their state government employers as they rally to defend their students from the damage being done by the publication of league tables.

The Australian Education Union's (AEU) federal executive resolved unanimously earlier this month to place a moratorium on the conducting of this year's national literacy and numeracy (NAPLAN) test. The data from the test is posted on the *My School* website and has been used by media outlets to compile league tables that name and shame struggling schools, worsening their morale and discouraging enrolment of students.

Education Minister Julia Gillard has said she is opposed to the publication of league tables but brushed off earlier warnings that they

The WA government has announced it will reprimand teachers involved in the moratorium and dock their pay even though they will not be absenting themselves from work. The ACT government has gone public with its stance in favour of the tests saying it will conduct them with non-union teaching staff. There was speculation that parents would be enlisted to supervise the tests but this is looking increasingly doubtful. The New South Wales Parents and Citizens group has said it will not be involved in the testing.

The deputy PM and the government insist that the large number of hits on the *My School* vindicates their position and that parents want the sort of information it contains in order to make a "choice" of school for their child. The claim is a bit rich. Parents and others would no doubt have surfed their way to the site out of curiosity about their local school, not out of some burning need to compare them with others. They would have also been interested to see what all the controversy was about.

The *My School* site colour codes the performance of schools; green for above average, white for average and shades of red for below average grades. It lists "statistically



And while it would look bad for the Commonwealth to do anything as crude as compile a league table of schools, it is happy to let the big circulation dailies do that for them.

sometimes "charter schools" – funded publicly but run by private enterprise. And, of course, there is endless testing and reporting to bewildered parents who simply want access to decent,

well and defend the reputation and survival of their schools. Children as young as five have a "SATs booster" teacher to ensure good results in the narrowly focussed tests that begin when pupils are seven years old. SATs is the UK equivalent of NAPLAN.

This sort of needless pressure has come to Australia. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, which happily ranked a number of schools in its pages, also reported on the achievements of some of the high scoring private schools. It quoted one of the parents. "Mandi Sanders, the mother of two children at St Francis of Assisi Regional Primary School in Paddington, which was rated the best-performing Catholic primary school, said the school was delighted with the result but it had come at a cost.

"There was enormous pressure at the school on both teachers and students from day one of term one to achieve good results," she said. "The preparation for the tests was intense, with extreme pressure to practise through regular class time and heavy-duty homework.

"Many children felt overwhelmed and stressed by the level of work and the performance expectations."

The observations back up the position of the teachers' union in Australia that tests linked to league tables disrupt the rest of the curriculum and encourage low grade rote learning. Schools that do not rank well are left demoralised. Teachers should be supported in this latest battle for the future of public education. ☘

The observations back up the position of the teachers' union in Australia that tests linked to league tables disrupt the rest of the curriculum and encourage low grade rote learning.

would arise from the launch of the *My School* website. She has refused to meet representatives of the AEU to discuss changes to the site and a way forward. Late last week she said she would meet with union representatives but would not discuss the website. She would only talk about the damage she claims will be done to students by the boycott of the NAPLAN test. This is an invitation to a lecture.

similar schools" from all over the country. It does not help parents to make a choice of local public school for their kids. These are zoned in normal circumstances in any case. It could provide the impetus to take children out of public schools listed as "below average", pay the extra and put them into private ones. This would suit the government's overall privatising strategy very nicely.

The federal government is determined to follow the US example in blurring the distinction between public and private education to the ultimate cost of the public sector. In New York, for example, "failing" public schools are regularly shut down and amalgamated into other supposedly better performing ones. Poor communities are being robbed of school assets. The winners are

free, secular, public education for their children.

There is no real "choice" within this scheme, either. Pots of funding money are not available to states seeking to escape the US equivalent of NAPLAN testing and reporting. The US federal Department of Education's *Race to the Top* program rewards states for "... implementing significant reforms in the four education areas described in the *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act*: enhancing standards and assessments, improving the collection and use of data, increasing teacher effectiveness and achieving equity in teacher distribution, and turning around struggling schools."

Reaction against these regimes of testing and ranking is strongest in Britain, the country that pioneered the neo-liberal measure. The majority of parents now want it scrapped. Students, teachers and parents are under enormous pressure to perform

WA Greens statement on mine safety

Alison Xamon & Robin Chapple

The Greens recognise that the Barnett government and Industry are keen to move to self regulation in relation to workers' safety; however the Greens believe this is going entirely in the wrong direction and that government should be looking at increasing regulations, not relaxing them.

All three major parties supported the recent passage of the Mines Safety and Inspection Amendment Bill 2009, recognising the urgency to ensure more mines inspectors and the need for Industry to contribute towards funding this. However simply increasing the

number of mines inspectors is not the silver bullet.

There must be a multi-faceted and mandated approach to mines safety.

The need to increase regulations is even more urgent in the light of an anticipated increase in the mining sector which will occur in the next 12 months and beyond.

There are many additional strategies which must be looked at – and increasing workers' participation in determining their own safety is a paramount. We also need to recognise the importance of increased union participation as recognised stakeholders, mandatory training, protection of OH&S reps, the harmonisation of occupational health

and safety laws, risk management, resolving jurisdictional disputes, and most importantly the introduction of an increase in penalties.

In the past 12 years there have been three reviews of the Mines Act and multiple inquiries; the solutions are well documented and now is the time for the political will to implement them.

As such, the Greens call for an urgent judicial inquiry in order to pull together the consistent recommendations, create an action plan and importantly a time frame for implementation and action.

It is time for all parties to get serious about workers' safety. This is about workers' lives and the lives of their families. ☘

To write a letter to you local federal MP, go to www.forourfuture.org.au/elobby.html on the AEU website and follow the instructions.

cpasa.blogspot.com

Official blog of the CPA South Australia

Coal, power privatisation and the future

Part 2

Peter Mac

The NSW government is determined to privatise the state's electrical power generation system. Although prevented from doing so at two ALP state conferences, the government is proceeding to privatise the system's retail organisation. A future Liberal/National party government would privatise the entire system at a moment's notice.

The Kennally government has offered subsidies for installation of household photovoltaic solar electricity panels, for a limited period. Otherwise, it has allowed the private sector to establish a virtual monopoly on power generation from renewable sources and has maintained its rigid commitment to coal as an energy source for its power plants.

One minor exception is the tiny thermal solar pilot plant built several years ago at the government's Lidell power station, used as the experimental basis for a huge new solar thermal power plant near the US city of Los Angeles.

Private firms are taking over renewable energy power generation. One corporation is developing the geo-thermal ("hot rocks") power generation plant in the Cooper Basin. New privately-owned wind power stations are also appearing in many country areas.

The government has established no parameters for construction of wind farms, and farmers who live near them often suffer from the deep, repetitive and highly disturbing noise of their operation. Nevertheless, clean renewable energy is certainly the way of the future for power generation, along with co-generation, localised power grids and other measures to utilise power more efficiently.

However, at the moment Australia has the world's worst per capita emissions. Almost half of our carbon emissions come from the coal-fired power stations that provide most of our electrical energy, and much of that energy is lost in transmission over the vast national grid.

It therefore stands to reason that the state governments should be introducing new state-owned renewable energy power generation systems.

But they aren't. Despite the lip-service paid by the various Australian governments to dealing with climate change, they have not reigned in power generation carbon emissions.

Former opposition energy spokesman Ian MacFarlane once predicted: "There will never be another coal-fired power station built in Australia." But that's not true either, because the NSW government now intends to build two new coal-fired power plants.

The ETS fiasco

An emissions trading scheme (ETS) is supposed to impose increasingly heavy pollution permit costs on high-emission industries. The Rudd government's ETS will eventually impose some cost penalties on the corporations that operate coal-fired power facilities (whether public or privately owned), but they will try to off-load the bill to consumers by way of higher rates.

Those increases would, of course, be entirely unnecessary if the government rapidly introduced renewable energy generation for its own power plants. As the renewable energy power came on stream, government energy authorities would begin to amass surplus credits, which the owners of the remaining coal-fired power stations, or other polluting industries, would be forced to buy in order to remain in business.

But that's not the case. Nor will the Rudd government's emissions trading scheme have much effect, because it's based on the threadbare ambition of a five percent reduction in emissions by 2020, and it grants the biggest polluters major concessions in the initial period. The coal and metal processing industries have shouted protests at the ETS, but they're not at all worried because it's so ineffectual.

The rate rise motivation

The state governments will attempt to pass on to consumers any cost increases that their coal-fired plants incur under the ETS. The NSW government's foreshadowed electricity rate increases give some early indication of this. However, given the pathetic penalties imposed on big polluters under the ETS, the scale of the rate increases (up to 64 percent in the long term) are remarkably out of proportion.

In fact, the primary motivation for the increases is not just dealing with the petty financial wrist-slapping of the ETS, but getting ready for another stab at privatisation of NSW power. In anticipation of this, the government is setting the state's power rates at



the point of profit maximisation (the Holy Grail of capitalism), rather than a reasonable level that consumers can afford, in order to make the power generation facilities an irresistible target for a future purchaser.

Fortress status quo

The NSW government is committed to retaining coal as the sole energy source for its power plants, as long as they remain in public ownership. A recent edition of the ABC's *Four Corners* program revealed that the government has bluntly refused to order a scientific study into the very high incidence of lung diseases and cancer among people living near the Hunter Valley open-cut coal mines.

That is not surprising. Such a study would inevitably link these mines with ill-health, with the implication that they should cease operating, as happened with Australia's former asbestos mines.

In view of the terrible threat posed by climate change, a further implication would be that combustion of coal, and the mining of coal itself, should be phased out. The world is heavily dependent on Australia's coal exports, so adoption of such a policy at federal level would provide a tremendous global impetus for adoption of sustainable industrial practices.

Retrenched coal industry workers could – and should – be given preference for employment in the new renewable energy industries as part of a national government "green industry" program.

Existing manufacturing industries that currently rely on coal should also be converted to using other energy sources. It is not scientifically correct to say we wouldn't have steel or cement without coal. Manufacturing those products requires heat, which can be obtained from many sources, not just coal. (Cement can also be made by a process formerly used in the Soviet Union, which requires very little energy at all).

However, given their close ties with the mining and metals industries, there's no way that either of the two major parties would contemplate any limitation on coal mining. And that is why it is crucial for the Australian people to dump those parties in favour of left and progressive coalitions in coming elections. ☺



Delta Electricity, the owner of Wallerawang power plant, must now monitor heavy metals and pollutants such as arsenic flowing into a channel that goes into Cox River and report back to the NSW government every three months. Cox River feeds into Sydney drinking water supplies. But the latest figures show that Delta is still polluting the river well above safe guideline levels. Monitoring pollution is one thing; stopping the pollution is what is really necessary. The Blue Mountains Conservation Society is mounting a case against Delta in an effort to restrict all harmful pollution. "The upper Cox River is basically dying because of the amount of salt and heavy metals being poured into it," said Tara Cameron, president of the Blue Mountain Conservation Society. The group is waiting to see whether the Land and Environment Court will uphold its original decision to cap the costs of a court case at \$20,000 before proceeding with the case.

Investments in the Indian Premier League (IPL) cricket teams are under scrutiny as allegations of corruption engulf the multimillion-dollar tournament. More than 40 Australians are involved in the IPL as coaches, players, support staff and umpires. The Communist Party of India leader, Gurudas Dasgupta, told the Indian parliament the league was being used for money laundering and illegal gambling "under the nose" of the Finance Ministry. "Players are bought and sold like vegetables. Betting is taking place openly. It is not cricket but an organised gamble." The IPL's estimated value is \$4.5 billion which ranks it among the world's 200 most valuable brands.

Tony Abbott is at it again – this time he had a brilliant idea of sending all those unemployed under 30 to the west to fill the skilled labour shortage in the mining industry there. As Paul Howes, AWU national secretary, was quoted saying: "If he genuinely thinks you are going to solve an economically crippling skills shortage by taking punitive measures against welfare recipients, he has clearly never lived in the real world. You can't just get any old Joe off the street and plonk them into a mine, and think that's going to mean they can work."

So ethics is in for those who want to opt out of scripture classes. Children are taking it on with enthusiasm despite religious educators' ill-mannered campaign to undermine the idea. A radio caller was spot on when he said that the difference between the two lies in the fact that ethics teaches children to think and religious classes make them follow the dogma without questioning it. Well put.

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The Wage Increase-Price Increase Myth

The so-called “green shoots” of economic recovery” are measured by the growth in profits and exports, not wage rates. But for workers, many of whose wages shrank during the economic crisis, the recovery is still to come. Prices have continued to rise and next month’s federal budget is set to cut spending in key areas that affect the living standards of workers and their families. Workers’ wages have a great deal of catching up to do, but trade union demands for even very modest wage rises are constantly met with employer and government claims that they will cause inflation and bring the recovery to its knees.

Such outbursts by bosses and the governments that serve their interests are not new. The following article, a chapter from *Penal Colony to Penal Powers* by J Hutson, was written for the Amalgamated Metal Workers and Shipwrights’ Union (now the Australian Manufacturing Workers’ Union) and first published in 1966. The “Fair Pay Commission” has taken over from the Arbitration Commission in its role of determining the minimum (basic) wage. The old imperial pounds, shillings and pence have been replaced by dollars. Just

the employers to obtain the abolition of the quarterly adjustments of the federal basic wage in 1953 without any struggle, or even much protest, from those concerned. The idea still had a strong hold in 1965, but the trade union movement has not done sufficient to clarify the issue among its members.

Even the militant section was confused at the time and was therefore passive, but it has now mainly come to see through the deception. They appreciate that although something effective should be done to impose control over increases in prices it would take a long combined political and industrial campaign to achieve it in the face of the strong opposition of the employers, who consider that only wages should be subject to price control.

But the matter of price control, important as it is, should not divert the workers from pressing for increases in wages by assuming that until something is done about price control nothing should be done about wages, for the general trend is for prices to rise continually. This is because increases are a result of either the law of supply and demand or the deliberate policies of the big monopolies which have no scruples in raising prices at every opportunity.

compensate for price increases, yet the only award increase of any kind was the 5/- [five shillings] average prosperity loading granted in 1937, which clearly indicates that other factors must have been operating to increase prices.

In 1956 the Victorian government abolished the quarterly adjustment of the state basic wage, yet after only one year in which there were no award wage increases the “C” Series Index Number for Melbourne [CPI] had risen by the equivalent of 19/-.

The movement of the Consumer Price Index from March 1960 to June 1961 also tells a revealing story, for although it rose sharply by nearly 4% no award wage increase was granted in that period. In contrast, from September 1961 to June 1963 it rose by only 0.4%, or 1/-, yet during that period the basic wage was increased by 12/-, margins** were increased by 10%, and over-award payments were substantially increased.

The reason for this came out in the 1962 Annual Leave Case when the employers’ advocate said that it should not be granted because the employers had been unable to pass on the 12/- increase in the basic wage granted in 1961 because of the credit squeeze and intensification of competition. In other words, because

goods industries prices fell in spite of wage increases. But Dr Coombs’ [Chairman of the Reserve Bank] comments support our conclusion that in spite of the employers’ submissions to the contrary costs need not rise automatically with wage increases ...”

In the 1963 Basic Wage Judgement this was reaffirmed when it was said that, “We agree with what was said both in the 1963 Margins decision and the 1961 Basic Wage decision that increases in prices are determined by those who fix prices.”

Monopoly price fixing

The comment referred to was made by Dr H C Coombs in 1959 when he said, “Consider the pricing policies of industrialists and traders. No doubt some degree of competition prevails over a wide range of industry and commerce but there are degrees of monopoly and tacitly accepted practices which mean that prices are determined by management rather than by the market for a wide range of goods and that within significant margins producers can decide at what prices their goods shall be sold.” [Monopoly price fixing and price fixing collusion is even worse today than it was then.]

This was substantiated by the statement of Sir Garfield Barwick in 1963, when he was Attorney General, that there were between 500 to 600 trade associations in Australia which had been formed to implement restrictive practices designed to maintain price levels.

In 1965, a Royal Commission set up by the Tasmanian government found that two-thirds of the trade associations in that state engaged in restrictive practices. The result is that the law of supply and demand has become inoperative in some areas and so is of little benefit to the consumer of many goods.

The resistance of the monopolies to reducing prices has now reached the stage that even in times of recession when the market becomes flooded they prefer to cut production rather than to cut prices. Some have even been known to increase prices during a recession in order to maintain their rate of profit on the reduced production. So any attempt to control prices could only be fully effective if a strong restraint was put on the power of such associations to manipulate prices in the interests of the big monopolies.

The monopolies have whenever possible applied the theory of the English economist, Lord Keynes, who said in 1936 that, “A movement by employers to revise money-wage bargains downward will be more strongly resisted than a gradual and automatic lowering of wages as a result of increasing prices.”

The success of the application of this policy is shown by the big reduction in the value of the pound that has taken place, for taking it as being as £1 value in 1945 its value in 1964 had been reduced to 4/-.

The success in reducing the value of increases granted in awards is shown by the following table, which was an exhibit in the 1959 Basic Wage Case.

The anomaly as far as trade unionists are concerned is that they require the approval of the Arbitration Commission after a long publicly argued case to increase the price of their labour power, but employers do



A “Clean Start” rally in Sydney in 2006 demanding a fair deal for cleaners.

The correct concept therefore, is that wage increases usually chase prices increase and not the reverse, and that they are the best means of obtaining immediate relief from increases.

multiply the profits by a thousand and not much else has changed. The chapter is titled: “The Wage Increase-Price Increase Myth”.

The employers have been successful in planting in the minds of many people the myth that wage increases cause price increases, so nobody is better off and could even be worse off by obtaining wage increases. Yet such a proposition is a fallacy that was exploded by the British economist Ricardo as far back as 1817. In the post-war [2nd World War] period of galloping inflation in Australia it did appear as though it were true, particularly in connection with the basic wage, for every time this was increased prices did go up.

There is no doubt that it was the strong hold that this idea had on the minds of the workers which enabled

Wages chase prices

The correct concept therefore, is that wage increases usually chase price increases and not the reverse, and that they are the best means of obtaining immediate relief from increases.

Economists admit that it is very difficult to show any relation between wage and price increases. For one thing, the price of Australian exports are determined more by world prices than by the level of local wages. And although wage increases can on occasions cause some increase in the internal price level, prices can rise even if the Commission grants no increases in the basic wage and margins. For example, in the 12 years between 1934 and 1946 the basic wage was increased by £2* [two pound] to

economic circumstances made it impossible for the employers to pass on the increase in wages in higher prices they were compelled to absorb it partly out of their profits and partly out of increased productivity.

This trend continued into 1965 for some goods despite the £1 increase in the basic wage in 1964. From June 1964 to June 1965 the Consumer Price Index rose by 5.1 points, but 2.2 points or nearly half of this was because of an increase in the prices of meat and potatoes in which wage increases had no effect at all.

The Arbitration Commission has no illusions about where the responsibility lies for increasing prices, witness the comment in the 1961 Basic Wage Judgement that, “... material was put before us which indicated that in 1960 in certain consumer

Date of increase	Amount of increase (shillings/pence)	“C” Series Price Index	Amount in 1936 value (shillings/pence)
1936	5/0	100	5/0
1946	7/0	132	5/3 ³ / ₄
1950	20/0	181	11/0
1956	10/0	285	3/6
1957	10/0	295	3/4 ³ / ₄
1958	5/0	300	1/8
1959	15/0	308	6/6

Decline in purchasing value of award increases.

not have to do this before increasing the price of their commodities.

Boosting profits

A good example of this was the increase in the price of steel imposed in early 1964 by the Broken Hill Proprietary Ltd and John Lysaght Ltd. Yet in the year ending May 1964, Lysaghts had a disclosed profit of £3,415,000, while BHP had a disclosed profit of £18,170,000 after allowing £28,738,513 for depreciation, while between 1955 and 1964 the wages and salaries per ton of steel had actually fallen slightly by 1/- to £13/5/-. But BHP made no secret of the fact that the increase in price was to finance its expansion programs, a matter having no connection whatsoever with wage increases.

In addition, the employers have developed a number of ingenious devices for obtaining a hidden profit by reducing the actual value of what is bought.

Obsolescence is deliberately built into the product; inflated advertising

Gil Scott-Heron: don't play apartheid Israel!

Open letter, from Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel

The Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI) is gravely disappointed by the announcement that well-known, progressive artist Gil Scott-Heron is due to perform in Israel on May 25. We call upon Mr Scott-Heron, a member of United Artists Against Apartheid in the 1980s and a featured singer on the breakthrough song "Don't Play Sun City," not to play apartheid Israel.

We urge you as an influential artist, and, more importantly, as a well-known activist on issues of social justice and equality, not to perform in Israel, a state that maintains a cruel system of occupation, colonisation and apartheid against the Palestinian people and has been widely accused by UN experts and leading human rights organisations of committing war crimes and grave violations of human rights. Your performance in Israel would stand in stark contrast to your anti-apartheid, anti-racist record and simply be part of Israel's attempt to "re-brand" and whitewash its apartheid system.

Your work has been an inspiration to activists around the world who are fighting for justice alongside the Palestinian people; do not tarnish your record and this admiration by turning a blind eye to the realities of Israeli apartheid. A performance in Israel would come a year and a half after Israel's bloody military assault against the occupied Gaza Strip which left over 1,440 Palestinians dead, of whom 431 were children, and 5,380 injured.

The 1.5 million Palestinians in the besieged Gaza Strip, the overwhelming majority of whom are refugees, were subjected to three weeks of relentless Israeli state terror, whereby Israeli warplanes systematically targeted civilian areas, reducing whole neighbourhoods and vital civilian infrastructure to rubble and partially destroying Gaza's leading university and scores of schools, including several run by the UN, where civilians, including children, were taking shelter. This criminal assault came after months of a crippling and ongoing Israeli siege of Gaza.

The situation for Palestinians outside Gaza does not fare well either. Palestinian refugees, the majority of the Palestinian population, are not allowed to return to their homes from which they were expelled in 1948. Palestinian citizens of Israel are treated as second-class citizens where rampant discrimination and differential

access to services is the norm. Palestinians in the West Bank are locked in by an apartheid wall with its connected system of Israeli-only roads, settlements and checkpoints. Literally, Palestinian areas are transformed into open air prisons and laboratories for the latest Israeli weaponry.

If you have any doubts that the situation of Palestinians is similar to that of black South Africans under apartheid, we urge you to heed the words of Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who in a recent letter to Berkeley students wrote: "I have been to the Occupied Palestinian Territory, and I have witnessed the racially segregated roads and housing that reminded me so much of the conditions we experienced in South Africa under the racist system of apartheid."

"I have witnessed the humiliation of Palestinian men, women and children made to wait hours at Israeli military checkpoints routinely when trying to make the most basic of trips to visit relatives or attend school or college, and this humiliation is familiar to me and the many black South Africans who were corralled and regularly insulted by the security forces of the apartheid government" ("Divesting from Injustice", *The Huffington Post*, 13 April 2010).

In the face of decades of unrelenting oppression, Palestinian civil society has called upon supporters of the struggle for freedom and justice throughout the world to take a stand and heed our call for boycott, divestment and sanctions against Israel until it recognises Palestinian rights and fully complies with international law. Many prominent international cultural figures including John Berger, Ken Loach, Arundhati Roy, Roger Waters, John Williams, among others, have declared their support for the boycott. Other renowned international artists, including Sting, Bono, Snoop Dog, Jean Luc Goddard and Joan Manuel Serrat have also heeded our call and cancelled their gigs or participation in festivals in Israel.

Your performance in Israel would be the equivalent to having performed in Sun City during South Africa's apartheid era, in violation of the international boycott unanimously endorsed by the oppressed South Africans. We hope that you will not play apartheid Israel. ✘

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turned and resistant yet,
shoulder risen a bit,
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a tonne of material
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still alive through
the settling dust,
WMC, BHP Rio Tinto
stamped on the sign
above the gaped mine face.

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could tell more of him –
a part of the community
now broken away.

"He was a union man,
part of us" as they tighten
together like
a clenched fist,
the children too
steeled by this
because knowing why
is the first step.

Tom Pearson



...nding a better wage deal for cleaners.

costs are included in the price structure; deceptive packaging gives an inaccurate impression of the actual contents and conceals price increases; poor construction results in high maintenance costs; trade-in policies produce an artificial price level and so on. Prices also have a habit of increasing a bit more than is usually warranted by any actual increase granted in award rates, as the opportunity is not missed of taking an extra nibble.

It is clear that without some form of firm price and profit control the general trend will be for prices to increase. To impose such control would require some very positive action by the Australian people. Until that is done they can only try to improve their economic position by struggling for increases in wages. If they do not because of a belief in the myth that wage increases must cause price increases, they will only fall that further behind.

* Metric conversion saw one penny replaced by one cent, one shilling by 10 cents and one pound by two dollars.

** Margins were the amount awarded by the Commission over and above the basic wage which recognised qualifications, skill and experience of particular groups of workers. ✘



Bob Briton, the Communist Party's candidate for the seat of Lee at the recent SA state election, received an unusual gift through the post recently from a supporter in Adelaide. It was a pair of hand-knitted red socks with a card saying "You did your best Bob - don't get cold feet now." The Party received three percent of the vote at the March 20 poll and was greatly encouraged by the support but the advice contained with the present is well taken. Comrades in SA are now planning their next for next major task – the federal election due sometime this year. The challenge is a big one and, indeed it is no time for "cold feet."

Chicago residents oppose water privatisation

Roberta Wood

CHICAGO: Rumours that a plan to privatise this city's drinking water is in the pipeline have residents alarmed. "Access to water is a human right," a woman who lives in the city's Little Village neighbourhood told a gathering last week. "It's a natural resource and water ownership plays out as a matter of life and death."

"I've seen what happens when private industry controls water," added former Peace Corps worker Jon Keesecker, an organiser with the Water Campaign of Food & Water Watch. "They can just turn off the tap."

The water issue takes on special urgency in this city on the shores of Lake Michigan. Chicagoans are still fuming over the secret privatisation of the municipal parking meter system last year. They got soaked when overnight the cost of parking on public streets - often in front of ones workplace or residence - quadrupled, and the rate increases are not over yet.

Water defenders here hope that the experience of the parking meter debacle will help hold back the

floodgates of privatisation. Word has leaked out that Mayor Richard Daley has met with consultants to explore selling off more public assets to for-profit corporations. "Everything is always on the table," he told the *Chicago Tribune* last fall.

Over 100 city residents attended the city-wide meeting on April 19 held in the basement of a community theatre on the city's near north side. At the podium 32nd Ward Alderman Scott Waguespack was joined by representatives of several environmental organisations. The event was publicised on 20 different web pages and through activists' Facebook networks.

Privatisation effects percolate down to consumers

Keesecker described the dangers of privatisation:

- 1) Rates can go up. Privately run systems in the state of Illinois average rates 36 percent higher than those publicly owned.
- 2) Services decline. Privately-run systems rack up more violations of water quality standards.

3) Local control and transparency suffer.

A city truck driver attending the gathering added his personal experience to the list. In a city reeling from unemployment, his job as a city truck driver was recently privatised. He described what happened next: "The rate paid to the drivers goes from \$30/hour to \$10. And the contractor keeps the difference. The new drivers with little experience are pushed to drive unsafe speeds and long hours. And they get no pensions, no benefits and no union," he said bitterly. "The private contractors are stealing our work and selling to their friends. The city residents pay a corruption tax."

Chicago model

Privatisation is a global phenomenon, but "Chicago is ground zero for a particular model that involves leasing the infrastructure," explained Rachel Weber, professor of Urban Planning and Policy from the University of Illinois. In 2005 the Chicago Skyway became the first toll road in the nation to be privatised. It had been owned and operated by the city's Department of Streets and Sanitation since it was built in 1958. The Daley administration sold it in a 99-year concession to an Australian-Spanish consortium for a \$1.83 billion.

Global funds thirsty for investment opportunities are driving pressure on privatisation schemes. With turmoil in other markets, publicly-owned infrastructure becomes an attractive opportunity. Transparency and democratic control are urgently needed in this sector, said Weber. She pointed out that financial giants like Goldman Sachs and Morgan Stanley have unregulated conflicts of interest. After they act as financial advisers urging municipalities to sell their assets, they then collect enormous bonuses on the transactions.



Phineas Baxandall representing the Public Interest Research Group explained why privatisation of water systems inevitably leads to higher consumer costs. Investors, he said, don't purchase assets with upfront money. Rather, they borrow the purchase money, and at higher rates than government agencies typically can get for financing infrastructure repairs. Then, in order to pay back the big loans, the investors raise rates and cut services along with wages and jobs. In the case of the toll road industry, analysts estimate that the tolls must be raised 30 percent to cover the financing costs.

Profiteering from a revenue stream

Baxandall compared the threatened water privatisation to the sub-prime mortgage debacle. The dominant business model, he said,

is, "You've got a revenue stream, a private investor buys it, then wants to cash out quickly. Then, he continued, "It's securitised and sold to a thousand investors" who own it but have no stake in running the system well. "Then who's looking out for the water users?" he asked. The Department of Water's revenue stream is the \$420 million Chicago homeowners and businesses pay in fees.

Alderman Waguespack is seeking support for a modest measure he has introduced in the City Council to slow down the drive to privatisation. The Assets Lease Ordinance would require public hearings and financial disclosure before future deals are signed.

Meeting attendees pledged to get the message out through their electronic networks and to approach their aldermen for support of Waguespack's ordinance.

People's World ☘

Solidarity with Turkish UPS workers

Transport trade unionists around the world are being urged to continue to support workers in Turkey who have been dismissed by their UPS employer for embarking on a campaign to organise the workplace.

Thirty-three workers employed by UPS Turkey and its subsidiaries in Ankara, Istanbul and Izmir, were sacked following an organising approach by International Transport Federation (ITF) affiliate Türkiye Motorlu Tasit İşçileri Sendikası (TÜMTİS). It is understood that the workers had been either leaders in the campaign or union sympathisers.

The union says that managers have been intimidating staff, threatening them with dismissal if they express their support for the union. Some workers were told to sign a form to confirm that they would not make any legal claims against the company as a result of the termination of their contract; all refused to do so.

Many affiliates responded to a call from the ITF to join the

federation in expressing solidarity with the dismissed workers by sending messages of support to TÜMTİS and writing a protest letter to UPS managers in Turkey. This included an approach by the Teamsters union in the US to representatives at the global headquarters of UPS in Atlanta.

Within 48 hours of the ITF's protest to the company, 24 workers were reinstated; nine, however, are still out of a job. The ITF is urging unionists to continue to support the workers until all are reinstated.

ITF inland transport section secretary Mac Urata said: "The dismissals and intimidation tactics are a fundamental violation of workers' rights and must be stopped immediately. That's why we are urging affiliates to carry on showing solidarity with the workers. We also want to see the company establish a dialogue with TÜMTİS."

The dispute coincides with Urata's upcoming trip to Istanbul next week; he will be visiting the workers and meeting TÜMTİS to discuss next steps. ☘

Demands for justice for Cameroonian journalists

The Federation of African Journalists (FAJ), the African Regional Organisation of the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), last week expressed its shock and dismay at the death in custody of leading journalist Bibi Ngota, editor of the bi-monthly newspaper *Cameroun Express*.

Bibi has been held at the Kondengui prison in Yaoundé since March 10 when he was arrested with three colleagues, Serge Sabouang, editor of *La Nation*, Robert Mintya, editor of *Le Devoir* and Hervé Nko'o, reporter at the weekly *Bebel* newspaper, following a complaint by the Secretary General of the Presidency of the Republic, Laurent Essou, that they allegedly "falsified his signature on a document in order to blackmail him". The journalists were carrying an investigation into alleged corruption involving the state-owned oil company SNH.

"We are tremendously shocked by the death of Bibi and the conditions in which these journalists have been detained," said Omar

Faruk Osman, president of FAJ.

Bibi's family repeatedly warned about his poor health as he had asthma and high blood pressure. According to his colleagues, the death certificate stated that he did not receive medical treatment when he asked for it. "We share in the sorrow of Bibi's family and the Cameroonian journalists who mourn his loss and we pass our deepest sympathy and condolences," Faruk added.

FAJ remains extremely concerned about the reports of alleged torture to force Cameroonian journalists to reveal their sources and fully supports the demands made by its affiliate in the Cameroon, the National Syndicate of Cameroonian Journalists (SNJC). "We back the call for an independent commission of enquiry to examine and determine the circumstances of the arrest and detention of these journalists which resulted in this dreadful tragedy," said Faruk.

The death of Bibi has come at a time when journalists in Cameroon are suffering increased harassment and abuse at the hands of

the authorities. The International Federation of Journalists has protested many abuses against journalists perpetrated by security forces and the use of criminal legislation to independent media.

In a letter to Cameroon President Paul Biya last February, the IFJ president pleaded for his intervention to stop arbitrary arrests, criminal prosecutions and torture of journalists. He raised in particular the cases of four journalists, Thierry Ngogang from *STV2*, Alex Gustave Azebaze, independent journalist and leader of Syndicat National des Journalistes du Cameroun (SNJC), Anani Rabier Bindz from *Canal2 International* and Manassé Aboya Endong from *Africa Top Secret*, currently under trial, and demanded that the charges against them be dropped.

During the Congress of the Federation of African Journalists in Harare in March African journalists adopted strong resolution supporting Cameroonian journalists. The Federation is due to carry out a solidarity mission to Cameroon in the next few weeks. ☘

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Bolivia hosts alternative summit on people and Mother Earth



WT Whitney

Bolivian President Evo Morales earlier this year called for an international conference to deal with the structural causes of climate change and to propose "alternative models" for humans to live in harmony with the natural world. The First World People's Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth (WPCCC) took place April 19-22 near Cochabamba, Bolivia.

Some 18,000 people were on hand, including scientists, intellectuals, lawyers and official representatives from 94 countries, among them the presidents of Ecuador, Venezuela, Paraguay and Nicaragua. The Cuban vice president and the prime ministers of Antigua and Barbados were present. Social movements from 132 countries were represented.

The conference came about in reaction to last December's failed UN Copenhagen Climate Conference. Dim prospects for a 17th UN Climate Conference in Mexico next December were confirmed at an interim UN climate conference in Bonn earlier this month.

The Copenhagen Summit missed in meeting its obligation under the 1997 Kyoto Protocols to establish numerical goals for reduction of carbon dioxide emissions by individual nations. A handful of industrialised nations, led by the US government,

commandeered the proceedings, finishing them off with a brief statement of generalities.

Sociologist Raul Prada, Bolivia's vice minister for strategic state planning, indicated that the Cochabamba summit would pay attention to a range of causes of climate change rather than focus on greenhouse gases alone. The agenda, he said, would include "environmental depredation," understood as wastage of renewable resources, "ecological disequilibrium," and environmental contamination. Inaugurating the conference, President Morales stated, "We have only two roads, Mother Earth or death. Either capitalism dies or Mother Earth dies." Earlier in Copenhagen, he had observed, "We are the ones called upon to head this struggle for the defence of Mother Earth... The debate [is] between the culture of life and the culture of death."

This was not new for Morales. At an indigenous congress in 2007 he called for "national and international decisions to save Mother Nature from the disasters provoked by capitalism in its decadence." At the United Nations in April 2008, he announced "10 commandments to save the planet, humanity, and life."

The United Nations last year made good on his proposal to name April 22 the International Day of Mother Earth. According to Mercosurnoticias.com, "Climate change [for indigenous peoples] is

a problem not only of atmosphere, technology, or financing, but one of the western model of life, of the ambition and greed of capitalism." Some 7,500 indigenous people attended the Cochabamba conference. The names given to 17 conference working groups suggested the broad range of topics undertaken. They included: structural causes, harmony with nature, the rights of Mother Earth, climate migrants, indigenous peoples, climate debt, climate change adaptation, forests, agriculture and food sovereignty, Kyoto Protocol requirements, development and transfer of technologies, "shared vision" for action, financing, action strategies, and "carbon market dangers". Morales' proposals for a climate justice tribunal and a world referendum on climate change filled out the list. Crammed into four days were 164 two-hour presentations carried out on the initiative of environmental, indigenous, energy, peasant and food sovereignty groups at the summit.

The gathering took on the colours of a "people's summit," reflected in commentary by one participant that "Confrontation on climate change had to proceed from the bottom up." Social movements dominated at the WPCCC, just as they have done in the new Bolivia. "It's not by accident," explained writer Eduardo Galeano, unable to attend, that this "summit of mother earth" took place in "this nation of nations."

The Bolivian setting for the summit indicated world recognition of Evo Morales' expanding leadership role in popular struggle. The United Nations last August named him a "World Hero of Mother Earth," identifying him as the "leading exponent and paradigm of love for mother earth in this world."

The WPCCC's message ultimately came down to the idea expressed by Galeano: that "human rights and the rights of nature are two names for the

same dignity." The People's Summit unfolded on the anniversary of popular victory marking Cochabamba's "Water War." Ten years ago, street clashes with security forces ended up dumping water privatisation plans set in motion by US-based Bechtel Corp. From then on popular mobilisation grew, leading to the election of Morales' socialist government in 2005.

People's World ✪



Global Briefs

VENEZUELA: On April 17, Chinese officials visiting in Caracas signed financial accords with Venezuela, providing for US\$20 billion in initial financial support for "diverse works of development." The new loan, China's largest foreign financial commitment in 60 years, complements earlier bilateral investments worth US\$12 billion. Agreements were also reached on cooperative oil extraction projects and construction of four supertankers. Venezuela is on track to become China's fourth largest oil supplier, eventually delivering one million barrels of crude oil daily, according to VTV News. Thanking China for confidence in his country's future, President Hugo Chávez identified "this newest bilateral tool" as "opening the road" for regional assistance. Chinese Energy Minister Zhang Guobao spoke of "elevating the Chinese-Venezuelan strategic alliance to the highest level."

HUNGARY: In parliamentary elections on April 11, the centre-right FIDESZ party took 52.8 percent of votes cast, while the ruling socialists could muster only 19.3 percent. FIDESZ will likely achieve a two-thirds parliamentary majority after second-round voting on April 25. The report on rebellion.org attributes the socialists' decline to the generalised assumption that foreign lenders have the upper hand in an economy that last year contracted by 6.3 percent. In a surge fuelled by 11 percent joblessness and full-throated anti-Gypsy, anti-Semitic rhetoric, the nationalist Jobbik Party took 16.7 percent of the votes and probably 26 parliamentary seats. The Hungarian Communist Party, reeling from a government-backed anti-communist media campaign, gained a mere 0.11 percent. Many young adherents switched allegiance to Jobbik.

TANZANIA: "One of the world's most protracted refugee situations" ended on April 16 when Home Affairs Minister Lawrence Masha announced the granting of citizenship with "all the rights of every Tanzanian" to 162,000 internees, those identified as the "1972 Burundian refugees." After fleeing civil war violence that killed 200,000 people, the mostly Hutu refugees lived in three specially reserved areas in Tanzania. As part of naturalisation processes that began in 2008, 50,000 Burundians chose repatriation. Joining Masha at the Katumba settlement for ceremonies, top UN refugee official António Guterres lauded Tanzania's "unprecedented generosity and courageous decision." The UN News centre indicated that in the wake of regional civil wars, by 2000 Tanzania "had the largest refugee population in Africa with 680,000 people in camps."

Greek civil service stage strike

Nurses, doctors, teachers, tax officials and dockers last week staged a 24-hour strike against austerity measures imposed by the social democrat government to appease EU commissioners and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

The action against public-sector wage cuts, increases in the retirement age and tax rises disrupted public services and shut down schools.

Emergency staff tended to patients at state hospitals.

Members of the class-oriented All-Workers Militant Front (PAME) alliance of trade unions maintained a blockade of Athens's main port of Piraeus, disrupting ferry services for the second consecutive day.

But airports remained open after air traffic controllers agreed to suspend their participation in the strike so as not to pile more misery on travellers who had been

grounded by Iceland's volcanic ash cloud.

Thousands gathered in central Athens for protest marches, carrying banners reading "tax the rich" and "don't take the bread from our table."

Riot police unleashed tear gas after about 150 demonstrators challenged police lines near the city's central Syntagma Square. PAME activist George Perros said: "This strike is a necessity due to the government's fierce attack on our pensions, our employment rights and our income."

"We want measures that will protect the unemployed," Mr Perros declared, vowing to step up resistance to the government's attacks on working-class living standards.

Cabinet ministers began talks with top IMF and EU officials this week on an expected three-year €40-45 billion "rescue package" that unions warn will lead to even

more cuts. Ilias Iliopoulos, secretary general of the half-a-million-strong public-sector ADEDY union, warned that more "blood-thirsty measures won't help Greece pull out of the crisis."

And civil servant Pavlina Parteniou emphasised that she and her colleagues "won't tolerate any more austerity measures because we already can't make ends meet."

"I have a mortgage, two children, I have cut down on every luxury," Ms Parteniou said, adding: "Why don't they catch those who stole the money?"

"Is my salary or my mother's pension of 300 euros going to save the country?"

One person in five lives below the poverty threshold in Greece, according to EU data, and this is set to increase.

The IMF predicted that unemployment would rise to 13 percent in 2011.

Morning Star ✪

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On atheism

Going on from Eddy Clynes Letter (Guardian April 14), I saw Richard Dawkins interviewed on television, and got the impression that he is what I would term an emotional atheist. This kind of atheist condemns religion out of hand, regards the Bible as myth, and its more extreme exponents question the sanity of believers.

Emotional atheists are in the final analysis simply subjective idealists. Opposed to this is what I would term ideological atheism.

This outlook takes materialist philosophy as its starting point, and sees atheism as a conclusion drawn from a materialist assessment of reality.

Further, the ideological atheist is prepared to work with believers in areas such as the peace movement.

It also regards the Bible as history. While this requires further elucidation, there is one interesting point: even the creation story tells us, all be it in a grossly over simplified form, that the material world existed before man did and that man is a product of the material world.

In conclusion the roll of atheism should be to promote a materialist

world outlook. It should not be seen as a thing in itself, and should certainly not be seen as an end in itself.

**Ron Barrett
Mt Druitt**

May Day

It's fitting that the international day of mourning is so close to May Day and that unions are taking up the issue of workplace deaths this year. The regrettable and avoidable deaths of four workers installing insulation have certainly raised the question of workplace safety. Usually the media seem more interested in deaths on the road.

The situation has been getting worse, as *The Guardian* has previously reported. The situation in the building industry is getting worse as bosses have nothing to fear from Howard's industry inspectorate. It protects them from the union.

It is shocking that Labor has not shut down the ABCC building industry police which has chased workers and trade unions for trying to save lives.

By shutting unions out of the job and installing the fear of huge fines or jail in many workers, building sites are becoming more dangerous. Workers' unions are the only force that will protect workers in dangerous jobs. They have an automatic right of entry and the Labor government should have kept its promise to rip up the Work Choices and give unions basic rights.

What is happening now, the large number of workplace deaths, demonstrates how important unions are and why every worker should be

a member of a union. No one else is going to look after them.

I note the recent deaths in the maritime industry too.

There is a strong correlation between the strength of the unions and the number of accidents and deaths in workplaces. The Howard government weakened the trade union movement and some workers have paid a high price with their life or serious injury.

Every child has a right for their parent to come home from work every night.

So, this May Day, let us resolve to fight harder to get rid of the ABCC and the laws that restrict right of entry and right to strike.

Building worker Ark Tribe, who is being persecuted by the ABCC, should not go to jail, and every union and every worker should be prepared to support him and to take action if the courts attempt to jail or fine him.

It is great that in the coming federal elections there will be communist candidates as well. I know who I will be voting for if there is a communist candidate in my electorate or for the Senate.

May Day is a day to celebrate past wins and the proud history of the working class movement and a time to focus on the fight ahead. By joining the marches, toasts and other activities we can show our strength.

**M Santos
Fairfield**

No place to hide

I'm watching with utter disgust the continuing scandal of the Catholic clergy's response to child abuse and rape perpetrated by its clergy.

The numbers involved, the cover-ups and complete disregard for both public opinion and criminal justice is staggering. It is not a question of a few bad apples, either.

It is systemic and long-term abuse which had not been addressed for years thus allowing the practice to spread and flourish. Country after country is exploding with cases of abuse. The hypocrisy of the church's attitude has become so evident that it essentially does not have any place left to hide.

All those abusers and all those who aided and abetted them in their crimes should not only stood down as suggested in the press but put on trial for their criminal activity. How can we protect our young when there is one law for the clergy and another one for the rest?

God's punishment is not an article in the criminal code as far as I am aware and as long as the perpetrators live in a society they should obey that society's laws. They have been spinning tales about their invisible friend for centuries and lived off it quite well – you only have to look at the opulence and riches of the church and the clergy (not all of them but many), real estate, etc.

Not paying taxes also helps to create wealth. One has an impression that looking after themselves is the only reason the church still exists as an institution. Let's hope that younger generations are more critical and more democratic and liberal in their views than the older ones which sometimes feel obliged to support the church.

**Mati English
Sydney**

An interconnected world

It is a pity the Icelandic volcano with the unpronounceable name did not start when the Copenhagen conference on the climate change was taking place. It might have sharpened the minds of all those taking part on some global solutions.

Seriously though, this event has shown once again what a small place the world has become and how everybody is interconnected and dependant on each other. It also showed the vulnerability and stupidity of some decisions taken with pure profit in mind.

One of the flow-on effects is the interrupted food supply for Europe. British greengrocers are running out of stocks of fresh fruit – they get their supplies from Africa.

Many countries in Europe do not produce enough food to feed their own people – it has been cheaper to import it. This practice does not help the countries in Africa, though because many farmers there produce flowers and exotic fruit for export but do not produce enough staple food to feed their own people.

Factories may be under the threat of closure as well because of the volcano and interrupted traffic. Practically all of them work on the just-in-time model and once there is an interruption in parts supply the whole thing collapses. In other words, a natural phenomenon has just reminded us that the present economic model has got huge flaws and needs re-thinking.

**T Southern
Brisbane**

Culture & Life

by

Rob Gowland

Cops, capitalism and the steep road ahead

On the "reality" TV show *The Force* the other night, NSW police descended on a house in the Sydney suburb of Auburn to execute a search warrant. The coppers were looking for evidence of car "rebirthing" (stealing cars and then combining elements from different stolen vehicles to hopelessly make identification difficult – or at least confused – and thereby to make resale easier).

The police did in fact find the evidence they were looking for, but a hostile crowd gathered, jeering and threatening violence. The all too common crime of car theft – even *organised* car theft as here – did not put the people from this house into the category of criminals as far as the crowd was concerned.

They were only too well aware that the people whom our legal system serves – corporate bosses, MPs, socialites and "personalities", brokers and financiers and all the rest who make up the so-called "big end of town" – are just as willing as the car rebirthers to believe that the law does not actually apply to them if it conflicts with their self-interest.

The crowd knew, because everybody knows, that the local entrepreneur running the rebirthing racket was only doing on a smaller

scale what the business world does on a large scale everyday. The people in the crowd might not have thought it through very thoroughly, but they knew it, all the same.

The tendency on the part of the *lumpen* proletariat – the underclass of our society – to regard society itself as a hostile force and the police in particular as the enemy is a significant function of capitalism. More than once it has had a pernicious influence on the working class, who are also frequently victims of the police.

Culturally, this tendency manifests itself in the practice of treating underworld figures as heroes rather than villains and thugs. This is particularly so among the ultra-left, who are prone to see criminals as rebels, and to readily imbue them with the characteristics of Robin Hood or Ned Kelly, rather than as anti-social elements who actually weaken and divert the class struggle.

Hoodlums, thieves, burglars, thugs and the rest, even when organised in gangs, rarely act for the common good. They are always on the lookout for what will serve their own advancement, their own interests.

They certainly do not "rob the rich to give to the poor" but to keep it for themselves. It is one of the expressed principles of our society that it is forbidden to pillage what other people have worked hard to produce. Of course, capitalism is based on doing just that; it's just one of the many contradictions of that very flawed system we in Australia live under.

To prevent the people from rising up and ringing the ruling class's collective neck for the thieving rogues they are, the capitalists disguise what they do, making a great pretence that they actually adhere to the principle "a fair day's work for a fair day's pay", which sounds a lot fairer than it really is, anyway.

Wage labour is based on a simple (but unspoken) principle: workers are paid a part, but never the whole, of the value of what they produce. The unpaid part is appropriated by the employer for their own benefit. The workers produced all of it but only receive part of it. And this is called "a fair day's pay"?

When capitalism was a newly emerging system, thrusting against the restraints of the still-prevailing feudal system, it railed against unfairness: the emerging class of factory-owners, financiers and merchants needed skilled workers in their enterprises, so they campaigned for universal public education (at least of boys),



which the feudal gentry had no need for since they saw the common people only as servants, shepherds and corn-mill attendants.

The emerging capitalists did not seek to educate the masses because they felt that ordinary people had a right to an education. No, they *needed* educated people to work in their industrial and financial enterprises.

(Today, when they have more workers available than they have suitable jobs for, they have much less interest in providing a high quality education for the masses, and more interest once again in providing quality education only to an elite. Unfairness now suits their purpose.)

Capitalism established the working class because it needed such a class; it turned peasants off their land, fenced in what had been common

land so they could no longer support themselves, all so that they would have to leave the land and gather in the towns, there to toil for the owners of mills and factories – for the new soon-to-be-ruling class, the capitalists.

That working class, as Marx showed, would eventually be the grave diggers of the capitalist system itself, through collective struggle and great sacrifice and effort, finally overthrowing the rule of capitalism altogether and ushering in a new social system, a higher social system, socialism.

The road to socialism, like the road to the stars, has been and still is steep and full of obstacles, but with effort and strength of will, and clear political understanding of what is required, we can be confident that the working class will get there. ✪



Sun 2 May –
Sat 8 May

During the stultifying, reactionary regime of John Howard, a major report by Aboriginal authorities, social workers, medical and legal personnel, and more, detailed the extent of family violence in Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory.

Family violence is by no means restricted to Aboriginal communities. It is everywhere, wherever there is anger, poverty, despair, hopelessness, lack of self worth, ignorance. The frustration of seeing no way out other than drug and alcohol abuse, the demoralisation of not being able to care for your own family, the knowledge that if you publicly vent your anger the police will put you in jail as soon as look at you – all this fuels a rage that is taken out on the weaker people around you, especially on women and children.

My mother, in her first marriage, was an abused wife. Her four children regularly had to watch her being bashed by her drunken husband. However, in Australia, that form of violence is even more prevalent in Indigenous communities, because that is where the poverty, hopelessness and frustrations are strongest.

How could it be otherwise, given the way colonialism and capitalism have treated the Aboriginal people?

Howard took the report on family violence in Indigenous communities as a golden opportunity to try to overthrow the concept of land rights altogether. Just as he had tried to use the supposed plight of children to justify his racist policy on refugees (“children overboard!”), so now he used the real evidence of child abuse to justify the introduction of a form of race-based semi-martial law.

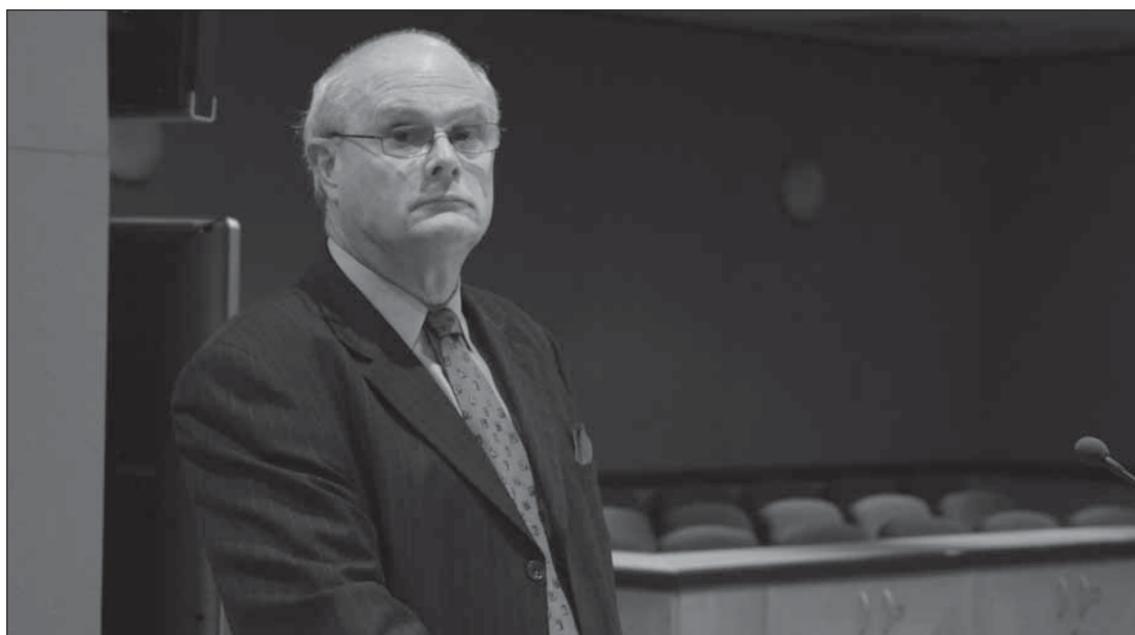
Howard and the so-called “Intervention” was just another burden the Indigenous population had to contend with. However, Indigenous Australians are taking their own steps to constructively address the problem.

Message Stick (ABC1 Sunday May 2 at 1.30 pm, repeated ABC1 Saturday May 8 at 11.30 am) is this week tellingly entitled *We The Problem, We The Solution*. It profiles the campaign of popular Indigenous Darwin-based ABC Radio AFL commentator Charlie King to build a movement among other Indigenous men, a movement of “strong men” taking a stand on family violence behind the slogan “No More!”

This is an encouraging and very positive approach, that puts its faith in the power of the people themselves to solve the problem and change the culture for the better. In the buzzwords of our time, it’s empowering.

Dr Who has regenerated, giving a new actor (Matt Smith) the chance to star in the popular sci-fi adventure series (*Dr Who ABC1 Sundays at 7.30 pm from April 17*). The series also has new (or at least altered) music behind its titles and of more significance, a new head writer: Steven Moffat replaces Russell T Davies.

I prefer the old (familiar) music; Smith makes an energetic Doctor (hopefully he will stop grimacing quite so much as he settles into the role); but the writing on the first episode – the one the ABC ran a



Gary Crooke, Senior Counsel Assisting New South Wales Royal Commission into Police Corruption, – *The Inquisition* (ABC1 Thursday May 6 at 8.30pm).

couple of weeks ago (their preview discs were sent out late!) – seemed a little disjointed, not as coherent as Davies’ scripts. Perhaps this too will improve with time.

Annie Leibovitz: Life Through A Lens (ABC2 Sunday May 2 at 7.30 pm, repeated ABC1 Sunday May 9 at 3.30 pm) is a portrait of the highly regarded photographer, perhaps the most influential female photographer working today.

She is responsible for some iconic images – remember the nude shot of a heavily pregnant Demi Moore? Despite the fact that the photos of hers that we remember are purely commercial (covers of celebrities for *Rolling Stone* for whom she worked for years or imaginative fashion shots for *Vanity Fair* who poached her from

the music mag), the film reminds us that she has also covered wars and natural disasters.

She is in fact, a great photographer and a superb photo-journalist (consider the wealth of meaning in the photo of the soldiers rolling up the red carpet after Nixon has flown away from the White House after resigning – none of the other press had thought there was anything worth waiting for, but Annie’s instinct told her to hang on).

Nevertheless, the film (made by her sister Barbara) leaves you wondering why a person who so perceptively recognises the *real* in a shot should devote herself to photographing celebrities (Donald and Ivana Trump for heaven’s sake) and even more bizarre – fashion.

It’s a long way from taking shots of peace marches in the ‘sixties to shooting fashion today. And it is surely mostly downhill, even if her skill and her artistry grew exponentially along the way (along with her bank balance, presumably).

Only a few naïve people would be surprised to learn that bribery and corruption were endemic in the NSW police force. The third largest in the world, the NSW police force operates in a State where government leaders are frequently up to their eyeballs in vice. And vice is the major arena for organised crime.

Vice is often also called “victimless crime”, because supposedly those involved are all consenting adults. That obviously does not apply to child pornography, nor to prostitution where so often the women involved are virtual

slaves, held in bondage by threats and violence.

However, the concept that gambling, prostitution, consumption of illicit recreational drugs and the like are “victimless” offences makes the task of policing them that much harder. Taking a bribe to ignore a pub serving beer out of hours or allowing gambling on unlicensed premises seems almost innocent. “Where’s the harm?”

However, turning a blind eye to that leaves a copper vulnerable when he is asked to turn a similar blind eye to the sale of hard drugs, extortion or other vice-related thuggery.

By the 1970s, cooperation between NSW police and the underworld was an open secret. It could hardly be secret when prostitutes were moved from one location to another *in police cars*, now could it?

Independent South Coast MP John Hatton collected a huge file on police corruption, but was ridiculed in the NSW Parliament. Meanwhile, the media lampooned the “inability” of the police to locate any of the well-known illegal casinos in Sydney.

It got so rich that in 1994 the NSW Parliament finally established a Royal Commission into the allegations. The story of that Royal Commission and its dangerous undercover work is told in the documentary *The Inquisition* (ABC1 Thursday May 6 at 8.30pm).

Written and directed by Rachel Landers, the program is essential viewing, because the forces that were operating in the NSW police then are by no means gone for good. ☼



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Population and economic, political and environmental issues

Statement, Central Committee, CPA

The Communist Party of Australia believes Australia can support an increase in population, but not without fundamental changes which democratise our economic and political system, doing away with the distortions and injustices created by the uncontrolled pursuit of private profit.

Much of the current debate on the required population level for Australia in the coming decades misses the point. The widespread assertion that environmental degradation is caused by "over-population" is typical of capitalist ideas. It says a lot about how ordinary people are regarded as a liability when, in reality, all creativity, all wealth begins with human labour. People are this country's greatest asset.

Proponents of population growth, including from increased immigration, present Australia as a rich, vast and under-populated continent that requires more people for economic growth.

Those arguing for a limit on immigration and a population ceiling argue that Australia's environment is degraded because of population pressures and that allowing more people into the country would place unacceptable strains on the environment and natural resources.

There is no doubt that Australia faces widespread environmental problems: global warming, soil erosion and salination, endangered species, an increasing incidence of toxic algal blooms in our rivers, declining fish stocks, air pollution, vulnerable and limited water supplies, declining bio-diversity and a fall in the productivity of forests and farms. But these are not the result of immigration.

The environmental crisis is mainly created by the rapacious exploitation of the earth's common resources for private profits. Ignoring present warnings, capitalism continues to aggravate the crisis by a callous and reckless disregard for the predictable consequences of its unplanned and largely uncontrolled activities. Even in the face of mounting global danger, it will stop at nothing to maximise corporate profits.

While population numbers have to be taken into account when considering the environment, assertions that population alone is the cause of environmental problems are used to divert attention from those mainly responsible.

The environment is not being destroyed because people are trying to produce more food to feed growing populations. It is being destroyed because production is directed into the most profitable areas, regardless of the impact on humans or the environment, by predatory transnationals which control agricultural resources. This is as true in Australia as it is in Bangladesh, Mexico or the USA.

The intensive production of beef, sheep, wheat, rice and cotton, mainly by agribusiness conglomerates, has led to salination, widespread erosion, outbreaks of blue-green algae and other environmental disasters. The world's hamburger multinationals destroy much of the earth's forest in order to graze cattle.

The private ownership of land and the monopolisation of Australia's natural resources lead to their inefficient use. One way this is demonstrated is through the choice of **what** is grown. The few who control the majority of farmland will grow whatever brings the highest profit.

Australia is the driest continent in the world; Europe is one of the wettest. It is illogical and

damaging to have transferred the agricultural system of the wettest continent in the world to the driest continent in the world without even attempting to adapt to the realities of Australia's natural conditions.

Enough grain is produced in the world to provide everyone with ample protein and more than 3,000 calories a day. But over one-third of this grain is fed to livestock.

In Mexico, where at least 80 percent of the children in rural areas are undernourished, livestock, mostly for export to the USA, consume more basic grains than the country's entire rural population.

The application of science, planned and controlled use of water supplies, and avoidance of over-exploitation (overstocking, for example) of the land and its limited resources could sustain a larger population in Australia.

In addition to environmental considerations, the development of Australia's infrastructure to accommodate the increase in population is critical.

For decades the maintenance and development of critical infrastructure has been neglected by governments and the private sector. Privatisation and deregulation have played a major role in this. Public housing, public transport, the public health system, public education, community services and job creation are just some of the areas that have not been planned nor adequately maintained or funded.

One of the targets of the population increase is to continue the government offensive on the trade union movement and Australian workforce.

Their aim is to reduce the wages and working conditions, and hence living standards, of workers in Australia to a level that is "competitive" with labour in third world countries – part of a drive by big business to reduce wages and working conditions globally to the lowest common denominator.

Every nation has the right to determine its immigration policies and the intake of refugees, while recognising internationally accepted obligations towards asylum seekers and refugees whose plight may arise from a number of reasons. In establishing an intake target, any government will take into account many social, economic, political and environmental considerations.

Our migration policy should not be based on skilled migrants to prevent brain drain from other countries. This is of particular importance for skilled migrants from third world countries because of the negative consequences for their countries of origin. We should instead base our migration policy on increasing the number of refugee intakes every year while more public money is spent on training and education for our current workforce.

Australia should give priority to refugees and victims of climate change and natural catastrophes. We have a particular responsibility to accept refugees from Afghanistan, Iraq and other countries who are victims of US wars and occupation in which Australia is complicit. As one of the largest per capita emitters of greenhouse gases in the world, Australia has a responsibility to accept populations from

Pacific Islands that are sinking as a result of climate change.

Migration has been and continues to be beneficial for Australia. Working people of various ethnic origins form an inseparable part of the Australian nation and constitute a component part of the labour movement and society as a whole. However, migrant workers will not become involved in the common struggles unless they are organised, their social and cultural heritage is respected, and action is taken to overcome widespread discrimination against migrant communities, even, in some cases, their demonisation.

Instead of increasing military spending on preparations for war (now \$71 million a day) and to pay for the war in Afghanistan and the so-called "Pacific solution", a humanitarian Australian government would cut its military budget, using part of these savings for aid to underdeveloped countries.

The best approach to combat ecological degradation is not through population controls but through more equitable socio-economic policies and fairer distribution of wealth and resources.

Also needed are measures such as changing production methods, government controls on crops and practices that damage the environment, replacing agri-businesses with democratically run co-operatives, the development of public transportation systems and implementation of the most environmentally friendly forms of distribution of goods throughout and between towns and cities. ✪



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