

CPA 10th Congress 2005

Opening Night Speech

by Warren Smith, CPA Assistant General Secretary

1. CONGRESS SLOGAN

It is with great pleasure we welcome you, our comrades and friends to the opening night of our Party Congress. Our Congress is the most important event in the life of our Party and it will determine the Party's policy and direction for the next four years.

The Communist Party's slogan for our 10th National Congress is:

***BUILD THE PARTY IN THE WORKING CLASS
EVERY MEMBER AN ACTIVIST***

We chose this theme because the capitalist ruling class is trying to disarm the working class movement, the working class itself and the people's movements all around the world and we believe we must build and strengthen resistance to this attack.

We chose this theme because we believe that it is the working class that must participate actively in the forefront of this resistance to the forces of greed and capitalism. It is the working class that must be united and organised in order to move away from the extreme anti-people policies that big capital is forcing onto the people of the world.

We are all working in a new situation. At the beginning of the 21st Century the system of socialist countries in Europe no longer exists and a "new world order" has spread across our planet like a plague.

At the time of our 9th Congress, even the *Sydney Morning Herald* recognised that:

"It is more than a decade since the end of the Cold war, and the US no longer has any check on its ideological or military dominance. Its brand of unbridled capitalism, with its insistence on deregulation and open borders for international companies, is now global orthodoxy...."

Four years later capitalism's onslaught continues with increasing ferocity

In the same period resistance to it at home and abroad has grown in size and understanding.

2. CURRENT SITUATION

Today 50 of the world's largest economic units are run by corporations, not governments of countries.

These transnational corporations are driven by greed and an unquenchable thirst for greater profits. They have no concern for humanity.

- they plunder the world's forests, minerals, oil and other resources;
- they condemn millions of people to lives of poverty, hunger and sickness;
- they destroy food to keep prices high while millions face famines;
- they make super-profits from the sweat and blood of child labour;
- they go to war against peoples struggling for progress and independence;
- they savagely attack democratic rights;
- they have crippled the economies of the under-developed countries;
- they abuse and exploit indigenous peoples;
- they impoverish women;
- they cause massive, often irreversible ecological damage.

In more than 70 underdeveloped countries per capita income has fallen sharply in the past 20 years. Wealth has accumulated in private hands to such a degree that the 200 richest people in the world own more wealth than the poorest 40%.

The world's biggest corporations are American, and they are leading the charge to take control of the markets and resources of the whole world.

With disregard for accepted international standards and an increasingly open use of force, illegality is being institutionalised — our Cuban comrades have described this as "*the law of the jungle*".

Australia is said to be an independent democratic country but it is heavily dependent on the imperialist countries, especially the US, Britain and Japan.

They dominate our economy, plunder our vast natural resources and control our political and cultural life.

Both Liberal and Labor governments have openly perpetuated the foreign domination of Australia in all respects.

Both Liberal and Labor governments openly side with the big corporations and:

- That's why our public health and public education systems are being starved of funds.

- why our public transport systems are being run down and privatised.
- why rural and regional Australia is neglected.
- why Australia's indigenous people are denied their rights.
- why refugees fleeing to our country are imprisoned in concentration camps.
- why our democratic rights are under attack
- And that's why workers' wages and conditions are under constant attack.

Industrial relations laws

With its industrial relations legislation the Howard Government has launched an unprecedented attack on workers' wages, conditions and capacity to take action. This is not an isolated event but part of a wider attack on the working class in the interests of big business.

Other elements of this attack include the wave of privatisation, deregulation, militarisation, taxation changes and abuse of the environment in the interests of maintaining rising profits.

The Howard government's agenda is not simply an attack on trade unions. It is an attack on the working class as a whole, it is an onslaught on working families and other members of the community — including small business which will suffer when wages go down, pensioners whose payments are linked to the minimum wage, and sport, culture, charities and churches which will be deprived of support when workers are forced to work longer hours.

The protection that workers have fought for and won for over 100 years through a centralised award system of legally enforceable minimum wages and working conditions will be replaced by four basic and inadequate legislated conditions and the barest minimum wage.

Awards will be further gutted to 16 allowable matters with a review process that will see more conditions swept aside in the quest for greater profit. It will be legal to reduce wages and conditions below what is in awards.

Collective bargaining will be replaced by individual contracts, where "agreement" is reached on the basis of "sign it or no job". Non-union AWAs and enterprise bargaining agreements (EBA) will become effective immediately without scrutiny.

Any worker unhappy about long hours of unpaid labour, wage rates, working conditions etc, will soon be out the door. The boss will be free to sack without reason anyone they so determine in workplaces with up to 100 employees. There will be no legal recourse in such cases. In these workplaces, many non-unionised the employer will have unbridled power.

The right of trade unions to recruit, make contact with members, negotiate on behalf of their members or take industrial action will be severely curtailed.

The IR legislation aims to seriously weaken the bargaining power of the working class and leave individual workers at the mercy of employers with virtually no protection or redress to gross injustices.

If this legislation is passed, the only thing then standing between workers and the loss of working conditions, massive wage reductions and the destruction of collective bargaining and collective agreements will be the strength of the union in the workplace and the courage and determination of workers.

We are holding this meeting in the office of the Construction Forestry Mining Energy Union.

The union is facing the Building and Construction Industry Improvement Bill which will make almost all industrial action illegal, including safety and political campaigns, including for instance Green Bans.

The Bill imposes huge fines on individual workers and unions, gives government officials the power to interrogate workers about industrial meetings and suspends workers' right to silence, meaning they can be jailed if they refuse to answer questions.

The campaign to defend workers rights and conditions will be an important focal point of the Party's congress. The CPA gives its full support to the current union and community IR campaign and will be working hard into the future to see that the proposed changes made by the Howard Government on behalf of their big business mates are defeated.

If the Government is successful in legislating these reactionary laws then we are of the view the aim of the campaign must be refocused to ensure the laws are made inoperable. To do this however we need to build the biggest worker and community campaign in many years.

The CPA pledges its full support in carrying out the continued building of this opposition movement.

War

Communists say that capitalism leads to war — and we are seeing this now.

The US is the most dangerous nation in the world; brandishing its high-tech weaponry at third world countries and threatening pre-emptive strikes if they fail to comply with Washington's directives.

"Usable nukes" are now an integral part of the Pentagon's forward-defence strategy making the Bush administration the first country to claim a "first-strike" policy if so-called US national interests are at stake.

The United States' missile defence program is a space battle system which aims to allow the US to attack other countries without fear of retaliation. It is

also a plan for stationing weapons in the heavens for the first time in human history.

Star Wars is the armed wing of globalisation — and it is pushing the world into an appallingly dangerous new nuclear arms race.

In Australia the Howard government's fawning and submissive relationship with the Bush administration is leading to the accelerating militarisation of Australian society and escalating military spending.

The Government gave military and political support to the Bush administration's illegal invasion and occupation of Iraq. Australian participation in the Bush administration's oil war is costing the Australian taxpayers millions of dollars.

Australia gave millions of dollars in aid to the Papua New Guinea military to wage war against the Bougainvillean people to try to protect Rio Tinto's copper mine.

The Howard Government is spending billions more buying three specialised warships with long-range anti-missile capabilities, upgrading radar facilities for the US "missile defence" program, establishing three new US "training" bases in the NT and Queensland, setting up facilities for US warships to change crews in Fremantle (WA), and buying new aircraft and tanks.

The cost of all this is a staggering **\$60 million a day**.

Yes \$60 million a day.

At the same time Prime Minister Howard claims we cannot afford Medicare. Nor apparently can his government afford to upgrade public schools, cut university fees, support childcare, tackle poverty or create jobs. But the diversion of only ten days military spending — about \$600 million — to public hospitals would overcome most of their critical problems.

Surely we have better things to do with our tax dollars than spend billions on aggressive equipment required to fight in US-led coalitions attacking other countries. We need more for hospitals and schools instead of \$6 billion for three air-warfare destroyers, \$1 billion for 12 pilotless surveillance aircraft, \$20 billion for new surveillance and combat aircraft, and \$600 million for tanks.

Environment

The private profit making system of capitalism is killing the planet.

Capitalist globalisation has resulted in massive damage to the world's environment. The corporations pollute the water, soil and atmosphere, rip out the planet's resources, and destroy its vegetation and biodiversity in their criminal drive for profits irrespective of the consequences for the long-term survival of life on earth.

Threats are real and urgent — global warming, loss of bio-diversity, air pollution, toxic lake and river systems, poisoned ocean waters and shores, degraded soils, the earth's last major forests under serious threat, falling water

tables, urban sprawl, traffic, and garbage problems, and accumulating nuclear wastes.

While we fight for the environment today, we also recognise that only liberation from capitalism will open up new possibilities for a fundamental change in humanity's relationship with nature.

In Australia there are vital struggles for sustainable development, for a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, for protection and care of river systems and water supplies, for land care, to stop salination, for environmentally sound waste management, against urban and workplace pollution, to stop loss of biodiversity, and for the protection of rain forests and old growth forests.

Democratic and human rights

The attack on democratic rights is world wide. At the time of the 60th anniversary of the defeat of fascism, the German Government declared the Federation of International Resistance Fighters (FIR) an "extremist organisation of the left" and an "enemy of the constitution". FIR is a federation of 25 organisations in 14 countries and includes all those who fought the Nazis and fascists in the war years.

A parliamentary investigation in Sweden found that the CIA had seized two Egyptian nationals in December 2001. The men were flown to Cairo in a Gulfstream 5 jet. The same jet has flown to 49 destinations outside America, including Guantánamo Bay. It made at least seven trips to Uzbekistan where secret police are notorious for their interrogation methods, including rape in front of family members and boiling prisoners.

In Australia the struggle for the maintenance of democratic rights is a major issue confronting all progressive organisations.

We seriously believe it is no exaggeration to talk of a slide to dictatorship. We believe a process is underway and is being slowly implemented by the Howard government which must be stopped before all means to resist it have been taken away.

Fundamental democratic rights have already been taken away under cover of anti-terrorism laws and the Howard government has locked up asylum seekers in privately operated, secretive prison camps.

Their inmates were being tortured; children were being born inside the camps and were growing up knowing no other life but incarceration. People such as mentally ill Cornelia Rau were wrongfully locked up. Another citizen, Vivian Alvarez, was illegally arrested and deported to the Philippines. At least 200 non-asylum seekers have been locked up.

ASIO has been given the power to detain people for up to seven days at a time (with consecutive detentions possible) in total secrecy, including children as young as 16 if ASIO believe that they will commit or have committed a terrorist offence. People can be detained even if they are believed to have useful information on terrorist activity. People can be questioned for eight hours at a time and failure to answer a question can incur a five-year prison sentence.

Attorney-General Philip Ruddock wants to increase ASIO's already draconian powers so the secret police would be able to detain, interrogate, torture and even kill with impunity and without being accountable. Immunity for ASIO would reinforce its role as the protector of the government's drive to dictatorship.

Here in NSW legislation has been introduced to give police the power to conduct secret searches of individuals' homes without telling them anything about it for up to two years. The intelligence gathered may be shared with foreign law enforcement agencies.

The "war on terrorism" is also being used to justify the introduction of an ID card that would be used to control the Australian people while doing next to nothing to limit the activities of terrorists.

Australia's Muslims are feeling pressure to make public statements to demonstrate their "loyalty" in a manner reminiscent of the loyalty oaths forced on civil servants and film actors in the US at the height of the McCarthy era in the 1950s.

Muslims may be the first to feel the weight of this sort of political oppression. Other Australians and particularly the labour movement must stand with them because, if these attacks are not defeated, they certainly will not be the last to be muzzled in this manner.

Arguments for the new legislation have been based on the assumption that secret service personnel are people of integrity. Why should we believe this after the scandals of the non-existent weapons of mass destruction and the children overboard?

Why should we believe it when Australian citizen Mamdouh Habib was sent to Egypt to be tortured before he was incarcerated without charge in Guantánamo Bay?

The potential for abuse inherent in the Howard Government's anti-terrorist laws was exposed by the case of the visiting US peace activist Scott Parkin who was snatched off the streets and detained at the Melbourne Custody Centre for five days before being deported.

In a dangerous precedent, Scott Parkin was deported for his political beliefs, because he opposes the US war in Iraq and has been active against the US conglomerate Halliburton.

Education

At the recent 16th World Festival of Youth and Students in Venezuela. Nazario Peña, mayor of Balasapuerto in Peru, said that limited access to education is one of the most serious consequences of poverty among the Amazonian peoples of Peru.

Samuel Moncada, the Venezuelan Minister of Higher Education, said that his country is studying the possibility of expanding its scholarship program to take in foreign students.

In Australia, exposing the Howard Government's real priorities, the 2005 budget allocated \$17.5 billion for the military and \$15.7 billion for education.

Education Minister Brendan Nelson crudely claims that the three Rs being taught are not reading, writing and 'rithmetic but "refugees, republic and reconciliation". Not that Nelson would mind if he thought that anti-refugee, anti-republican and anti-reconciliation viewpoints were being taught.

All schools already have, as a condition of their government funding, a commitment to a national values framework through which the federal government demands such things as schools flying the Australian flag.

But now the Department of Education, Science and Training is calling for organisations to develop and distribute values education curriculums and to set up and maintain a website on values education.

The Howard government is rejecting diversity and multiculturalism on behalf of Christian fundamentalism and extreme nationalism. The government wants more control over what is taught in schools in order to inculcate the right-wing views they are committed to. They want to create children who come out of the education system with their heads filled with the tub-thumping nationalism of Howard, Costello and their friends.

Over the last ten years, TAFE staff reductions and massive funding cuts have led to loss of student places (more than 50,000 in 2004), loss of higher level courses, loss of traineeships, bigger class sizes, reduced choice of subjects, cuts to student services, more casual employment, closure of certain facilities and steep fee increases.

Under the Howard government's new "Skilling Australia's Workforce" legislation, TAFE colleges will now be required to "offer" their employees individual contracts and performance-based pay. In effect, the colleges will be required to pressure employees to sign individual work contracts or to accept casual employment, with the intention of forcing down pay and conditions, and eliminating employee unionisation.

Institutions that refuse to co-operate face losing their federal funding. The government plans to cut funding to universities by \$280 million and cut TAFE

funding by \$1.2 billion unless they adopt hard line industrial policies that include offering all staff individual contracts with inferior conditions and introducing more casual employment.

Thousands of long-serving education staff face the prospect of being made a casual worker and losing their job security.

At the tertiary level university students are facing more cuts as well as a battle against voluntary student unionism. One of the main aims of VSU is to remove student control over the provision of student services and let the private, for-profit sector take over, charging "market rates". The other main aim is to cripple organised student opposition to the Howard government's policies by destroying student unions and de-funding political organisations on campuses.

ALP leader Kim Beazley has reversed the party's 30-year opposition to VSU, saying the government need only retain basic student services such a food and sport on campus.

3. CAPITALISM CAN'T DEAL WITH THE CRISIS

The leaders of the capitalist countries can never adopt policies that would undermine the capitalist system of which they are the captains. They will never act against their system and that of the big corporations that see that they remain where they are. It is their capitalism that creates poverty. That is why they can never adopt policies that will really eliminate poverty. They have failed, their policies have failed, their system is a failure.

If we need any proof that capitalism is unable to solve the problems people face around the world, Hurricane Katrina provides a clear lesson. The parallels between the world's biggest capitalist economy and a small underdeveloped socialist economy in times of a natural disaster crisis are worthy of reflection.

Socialist Cuba lies directly in the path of many hurricanes, yet the loss of life is usually minimal, because the government has systems in place to aid orderly evacuations, provide emergency shelter, and look after the elderly, the handicapped, and the poor.

In 2001, when Hurricane Michelle, a level-4 storm, hit with sustained 200km/h winds and widespread floods, more than 700,000 people were evacuated. Only five Cubans lost their lives in the storm.

In September 2004, Cuba endured Ivan, the fifth largest hurricane ever to hit the Caribbean, with sustained winds of 200km/h. Cuba evacuated almost two million people — more than 15% of the total population.

Within the first three hours 100,000 people were evacuated. And 78% of those evacuated were welcomed into other people's homes. Children at boarding schools were moved. Animals and birds were moved.

No one was killed.

The UN declared this to be a model of disaster preparation.

In the USA, in contrast, the free market played a crucial role in the destruction of New Orleans and its residents. Armed with advanced warning of hurricane Katrina, officials played the free market. They announced that everyone should evacuate. Everyone was expected to devise their own way out of the disaster area by private means.

Many people "refused" to evacuate, media reporters explained, because they were just "stubborn".

In reality those who didn't have the ability to flee or the means to finance their own evacuation were left to perish. Without cash, credit cards and cars, thousands of people had to sit tight and hope for the best. It is the working class, particularly black Americans, who are suffering the most from this disaster.

The fact that no preparations were made for their evacuation and that no thought was given to meeting their basic emergency needs in the wake of the storm, lays bare the brutal class consciousness and racism at the core of US society.

The free-marketeers say relief for the unfortunate should be left to private charity. Offers of aid from France, Germany, Russia, Cuba, Venezuela and other countries were refused by the White House.

The Red Cross did go into action but by day 3 it became clear the effort was failing and people were dying because relief had not arrived. The authorities seemed more concerned with the looting than with rescuing people. It was property before people.

Bush's policy is to slash essential programs in order to pay for a tax cut for the wealthy and for the occupation of Iraq. So he sliced \$71.2 million from the budget of the New Orleans Corps of Engineers, a 44% reduction. Plans to fortify New Orleans levees and upgrade the system of pumping out water had to be shelved.

The flooding was exacerbated by the elimination of wetlands, which provide a natural absorbent and buffer between New Orleans and the storms riding in from across the sea. The Bush Administration removed Federal protection from as much as 20 million acres of wetlands which are being drained by developers.

The National Guard, who would normally be deployed to aid in evacuation and disaster relief, has been unable to respond adequately because 40% of the Mississippi National Guard and 35% of the Louisiana National Guard is in Iraq. So is much of their equipment, including high water vehicles, refuellers and generators that are essential for this type of emergency.

The Bush Administration rejects the 1997 Kyoto Accord which is designed to limit emissions that cause global warming. But it has been known since 1987 the intensity of hurricanes is related to surface sea temperature and we know that, over the last 15-20 years, surface sea temperatures in these regions have increased by half a degree centigrade.

Beyond the horrific loss of life and homes, working people everywhere will suffer as they pay more for petrol. The oil companies, however, are raking in record profits.

The contrast between the United States and Cuba, in handling these hurricane disasters, is the contrast between capitalism and socialism.

This is but one of the reasons why we say socialism is the answer.

4. SOCIALISM IS THE ANSWER

We are convinced that socialism is a better economic, political and social system than capitalism. It is a system that is committed to meet the needs of the working people and not the selfish interests of exploiters. It means jobs, more democracy and public ownership, environmental protection, better education and health services, more for young people and real economic and social equality for women. Instead of the individualism propagated by capitalism, socialism brings a cooperative society into existence.

Socialism is a young system. It has however achieved much for the many millions of people who have lived under and built socialism. The collapse of the Soviet Union and other socialist countries was not in our view a failure of socialism but more a failure in the application of socialist principles. These changes have not diminished the validity of socialism. Those socialist countries that have been beset by external and internal crisis have provided valuable lessons for the remaining socialist nations who have used the experiences of others to benefit and develop their own societies.

Socialism is the logical answer for us and for constantly growing numbers of others around the world.

Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez told delegates to the recent 16th World Festival of Youth and Students in Venezuela that the fate of the planet is at stake and that socialism is the only hope for humanity.

5. WINNING IS POSSIBLE

The profound crisis of the capitalist system provides the necessity and the basis for fundamental change. The growing resistance to capitalism and the TNCs can become the revolutionary movement that brings down capitalism and makes the 21st Century the century of socialism.

More and more people are becoming involved in anti-capitalist struggles. The power and importance of the organised working class in these struggles cannot be underestimated.

There have been huge anti-globalisation demonstrations and millions in the streets around the world protesting against the attack on Iraq.

Close to a quarter of a million people took part in rallies and marches across Australia on June 30 and July 1 against the Howard Government's industrial relations agenda. As they marched they chanted "Workers united will never be defeated".

These demonstrations reveal the growing understanding of the real nature of the world we live in. More and more people are resisting Nike, Nestle, Mitsubishi, Shell and the many other transnationals with their criminal exploitation and abuse of workers, farmers and the environment upon which we all depend for survival.

All these movements have to link up to form a united national political alliance. Alliances are effective and powerful, and can create enthusiasm and win considerable support.

We need a popular democratic movement, diverse and unified, and committed to mass action if we are to change the conditions of our lives.

We have an urgent task to accomplish in Australia. As a first step to reconstructing Australian society in the interests of the working class and the people, we need a new type of government in this country made up of representatives of the working class, of the people's movements, of the left and progressive parties, answerable to the people, and with a program of reconstruction in the interests of the people. A government which really represents the people can only succeed if it is backed by a powerful, united people's movement, with the working class and its organisations at its core.

A profoundly encouraging and moving example comes to us from Venezuela where the Bolivarian revolution is bringing direct participation by the people in the decision-making process, in the process of change.

The government has organised "Bolivarian Circles" throughout the country to mobilise citizens to help improve education, health, housing and public services.

A literacy program was launched involving 1.2 million people. About 12% of the population was illiterate two or three years ago but now about 95% of the people are literate. Education is free to university level.

There is a popular program which provides free health care to poor people. International solidarity is at work. Cuba has sent thousands of medical personal to help with this program.

The revolution protects indigenous people's rights, has stopped further privatisation of the state-run oil company and limited foreign penetration of the industry, and has approved new conservation measures to protect Venezuela's marine resources. Five new banks for women, small enterprises and farmers have been set up. US military advisors have been expelled.

Worker-state co-management has a major role in the nation's revolutionary project, together with producer cooperatives, stepped-up industrial productivity and land reform.

Despite weekly killings of peasant leaders, land reform is going ahead. Since January, almost 2 million acres of once privately held land has been transferred to 452 agricultural co-operatives. Peasant farmers receive considerable educational, financial and technical support.

The "Mercal Project" has been launched to store, distribute and market food. Using the army and money from oil sales, the government has developed thousands of new food outlets through which masses of poor or infirm people are gaining access to nutritious, inexpensive food.

6. CONCLUSION

Our Party works for a society where people's needs come first. Publicly owned enterprises must play a major role in the economy. People's participation and democratic decision-making are paramount. In our vision of an alternative society, the purpose of the economy must be to fulfill people's needs, not to produce ever-increasing wealth for private corporations.

We look forward to working with you in the future and we hope that some of you will also join our ranks in the struggle.

The aim of the Communist Party of Australia is the establishment of a society that is fairer, co-operative, more democratic and far more enriching for the people than the present society. Such a society can only be a socialist one.

Our goal is the creation of a society that will resolve the problems inherent in capitalism.

This goal is not something just for the future. People are suffering from capitalism now! Increasingly, people are rejecting capitalist values and institutions...they are looking for answers, for an alternative to war, environmental destruction, exploitation and poverty. Many more of us are needed who can explain and fight for such an alternative.

The struggles against the military, political and economic forms of corporate globalisation are the dominant and defining political issues for the foreseeable future. This movement is what is new, what is coming into being and what will be the fundamental determinant of this new century, a century of socialism.

Thank you.