



# Qantas takeover

## Jobs, services, safety at risk

**The "deed of undertaking" drawn up by the Howard Government to allow the consortium Airline Partners Australia to take over Qantas will not safeguard the jobs of the airline's workers or the services the airline currently provides. After making the announcement the government admitted as much, Transport Minister Mark Vaile conceding that maintenance work could be moved offshore.**

"If Qantas requires some maintenance to be shifted off-shore, we're not going to micro-manage this." Prime Minister John Howard cast out a broad and essentially pointless statement saying that "no job could be guaranteed forever". Certainly not his in the coming election.

And if Qantas is on-sold to another buyer the deed would truly become a meaningless piece of paper. The deed states that Qantas headquarters and control must stay in Australia and that two thirds of the board of directors must be Australian; that it must support regional routes and improve its domestic network; that Qantas and Jetstar must operate separately; that assistance to Australians in times of emergency, such as evacuations, must continue.

In an example of the growing political as well as economic power of one member of the consortium, Macquarie Bank, the deed contains a block on Macquarie Bank from voting on the Qantas board on any matter relating to

Sydney Airport because the privatised airport is managed by one of the bank's infrastructure funds. Like the guarantees about jobs and services, this too is merely an empty gesture by the government.

On ABC radio's *The World Today* program last week, Janet Whiting, a commercial law specialist, said the agreement had holes in it. "I think the deed of undertaking that's been entered into has got a number of legal loopholes in it, in that it certainly binds the parties to the deed but if Airline Partners is successful in taking over Qantas, then the company will be privatised.

"If Airline Partners then wants to dispose of their interest in Qantas to a third party – so in other words on-sell – it won't bind the third party."

It would be no precedent in underhanded corporate tactics in Australia for the consortium itself to set up a shell company and sell the airline to it.

The Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union (AMWU) condemned the government's decision and rejected assurances that jobs will be protected under the deed. "The Federal Government has lined up behind big business on this takeover, against the interests of Qantas workers and the Australian public", said AMWU National Secretary Doug Cameron.

"The deed governing the conditions of this takeover gives no certainty on the protec-

tion of Australian jobs." The union said it will continue to campaign against the takeover until shareholders decide on whether or not to accept the bid.

"It is quite clear that the major beneficiaries of Howard's capitulation to big business are the senior executives and the private equity consortium, at the expense of workers. We believe the deed document is full of weasel words that do not give any security to Qantas workers."

### Qantas workers hit

In preparing for the takeover, Qantas management has already forced a number of long-standing employees to quit their jobs by making unmanageable changes to their work shifts. The Australian Services Union says the changes are in breach of agreements. Women with family responsibilities have been hit very hard by the changes. They are taking a case to the Human Rights Commission.

By driving these workers out, Qantas opens the way for using the Coalition Government's anti-union, anti-work WorkChoices legislation to bring in new staff on AWAs at a fraction of the cost. After all Qantas management are out to show any new owners that they are capable of making the "hard decisions" to rake in the even higher profits to service the huge debts involved in any takeover.

### Safety fears

The union also noted that the safety record of the airline was a concern as fears of cuts to maintenance in Australia and the possibility of maintenance being moved overseas remain.

Qantas currently utilises three heavy maintenance facilities in Australia, at Tullamarine and Avalon in Victoria and in Brisbane. The heavy maintenance site in Sydney, the biggest in Australia, was partially closed in November 2004 and then closed down completely in May 2006 with the loss of 256 Licensed Aircraft Engineer positions and several hundred additional support staff.

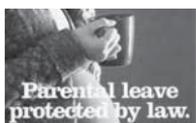
Members of the Australian Licensed Aircraft Engineers' Association (ALAEA) recently visited the two current facilities in Asia maintaining Qantas and Jetstar aircraft. At the Manila facility they found that at any one time there were only two licensed engineers working alongside 44 unlicensed engineers. The two licensed engineers were required to check and certify their own work and that of 21 others at the same time.

The Singapore site has up to 60 engineers working at any one time of which only five are licensed. The facilities in Australia have close to 70 percent licensed engineers and 30 percent unlicensed.

The ALAEA considers both the Singapore and Manila sites are operating at unsafe levels of licensed engineers. ✪



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## The Guardian

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### For principled unity

The decision of the Greens to give the Labor Party, and in some electorates other progressive candidates, its second preference vote in the NSW state election on March 24, is a principled and significant step. The aim of the Greens is not only to win seats for themselves but to ensure that the Coalition parties led by arch-right-winger Peter Debnan does not succeed in their ambition to form a government.

In making the announcement, Lee Rhianon, MLC and leader of the Greens in NSW, has expressed justified reservations in the Labor Party Government of Morris Iemma. There are many shortcomings in the policies and work of the government going back to the days when Bob Carr was Premier. The right faction in the ALP has retained control of the party machine and the majority of State Labor Party parliamentary representatives, and there is no expectation that this is going to change in the near future.

The main, but not the only consideration, is to ensure that the Liberal/National Party coalition does not break through. The appointment of Peter Debnan as leader of the Coalition put the extreme right-wing faction, which can be described as being neo-fascist on a number of questions, in control. This would be an even greater disaster for the state than another ALP government.

As far as is known the ALP does not intend to also make a principled decision and give Labor Party preferences to Green candidates. They fear that the media would launch a vicious campaign against the Labor Party asserting that it has "gone to the left" and is appeasing the "rabble-rousers" in the community, such as those who are campaigning against the big developers and the coal mining companies which are ripping the heart out of the state in disregard of the urgent environmental and other problems facing the community. It is obvious to all that a right-wing Labor government in practice gives first preference to the needs of the corporations and the developers.

This is one of the reasons why "independents" are standing in a number of electorates and have already made a dent in the number of seats held by both the ALP and the Coalition. This trend could go even further in the coming State election. Of course it will be necessary to watch out for bogus independents and small parties that serve to divert votes through the preferential system back to the major parties.

To this extent the Greens and the independents are bringing about the unravelling of the two-party system of Liberal and Labor that has dominated Australian politics for the last 100 years. This stranglehold must be broken if Australia is to start taking steps in a new political direction which are genuinely people friendly.

Sooner or later the membership of the Labor Party has to reconsider the course that has for so long been taken by their leaders – always compromising and making deals with the big money end of town while throwing their working class electorate peanuts when it comes to education, health, housing, workers' compensation, IR laws and other community needs.

It is because of these inadequacies that many voters see very little difference between the policies of the two major parties and why the ALP is seen as the "alternative party of capitalism". Many are now actively looking for alternatives.

We see what happens when principle is abandoned. It was the decision of the Victorian Labor Party to give the Family First Party their preference that gave Howard a conservative majority in the Senate in the last federal election. It was a scandalous decision which gave Howard the opportunity to push his agenda (including WorkChoices) through the Senate and impose it on the working people of Australia with all its dire consequences for workers and their families.

It will be a big step when the left and progressive elements in the Labor Party insist that their Party, in a principled way, decides to exchange preferences with all of the left and progressive parties.

The Communist Party has always been in favour of such unity. In the NSW state elections we advocate a first vote for the Greens, secondly, other progressive candidates who are also for progressive unity, then the Labor Party and always put the Liberal/National Party Coalition last.

#### PRESS FUND

Rental accommodation is getting extremely hard to find in some of Australia's largest cities, and rents are skyrocketing. That's capitalism! If you're tired of being ripped off by the system, and if you like our coverage of news and current affairs, you can fight back by contributing to *The Guardian* Press Fund. The Fund is intended to assist with the many costs of producing the paper. You can contribute to it by sending in a cheque or money order, or just by dropping in a cash donation, prior to the next issue. This week we offer our sincere thanks to the following, for their generous support:

Bert Appleton \$100, A Attard \$20, D A \$10, R Girvan \$5, Peter Hackett \$100, K M \$10, "Round Figure" \$15

This week's total: \$260. Progressive total: \$1120.

# Corruption greases the wheels...

Julie Messenger

In last Thursday's *Sydney Morning Herald* (March 8, 2007) on page 16 they printed the usual daily cartoon by Moir. (Without a doubt one of Australia's most brilliant of his profession.)

It was of a television news presenter describing a political scandal.

Over six frames it read: "In sensational breaking news it has been revealed that the newly appointed minister ... is said to have shaken the hand ... of the man who is rumoured to have danced with the wife ... of an ex-colleague ... who once was seen to slap the back of ... disgraced ex-Premier Burke".

Exactly!

The front page news reveals that despite John Howard flinging

all the mud he could scrape up at Kevin Rudd over the "scandal", the Rudd-Burke affair did not hurt the opposition leader – in fact his popularity increased!

The Australian people are so used to the lies, the secret deals, the sackings of disgraced ministers and internationally-criminal multi-million-dollar "Wheat for Oil" – type scandals, it should not come as a surprise if a few dinners between an opposition leader and an ex-premier with a criminal conviction were bound to sink from sight after a few days.

The Iemma Labor Government in NSW is set to be comfortably re-elected on March 24 – despite the "jobs-for-the-boys", the Cabinet reshuffles to "punish" incompetent ministers and the

hundreds of millions of dollars lost on doomed-from-the-start public/private partnership deals. Not surprising either is that all of the publicly acknowledged funding from property developers to the Carr and Iemma Labor governments over the last 10 years has outstripped contributions from trade unions.

The cases of corruption that come to the surface involving individual politicians or the businessmen who buy them off are just the tip of the iceberg. The system is corrupt. It is more true today than ever before: "Corruption greases the wheels of capitalism".

Kevin Rudd has dinner with Brian Burke? The least of our worries. ☘

## Child health compromised in Tasmanian tobacco decision

Tasmanian churches, child health and community organisations have expressed disappointment with a Tasmanian government decision to leave shop displays of tobacco in the faces of children. But the organisations have welcomed government decisions to ban smoking in cars carrying children and to ban fruit-flavoured cigarettes.

A large coalition of health and child welfare organisations had urged the Lennon Labor Government to protect children by putting tobacco products out of sight in shops. But the government has announced it will continue to allow one square metre of tobacco displays (and four square metres in tobacconists).

Spokesperson for the coalition, Dr Harley Stanton (Tasmanian res-

ident, former WHO health expert and President-elect of the Asia-Pacific Association for the Control of Tobacco) said: "The decision will reduce display, but it's not good enough. One square metre of tobacco display in kids' faces is still one square metre too much.

"We're disappointed that the government has compromised children's health following misleading representations from tobacco retailers.

"We urge the government and all MPs to review this decision and to bring a total display ban into effect as soon as possible.

"In the short term, retailers choosing to continue displaying this deadly and addictive product could at least be required to show a graphic warning picture of equal size."

Churches supporting removing tobacco from children's view are the Baptist Union, Catholic, Friends (Quaker), Lutheran and Uniting Churches of Tasmania; the Tasmanian Council of Churches; the Church of Christ Hobart; and nationally, the Public Affairs Commission of the Anglican Church.

The churches and their allies have pointed to independent research showing retail displays normalise tobacco to children and predispose them towards smoking.

"We are also very disappointed that the government will allow child staff to continue to sell tobacco products – leaving them even more associated with acceptable child behaviour."

Action on Smoking and Health Australia ☘

Australia-Cuba Friendship Society, ACFS

## Welcome back to the Brigadistas 24th Southern Cross Brigade 2006/07

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# Families WorkChoices pressure

Bob Briton

**In 2002, John Howard himself referred to the subject of the lack of time left to families after meeting work commitments as a "barbecue stopper". Since then, WorkChoices has further undermined the ability of workers to negotiate hours of work that allow them to attend adequately to the needs of their families. The situation has now moved from being a barbecue stopper to a hot election issue with anger at deteriorating purchasing power and quality of family life nearing boiling point in many households.**

Howard & Co sought to buy off opposition to the demands of the 24/7 world of work imposed by neo-liberal globalisation with tax cuts, changes to the Family Tax Benefit and the baby bonus. Introduced in 2004, the bonus has grown from a non-means tested \$3,000 grant to a \$4,000 one last year and is due to go up to \$5,000 this July. Unfortunately for Howard, the craftily directed bribe is being quickly swallowed up as young couples struggle to meet their steep housing and childcare costs and their spiralling food and fuel bills.

Since taking office, the Coalition Government has shot down every attempt to introduce universal paid maternity leave and other forms of carer's leave. While the Commonwealth and state public services and some sections of the banking, finance and hi-tech industries have maintained reasonable standards of maternity leave, the overall picture for Australian women is bleak.

WorkChoices pays meaningless lip service to the idea of maternity leave in one of its "guaranteed" five minimum conditions that allows for one year of unpaid maternity leave. This "guarantee" to rehire the returning worker can be sidestepped by companies claiming "operational reasons". Even this less-than-token measure can be scrapped by the signing of an Australian Workplace Agreement (AWA). Before WorkChoices – and before the government erected a wall of secrecy around the details of current AWAs – 93 per cent of AWAs had no provision for maternity leave.

The results of this neglect are now in. Australia has a declining fertility rate which now stands at 1.8 children per woman of child-rearing age. It has the eighth lowest workforce participation rate in the OECD for women between the ages

of 25 and 44 years. More and more Australians are finding the work/family balance impossible. Federal Treasurer Peter Costello's suggestion that working families should tackle the future problems of an aging society by having "one for mum, one for dad and one for the country" is a sick joke.

Last week, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) released a report that captures some of the reality of these highly stressed times. Entitled *It's About Time: Women, Men, Work and Family*, the study is the result of numerous public meetings, focus groups and 181 submissions. HREOC president John von Doussa noted that patience with current social conditions is wearing thin. "This paper is not simply a talking point; it's a template for action", he said.

It's About Time contains 45 recommendations to Australian governments to help workers meet their responsibilities as parents and carers. Among them are calls for:

- A national, government-funded 14 weeks paid maternity leave scheme
- 12 months unpaid carer's leave
- Changing the child-care rebate to make it a fortnightly payment
- Financial assistance for sole parents returning to work
- Tax breaks for companies providing childcare
- Extending the super co-contribution to carers
- Financial incentives to encourage schools to provide after-hours care
- A national pre-school year for all four-years-olds
- More data from the Bureau of Statistics and other agencies about work, pay and care
- Employers to be obliged to reasonably consider requests for flexible work arrangements with a right of appeal for refusals
- Grants to assist companies to develop better conditions in part-time work
- A federal government commitment to reduce the gender pay gap

The response from the big end of town to the report has been predictable. Peter Hendy of the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry called the report "naïve" and packed with unrealistic "ambit". "Employers are also very concerned at any proposal that would see more employees suing their employers on matters that can

Reality: 93% of AWAs had no provision for maternity leave



be worked out using a little common sense and mutual understanding. All this would do is reward lawyers and destroy working relationships." The current, unregulated mess that is proving so damaging to families is just fine by the bosses.

The Federal Government will doubtless ignore HREOC's recommendations for paid maternity leave the same way it ignored calls from the Equal Opportunity Commission

in 2002. As university lecturer and social commentator Eva Cox lamented, "How many reports does it take for politicians to deal with this vital issue?" It looks as though it will be up to a future Labor Federal Government to deliver on paid maternity leave and the "right to request" more family-friendly work arrangements. IR spokesperson Julia Gillard and Tanya Plibersek are reported to be ready to put such

policies to the ALP's national conference next month.

Resistance to these sorts of changes is strong and will continue until fundamental social changes are brought about by a people's government. In the meantime, it is vital that the whole labour movement get behind these long overdue interim measures to take some of the pressure off the home-life of workers. ✪

## Switkowski promotes the nuke "solution"

Peter Mac

**Applauding the supposed advantages of nuclear power, former Telstra boss Ziggy Switkowski has suggested that the Howard Government will soon put a price on greenhouse gas emissions. Switkowski headed the committee which recently recommended Australia generating electricity by nuclear power. Last week he declared: "Once carbon dioxide emissions are costed and ... people make a decision they really do want to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, then the only alternative which is cost-competitive, clean and safe ... is nuclear power."**

Clean and safe! Apart from conceding patronisingly that nuclear waste storage was an "emotional" issue, and his absurd implication that the Australian people can't make up their minds as to whether greenhouse gas emissions should be cut, Switkowski ignored the huge hazards of nuclear power generation.

In contrast, one leading Chinese nuclear scientist recently stated bluntly that nuclear power involved great hazards, and that Australia should not develop a nuclear industry because of the enormous expense.

For a nuclear physicist, Switkowski's approach seems re-

markably unscientific. Despite mounting evidence to the contrary, he dismissed renewable energy as unreliable and inadequate to meet Australia's power needs. He conceded that establishing nuclear power would take 15 years and involve enormous expense. Nevertheless, he claimed that new technology would soon make long-term storage of nuclear waste feasible – as if this was all that mattered, even assuming it was true.

In point of fact, rapid advances are already being made in renewable energy power generation. The company Origin Energy has built a pilot plant to produce the new "sliver" solar cells, which produce energy far more efficiently than the currently-available photovoltaic cells. This will reduce the cost of solar energy production below that of coal-fired power plants, bringing the installation of domestic solar power facilities easily within the financial reach of many Australian families.

The NSW town of Bourke also plans to build a windfarm to supply its power needs. It will join Moree and Mildura, which are installing solar power plants, as renewable energy centres.

Notwithstanding its flaws, Switkowski's statement is in some respects highly significant. Last year, for the first, time John Howard

began to seriously discuss introducing a carbon trading scheme. However, representatives of the coal industry subsequently expressed bitter opposition, and Howard has remained largely silent on the issue since then.

Echoing Howard's argument for not ratifying the Kyoto Protocol, one industry spokesperson commented that a carbon scheme should only be introduced if all the world's nations agreed to do so. He even suggested that if such a scheme were introduced, the coal industry should be exempted, presumably because of its economic importance. It is entirely possible that the Howard Government might do just that, given its tendency to dance to the industry's tune.

Zwitkowski's declaration that "clean coal" technology would take 20 or 30 years to implement is a cogent point. Britain's Stern Report, released last year, concluded that cuts in emissions have to commence immediately, with major cuts within ten years. There is little chance of that happening under a Coalition Government, because of its intransigent support for the coal and uranium mining industries. But cheer up! His advocacy of nuclear power will be one major reason for his government – and perhaps he himself – failing in the federal election poll later this year. ✪

Pete's Corner



# Nurses highlight risks of Liberal IR policies

NSW Nurses Association (NSWNA) members in Broken Hill stepped up their *Nurses Rights at Work: Worth Fighting and Voting For* campaign last week with a regional event depicting the impact of state and federal industrial relations laws on the nurse shortage.

Photos of many concerned nurses from across the Far West were assembled in a "Sea of Nurses Faces" at the action to show the community the human face of this important State election issue within their local area.

NSW public hospital nurses are currently protected from those laws by State legislation. *The Nurses Rights at Work: Worth Fighting and Voting For* campaign is being run in the lead-up to the NSW State election on March 24 to highlight the negative impact laws such as the federal Coalition Government's new industrial relations laws would have on nurses and the public health system.

For the past few weeks the campaign has mainly consisted of radio and television advertisements advising the people of NSW that the Iemma Government had eased the situation regarding nurse shortages in public hospitals and warning of the negative consequences of a Liberal government replacing state legislation by the federal laws.

The regional events, which started last week, are being organ-

ised by local nurses and will depict the faces of many of the local nurses who would be negatively affected by such a policy.

Over the next two weeks similar regional events will be held in the Hunter, Illawarra, NSW South Coast, New England and the greater Murray region. These will culminate in a major event in Sydney later in the month.

NSWNA general secretary, Brett Holmes, said more than 120 NSWNA branches have passed a resolution in the last few weeks strongly supporting the current State-based industrial relations system for public hospital nurses.

Nurses know that those state laws have played a big role in improving the wages and working conditions of public hospital nurses and protecting their rights at work.

In fact, the single biggest contribution to rebuilding the nursing workforce in recent years has come from the NSW Industrial Relations Commission. The pay rises it granted restored the relative value of the nursing profession and led to similar pay rises around the country, and a new workloads management clause was inserted in the NSW public-hospital-nurses state industrial award.

Subjecting public hospital nurses to industrial relations arrangements such as those the



In the next few weeks nurses will take action in regional NSW

Coalition Government has put in place, would undermine the bargaining power of nurses, reduce their rights at work and have a detrimental impact on attempts to overcome the nurse shortage. It would cause more nurses to leave the profession. This point will be emphasised at the regional events and depicted in the visual displays.

So far Liberal leaders have said very little about keeping public hospital nurses in the State system. In fact, the exact and only wording the

union has officially received from Debnam on this industrial relations issue is: "I have made it clear that public hospital nurses will remain in the State system, with pay and conditions not only maintained, but enhanced".

"Talk about a detail-free zone", said Brett Holmes. "Given the Liberal and National parties' well-known and long-held views on industrial relations, nurses find it very hard to take such a loose commitment, on such an important issue for them and our health system, seriously. Especially as it is made ahead of an election and while the new federal industrial relations laws are causing the Howard Government so many problems."

Recent Liberal Party attacks on state-based pay rises for nurs-

es give nurses even more reason to be sceptical. For example, the federal Liberal Health Minister, Tony Abbott, recently attacked excessive pay rises for public sector workers, including teachers and nurses, in a *Sydney Morning Herald* article (February 14). Those comments follow last year's attacks on state-based nurse pay rises by the federal Minister for Ageing, Santo Santoro, and federal Liberal backbenchers such as Peter Lindsay.

"Frankly, it is asking the nurses and people of NSW to suspend reason if you are asking them to believe that the Liberal and National parties would not eventually seek to introduce WorkChoices-style changes in public hospitals. A leopard doesn't change its spots", Mr Holmes said. ✪

## Call centre collective canned by corporate crackdown

Workers at a North Rocks call centre in Sydney's north west are angry at the decision of their boss who refused to discuss a majority request for a collective workplace agreement.

Telephone sales workers at Officeworks, a subsidiary of Coles Myer, say management is using the Howard Government's IR laws to block the majority decision that a union collective agreement be put in place.

Call centre worker Bronwyn Kuchin said that the decision

to ignore the workers' wishes highlighted the dangers faced by workers under the Federal Government's legislation.

"The majority of workers want to have a collective agreement. Yet, the company has flatly said "no" without a reason or even a discussion. The new laws allow them to get away with it. We are hard-working and loyal workers. The least the company could do is discuss this matter with us.

"If this is industrial relations un-

der John Howard's IR laws, well, it stinks", Bronwyn said.

Staff at the call centre, the vast majority of them women, have been given a deadline to sign the new contracts. The new contracts have personal leave days taken away, an inferior redundancy package to that enjoyed by other Coles' workers, no expiry date to the contracts and a clause allowing contractual changes by management at any time.

"We will refuse to sign. We won't be bullied into it. We simply don't want to go onto these individual contracts. The majority of us want to be on a collective agreement. We feel we will be safer and our jobs more secure if we stick together", Bronwyn said.

National Union of Workers NSW Secretary Derrick Belan said Officeworks would be smart to listen to the majority decision of their call centre employees.

"These workers are willing to tough this out. They have been treated like dirt. True, under Howard's harsh IR laws bosses can refuse to enter into collective arrangements, but how can that be beneficial to better productivity and loyalty?"

"Centre management is even going against Coles' existing procedures. The rest of the Coles business accepts collective agreements. Yet, these managers can't even bring themselves to sit down and talk about it.

"The workers' disappointment will soon turn to outrage. Then Officeworks' management could have a much bigger problem to deal with", Belan said. ✪

## Entitlements, jobs at risk at ACL

The Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union (AMWU) is fighting to secure the entitlements of workers at auto parts company ACL Bearing in Launceston.

The company has already announced redundancies for 90 workers over the next six months, but there are fears more could be out of work soon.

AMWU National Secretary elect, Dave Oliver, said the company was seeking a wage freeze and had indicated that an extra 20 redundancies were likely if this did not happen.

"We are very concerned about the financial viability of this company and workers' redundancy entitlements and we are meeting the company this week to gain as-

surances that everyone who is made redundant gets their full entitlement," said Oliver.

Oliver also condemned the Federal Government for refusing to assist the company and for neglecting industry policy for the manufacturing sector.

"The company sought assistance from Federal Industry Minister, Ian MacFarlane, who basically told them there was nothing he could do for them. This is a clear example of the Coalition Government turning their backs on the manufacturing industry once again."

"The flow-on effect of these 90 redundancies will probably quadruple the actual losses to the Launceston community." ✪

## Cleaners win IWD awards

Three Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers' Union (LHMU) members have been praised by the ACT Minister for Women, Katy Gallagher, for their outstanding work on behalf of other women workers.

The three Canberra women, Marija Cupac, Lena Sukloska and Christine Wagland were recipients of this year's ACT International Women's Day Awards.

Marija, Lena and Christine all work as cleaners in Canberra and have actively worked as part of a team to improve the working lives of all national capital cleaners, the majority of whom are cleaners from immigrant backgrounds.

The Minister praised the tireless efforts of cleaners to get community and media support.

The International Women's

Day Awards aim to recognise the outstanding achievements women make in a diversity of roles across the Canberra community, the ACT Minister for Women, Katy Gallagher said.

The Minister said the tireless efforts of Marija, Lena and Christine have helped ensure the continued success of the Clean Start: Fair Deal for Cleaners campaign by winning community support, initiating public protest and bringing their issues to the forefront of the media's attention.

International Women's Day (IWD) is marked on March 8 every year. The first International Women's Day march was almost 100 years ago, when socialists marched in support of women's suffrage and for other women's rights. ✪

### May Day in Havana?

Like to join people from all over the world in the second annual May Day World Brigade to Cuba?

A 14-day program from April 22 to May 6 will show you some of many impressive achievements of the Cuban Revolution and other places of historical and cultural interest.

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# Brough's housing bid sparks debate

**A proposal by Federal Indigenous Affairs Minister Mal Brough to axe all Federal funding for urban Indigenous housing and divert it instead to bush communities has sparked a fiery debate. The Minister has been reviewing Indigenous housing funding for the past six months and announced last month that he would be seeking Cabinet approval for the changes.**

He says they will help target Indigenous-specific housing funding where it is most needed – that is remote communities – and address corruption and mismanagement by Aboriginal land councils and housing bodies.

In September last year, the Minister warned State and Territory Governments not to expect big funding increases, saying they had under-spent Federal Indigenous housing monies by more than \$150 million in 2004-05.

The Federal Government was embarrassed a few months later when an evaluation of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) trial site of Wadeye, in the Top End, revealed that each of several hundred homes in the overcrowded community housed an average of 16-17 people.

Now, despite growing fears of a rental and private housing crisis across Australia, Mr Brough says most Indigenous people in urban centres don't need Indigenous-specific housing anyway.

"The fact is that Indigenous people in cities have access to housing through a variety of sources", Brough said. "The overwhelming majority of Indigenous Australians in cities live in state public housing, private rental properties or either own or are buying their own home.

"This is not the case in remote areas and my proposal would see all the Australian government's Indigenous-specific housing funding directed to the area of most need – people living in remote communities.

"At present, only 40 per cent of the \$240 million spent on new Indigenous housing and maintenance is directed to remote communities.

"This imbalance needs to be

addressed if we are serious about tackling housing issues in remote communities.

"Redirecting the Indigenous-specific housing programs would have little impact on urban Indigenous Australians. It would however make a huge difference to remote areas where there are no alternative housing options."

While few further details of the plan have been released, it is understood that more than \$100 million will be cut from the budgets of 600 Indigenous housing bodies throughout the country.

"Issues like overcrowding are chronic in many remote communities. A sensible, practical approach is to ensure that taxpayers' dollars are directed to the area of greatest need.", Mr Brough said.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner Tom Calma has reportedly questioned whether such targeting of Indigenous Australians might breach anti-discrimination legislation.

However, like others including Northern Territory Housing Minister Elliott McAdam, Mr Calma wants to find out more.

"I would be interested to test whether this contravenes the Racial Discrimination Act – that's something we want to find out when we see the details", he reportedly told *The Australian* newspaper.

Opposition Indigenous Affairs spokeswoman Jenny Macklin responded to news of the proposal by saying it would only exacerbate the current housing crisis, especially for the majority of Indigenous Australians who live in urban areas.

"Mal Brough claims there is rotting in the current system. Responsibility for Indigenous housing was transferred to the Commonwealth from ATSIC in 2004, so the government has had the power for two-and-a-half years to stamp out this alleged rotting", she said.

"Taking away money from Indigenous Australians in urban areas will not solve these problems. In fact it will only make them worse. Stripping money from maintenance of existing urban housing stock won't help the situation either."

Queensland Democrats Senator

Andrew Bartlett also weighed in, saying the government's reasoning was reminiscent of the same arguments promoted by controversial former One Nation leader Pauline Hanson.

"This sounds very much like yet another major, ideologically driven, 'one-size-fits-all' change foisted on Indigenous people and groups without consultation", he said.

"There are different challenges facing Indigenous people in urban areas to those who live in remote communities, but it is naïve to think that these can all be easily addressed by 'mainstream' services.

"We should not be reinforcing that myth that 'real' Aboriginal people only live in remote areas and not in the cities."

Redfern-based Aboriginal Housing Company Chief Executive Officer Mick Mundine issued a statement describing the proposal as 'crazy' and likely to worsen the homelessness problem, creating overcrowded ghettos in the inner cities.

"Most Australians are not aware that last year the United Nations declared that Australia has the worst Indigenous housing in the world", he said.

"The fact remains the best way to deliver services to Aboriginal people is through well-resourced Aboriginal service providers.

"We know what our people need. For the most part, Aboriginal organisations have done their best to provide services within the financially anorexic environment the government has created.

"It is government neglect and stupidity that has led us to the desperate place we find ourselves today. Mal Brough says there is corruption in Aboriginal organisations. I say to him 'show us the proof'... I also challenge Mal Brough to show us a perfect mistake-free system even within his own government. Need we remind him of AWB (the Australian Wheat Board)?"

Mr Calma was a strong critic of federal government changes to the *NT Land Rights Act 1976* that last year paved the way for 99-year town or land leases to be issued over Indigenous land. ☘



Aboriginal Housing Company Chief Executive Officer Mick Mundine describing Brough's proposal as "crazy"



John Howard is nothing if not a hypocrite. He has been the head of a government that for 11 years has viciously attacked Indigenous rights in every area: health, housing, land rights, reconciliation, education – the list is long. Last week he used the 40th anniversary coming up in May of the referendum on Indigenous rights to "recapture its spirit of support for Aborigines". Speaking at a Global Foundation gathering, Howard stated, "The gulf between the first Australians and other Australians on economic and social outcomes is a measure of the distance we still have to travel". He must mean backwards. (The Global Foundation was set up in 1998 as a spearhead for big business both here and internationally. It has a membership of 180 global corporations, universities and individuals. Just the place to take Indigenous right forward!)

*Forbes* magazine's 2007 billionaires list was unveiled last week. It is notable for the growing gap globally between the *haves* and *have nots*. The number of billionaires is 19 percent higher than last year when there were 793. Their total net worth grew 35 percent to \$US3.5 trillion. Among those joining the list is Howard Schultz, the founder of Starbucks. Microsoft chairman Bill Gates is the richest man for the 13th straight year with \$US56 billion.

The release last week of the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee Student Finances Survey demands a complete review of government support services for students. "It is outrageous that more students are living in poverty now than six years ago", said University of Sydney Students' Representative Council President, Angus McFarland. "A quarter of students are admitting that they miss classes in order to survive." The amount of students obtaining loans to survive has more than doubled in the last six years and now averages \$5,000 per loan – nearly half the average income of undergraduate students. Said Mr McFarland, "The Howard Government needs to get its priorities right. If it believes in addressing the skills shortage and securing the future of Australia it would invest in higher education and fairer income support for struggling students living in poverty."

And while on university funding, at the University of Technology, Sydney, the director of coaching, Tim McLaren, who has taken rowing teams to four Olympics, has resigned. He's taken a job as head coach and director of the California Rowing Club, a training centre at the University of California. Why? Because the UTS Student Union has lost its annual \$6 million in student fees as a result of the Howard Government's voluntary student unionism, and can no longer guarantee funding for rowing.

**CAPITALIST HOG OF THE WEEK:** is the NSW Minerals Council. The Council has attempted to censor the climate change debate by getting their lawyers to shut down a community-based climate change website. The website parodies the Mineral Council's big budget public relations campaign to promote the virtues of the coal industry.

## Perth IWD celebrations

**The Perth branch of the Communist Party of Australia celebrated IWD on Sunday March 11. Some 20 people gathered at the commemoration to hear guest speaker Cheryl Davenport talk on the role of women in the public sector.**

Sheila Suttner from the CPA opened the function by dedicating the celebration of struggle for women's rights to the freedom of the "Cuban Five". The Cuban Five have been deprived of the right to be visited by their wives and daughters, and Sheila spoke of how hard it was for her to visit her son Raymond when he was imprisoned by the Apartheid regimen in South Africa for 11 years and says could not imagine how much more difficult it would have been not having the right to visit during those difficult times. ☘



Sheila Suttner



Guest speaker Cheryl Davenport

# Unionising Wal-Mart

## The Chinese experience

Chris White\*

**At the high-rise Beijing headquarters of the All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU) I asked Ms Guo Chen from their Grass-Roots Organisation and Capacity Building Department to go through the steps which resulted in unionising Wal-Mart stores in China.**

Wal-Mart is the largest retail company in the world and is actively anti-union. 'No union at all' is its motto. A management handbook says that 'Staying union free is a full time commitment. The commitment to stay union free must exist at all levels of management – from the Chairperson of the Board down to the front line manager... The time involved is 365 days per year.'

### Breakthrough

The China union breakthrough is therefore a significant achievement. The reputation of the ACFTU was that it unionised top-down with management approval. But arguably Wal-Mart was different and involved bottom up union building. Does this herald a shift from the unique Chinese servicing model to an organising model of unionism? Can the ACFTU be an effective collective bargaining voice for Chinese workers?

For years, the regional trade unions reported that Wal-Mart managers were opposed to unions in China. Local Wal-Mart management always rebuffed union approaches repeating, "our workers do not want to join. We are reluctant to have our Chinese workers in the union". Other multinationals agreed with Wal-Mart.

The 2003 ACFTU Congress resolved to set up unions among Wal-Mart workers and the unionisation of foreign multinationals began to be publicly debated.

China's Trade Union Law states that there is a legal right for 25 workers to start a local union committee in an enterprise. The ACFTU at the national and local level held meetings to unionise Wal-Mart. In 2005, again the request was made to each regional city union organisation and to local trade union cadres in branches to talk to the local management in Wal-Mart stores and ask them to allow their workers to be in the union. This was done, but were again rebuffed. In Nanjing the Trade Union Council was rebuffed 28 times. The top-down attempts were not successful.

Normally, the ACFTU did not organise from the bottom up as happens elsewhere where unions face hostile management. But elsewhere, unions had not succeeded in Wal-Mart either.

An article came to the attention of the ACFTU leaders in the Chinese business news asking, 'Is Wal-Mart or China's ACFTU the more powerful?'

Finally in 2006, the trade union heads and organisers at a large meeting resolved on a unionisation drive:

- mobilise all workers in Wal-Mart into the union;
- give attention to a public campaign in the mass media, TV and extensive leafletting and pamphlets, etc;
- increase material and manpower investment for unionisation;
- enforce legal provisions
- that management not prevent workers from joining a union;
- that hindering or limiting this right is illegal;
- that businesses investing in China must abide by local Chinese laws;
- increase investment in dealing with those workers who have been punished unfairly or mistreated by management;
- improve low wages and conditions.

### Into action

The local union cadres went into action in front of Wal-Mart exits. Organisers handed out flyers and leaflets urging workers to join. Union pamphlets showed the benefits of joining with special offers for a range of services.



Local cadres met workers in restaurants and in their dormitories and homes at night.

Reports came in that young women were too scared to join as management would discriminate against them. Trade union cadres complained to management pointing out the law allowing workers to join. Management continued to say that their workers did not want to join.

The union locally discussed how to go forward. Wal-Mart's rude and arrogant attitude was reported in the newspapers. Journalists reported the contest, leading to a public outcry.

### Celebration

On July 29, 2006, the first trade union committee in the world was formed in a Wal-Mart store. It was formed in secret and held at night to include night and day shift workers. A young 29 year old meat-packer was elected the leader and Chair and thumbprints recorded the union oath of the workers. Their names were kept secret at the local level so as to not give information to management. With the first 30 joining, the feeling was that it was historic.

There was a celebration and the singing of the Internationale. Photos and speeches of the young chairman, Ke Yunlong were distributed. He declared that it was "the most meaningful achievement of our lives".

Union organisers worked seven days and nights in a row giving advice in the provinces. Legal advisors were used to help dispel the misgivings of those who feared to join the union. The union would defend their rights.

When Wal-Mart found out from the public announcement that trade union committees had been formed, they first responded adversely. Various tactics were used to intimidate workers not to join. They alleged that their workers had not joined voluntarily. But after an argument, management started to say locally that if 25 decided to join, then they would recognise the law.

Many workers were now saying they had a long aspiration to join, but were worried about being punished or dismissed and worried to raise their demands. Other union local committees emerged in stores. Unionising Wal-Mart became a national and then an international story.

The head of Wal-Mart China came to the ACFTU headquarters and claimed the company wanted to play a greater role. One point they put up was that the local management could be the Chair of the union committee. This was rejected. Wal-Mart then

said that it would be better if they organised the trade union committee elections, rather than the union.

### Workers call for bigger union role

In response to this the ACFTU surveyed the union members who all said the union should play the bigger role and that union candidates should come from the workers and not be put up by management. Back in the stores, this was debated and workers insisted that they had to elect the union committee. They did not want "an employers' union". Wal-Mart had to back off.

Eventually Wal-Mart made an agreement with the unions.

Workers are to seek guidance from the union, membership is voluntary and open to all, and democratic elections must be carried out for the chair of trade union committees in each store.

A compromise was that the preparatory committees have management, district union officials and employees, but management is to be only 20 percent of committee members.

By October 2006, the ACFTU had recruited 6,000 members in Wal-Mart stores. The trade union committees in some stores have increased wages and succeeded in raising the wages of part-time workers. The probation period for part-time workers was abolished. The union assists in disputes and collective agreements are being signed.

Wal-Mart now says, "we are abiding by the law allowing workers to join and that Chinese unions are different from unions in the west, that the ACFTU has made it clear that its goal is to work with the employers, not promote confrontation".

The ACFTU insists it sticks to the principle of relying on workers to form unions and that it is a big departure from past organising practices. But critics say the arrangement is still top-down.

The ACFTU says this organising experience is being driven into all foreign enterprises not unionised, with a target of 70 percent unionisation by the end of 2007.

But why is this significant? It sounds like "normal" organising to Australian trade unions. The last ACFTU Congress gave priority to unionising the workers in the foreign sector – target the biggest companies first and others would follow.

Interesting times indeed! How should Australian activists engage?

Wal-Mart is not in Australia. It is however, the biggest company in the world,

has 1.3 million employees, sells annually more than the GNP of most countries, is the biggest employer in the US, will open 70 super centres in China in 2007, 80 percent of their 6,000 supplier factories are in China and these Chinese suppliers are screwed on price, so they exploit other Chinese workers.

Worldwide Wal-Mart trumpets its low prices. *China Newsweek* (22/3/2004) reported "The Dark Side of Wal-Mart's Low Prices: Suppliers Seriously Violate Labour Law". It reported lower wages, longer hours, the poorest of conditions and huge profits made in large sweatshops. The ACFTU is now pushing labour administrations for greater compliance by companies in 2007.

### Providing services

In saying that trade unions in China are different from unions in the west is to point out that they are greater servicing organisations. I stayed in Beijing at The People's Palace, one of its 4 star hotels, next to its multi-storied headquarters.

They organise health insurance and social security benefits in state-owned enterprises, run senior citizen homes, assist workers to find homes, run canteens, medical centres, kindergartens and public baths.

Eighty percent of union members in a poll in private companies on what the union did well put cultural events, cinema tickets at the top. Only eight percent said that the union fights for workers' workplace wages and conditions. Is this being turned around?

In China the main responsibility of unions is seen to be economic development. In all the enterprises, the union supports production and economic efficiency. In some enterprises the union head is also at the top of management. Finance for the union is guaranteed, as the enterprise is required by law to submit 2 percent financial assistance. There are union participatory rights particularly in state owned enterprises and increasingly in the private sector. But although there are "employee councils and assemblies", and rights for the union to conclude collective agreements, these collective agreements are not extensive and only cover 22 percent of the private sector. The ACFTU is not yet in a collective bargaining role to improve wages and conditions as in the West. But it has to respond to the increasing demands of its members.

\* Chris White is a labour law researcher in Canberra and at the Flinders University School of Law. He was a former Secretary of the United Trades and Labour Council of South Australia ☺

# Mystery: How wealth creates poverty in the world

By Michael Parenti\*

**There is a “mystery” we must explain: How is it that as corporate investments and foreign aid and international loans to poor countries have increased dramatically throughout the world over the last half century, so has poverty? The number of people living in poverty is growing at a faster rate than the world’s population. What do we make of this?**

Over the last half century, US industries and banks (and other western corporations) have invested heavily in those poorer regions of Asia, Africa, and Latin America known as the “Third World”. The transnationals are at-

spent on US products, and the recipient nation is required to give investment preferences to US companies, shifting consumption away from home produced commodities and foods in favour of imported ones, creating more dependency, hunger, and debt.

A good chunk of the aid money never sees the light of day, going directly into the personal coffers of sticky-fingered officials in the recipient countries.

Aid (of a sort) also comes from other sources. In 1944, the United Nations created the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Voting power in both organizations is determined by a country’s financial contribution. As the largest “donor”,

**The United States is one of the few countries that has refused to sign an international convention for the abolition of child labour and forced labour.**

tracted by the rich natural resources, the high return that comes from low-paid labour, and the nearly complete absence of taxes, environmental regulations, worker benefits, and occupational safety costs.

The US government has subsidised this flight of capital by granting corporations tax concessions on their overseas investments, and even paying some of their relocation expenses – much to the outrage of labour unions here at home who see their jobs evaporating.

The transnationals push out local businesses in the Third World and pre-empt their markets. American agribusiness cartels, heavily subsidised by US taxpayers, dump surplus products in other countries at below cost and undersell local farmers. As Christopher Cook describes it in his *Diet for a Dead Planet*, they expropriate the best land in these countries for cash-crop exports, usually monoculture crops requiring large amounts of pesticides, leaving less and less acreage for the hundreds of varieties of organically grown foods that feed the local populations.

By displacing local populations from their lands and robbing them of their self-sufficiency, corporations create overcrowded labour markets of desperate people who are forced into shanty towns to toil for poverty wages (when they can get work), often in violation of the countries’ own minimum wage laws.

In Haiti, for instance, workers are paid 11 cents an hour by corporate giants such as Disney, Wal-Mart, and JC Penny. The United States is one of the few countries that has refused to sign an international convention for the abolition of child labour and forced labour. This position stems from the child labour practices of US corporations throughout the Third World and within the United States itself, where children as young as 12 suffer high rates of injuries and fatalities, and are often paid less than the minimum wage.

The savings that big business reaps from cheap labour abroad are not passed on in lower prices to their customers elsewhere. Corporations do not outsource to far-off regions so that US consumers can save money. They outsource in order to increase their margin of profit. In 1990, shoes made by Indonesian children working twelve-hour days for 13 cents an hour, cost only \$2.60 but still sold for \$100 or more in the United States.

US foreign aid usually works hand in hand with transnational investment. It subsidises construction of the infrastructure needed by corporations in the Third World: ports, highways, and refineries.

The aid given to Third World governments comes with strings attached. It often must be

the United States has a dominant voice, followed by Germany, Japan, France, and Great Britain. The IMF operates in secrecy with a select group of bankers and finance ministry staffs drawn mostly from the rich nations.

The World Bank and IMF are supposed to assist nations in their development. What actually happens is another story. A poor country borrows from the World Bank to build up some aspect of its economy. Should it be unable to pay back the heavy interest because of declining export sales or some other reason, it must borrow again, this time from the IMF.

But the IMF imposes a “structural adjustment program” (SAP), requiring debtor countries to grant tax breaks to the transnational corporations, reduce wages, and make no attempt to protect local enterprises from foreign imports and foreign takeovers. The debtor nations are pressured to privatize their economies, selling at scandalously low prices their state-owned mines, railroads, and utilities to private corporations.

They are forced to open their forests to clear-cutting and their lands to strip mining, without regard to the ecological damage done. The debtor nations also must cut back on subsidies for health, education, transportation and food, spending less on their people in order to have more money to meet debt payments. Required to grow cash crops for export earnings, they become even less able to feed their own populations.

So it is that throughout the Third World, real wages have declined, and national debts have soared to the point where debt payments absorb almost all of the poorer countries’ export earnings – which creates further impoverishment as it leaves the debtor country even less able to provide the things its population needs.

Here then we have explained a “mystery”. It is, of course, no mystery at all if you don’t adhere to trickle-down mystification. Why has poverty deepened while foreign aid and loans and investments have grown? Answer: Loans, investments, and most forms of aid are designed not to fight poverty but to augment the wealth of transnational investors at the expense of local populations.

There is no trickle down, only a siphoning up from the toiling many to the moneyed few.

In their perpetual confusion, some liberal critics conclude that foreign aid and IMF and World Bank structural adjustments “do not work”; the end result is less self-sufficiency and more poverty for the recipient nations, they point out. Why then do the rich member states continue to fund the IMF and World Bank? Are their leaders just less intelligent than the critics who keep pointing out



to them that their policies are having the opposite effect?

No, it is the critics who are stupid not the western leaders and investors who own so much of the world and enjoy such immense wealth and success. They pursue their aid and foreign loan programs because such programs do work. The question is, work for whom? Cui bono?

The purpose behind their investments, loans, and aid programs is not to uplift the masses in other countries. That is certainly not the business they are in. The purpose is to serve the interests of global capital accumulation, to take over the lands and local economies of Third World peoples, monopolise their markets, depress their wages, indenture their labour with enormous debts, privatise their public service sector, and prevent these nations from emerging as trade competitors by not allowing them a normal development.

In these respects, investments, foreign loans, and structural adjustments work very well indeed.

The real mystery is: why do some people find such an analysis to be so improbable, a “conspiratorial” imagining? Why are they sceptical that US rulers knowingly and deliberately pursue such ruthless policies (suppress wages, rollback environmental protections, eliminate the public sector, cut human services) in the Third World? These rulers are pursuing much the same policies right here in our own country!

Isn’t it time that liberal critics stop thinking that the people who own so much of the world – and want to own it all – are “incompetent” or “misguided” or “failing to see the unintended consequences of their policies”? You are not being very smart when you think your enemies are not as smart as you. They know where their interests lie, and so should we.

\*Michael Parenti’s recent books include *The Assassination of Julius Caesar* (New Press), *Superpatriotism* (City Lights), and *The Culture Struggle* (Seven Stories Press). For more information visit: [www.michaelparenti.org](http://www.michaelparenti.org)

## Howard

(Written in Arabic, the name Howard can also read, as “he is ... a monkey”)

He is ...  
Not  
... a monkey  
In the full sense of the word,  
In that sense, we are all monkeys.  
Some of us tamed,  
Over the years,  
While the others remained as they were.

\* \* \*

The tragedy of those monkeys  
Who were not tamed  
That they deserve pity,  
But most of all,  
They deserve taming.

Habib Fares

# Who will control Iraq's oil?

Susan Webb

**Under heavy pressure from the US, Iraq's cabinet approved a draft oil law on February 26, that would effectively shift control of the country's huge oil resources to multinational corporations, experts charge. Iraq's Parliament has yet to see the details, but US and British oil corporations and the International Monetary Fund have been involved in the drafting process since early 2006.**

Iraq has the world's second or third largest proven oil reserves. Oil is seen as key to rebuilding the country and enabling it to achieve economic and political sovereignty. Iraq's oil also puts it in the cross-hairs of transnational oil corporations and international power politics.

The draft law provides for "exploration risk contracts" allowing foreign companies control of oil exploration, development and production for up to 30 years. Earlier drafts used the more commonly known term "production-sharing agreements" (PSAs), but these sparked enormous opposition in Iraq, particularly from its unions.

The new draft "sets up the same thing with a different name" said Greg Muttitt, co-director of Platform, a British group that watchdogs the multinational oil corporations. In addition, the draft allows the government to sign contracts without Parliament's approval, he said.

If the law is adopted as is, "basically, control of the Iraqi oil industry will shift from the public sector, where it's been since the 1970s, into the hands of the multinational oil companies, especially British and American, which is a very radical change", he said. But Iraqis are "passionate" about keeping the oil in Iraq's hands, Muttitt noted. "It will be very difficult to overcome public sentiment."

"We are against PSAs" regardless of what they are called, said Salam Ali, of the Iraqi Communist Party's international relations committee. National ownership of oil is a "very sensitive" issue for Iraqis. "Whoever drafted this version has made sure it will not seem as controversial as had been expected", Ali said. "There was some massaging." But privatisation is a "subtext" of the draft, he said.

With this agreement, Muttitt said, Iraq would be "completely breaking away from normal procedure" used by all major oil-producing countries, none of whom allow such foreign control. In Saudi Arabia, with the world's biggest oil reserves, oil is fully owned and controlled by the national oil company. The same is true for Kuwait. The United Arab Emirates and Iran allow some foreign investment but maintain national control.

Russia offers a striking lesson, he said. With the world's seventh biggest reserves, Russia is the largest country to have signed PSAs. It signed three such agreements in the mid-1990s, but they became so controversial that none have been signed since and "there is no chance of more", Muttitt said. Like Iraq today, Russia in the 1990s was in a period of political and economic chaos. "A few years later, the Russians woke up" and saw that these deals were a big mistake, "but it was too late." Now, he said, the same thing could happen to Iraq.

Experts note that Iraq has fallen behind on technical expertise after a dozen years of US-imposed economic sanctions, followed by the war. What would help Iraq, they say, is "technical service contracts" like those used by Iraq's neighbours. These are standard business contracts that countries' national oil companies sign with foreign companies to bring in expertise. They are for limited time periods, for specific services and fees, not contracts that hand foreign transnationals exclusive rights to develop the oil for their own interests and take a large share of the revenue.

Such service agreements, with transfer of technology to Iraq, would establish "equitable" relations from which Iraqis would benefit, Ali said.

Since last July, drafts of the oil law have been reviewed by US officials, multinational oil companies and the IMF, but not the Iraqi public, news media or Parliament, said Muttitt.

The Iraq Study Group report last December listed action on oil among its key recommendations. "The United States should encourage investment in Iraq's oil sector by the international community and by international energy companies", it declared, and "should assist Iraqi leaders to reorganise the na-

tional oil industry as a commercial enterprise."

Some in Iraq and elsewhere divert attention from the key issue by focusing on how oil revenues will be distributed, although the draft addresses that, allocating revenues to provinces based on population, Ali said. "They don't talk much about the importance of Iraq's oil to the oil monopolies. They dress it up as ... addressing fears of the Sunni population. The reality of the matter is the oil law has much more to do with control of the oil sector."

A reason why the US and Britain are pushing so hard on the oil law, said Muttitt, is the growing pressure on them to pull out troops. "As long as the two countries have major troop presence they have a lot of influence", he commented. "They would like to see this happen before any significant troop withdrawal."

Current security problems may prevent foreign monopolies from moving in now, said Ali, "but once you sign a contract you can sit and wait" for the situation to improve. *People's Weekly World* ☘



Part of the tactics of the Iraq war is to hand over the country's oil to the transnational oil companies

## Abolition of Foreign Military Bases Conference There can be no peace without justice

**At 9:15 this morning (March 5) the auditorium of the Catholic University's Cultural Centre in Quito, Ecuador, hosted the Opening Ceremony of the International Conference for the Abolition of Foreign Military Bases. The auditorium was full of young people, men, women and delegates from forty countries who are committed to peace, the struggle against militarization, and the abolition of foreign military bases.**

The air was full of the excitement of hundreds of participants who rushed to register and receive their conference material. In the opening panel, speakers included the Mayor of Quito, Paco Moncayo, the Assistant Secretary of Defense, Miguel Carvajal, the President of the Catholic University, Manuel Corrales,

Philippine activist Corazon Fabros from the International No Bases Network, Ecuadorian organiser Nieve Solorzano from the Ecuador No Bases Coalition, and Medea Benjamin, representative from Code Pink, an organization from the US.

Paco Moncayo emphasised that the municipality is committed to working to improve social services as part of its support of initiatives like the No Bases initiative. He clarified that working for peace requires more than eliminating war, it requires broadening the struggle for the social welfare of all people; because "what does peace mean to someone who doesn't have food to eat".

Manuel Corrales spoke about the delicacy of the Conference's politics, but assured the audience that there is no better place than the University to debate these issues and produce constructive criticism. He concluded by declaring "Peace is the fruit of justice, so if there is not justice, there can be no peace".

Dolores Solorzano shared the vision of the community in Manta where the US maintains a military base. Recalling 1999 when the contract was signed by Jamil Mahuad, Solorzano described the results of the bases installation, which include the displacement of farmers, the drowning of fishing boats, an increase in child prostitution, the invasion of air space, and the invasion of Ecuadorian sovereignty. All of these affects have been confirmed by studies conducted by organisations working to close the base. INRED, SERPAJ (Servicio de Paz y Justicia), ACJ, PRODH, and APDH are some of the groups that first began working on this issue.

Today, more than 30 percent of the population in Manta and 60 percent of the national population do not want the Manta military base in Ecuadorian territory.

Solorzano argued that the

fight against drug trafficking is no longer the US's only motive for maintaining the base in Manta. Other interests have become obvious, including the monitoring of PLAN Colombia, the control of Amazonian water resources, and the surveillance of subversive movements.

Medea Benjamin of the United States began her speech with the declaration, "the fight is not against the people of the United States, instead it is against the Empire, and we are also victims of this Empire." This statement evoked a round of applause from the audience. She gave thanks to Ecuador and President Rafael Correa for being a "president in favour of peace" and expressed hope that, with encouragement of the people, Ecuador would stop sending soldiers to the School of the Americas, a training school in the US that has produced many dictators, death squad leaders, and other officials who have brought death and torture to many Latin American communities.

Benjamin's message was reflected in the words of the following speaker, Assistant Secretary of Defence Miguel Carvajal, who emphasised that the government under Correa believes strongly that security cannot be separated from social welfare, indeed, security must be attained by fighting the poverty that affects 64 percent of the Ecuadorian population, addressing the destruction of the environment, reducing illiteracy, and creating equality. All of this implies that the Armed Forces must be involved in this social struggle under the guidance of the new government.

Finally, he affirmed that the Ecuadorian government will not renew its contract for the base in Manta that concludes in 2009. He declared "the coherence to principles of peace will be developed only by demanding national sovereignty". ☘

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# Italian left unites to bar Berlusconi return

Brian Steinberg

**As the Bush administration, the Vatican and the business community attempt to shift the Italian centre-left government towards the centre, the left is thinking in new ways to counter that shift. The left (Refoundation, the Party of Italian Communists and the Greens) represents 12 percent of the parliamentary vote. They are unified in that they will not split the centre-left, allowing the return of the ultra-right government of Berlusconi.**

The centre-left clearly has a program much more sensitive to the working class and to questioning the Bush administration's permanent war policies.

Nevertheless, further progress may be threatened. A new Democratic Party will merge the Democrats of the Left with the more centrist Margherita party, diluting the left element in the comparatively large Democrats of the Left. Some of these elements will continue to coordinate with the left parties.

Another threat is posed by possible cooperation with elements of the other Christian Democratic

Party that had fought on the side of Berlusconi and is now sliding towards the middle.

What is new in the left now is not only the rejection of a split that would lead to the return of Berlusconi but also a search for new forms that would make their unity more solid in the centre-left government.

Refoundation has limited its push for all left forces to come under a one-party umbrella and is looking for a level of unity that could mobilise all left elements in a concentrated response. The Party of Italian Communists is putting aside its long-term goal of a confederalist left structure that would allow organisational diversity while acting as a single arm in policy formation. The two parties appear headed towards discussions on new forms that both can accept.

Refoundation faces a greater internal struggle over the new adjustments. Several of its organised sections saw Refoundation's concept of the socialist alternative as a principled position against a centre-left government. The majority of the party has now come to see the concept as essentially a political

strategy to be adjusted by practice and tactics.

Indeed, the experience of the Berlusconi ultra-right government led many Refoundation members to see the socialist alternative concept as consistent with belonging to a centre-left government.

The first organised section to leave Refoundation was Communist Project, led by Marco Ferrando, who had been an active participant in the Fourth International. Franco Turigliatto, a Refoundation Senator, was expelled from the party for two years and has resigned from parliament after placing the vote that led to the failure of the centre-left party position over the last week.

Both Refoundation and the Party of Italian Communists allow their members to express opposition to policies during debate as long as they take no voting action that would bring back the ultra-right, pro-Bush Berlusconi administration. Refoundation has been helped in its adjustments by the acceptance of the centre-left formation by many of the mass movements it relates to, as the only political option to the horrors of the Berlusconi administration.

*People's Weekly World* ☪



"Lower taxes for the rich, lower pensions for the poor." An anti-Berlusconi poster used during the Italian elections in 2006

## Privateers profit at Walter Reed

Tim Wheeler

**WASHINGTON – Wounded soldiers and a soldier's wife told a congressional hearing on March 5 of their daily ordeal to get help at Walter Reed Army Medical Centre, even as a memo released exposed sharp staff cutbacks by a private contractor at the Army's flagship medical complex.**

With tears streaming down her cheeks, Annette McLeod, wife of US Army Cpl. Wendell McLeod Jr, told of her husband leaving for Iraq a healthy man and returning with a brain injury that has left him severely disabled. Yet screeners at Walter Reed, she charged, attempted to deny him disability benefits, claiming he is suffering from a "pre-existing condition" and that he "didn't try hard enough" when given diagnostic tests.

"My life was ripped apart by what happened at Walter Reed", she told the House Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs which convened the daylong hearing at Walter Reed's main auditorium. "This is how we treat our soldiers. They go to fight, put their lives on the line, and when they return they get zero percent", she said.

Specialist Jeremy Duncan lost an ear and vision in his left eye and suffered a broken neck from the explosion of a roadside bomb. When he arrived at Walter Reed he was assigned to the infamous Building 18 with mouse droppings, dead roaches, mildew and holes in the ceiling.

"It wasn't fit for anyone to live in a room like that", he testified. "That's when I contacted *The Washington Post*."

Staff Sergeant John Shannon, wearing an eye patch with a purple heart embroidered on it, said he was designated an outpatient five days after he arrived gravely wounded from Iraq. The Pentagon brass should "pull themselves up by their bootstraps and admit to their mistakes and work to fix them until they're fired", he said.

Several lawmakers zeroed in on a memo written by Walter Reed Garrison Commander Peter Garibaldi in September 2006, describing how the privatisation of support services at Walter Reed caused an exodus of "highly skilled and experienced personnel." His memo warned that "patient care services are at risk of mission failure." In January 2006, Walter Reed awarded a five-year \$US120 million contract to IAP Worldwide Services, a Florida-based firm that won notoriety for failing its contract to deliver ice to the Gulf Coast devastated by Hurricane Katrina.

The company is headed by Al Neffgen, a former Halliburton executive who testified before Waxman's committee in July 2004 in defence of Halliburton's exorbitant charges for troop support and fuel delivery in Iraq.

Outrage at the Walter Reed scandal is spreading across the nation, exposing the demagoguery of Bush's "support the troops" slogan.

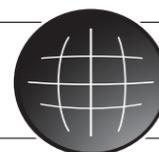
US Army veteran Ellen Barfield, leader of the Baltimore Chapter of Veterans for Peace, has stood vigil outside Walter Reed repeatedly since the Iraq war began. "They are privatising everything", she told the *People's Weekly World*. "But it is particularly evil to put captive people like wounded soldiers or seniors at the mercy of those whose bottom line is to make a profit. If you do that, then of course people are going to suffer."

Representative Waxman, chair of the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, wrote a letter to Major General George Weightman, asking him to explain the Garibaldi memo when he testified in the March 5 hearing. Weightman had just been fired as commander of Walter Reed.

"According to multiple sources", Waxman wrote, "the decision to privatise support services at Walter Reed led to a precipitous drop in support personnel at Walter Reed" from more than 300 federal employees to under 60. "Yet instead of hiring additional personnel, IAP apparently replaced the remaining 60 federal employees with only 50 IAP personnel", Waxman wrote. "The conditions that have been described at Walter Reed are disgraceful."

In his cross examination of Weightman and Army Surgeon General Kevin Kiley, Waxman declared, "We've contracted out so much in this war. We have mercenaries instead of US military."

*People's Weekly World* ☪



## Global briefs

**BRITAIN:** Overturning a 2004 British appeals court decision, the European Court of Human Rights has granted the British train drivers' union, ASLEF, the right to expel a member belonging to the British National Party. The BNP's constitution opposes "racial integration between British and non-European peoples". Trades Union Congress General Secretary Brendan Barber commended a "decision that the right to freedom of association does not force unions to accept into membership people opposed to the basic principles of trade unionism". The ruling may lead to changes in British law, according to TUC.org.uk, but "every union will welcome this clear decision that they can now expel BNP members".

**UN:** The UN Commission on the Status of Women convened in New York on February 26, with 45 UN member nations represented, to determine priority themes and make recommendations on gender equality and the advancement of women. Education International (EI), a world federation of teachers unions, called upon nations to eliminate violence against women and to guarantee the "fundamental right to education to all girls". EI joined other international labour federations at the commission's 51st annual gathering to advocate for labour's role on behalf of women. Its web site points out that "50 million women from 160 countries belong to trade unions, making the union movement the single largest voice of working women". Unions with their global reach are well situated to pressure governments to make good on the Millennium Development Goals, especially as applied to schools, health care and safety for women and girls. The session ended on International Women's Day, March 8.

**COSTA RICA:** Some 50,000 Costa Ricans demonstrated in San Jose on February 26 to press the nation's Legislative Assembly to block President Oscar Arias' demand for approval of a US-Costa Rica so-called free trade treaty by April 30. Ottón Solís, losing presidential candidate in the last elections, proclaimed a "fiesta of democracy" as marching unionists, students, environmentalists, and indigenous groups declared that "Costa Rica is Not for Sale". Polls show most Costa Ricans oppose the treaty as promoting the transfer of wealth to multinational corporations. Of five Central American nations signing the bilateral treaties pushed by Washington, only Costa Rica has yet to secure congressional ratification. Critics see the state electric company and national bank as candidates for privatisation.

**MALI:** Five hundred people from 98 countries gathered in Sélingué on February 23-27, for a "forum in the countryside" to build the movement for food sovereignty. Represented were women's organisations, indigenous groups, environmentalists, small farmers, consumers, and people who fish and raise cattle. On the agenda, according to rebelion.org were: global politics, local food production, sustainability, genetic diversity, genetically modified foods, and privatisation of land, water and seeds. President Hugo Chavez of Venezuela sent a message associating La Via Campesino, a forum organiser, with the Bolivarian Revolution. La Via Campesino coined the term "food sovereignty" in 1996 when Venezuelans were intensifying their "struggle against powerful forces of capitalism, imperialism, and neo-liberalism" devastating to field and farm.

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



email: guardian@cpa.org.au

## Open letter to DFAT

Dear Mr Wojciechowski,  
Thank you for your letter dated 22 January 2007, on behalf of Mr Downer. This letter is in reply to our letter dated 27 December 2006 concerning the military operation near the town of Mulia in the Puncak Jaya region of West Papua. In your letter we note that you have reported that "It has been difficult to confirm these reports to date, due to poor communications in the remote Puncak Jaya District".

We have attached a detailed report on the situation compiled by the Rev Socratez Sofyan Yoman who is President of the Fellowship of Baptist Churches in West Papua. We would like you to bring Rev Socratez and AWPAs' concerns about the human rights situation in West Papua to the attention of Mr Downer.

To quote from Rev Socratez report: "Local indigenous West Papuans live continuously under heavy terror and intimidation because the Indonesian military has isolated them [from food gardens or

other help] and because of the military's harsh control/sweeping.

"The people who live in the towns are indigenous Papuans who work as government officials and migrants (these people do not experience terror and intimidation). Indonesia is trying to commit massive killings of the indigenous West Papuans by allowing them to live in fear and hunger.

"Every corner of Mulia town and the entry points from Guragi (from the East), Yamo (North), Mepagaluk (West), and Yambi (South) are heavily guarded by military and mobile brigade personnel. Every passing indigenous Papuan was searched thoroughly and their belongings were seized. For example, the military and the police took and kept the Papuans' kerosene, which is important for woodcutting."

Rev Socratez also points out that the military operation was a response to the incident which took place on the 8th December 2006, in which two Indonesian military personnel were shot dead by members of a false OPM group (Free Papua Movement). It is well known that the TNI use militia groups and have created a "fake" OPM to instigate incidents so the military can use such incidents to crack down on so-called separatists groups.

We urge the Australian Government to respond to Rev Socratez's call for support by urging the Indonesian Government to:

- dialogue with the West Papuan

leadership to try and solve the many issues of concern in West Papua;

- to allow human rights observers into West Papua to investigate the human rights situation in the territory.

We also urge the Australian Government to call on the Indonesian Government to release all political prisoners as a sign of good faith to the West Papuan people and urge the Australian Government to send a fact finding mission to West Papua to investigate the human rights situation in the territory.

We would also like to congratulate the Australian Government for the \$7.2 million in development assistance it is intending to give to directly to West Papua for programs on health, HIV/AIDS prevention and local government capacity building. The West Papuan people face great challenges and as one of their nearest neighbours we have a moral duty to help.

Joe Collins  
Australian West Papua  
Association (Sydney)

## Iran and the nuclear issue

Various western powers, the USA, France, Britain, Germany, as well as China and Russia are targeting Iran over its nuclear program. Although there have been some disagreements between them, mainly the reluctance of China and Russia to slap harsh sanctions on Iran, these

countries have followed the USA in accusing and campaigning together against Iran. While Iran says that it is pursuing a domestic nuclear power program, these nations accuse it of pursuing nuclear and ballistic missile programs. The USA along with several key allies are demanding that Iran freeze uranium enrichment, a process used to produce fuel for nuclear reactors, but which if extended, can provide the raw material for bombs.

In August last year the USA and its supporters, in a joint initiative, put forward a resolution at the UN against Iran. The UN passed the resolution setting a deadline for Iran to abandon its uranium enrichment program and its alleged nuclear weapons plans and promised punitive measures if Iran defied the UN. Iran ignored the ultimatum and the UN suspended some technical aid and imposed sanctions on Iran.

Conspicuously, almost all the countries pushing to punish Iran for pursuing its nuclear program are powers that themselves possess thousands of nuclear weapons. These states, despite decommissioning thousands of nuclear weapons, still have between them about 28,000 active nuclear weapons. It is estimated that the USA still has 10,000, Russia 16,000, Britain 200, France 350 and China 130 warheads. Also many of these so-called decommissioned weapons have simply been stored away or partially dismantled and not destroyed.

While I am resolutely opposed

to nuclear weapons and against the use of nuclear power because of the problems of safety and the storage of waste, I am astonished at the audacity of the USA and these other countries and their utter hypocrisy on this issue.

This is even more glaring, when looks at the country in the Middle East that really does have nuclear weapons. Israel has between 100-200 nuclear weapons in its possession, but does not admit it and does not allow any inspection of its nuclear installations. Yet nothing is said or done to bring this close US ally to account and there are certainly no UN resolutions against Israel on this issue.

Does anyone need to wonder why this is the case. It seems to me that the situation with Iran is an excuse for the USA to isolate and attack Iran and continue to entrench its control over the region. If the USA feels it is in the national interest it will resort to conventional military action, or even a nuclear strike to destroy opposition. And Israel is always ready to help to serve the USA and therefore its own interests. Remember that the USA is the only country in history to have used nuclear weapons and has several other times come close to using them again. I for one definitely do not trust nuclear weapons in the hands of the leadership of the USA and Israel more than any other nuclear-armed country.

Steven Katsineris  
Victoria

# Culture & Life

by  
Rob Gowland

## The day of reckoning

In his short story *An Encounter*, Alan Marshall's narrator tells of a visit to a barber's shop. The question of Communism comes up and the barber admits to being ignorant on the subject.

"I'm not for or against it. But I'd like to learn", he says. However, he'd had an unfortunate experience with regard to the topic.

"Two chaps came in here once, and they said ... 'Do you believe in Communism?' and I said, 'I know nothing about it', and they both went off the deep end.

"I wouldn't shave them. ... They said I'd get mine when the revolution came. Well, that puts a bloke off."

Set in the 1930s or early '40s (it was first published in book form in Marshall's 1946 collection *Tell Us About the Turkey, Jo*), the story is today historically interesting, for it demonstrates an attitude that was prevalent at the time within both the Left and the Right: that the Revolution was imminent.

I touched last week on the way the more reactionary elements of big business (and their governments) aided and abetted the rise and development of fascism as a bulwark against that same Red Revolution.

They even contrived to continue providing support to fascism even while they were officially at war with the fascist Axis powers (Germany, Italy and Japan). After the War, not surprisingly, they rehabilitated the capitalists and the corporations that had backed the Nazis and their ilk.

During the same period, the belief persisted among some sectors of the Left that capitalism would up and expire very, very soon. Its continued and unexpected resilience was a baffling blow to some Comrades.

There was one long-time Comrade in Sydney, Bruce Bull, a good Comrade and a good friend, who in the 1970s was still convinced that capitalism was about to fall in a heap at any moment. He watched eagerly for the signs of this much longed for collapse.

If Wall Street suffered major losses one day, I knew that Bruce would be on the phone later that day or certainly the next day to exuberantly welcome the slump as the harbinger of all-out collapse. He became very despondent when I did not share his vision.

But Wall Street is only one aspect of capitalism, it is not the whole capitalist system. In the second half of the 20th century, cap-

italism spread its tentacles into every corner of the world.

Even while bigger and bigger corporations went belly up, and productive capacity continued to diminish or be under-utilised, the rate of exploitation kept going up, profits kept climbing and more and more of the world's resources were appropriated by the big corporations.

This particularly impacted the Third World, whose people were impoverished in the interests of shoring up global capital.

Briefly, capitalism has been able to stave off the day of reckoning so far by soaking up the wealth of former colonial countries, by forcing developed countries to open their markets to products from low wage countries and by forcing workers who want jobs to become migrants, resigned to travelling to other countries in search of work.

There is another old comrade who rings me regu-

larly for a chat. He rails against the skullduggery of both Liberal and Labor politicians, and certainly there's plenty to get upset about there.

But more recently he also expresses his despondency about the revolutionary movement in the world. He was born into a Communist family and joined the Party as soon as he was old enough.

Now, however, he has difficulty maintaining his optimism about the future. This despondency is not just the result of the continued ability of capitalism to renew itself at the expense of the bulk of the world's people.

It is also a matter of perception. It should never be forgotten that capitalism controls the bulk of the mass me-

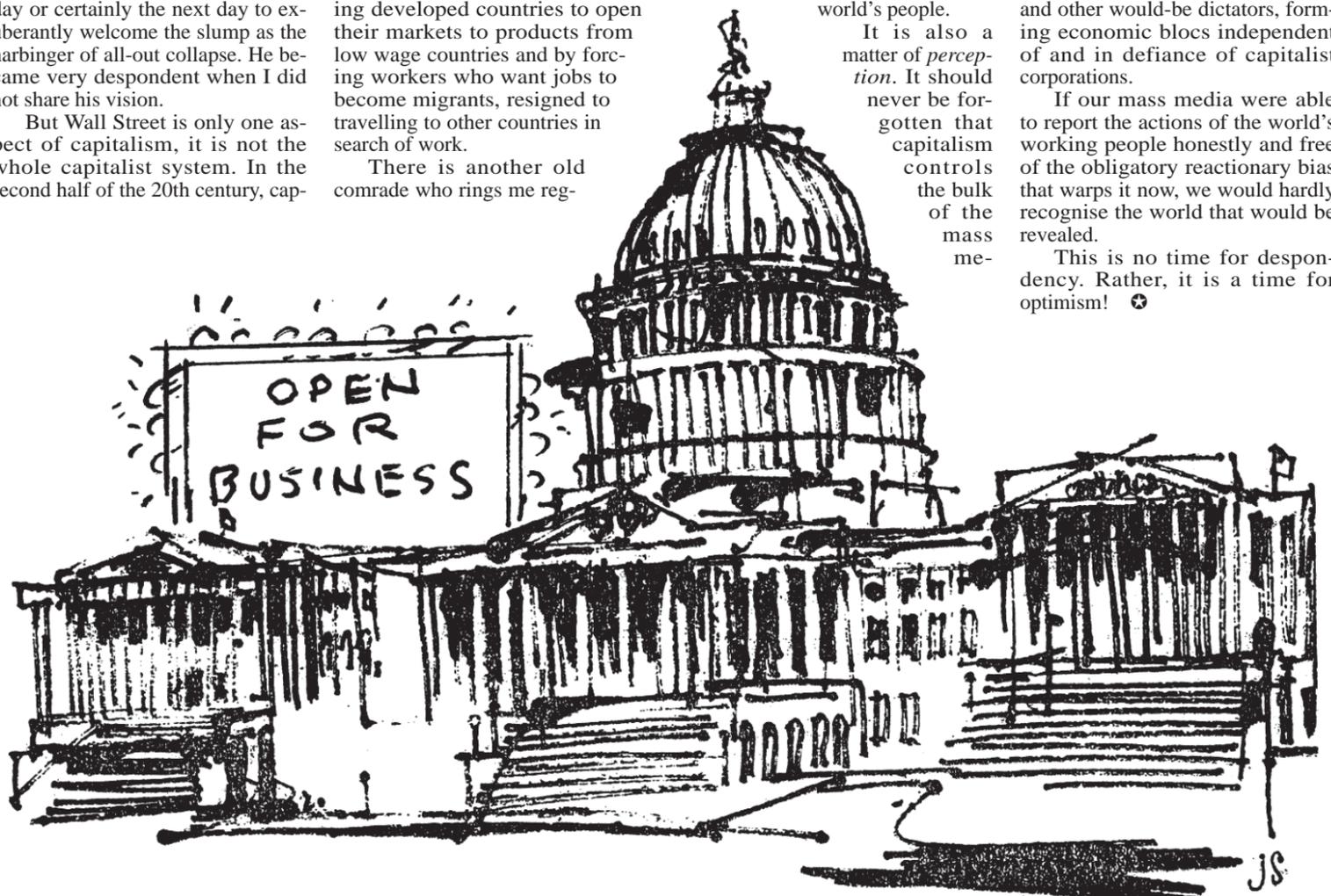
dia, and is thereby able to mould people's perception of the state of the world, their perception of the nature of the global economy and, perhaps crucially, their perception of what's possible.

Our perception, here in Australia, of the state of the world revolutionary movement, of the progress of the people's struggles on a global scale, is, I suggest, vastly different to that of people in South Asia or South America, say.

Huge, successful workers' movements are winning elections, repelling the attempts of US imperialism to bully them into submission, overthrowing "Royal" autocrats and other would-be dictators, forming economic blocs independent of and in defiance of capitalist corporations.

If our mass media were able to report the actions of the world's working people honestly and free of the obligatory reactionary bias that warps it now, we would hardly recognise the world that would be revealed.

This is no time for despondency. Rather, it is a time for optimism! ✪





Sun March 18 –  
Sun March 24

**The Bridge (ABC 7.30 pm Sunday)** is the first of three docu-dramas from Film Australia in the series *Constructing Australia*. It is a very impressive mixture of documentary footage, interviews and re-enactments, that skilfully avoids the bane of docum drama – the invented, fictional dialogue scene.

All the dialogue, or in some scenes, monologue, is drawn from letters, published memoirs or diary entries.

The film is the story of the planning, designing and above all the building of the Sydney Harbour Bridge, an engineering achievement of the first magnitude. As one commentator says in the film, “it was the moon landing of its day”.

The Great Depression looms large in the story of course, as does populist NSW Premier Jack Lang. So does the fascist New Guard, whose danger to the country is downplayed by only Gerard Henderson of right-wing think tank, the Sydney Institute.

News reel companies made a point of not filming scenes of the Depression, so once again the excellent 1950s re-enactments by the wharfies for their own film *The Hungry Miles* stand in for the real thing.

I thought the program was very good, and look forward to the others in the series.

The Sun releases more energy every second than humans will use in the next million years. *The Sun*, screening in the *Science* timeslot (SBS 8.30 pm Sunday), explores the past, present and future of the Sun’s importance to our world.

Investigating the link between sun spots and climate change, *The Sun* also notes that, for a period of 70 years, from 1645 to 1715, astronomers observed very little solar activity. During this period – known as the Little Ice Age – rivers and lakes throughout Europe froze.

In examining the information on global warming, *The Sun* asks experts whether the strengthening of the Sun’s magnetic field could explain global warming and whether humans can protect themselves from the effects. Could the Sun’s power be successfully harnessed to meet the world’s spiralling energy needs?

The commercialisation of various sporting codes in order to boost the revenues of TV corporations is one of the less tangible but nevertheless dire effects of capitalism’s ruthless quest for profits in all areas.

*Pride of the League*, screening on *Message Stick* (ABC 6.00 pm Monday), takes rather a coy approach to its account of the history of Redfern-based Rugby League club Souths. While Rabbitohs’ supporters are seen carrying placards accusing Rupert Murdoch of trying to kill off the club for his own commercial gain, the program itself steers well away from such controversy, preferring to talk about Souths “falling behind as the game moved towards full professionalism”.

Nevertheless, through interviews with such greats as the phenomenal goal kicker Eric Sims,



“An engineering achievement of the first magnitude”. *The Bridge* (ABC 7.30pm Sunday) during construction in 1931. Architect John Bradfield in centre.

the program does show how over the years Souths has had a proud record of fostering Indigenous talent.

That the club has now become a commodity, owned not by its members or the community but by actor Russell Crowe and “prominent businessman”, Peter Holmes a Court, is a matter the program sidesteps.

I have not been able to see *Forbidden Future*, screening in the *Cutting Edge* timeslot (SBS 8.30 pm Tuesday). It is described by SBS as a “shocking and revealing documentary on the subcultures in the Islamic Republic of Iran; young Iranian artists expressing themselves through music, paintings and sport – thereby risking anything from public floggings to death.”

The problem is, one cannot tell

how accurate it is: how widespread are the attitudes it shows? With the US poised to invade the country, programs such as this could be genuine or they could be part of US “black propaganda” to convince people abroad that Iran is such a dreadful place that enforced “regime change” is a good thing.

Watch it with care and draw your own conclusions.

*Dance On Screen* is actually a collection of short dance films shown over two successive weeks (ABC 10.00 pm Tuesdays). *The Shape of Water*, the first in this week’s offering, is little more than an exercise in having dancers simulate waves crashing on the shore. It’s clever but doesn’t get you very far.

For me there was a strong sense of *déjà vu*: it reminded me strongly of the “experimental” films of dancer turned filmmaker Maya Deren – in the 1940s!

The other film, *Break*, from New Zealand, has apparently won a swag of international awards including Best Film in the New York Dance On Camera Festival and the People’s Choice Award in Australia’s ReelDance Festival. All I can say is that the audience must have been sufficiently young not to have seen it all before.

Still, if dance is your thing, and you haven’t seen it before, enjoy!

Three people with obsessive-compulsive disorders (OCDs) agree to live together in a London house for nine days. No, it is not another phony “reality TV” show; it is an exercise in accelerated therapy that will hopefully cure them of their condition.

In other words, it is *real* “reality TV”. It is *The House of Obsessive Compulsives* (ABC 9.30 pm Thursdays), from Britain’s Channel 4, and – on the basis of the first episode at least – it is excellent.

These are disturbed people: Wendy hasn’t shared a bed with her husband or touched her twin children for five years; Sophie spends three hours a day washing her hands. Gerard is terrified of any human contact for fear he might incriminate himself – he can’t leave phone messages, refuses to write anything down and walks around in public with a mouthful of water to stop himself from confessing to something.

The first episode shows how debilitating the condition is and also demonstrates the power of the collective. It is sad, informative, and yet full of optimism. I will certainly be watching the second episode. ★

## Rockin’ For Rights! Protest March

Hyde Park to SCG Sunday 22 April  
Assemble Hyde Park Nth 11.00am  
March to the Sydney Cricket Ground

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Kids need a wrist band – free for them  
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www.rockinforrights.com

Free kids Activity Area  
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Perth

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- Close Guantanamo Bay
- Justice for David Hicks

MC - Peter Dowding  
Speakers include Carmen Lawrence and Peter Tinley

For more info ph: 08 9218 9608 or 0409 762 081

## Workers’ Radio

Nine 10-minute programs on the militarisation of Australia – including material on US Pine Gap Base and the upcoming Talisman Sabre joint exercises – will be broadcast on Workers Radio. They will be broadcast twice a week in two different time slots. Workers’ Radio broadcasts in Sydney on 88.9FM (radio skid row), Mondays to Fridays from 6 to 9 am.

The scripts will go up on the Anti-Bases Campaign website in the same week (www.anti-bases.org). If you have any questions please contact workersradiosydney@hotmail.com

## Militarisation

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# Sydney POLITICS in the pub

16 March

## THE US DEMOCRAT VICTORY – IMPLICATIONS FOR AUSTRALIAN POLITICS

Anne Summers, Journalist/author with a long standing interest in US politics  
Bob Howard, Research Associate, Dept Govt & Intern’l Relations Uni Sydney  
Betsi Beem, Department Government, Sydney Uni

23 March

## THE ISRAELI LOBBY AND WESTERN MEDIA

Antony Lowenstein, Sydney based journalist, author of My Israel Question  
Peter Manning, Snr Lecturer in Journalism UTS and author of  
*Us & Them – An Investigation of the Middle East*

30 March

## ECONOMIC MANAGEMENT OR DEBUNKING HOWARD’S MYTHS – INTEREST RATES, BUDGET SURPLUS, PRIVATISATION

Damien Cahill, Political Economy, Sydney Uni  
Dr Ben Spies Butcher, Edmund Rice Centre

6 April

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# Somare bites back

Maryann Keady \*

**Papua New Guinea's Prime Minister, Sir Michael Somare has now disbanded the Defence Force Board of Inquiry looking into the escape of Australian fugitive Julian Moti from PNG last year.**

The Board had earlier found that the PNG Prime Minister must have known about the clandestine military flight that helped Moti avoid extradition to Australia. But under charges by Somare that it was biased and a political witch hunt, PNG's Defence Minister Martin Aini was forced to scuttle its work. And in a further dramatic move, the Defence Minister has now been sacked.

In an interview with me last week, Somare stated that he believed there was a political motive behind the charges that he helped Moti escape PNG, despite the latter being arrested by Australian Federal Police on child sex charges.

## Allegations

"These are allegations. You have to understand there are people in this country ... including some Australians too, who don't want to see me be the Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea because it is going to be difficult for them to get anything they want. And all I want to say is that I never helped Moti in this particular case. I did my best, I had the advice, and I allowed the process of court to take its course, and that is where it stops. I don't give directions. I only give directions to the Chief Secretary. He is the Chief Advisor to government. He then directs his public servants, and that is where the buck stops. ... there are people around who are pushing that particular issue because there are elections coming up - I am not that stupid", said Somare.

took out ads in local papers, calling on Solomon Islanders to stand by RAMSI and reject attempts to re-arm the police. Sogavare accused Canberra of dirty tactics, and circumventing correct diplomatic procedure in writing to the local papers.

## Strong arm

Is this the way Pacific relations are to be played out? Has Australia decided to strong arm Pacific Island nations, and to hell with the consequences? Or could it be, as some suggest, that Moti was going to point the finger of blame at Australian police for the riots in Honiara?

Speaking from the coastal town of Wewak in PNG last week, Prime Minister Somare did little to dispel the accusation that Australia has taken on a colonial attitude to our Pacific neighbours. Speaking passionately about the need for Pacific countries to be run by their own people, Somare launched a scathing attack on Canberra:

"We are running a country, we are a government, we are an institution that is established, and we have run those institutions from the beginning ... and now 32 years after independence, we're running things the way we believe it can be run, and it is our society. We know the problems associated with our people, and we believe if we have an Australian there as an advisor, we will accept him there as an advisor ... But to come in and tell us we are weak and we cannot perform ... you are not giving us a challenge to try and see the education that you have instilled in the minds of the Papua New Guineans. You are not allowing us to make that work. And suddenly you are coming up and telling us that you know bet-

highly paid consultants, they put them in big compounds with high salaries and after six minutes past four everyone goes out of their office and doesn't stay and collect all the routine matters that need to be tidied up ... But I think that 'Australian aid song' that Australian voters are being told is not correct. You can work out that almost half of the money, almost two thirds of the money goes back to Australian pockets ..."

## PNG independence

As the first leader of PNG after independence, Somare has a long political memory. He is vocal about Australia's treatment of his people after World War II, during the fight for independence, and today. "If I go back to my experience on how we were treated, people talk about South Africa. But young people of Papua New Guinea really don't know - when we had former

Michael Somare meets with Chinese President Hu Jintao at the Asia/Africa Summit in Jakarta in 2005



as diplomatic talk that camouflages not just "strategic" but defence rationale. As Hugh White, one time Deputy Secretary for Strategy and Intelligence in Australia's Defence Department, and former head of ASPI, said of Australia's Pacific policy in 2004:

"I think this is more than a passing fad. It has deep roots in Australia's basic strategic instincts - going back to Alfred Deakin and other early Australian strategists - about the importance of these islands to Australia's security. And it reflects important long term changes in Australian perceptions of our interests and responsibilities in the region. The Australian Government's rhetoric about failed States and 'the arc of instability' comes from a security agenda that requires these nations to be depicted as constantly on the brink of chaos."

John Howard has referred to "an inherently unstable situation" in PNG - but the cry in the region is: Who is creating the instability, and who benefits? There has been a coup in Fiji, unrest, "outside influences" and "shadowy forces" in East Timor, riots in the Solomons and in Tonga.

And this is not just a Liberal Party pre-occupation. Robert McLelland, Shadow Defence Minister indicated in 2006 that Labor under Kevin Rudd would maintain the current direction of "hands on" administration of the Pacific.

Recent comments from the leaders of both PNG and the Solomon Islands indicate, however, that they are not happy about the intrusive nature of the Australian "Pacific Policy".

## China, economic player

Somare talks of "the West, may be fearing China" in reference to the new economic player in the region. PNG has inked a \$1 billion dollar agreement with Chinese company Metallurgical Group Corp (MCC) for the Ramu nickel project - the largest such project with the Chinese in the region. Despite disquiet over labour conditions at the mine, as well as allegations that his former

Ambassador to China facilitated illegal entry of Chinese citizens into the country, Somare says they are small problems of "public relations" and unsubstantiated allegations:

"China has been a good partner to us. Since we established our diplomatic relations they have not been very forceful. They do not tell us 'because we have a big investment in PNG, you should follow our laws and regulations'. No. We have a better understanding. There is proper dialogue, and in a South East Asian context it's understanding each other that counts most", said Somare.

As to concerns that cosy bilateral relations with a country the USA calls their "peer competitor" might lead to further unwanted scrutiny from Canberra, Somare maintains it is simply about business.

## Stay neutral

"We want to stay a neutral country. We do not want the ideologies of West and East, even though it has died out. And China becoming powerful, very powerful economically, they will create it into an economic ideology. And we don't want to fight the war. We are friends and I said before 'We want to be friends - and enemy to none' ... I think that all the countries of the world ... fear China, but I personally don't see any reason why we should. If we control ourselves, and maintain and sustain ourselves well, I don't see a reason why we should be fearful of Chinese control", he said.

Whether or not Somare is returned in the PNG elections, the current machinations in the Pacific will continue.

Attempts by Australia to discredit those that challenge Canberra's heavy-handed tactics will only further tarnish our image in the region. Sir Michael Somare fought for PNG's independence 32 years ago. At 70, he should not have to remind Canberra to respect his country's sovereignty - and his people. The Australian Government must be careful to respect the sovereignty of our nearest neighbours or risk the charge of "colonial interference" being levelled at every Australian action in the region.

\*Maryann Keady is a freelance journalist ✪

## The Australian Government's rhetoric about failed States and 'the arc of instability' comes from a security agenda that requires these nations to be depicted as constantly on the brink of chaos."

Somare is running for re-election in national elections, expected to take place in June. In the last few days, Moti himself has claimed that he will sue the Howard Government over the child sex allegations, which were thrown out of a Vanuatu court in 1999.

The affair reveals much about relations between Australia and our northern neighbours. Take the Solomon Islands, for example. The Prime Minister, Manasseh Sogavare recently claimed that Canberra was operating a "parallel government" in his country - hitting back after Australia's Foreign Minister Alexander Downer said Sogavare was trying to destroy the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI), and after Downer

ter, that you can do better than us ... Work side by side. And help Papua New Guineans to progress ... Allow the independent sovereign people decide for themselves what they need for their country" commented Mr Somare.

As to Downer's claims that, as PNG's biggest contributor of aid, Australia had a right to a say in PNG's affairs, Somare raised serious questions about the intent and effectiveness of Australian aid:

"That 800 million [dollars in Australian aid], if you work it out, if you look at the consultancies you pay the Australians, if you break that down ... 300 million is actually the grant in aid. The rest is Australian-paid, Australian-controlled programs. They pay their

Australian expatriates who settled in our plantations, the race relationship was worse ... But in PNG, we will sit over these things ... The racism that was practised in this country, Papua New Guineans never talk about it. We want to leave these bad things - these bad deeds of others - behind, and progress on."

Historically, PNG has always had a role in Australia's defence, and the depiction of the Pacific Island countries as "failed states" for the last few years must be read in this context. While the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) and other so-called "independent" think tanks continue to depict Pacific Island nations as on the verge of collapse and overrun by criminals, this can also be read



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