

# Solidarity



Issue No. 4 June 2008  
\$3/\$5



## NT Intervention Yuendumu says NO

**Aboriginal community resists the intervention page 5**

**Image: Harry Nelson, president Yuendumu community council**

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NSW privatisation  
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# Solidarity: who are we?

Solidarity is a socialist organisation with branches across the country. We are committed to helping build social movements and the wider left in Australia, through throwing ourselves into struggles for social justice, to overturn the legacy of the Howard government and to strengthen the confidence of rank and file unionists.

Solidarity is a member of the International Socialist Tendency. For more information about our events and activities, you can contact us via the details below:

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Wednesday 11 June

Why is Rudd continuing Howard's Northern Territory intervention?

Speakers: Shiralee Hood, Indigenous activist and comedian; Michaela Stubbs, Alliance for Indigenous Self-determination and Friends of the Earth; David Glanz, Solidarity

Wednesday 18 June and 25 June

Branch meeting

Wednesday 2 July

The history of gay and lesbian liberation in Australia

Speaker: Amy Thomas, Solidarity

Melbourne Solidarity meets 6pm every Wednesday at the New International Bookshop, Trades Hall, corner of Victoria Parade and Lygon Street, Carlton. All welcome.

For more information contact David on 0418 316 310 or melbourne@solidarity.net.au

## Brisbane

Brisbane Solidarity meets 7pm every Tuesday.

For more information contact Rob on

0424 265 730 or brisbane@solidarity.net.au

## Sydney

Wednesday 11 June

Hezbollah and the struggle in Lebanon

Wednesday 25 June

A real chance for change?

Eyewitness report from Obama's campaign

Sydney Solidarity meets 7pm every Wednesday at the Newtown Neighbourhood Centre, opposite the Newtown Train Station on King Street. All welcome.

For more information contact Jean on 0410 772 110 or sydney@solidarity.net.au

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**A lesser known moment from 1968:**  
"Be concerned about your brother. You may not be on strike. But either we go up together, or we go down together."  
—Martin Luther King Jnr, speaking to striking sanitation workers in Memphis, 1968. The strike was a key moment in the civil rights movement.

## Vist our new website [www.solidarity.net.au](http://www.solidarity.net.au)

With magazine archive, special online updates, links to campaign and theoretical sites and a guide to left events around the country

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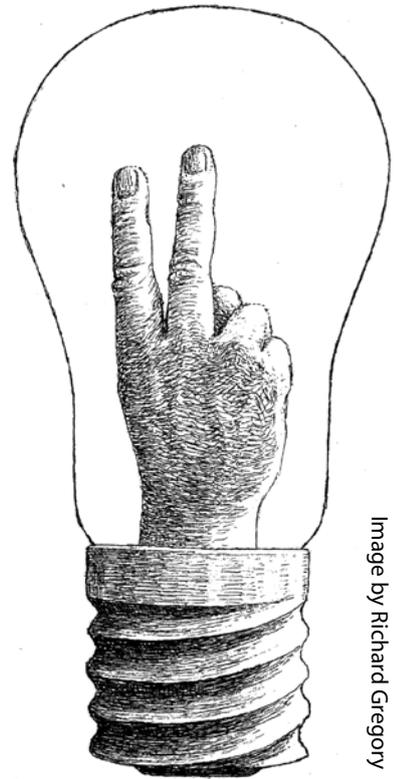


Image by Richard Gregory

THE  
IEMMA  
ELEMENT



Australian combat troops on their way home from Iraq—but almost 1000 military personnel remain

# Rudd under the pump?

IS RUDD'S honeymoon coming to an end? Recent weeks have seen him blunder over fuel prices, his Howardesque moralism over Bill Henson and brewing battles with unions over pay disputes and the rollback of Workchoices.

For the first time since its election, the Rudd government is looking on the back foot. Elected on the back of promises to combat the rising cost of living, Rudd has done little to deal with rising fuel prices. In early June they hit a new high of 164.9 cents a litre in Sydney, even as the price of oil dropped.

Leaked cabinet documents showed that the government is pushing ahead with a national FuelWatch scheme, despite opposition from four public service departments and Resources and Energy Minister Martin Ferguson. This came after Brendan Nelson's call for a five cent per litre cut in petrol excise—no more than a populist stunt. But in his rejection of the scheme, Rudd underestimated just how much high fuel prices are hurting the "working families" he claims to represent.

Rudd claims that his government is hamstrung because oil prices are rising around the globe, and says OPEC must increase production.

Instead of talking about providing motorists with information on fuel prices through FuelWatch, Rudd should be intervening to cap prices and stop petrol stations profiteering by increasing costs at the pump. The debate over Nelson's pathetic proposal to cut excise by a few cents indicated that both he and Rudd are committed to economic rationalism, and are not prepared to substantially reduce taxes that hit consumption like the GST and fuel excises. On the other hand, they talk about the need to reduce corporate tax even further.

As Rudd bungled his response to rising fuel prices, some sections of the environment movement, including the Greens, championed rising fuel prices. They reason that in the face of government inaction on climate change, rising fuel prices will force a key change needed to combat climate change—shifting people out of



Rudd promised to "ease the squeeze" on households, but has taken no serious action on petrol prices

cars and onto public transport.

But lack of investment in public transport infrastructure means people are reliant on cars. And as we have seen time and again, state governments have not been prepared to substantially boost funding to public transport to improve access. A higher fuel bill for individuals will not force them onto public transport if there are no services. All it will do is increase profits at the big end of town.

If Rudd does not take serious action to combat cost of living increases, the unions' battle for above-inflation pay rises takes on added importance (see pages 6-7). All of the public sector disputes of the recent period—teachers around the country, nurses and firefighters in NSW, have seen government ministers arguing for below inflation pay rises—in effect pay cuts.

The willingness of the public sector unions to challenge these pay limits is encouraging. In NSW the state government has been under huge pressure over the privatisation of electricity. A united campaign led by public sector unions against privatisation and the state government's pay cap could deal a

serious blow to Iemma's economic rationalist agenda. Unfortunately, Unions NSW has been reluctant to escalate the union demonstrations against privatisation. There needs to be as much pressure applied as possible, particularly from public sector union members, for the campaign to continue and for an escalation of protests backed with strike action.

Finally, the scandal over Bill Henson's artwork (see page 32) has worried those who thought that a Rudd government might undo some of Howard's bigotry and fear mongering. Rudd's hard line, despite the legal case against Henson collapsing, reflects his investment in using reactionary values as a tool to reinforce his conservative economic agenda.

These thoughts have begun to sharpen suspicions about whether Rudd really plans to undo Howard's legacy. The history of Labor governments in power (see page 24) reveals much about the nature of the party and the way in which we can begin to build a political challenge to Rudd's conservatism. The task now is to turn these moments of doubt into confident action.

Rudd should be intervening to cap prices and stop petrol stations profiteering by increasing costs at the pump

# Yuendumu opposes intervention measures

By Paddy Gibson

THE WALPIRI people of Yuendumu, 300 kms north west of Alice Springs, have been at the forefront of the fightback against the NT intervention.

Following Howard's announcement last June, the community council took a strong position against the laws and a strategy of non-compliance has held off repeated attempts to enforce regressive changes.

Harry Jakamarra Nelson, president of the community council, was one of many Yuendumu residents who traveled to Canberra to join a mass demonstration against the intervention on February 12, the opening of parliament this year.

Mr Nelson also attended the recent conference against the intervention held in Sydney. He argues that the paternalism of the intervention has been "a nightmare... it's trying to take us back forty years" and insists, "our people will never bow down".

The intervention's government business manager (GBM) is stationed at Yuendumu behind a barbed wire fence. The GBM has extraordinary powers, including the ability to remove people from their own community and seize control of locally owned assets and services.

He refuses to talk to local people, liaising only with white "bosses", and has not even introduced himself to many respected traditional owners and community members.

From their first appearance in the town, intervention officials have been met with angry community meetings.

Jeanie Egan, from the Yuendumu community council has said, "They come here to tell us what to do. They are not interested when we talk about our rights."

Yuendumu is proud of successful independent organisations that provide services and employment opportunities in the community built up over many years by the local community. Yuendumu women were the founders of the Night Patrol Service, which has been copied in many communities across the NT.



The Yuendumu business manager's residence is fenced with barbed wire

But rather than supporting local initiative, intervention officials have applied enormous pressure on community-run organisations, trying to seize assets and administrative control.

The Old People's Program, for example, has consistently been forced to assert its autonomy.

The biggest confrontation however, has come over the welfare quarantine system. This system has proved a disaster across the NT, segregating service delivery in Centrelink and shops and severely restricting the ability of Aboriginal people to control their own lives.

## Community store defies quarantine

Since late last year, intervention officials have been trying to set a firm date for the introduction of the quarantine. But non-cooperation by the people at Yuendumu has frustrated this. In open defiance of officials, the local Social Club store and the mining shop refused to apply for a license that would allow the new system to operate.

This left intervention officials with a choice. They could have brought in the quarantine without a local shop in the system, forcing people to travel into Alice Springs for shopping.

Similar measures have been ap-

plied in other communities, forcing literally thousands of people into urban centres.

But Yuendumu is the largest remote community in central Australia and the backlash would have been too strong. Instead, they pushed on with attempts to enforce the policy against overwhelming opposition in the community.

From April this year, the Social Club store, which has been community owned and run for decades, began to be threatened with take over. Payments on government purchase orders were withheld. Still, the committee running the store refused to shift its position and began to prepare a legal and political defence campaign.

In late May, the government began pushing a plan to establish another store in Yuendumu to run the quarantine.

This would have forced residents to shop away from the Social Club store, a serious threat to its viability.

Many residents who travel between Yuendumu and other prescribed communities were already suffering because there was nowhere for them to spend quarantined money in the township.

On June 5, the Social Club committee released a statement explaining they would participate in income management, while stressing their ongoing opposition to the intervention.

Despite this recent set back, the resistance shown by the Walpiri at Yuendumu has demonstrated to many in prescribed communities across the NT that the intervention can be fought.

Mr Nelson, who attends Central Land Council meetings, has said "people are starting to realise it's not doing any good. They don't need to accept that".

A big delegation from Yuendumu is set to travel into Alice Springs on June 21 as part of the National Day of Action against one year of intervention.

The hard battle for basic rights being fought at community level needs the backing of a strong movement across the country. We must stop the ruthless implementation of these racist laws on Aboriginal people.

From their first appearance in the town, intervention officials have been met with angry community meetings

# NSW teachers take on Iemma

By John Morris  
Secretary Canterbury-Bankstown  
branch, NSW Teachers Federation

NSW TEACHERS will continue rolling industrial action unless the New South Wales government sits down and negotiates on proposed changes to the school staffing and transfer system.

In late May over 2000 teachers rallied in front of the Education Department's headquarters in Sydney's CBD as part of a state-wide 24-hour strike over the decision to allow principals to hire staff directly. The stop-work action involved over 40,000 teachers across NSW. Teachers are also seeking a 5 per cent per annum pay rise. The government has made a below-inflation 2.5 per cent offer.

The government's changes undermine an incentive scheme, under which teachers are encouraged to work in regional areas in exchange for a placement on the top of the transfers list for a more desirable posting later in their careers.

The government says the formula used to allocate the number of teachers to schools will not change and the transfer system will never be dismantled.

The reality is that sought-after schools have few positions available and these will now be subject to interview at the discretion of principals and area directors while difficult-to-staff schools with high staff turnover will find teachers less willing to take up placements.

The instability of the new system is already being felt, with schools such as rural Kyogle High taking stop work action as the Department refused to allow a teacher's representative on the selection panel for a new Principal. Such "reforms" will eventually erode job security and the NSW Teachers Federation's ability to force the government to deliver on improvements such as reduced class sizes.

Federation president Maree O'Halloran told the rally Education Minister John Della Bosca should not have imposed the changes.



Over 2000 teachers rallied outside the Education Department's headquarters

.....  
**Unions NSW should call joint union action to push the state government away from its market driven policies**

"(He is) a minister who tells us to suck it and see," she said. "Well, not with our students, not with our community and not with our professional lives."

A large section of the crowd were TAFE teachers who were angry that permanent jobs will be offered to teachers without university qualifications.

#### **Economic rationalist logic**

Della Bosca exposed the market-driven rationale of the staffing changes with his media statement:

"In the end, making the right savings to get the right dollars into incentives is one of the issues that we need to work on," he said.

The NSW Government is also now facing rising discontent from other public sector workers such as nurses, who are calling on the Government to improve on its offers of

2.5 per cent per annum.

The Iemma government's state budget, handed down in early June, anticipates a healthy surplus for the coming year based on holding down the wages of public sector workers below inflation.

The NSW Teachers Federation State Council will vote on June 14 on whether to hold another state-wide strike early next term to build on rolling stoppages also commencing in June.

Unions NSW should call joint union action, to build on the militancy displayed by teachers, electricity workers and firefighters, to push the state government away from its market-driven policies of electricity privatisation, school staffing and below-inflation pay rises.

See page nine for more information on the campaign against electricity privatisation

# Inflation rhetoric is scare tactic

By James Supple

CONTINUOUSLY SINCE its election, the Rudd government has tried to convince us of the urgent necessity of reducing inflation. Why is it so worried?

The inflation rate, at 4.2 per cent for the January to March quarter, may be slightly above the Reserve Bank's target range of 2 to 3 per cent, but it is not high by historical standards. In the high inflation period between 1970 and 1990 it averaged 9 per cent a year.

Although they won't admit it, the government understands this. Despite all the talk about the need for savage cuts to government spending to tackle inflation, the scale of the cuts in the recent budget were modest. Peter Hartcher of the Sydney Morning Herald argued that overall spending had actually increased slightly, by 1.1 per cent above inflation. There were still some vicious cuts—including 1224 people sacked from the public service. But it does raise a question—why are Rudd and Swan spending so much time invoking the inflation monster?

Inflation worries business because it creates unpredictability. For example, fluctuations in prices make companies' decisions about whether they will be able to repay a loan more difficult.



But it also scares them because it encourages workers to demand pay rises to keep up with the rising cost of living.

Kevin Rudd's promises during the election campaign to ease cost-of-living pressures have built up workers' expectations of change.

Labor's argument about the need to "fight inflation" is aimed

**Above: Inflation is starting to be felt in the supermarket**

at dampening down these expectations and convincing us to accept lower living standards.

This serves to justify the continued underfunding of public services like health, universities and schools. It is also deployed to argue workers should accept wage cuts.

## What's causing inflation?

But it is not rising wages that are causing inflation. There are two main reasons for recent rises. Inflation has risen globally due to higher oil and food prices. Oil prices were at \$US25 a barrel in 2003 and have recently touched \$US138. The price of rice has more than doubled in the past year.

Much of this is due to speculation. Transactions involving oil futures on the world's biggest market for oil, the New York Mercantile Exchange, have almost tripled since 2004.

Secondly the continuing economic boom in Australia means there is high demand for goods and services, which pushes up prices. Underlying this is the money flooding into the economy from booming sales of Australian mineral exports.

The big end of town is awash with money. Yet Labor's commitment to "economic conservatism" means they believe working people have to pay so that business can keep making record profits.

# Engineers battle Qantas below inflation pay offer

By Tom Orsag

IN MAY, around 1500 Qantas aircraft engineers took strike action in Sydney, Brisbane and Melbourne over a pay claim. They took this action despite rumours of 100 strike breakers being offered \$100,000 for six months work in their place.

Over 18 flights were cancelled during two days of rolling stoppages.

Members of the Australian Licensed Aircraft Engineers Association (ALAEA) are seeking a 5 per cent pay rise per year, slightly more than inflation.

Qantas is offering an insulting below-inflation rise of 3 per cent.

With an expected record \$1.5 billion profit coming in and Qantas being worth more than any one of the six U.S. carriers, the argument that it can't afford a 5 per cent pay rise is a lie. Qantas management gave themselves a 22 per cent pay rise last year. CEO Geoff Dixon's pay packet is now over \$6 million.

The company's market share increased by 2.2 per cent in the last year due to record high load factors.

Qantas has even told investors that they are "successfully managing fuel costs." That's because it has increased ticket prices by 3.3 per cent in the last two months.

Geoff Dixon is happy to allow rumours of strike breakers, while not

.....  
**Qantas has told investors that they are "successfully managing fuel costs."**

having actually used any in order to frighten the leaders of the ALAEA.

The surprise of the Qantas dispute is not that it took off but that it is being pushed by rank and file engineers.

"It is an excuse about the fuel, it's all about profit," says Transport Workers Union spokesperson Mick Pieri.

It is clear Qantas intends to get that profit increase by sacrificing the jobs and living standards of their employees.

The TWU covers other airline workers who will soon claim their own pay rise, along with air traffic controllers. If unionists strike together they will certainly clip the wings of Qantas arrogance and possibly beat the inflation cap.

# Rudd repeats Howard ban on same sex unions

by Amy Thomas

IN EARLY May, the Rudd government threatened to overturn the proposed civil unions bill for same-sex couples in the ACT, breaking a key election promise not to block the legislation and surprising many who expected progressive queer rights legislation from Labor.

The ACT Labor government has now abandoned the bill for the "Civil Partnerships Act", which allows couples to "register" their partnership but does not allow legally binding ceremonies. They're the sticking point for Rudd and McClelland: "we believe such ceremonies would mimic marriage and therefore undermine the Marriage Act."

However, it's ok to mimic John Howard's policy handbook. Rudd's repetition of Howard's mantra that marriage is "traditionally between a man and a woman" continues the promotion of homophobia by the former government. As activist Rodney Croome has commented, "traditionally, there was slavery and traditionally women didn't get the vote".

While Rudd's promised removal of 100 laws that discriminate against same-sex couples in areas like tax and workers' compensa-

tion (the result of some pressure from the LGBTIQ movement) is a step forward, the discrimination could have been easily removed by allowing queers to marry and form recognised de-facto relationships.

While marriage is not the hal- lowed institution conservatives would have us believe, the Howard government's same-sex marriage ban of 2004 and then its overriding of the ACT's first attempt to introduce civil unions in 2006 represented state-sanctioning of homophobia.



allow women the right to make reproductive choices for themselves. Anything less leaves the state as a "watchdog" over women's bodies. Restrictions on late-term abortions in particular are often discussed in a manner that depicts women as frivolous, incapable and in need of the state's "moral" guidance.

Legislating the Menhennit ruling or placing time-limits on abortions would continue uncertainty of access for Victorian women.

Such options also make it easier for the well-organised anti-choice pressure groups to wind back abortion rights in the future, because they concede the principle that abortion access must be regulated or restricted.

While Labor Party policy is explicit in its support for full decriminalisation, Victorian Labor Premier John Brumby has ruled out making it a reality for women. He blocked left Labor MP Candy Broad's push

The fight for civil unions and marriage for same-sex couples is a fight against this: and it's time for the movement to step up the pressure. The LGBTIQ community needs to unite around clear demands and make links with broader forces. The national day of action for same-sex marriage and civil unions, on August 3, is a step towards that. Various state-based Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobbies, AIDS councils and some unions have already signed on in support.

## Law reform: Victorian Labor should end *all* abortion restrictions

THE VICTORIAN Law Reform Commission has just delivered its report on reforming abortion law in the state. As is the case in all states and territories, abortion in Victoria is currently illegal.

Limited access was obtained for Victorian women after the 1969 Menhennit court ruling, which decided that an individual doctor has the authority to determine whether an abortion is necessary if the pregnancy poses a "risk" to the woman.

The report presents three options for reform. The first is to enshrine in legislation the 1969 Menhennit ruling, the second to give the woman herself the authority to make that determination for an abortion up to 24 weeks gestation, and the last would give women the power to choose an abortion at any stage of pregnancy.

Full decriminalisation—only represented in the last option in the report—is the only option that would

to put forward a full decriminalisation bill last year in favour of setting up the Law Reform Commission Inquiry.

At the time he assured right-wing critics that he was not looking at "making changes in practice", but only to the "way in which the law is presented", implying that he plans to legislate nothing more than a symbolic change that moves abortion from the Crimes Act to the Health Act, but does nothing to recognise women's rights or improve access to abortion.

The Greens, as well as Pro-Choice Vic and Reproductive Choice Australia, have spoken out in favour of the report's last option. Mobilising the pro-choice majority—surveys show over 80 per cent of Australians are pro-choice—is needed to put the necessary pressure on the Victorian ALP to truly allow women the right to choose.

**Amy Thomas**

.....  
**Full decriminalisation is the only option that would allow women the right to make reproductive choices for themselves**

# Crunch time for anti-privatisation campaign

By Kieran Latty

THE CAMPAIGN against electricity privatisation has reached a critical stage in NSW.

Concerted campaigning within the ALP and amongst the public secured an overwhelming vote against privatisation at the ALP state conference in early May. Eighty-five per cent of the general public also opposes privatisation. This has been reinforced by the widespread concern regarding global warming.

The conference vote and continued lobbying of state ALP politicians has meant that some have opposed the legislation in caucus. A number are also willing to cross the floor and oppose the legislation in the lower and upper house.

However, it looks increasingly likely that Iemma will succeed in getting privatisation enabling legislation through both houses of parliament. He has ignored opposition within the party and frantically introduced a pro-privatisation bill in an attempt to resolve the intense conflict within the party over the issue.

But the campaign is far from over. Unions NSW secretary John Robertson has so far refused to accept compromises over the privatisation model.

Since Iemma spurned the conference decision, the Unions NSW strategy has revolved around lobbying Labor MPs in an attempt to get the parliamentary caucus to follow ALP policy and the conference decision.

While every extra MP compelled to publicly oppose privatisation and cross the floor is an asset to the campaign, we cannot rely on local lobbying or on negotiating a compromise.

Trying to draw the unions into a compromise deal is a strategy of the government's designed to divide and weaken the campaign. It was a huge mistake for Newcastle Trades Hall Council to cancel a planned rally outside the May 27 cabinet meeting in Maitland because, according to THC Secretary Gary Kennedy, "we don't want any sort of incidents to jeopardise negotiations".

Only a minority of Labor MPs



Unions rallied outside the Labor conference in May

are considering crossing the floor. It is now very likely that the Liberals will support Iemma's privatisation bill. Iemma has redrafted the bill to accommodate the Liberals' stated requirements for the bill to get their support.

A parliamentary vote may yet kill off privatisation. But the campaign needs a plan for what to do if the bill gets through.

There may still be months between the passage of the enabling legislation and the government finalising a sale to a prospective buyer. Iemma is hoping that he will be able to push his privatisation proposal through with minimal damage to the party or his reputation.

But, so far Unions NSW has

been wary of discussing further industrial action, fearing that it may undermine public support or will be difficult to build amongst union members.

There have been no public calls for mass rallies outside parliament house to pressure MPs.

But the government is massively unpopular. There is a mood to fight Iemma, but it will eventually give way to demoralisation unless Unions NSW is prepared to mobilise it.

Thanks to pressure from ETU members, their union was discussing further industrial action as *Solidarity* went to press, possibly timed to occur between the passage of Iemma's bill through the lower house and its introduction into the upper.

This needs to culminate in a united mass rally in central Sydney for maximum effect. Unions NSW should be talking of mobilising other public sector workers and other unions to back them up.

The Iemma government is deeply unpopular over its underfunding and disastrous handling of public health and transport and is also under attack by unions over its attempt to cap the pay of public servants below inflation and to impose changes to the teachers' staffing agreement.

A defeat for the government over privatisation will put unions in a better position to beat its public sector pay limit. The call for a day of action needs to be widened, strengthened and built. A day should be set for a mass protest as soon as possible and union mass delegates' meetings convened to develop a strategy and plan for further action.

## Move this resolution at your union, Labor party or Greens branch

We call on Unions NSW to:

1. Set a date for a mass protest of all union members and supporters against power privatisation, to coincide with strike action by ETU members.
2. Convene union mass delegates' meetings to discuss through strategy for the anti-privatisation campaign and plan for the day of action.

So far Unions NSW has been wary of discussing further industrial action

# Howard's legacy hangs over Villawood

By Ian Rintoul

AT THE end of May Immigration minister Chris Evans announced a long awaited review of the cases of long term detainees. But the results fell far short of what the detainees and refugee supporters expected from the new Labor government—32 granted visas, 24 to be deported and another 17 yet to be determined.

Evans' decisions revealed all the problems of the lack of transparency and the triumph of bloody-minded administration over humanitarian policy so much a feature of the Howard years. It was good news for the 32—among them, Ali Humayan, a gay Bangladeshi, over three years in Villawood, and a Chinese asylum seeker, Xiao Yan Zheng, held for three and a half years, although Evans had refused Zheng only a few weeks previously.

However, the immigration department didn't even wait for the minister's decisions to begin the deportations. By the time of the announcement, five people had been deported. A Falun Gong practitioner was deported even though he was still vomiting blood after a suicide attempt.

Evans had said that he was com-



mitted to finding alternatives to immigration detention. But rather than use his discretionary powers to order the release of the 17 while their cases are determined, they still languish behind the razor wire.

Within days of receiving their deportation notice, two Chinese asylum seekers staged a courageous rooftop protest inside Villawood. Astonishingly, after three days, they won the right for legal assistance to re-submit their appeal to the Minister. Although this would seem to show up the flaws in both the refugee determination process and the use of Ministerial

**Long term detainees are part of the legacy of Howard's refugee policy**

discretion, Evans has refused to call a halt to further deportations.

The deportations from Villawood are likely to be the tip of the iceberg as Evans' rejection of asylum seekers on Bridging Visa E's (people who live usually without work rights in the community while their claim is processed) is also increasing.

The Asylum Seeker Resource Centre in Melbourne recently protested that over five weeks, 41 of 42 of its asylum clients had been rejected by the Minister—the highest rejection rate since 2001.

Evans' review of the long-term detainees has only highlighted the flaws in the whole refugee determination process and the need for a thorough-going inquiry into the Immigration department and refugee policy.

Evans has rejected the call for a Royal Commission saying he sees signs of cultural change in the Immigration department. But the real obstacle to cultural change lies in the Minister's office. The new government has announced some welcome shifts in policy such as re-establishing permanent visas for refugees, but is too timid to break with Howard's legacy and implement the root and branch change that is so badly needed.

# Anti-Muslim racism at play in Camden

By Mark Goudkamp

IN MANY ways, the gatherings in Camden, on Sydney's outskirts, opposing the construction of an Islamic school, resembled the Cronulla riots minus the booze.

When, on May 27, the council voted unanimously to reject a development application for the school, there were cries of "victory" from the racists assembled outside.

Mayor Chris Patterson claimed the rejection was made "on planning grounds alone". Yet the racist nature of the campaign undoubtedly played a key role in determining the council's decision.

Many local residents abhor the wave of prejudice that has swept their suburb. Chef Thiery Marillier said the decision had given Camden a bad name: "I have Muslims eating at my restaurant and they've been fantastic. I don't have a problem;

this decision is narrow-minded."

A pre-Xmas rally in Camden attracted over 1000 people—and certainly not around environmental demands. Christian fundamentalist Fred Nile, whose party has been campaigning for a 10 year ban on Muslim migration, asserted to the audience that the Koran prohibits singing carols. Other rally participants included the fascist Australia First Party, the Australian Protectionist Party and the Anglo-Australian National Community Council.

More recently it's a more parochial bigot, Kate McCulloch, who has risen to prominence. On May 31, *The Sydney Morning Herald* gave her vilification of Muslim migrants front-page treatment: "the ones that come here oppress our society, they take our jobs and don't want to accept our way of life", she bleated.

McCulloch met Pauline Hanson when she dropped by Camden last November as part of her (failed)

.....  
**After the school's rejection, federal Education Minister Julia Gillard expressed her support for the decision**

Senate campaign. McCulloch is now considering becoming a local candidate in 2010...in what has become a marginal seat after a 10.5 per cent swing to Labor last year.

Wearing a green and gold jacket and Akubra adorned with Australian flags, McCulloch added: "I guess (joining the) Liberals would be natural".

During the election campaign Kevin Rudd too expressed his opposition to the Islamic school... on planning grounds! After the school's rejection, federal Education Minister Julia Gillard expressed her support for the decision.

Labor's eagerness to side with the racists shows its failure to break with the Howard government's disparaging of multiculturalism.

There is a pressing need for the left to draw together all those who want to stop the spread of anti-Muslim racism, and to prevent the growth of organised racist parties like One Nation and Australia First.

# The honeymoon that never began: Rudd, the 'anti-terror' laws and the Haneef inquiry

By Anthea Vogl

SINCE COMING to power late last year, the Rudd Government has been unabashed in continuing the Howard Government's "anti-terror" campaign. Not only has the Rudd government made it clear that it has absolutely no intention of reviewing or repealing the "anti-terror" laws introduced under Howard, the Government has continued to pursue criminal charges against the Muslim men from Melbourne and Sydney arrested under these laws. They have severely limited the powers of the inquiry into the detention-without-charge and deportation of the Queensland doctor, Mohamed Haneef, on false allegations of "providing support" for a terrorist act.

This grim picture should probably come as no surprise. When Rudd made a late election promise in 2007, that Labor would launch an independent judicial inquiry into the Haneef affair, he stated that the purpose of the inquiry would be to restore public trust in the "anti-terrorism" laws and, on 12 July 2007, during Haneef's unlawful detention, Rudd roundly declared that he had "confidence" in the Australian Federal Police (AFP) to "handle this manner in an appropriate way", before confirming that Labor would retain the "anti-terror" laws if it won power.

More recently, Attorney General Robert McClelland has stated the objective of the inquiry is not to uncover the lies and highly politicised manoeuvring that led to the victimisation of a Queensland Muslim doctor, but rather to reassure Australians "that their national security agencies are functioning as effectively as they can be, and that our counterterrorism laws are being appropriately enforced."

However, it is hard to imagine how the inquiry report (to be delivered on 30 September) will be able to reassure anyone of anything at all. The Rudd government has refused to grant the inquiry any coercive powers. This means that Mr Clarke has no power to compel any of the key participants to give evidence (or tell the truth when they do so), nor any power to force compliance with the production



documents requested by the inquiry.

All of this is occurring against the backdrop of the extraordinary admissions made by Federal Police Commissioner Mick Keelty in April to a parliamentary committee that, at its height, the investigation in Dr Haneef involved more than 600 state and federal police and had so far cost \$8.2 million. He also revealed that Dr Haneef is still under inquiry by the AFP. Haneef's lawyer, Rod Hodgson, has pointed to this continued investigation as a possible AFP tactic to circumvent the powers of the inquiry, despite him being fully cleared by the DPP in July 2007.

Rudd's weakening of the Haneef inquiry has occurred hand in hand with Labor's defence of the anti-terror laws. When new anti-terror laws were being rushed through Parliament in 2005, Rudd, then Shadow Foreign Minister, argued for more time to scrutinise the laws. In March of this year the ALP blocked Liberal Petro Georgiou's proposal for an independent review of all the Howard government's "anti-terrorism" laws—a modest proposal already supported by parliamentary committees.

In mid-May a further two anti-terror raids were conducted in Glebe and Riverwood in Sydney. Shrouded as ever in secrecy, the raids were conducted by the Joint Counter-Terrorism Team. No details of the purpose of these raids, the evidence acted upon, or of the con-

**Above: Police Commissioner Mick Keelty**

tinuing investigations have been revealed by police.

We can only guess that the victims of these raids will eventually join the members of the Barwon 12 and Goulburn 9, held without bail on anti-terrorism charges since late 2005 and early 2006 and whose trials finally began in February of this year. None of the charges against these men involve allegations that any of the defendants committed a terrorist act or even attempted to commit a terrorist act, but rather include charges of membership of an unspecified terrorist organisation and "conspiracy to do acts in preparation for, or planning, a terrorist act".

Rudd's track record so far reveals the government hasn't the slightest intention of restoring the civil liberties stripped away by the Howard government's anti-terror laws. Instead, Rudd has ensured that the final truth of the Haneef affair may remain forever in the backrooms of Parliament House, ASIO and the AFP. Without a public campaign against the terror laws, Rudd will continue with the prosecution of trumped up "terrorist" charges and the abolition of basic civil liberties begun by the Howard government in 2002.

Stop the war coalition Sydney is holding 'putting the terror laws on trial' a public meeting with Peter Russo, Mohamed Haneef's lawyer, on Monday June 21, 7pm, room CB 01.04.06 at UTS, info: Jean 0410 772 110

# Climate Camp needs focus on domestic emitters

By Ian Rintoul

IN JULY hundreds of people will converge in Newcastle in a week long camp, with the aim of drawing attention to Australia's contribution to climate change and rejuvenating the wider campaign for climate action.

Last month *Solidarity* reported that Climate Camp organisers had adopted a demand to stop the privatisation of NSW power industry. Unfortunately we were wrong.

This is a worrying sign. Rather than focus on concrete demands that could mobilise large numbers on an ongoing basis, the focus of the Camp is once again on coal exports and Newcastle as a coal port. By labelling this as the number one priority of the Camp and the climate campaign, the Camp has taken the focus off the domestic polluters.

Climate organisers seem to have been seduced by a media strategy of keeping the protest "on-message" rather than looking at how a climate campaign can build out of the Camp.

The NSW government's move to hand power generation to private companies has already engaged unions and the wider public over climate change. A focus on the power privatisation would have been a way to directly link the Climate Camp with the union fight. Private ownership will likely mean the next power station will be coal fired, yet the Climate Camp demands are limited to coal exports, stopping the expansion of coal mines, a moratorium on new mines along with the demand for a just transition to a green economy.

Similarly the Camp's call for direct action seems designed for its media impact. The mass direct action—walking onto the coal train tracks to "block" coal trains—and its clever slogan, "stopping climate change in its tracks", has already been announced to the media without any attempt to discuss it with other environment collectives or groups going to the camp. This does not actually empower those involved or put direct action at the centre of discussions about how an ongoing, mass campaign can be built in the cities. The action could, for example, have targeted state



**Demands for an end to emissions by domestic coal power stations are key for building a movement to combat climate change**

.....  
**Discussion and debate at the Camp will be a crucial part of laying the political basis for a growing climate campaign**

government offices or power stations, as well as corporate vandals in Newcastle.

Discussion of a second day of decentralised action has been left to affinity groups—again something that detracts from the solidarity and cohesion of the Camp and a move that seems designed to favour fragmented media stunts by small groups of people. Hopefully activists will have the opportunity to argue for collective anti-privatisation, anti-corporate action on the second day.

The dropping of the anti-privatisation demand has generated some debate among those building the Camp. Sydney University Environment Collective is mobilising for the Camp around the slogan of opposition to power privatisation and will be taking the demand to the Camp.

#### **Climate Camp**

##### **Newcastle July 10-15**

Visit the website for details of preparation days in your city and how to get to the camp  
[www.climatecamp.org.au](http://www.climatecamp.org.au)

##### **Melbourne Climate Emergency rally**

##### **1pm Saturday July 5**

**City Square, cnr Swanston & Collins St**  
[www.climateally.blogspot.com](http://www.climateally.blogspot.com)

The Camp will be an important focus for climate activists around the country. Discussion and debate at the Camp will be a crucial part of laying the political basis for a growing climate campaign.

The experience of activists attending from Melbourne, where a promising rally is bringing unions and community campaign groups together, will be extremely valuable.

The Climate Emergency Rally in Melbourne on 5 July is demanding, "No desalination plant, phase out coal, no new freeway tunnel, no bay dredging and yes to renewable energy, public transport and urgent action to stop global warming." This is a good example of how to put forward immediate demands, with a focus on the big picture of global warming.

#### **Sydney Climate Camp forum:**

##### **Curing Australia's Coal Addiction**

##### **6.30pm Wednesday June 19**

Footbridge Theatre, University of Sydney, Parramatta Road

Speakers: George Monbiot (via videolink), Holly Creenaune (FoE)

#### **Students of Sustainability conference**

##### **July 5 to July 9, Newcastle University**

[www.studentsofsustainability.org](http://www.studentsofsustainability.org)

# China quake: 'This is not a natural disaster'

By **Tim Erikson**

THE DEATH toll from China's earthquake has risen to 65,000, with over 23,000 people still missing. Such a powerful quake might be expected to claim many lives. But a similar earthquake in Japan in 1995 under Kobe, a city of 1.5 million, killed only a tenth of the expected Chinese toll.

A growing number of Sichuan survivors are pointing to corruption and shoddy construction in the building industry (referred to as "tofu building") as the real killers.

The breakneck speed of China's construction boom combined with rampaging market forces have created the optimum conditions for local party officials to pocket vast sums by cutting corners on building standards.

In the city of Dujiangyan, close to the epicentre of the quake, there was little evidence of steel reinforcement bars in the concrete rubble. Many of the worst collapses in the city were of four to six storey buildings built from un-reinforced brick and hollow concrete slabs.

Online, where there has been an outpouring of criticism of the authorities, one architect wrote that the Juyan Middle School, where 900 children died, used pre-fabricated concrete board—strictly forbidden under current building codes.

Survivors despaired at the collapse of the Juyuan High School while nearby buildings belonging to the army remained intact. One resident's comment about local officials was: "They took our money from investment, so [too] they took the lives of hundreds of kids. They have money for prostitutes and second wives but they don't have money for our children. This is not a natural disaster—this is one by humans".

Now a petition is being circulated demanding punishment for officials responsible for poorly-built schools.

## Victims raise protest

Close to 7000 schools were destroyed—a disproportionately large number of buildings. Schools are among mid-sized building projects handed out to contractors. They don't produce profits or house party officials so they are vulnerable to

One resident's comment about local officials was: 'They took our money from investment, so [too] they took the lives of hundreds of kids.'



**Protest in Sichuan by parents whose children were killed in the quake**

dangerous cost-cutting.

In the small town of Wufu, where 127 school children died, parents raised a huge banner that read: "The children did not die of a natural disaster but of an unsafe building". They marched to the regional headquarters demanding an investigation. Luo Guomin, a farmer from Dujiangyan said, "the people responsible for this should be brought here and have a bullet put in their head."

By late May many informal gatherings of grieving parents evolved into protests demanding justice. Hundreds of parents rallied in the city of Mianzhu on May 24. The following day they attempted to march to the provincial capital Chengdu but were blocked by police.

Parents were told that they could receive \$US4500 a child. One farmer said, "We don't want their money, we just want this corruption to end." This anger has pressured the Housing Minister to set up an inquiry into whether corruption was to blame for the large number of schools destroyed. The government has also suspended its one child policy in Chengdu,

Dujiangyan and Pengzhou.

Over the years the government has launched numerous anti-corruption drives, netting some high-profile party officials. But corruption remains deeply entrenched. In 2005 the National Audit Office in Beijing revealed that \$US1.5 billion dollars had been misappropriated that year. Today it is estimated that 1 RMB (currency unit) in 6 is corrupt. Corruption has a stranglehold over the most basic transactions—buying a train ticket, building a house, getting a job transfer.

The scale of the tragedy and rescue response by the Chinese authorities has muted criticism and diverted international attention away from China's crackdown in Tibet and the possibility of protests at the opening of the Olympics.

However the quake has exposed the Chinese government to a far more potent threat—growing domestic discontent. Capitalist growth in China enriches the few and places millions in the path of ecological catastrophe. Following the Sichuan tragedy there is a sense that more people are rejecting Beijing's mantra of growth at any cost.

# Hezbollah delivers blow to US

By Paddy Gibson

ON MAY 6, the US-backed "March 14 coalition", who controlled the Lebanese government, took a new initiative aimed at weakening the power of Hezbollah, which led the successful resistance against Israeli invasion in 2006.

As a flotilla of US warships moved in to patrol the coast, the government announced that the communications network of Hezbollah was illegal and would be dismantled.

On May 7, workers across Lebanon took widely supported strike action demanding an increase in the minimum wage, in response to soaring food prices. Organised workers have been a crucial part of the broader opposition movement led by Hezbollah in Lebanon, and have long been calling for the removal of the US-backed government.

Government backed militia attacked workers attempting to demonstrate, and the large-scale mobilisations happening around the country



quickly took on a more general character of confrontation between pro-government and opposition forces.

The next day, Hezbollah fighters took over a large section of West-Beirut, disarming pro-government militia, occupying their buildings and disabling media agencies. Across the country, supporters of the opposition, including Sunni Muslims in the south of Lebanon, helped complete a

**Above:** Hezbollah rose to prominence with their opposition to Israeli imperialism in 2006

Photo: Jarvis Ryan

route of pro-government forces.

Strong support for Hezbollah amongst some sections of the army means Lebanon's rulers are afraid to use it against the resistance movement. Hezbollah's strategy in areas it took over was to quickly hand control and prisoners to the army.

Acknowledging defeat, the government struck a deal with the opposition that will see General Michael Suleiman, head of the army, become president of Lebanon. Opposition forces, including Hezbollah and the mainly Christian Free Patriotic Movement, have been granted more seats in cabinet, enabling an effective veto over government decisions.

Unfortunately the deal does not challenge the neo-liberal "Paris Agreements" imposed on Lebanon, which lie at the root of problems faced by workers. Unless they address these concerns, Hezbollah risks alienating its mass base. But for US imperial planners, unable to remove Hamas from Gaza, facing renewed resistance in Iraq and growing disquiet in Egypt, this victory for Hezbollah is a serious setback.

## Bolivia: big business declares war on government

By Paula Pfoeffler  
Cochabamba, Bolivia

ON MAY 4 the Department of Santa Cruz in Bolivia held an autonomy vote. Autonomy would give them more tax revenue powers and the right to create their own security forces. Santa Cruz holds the majority of the country's natural resources and massive agri-business stands to lose much planned reforms.

The autonomy movement began in 2003, after powerful landowners and business leaders sensed their dwindling political power after the October Gas War and the fleeing of then President Gonzales de Lozada. Unsurprisingly, the racist ruling class "autonomistas" have the backing of the United States, which wants to put a brake on the progressive reforms of the government of Evo Morales.

Similar referendums were held on June 1 in the Departments of Pando and Beni. The National Electoral Court declared the referendums illegal. The MAS government

called for people to abstain and refused to recognise the results. This sets the scene for a major political power struggle. A Recall Referendum for the President and all nine governors of Bolivia's Departments will now be held on August 10.

The Santa Cruz bloc immediately declared victory, saying 85 per cent voted in favour of autonomy. The numbers show a different picture. When you add the 41.3 per cent who abstained to the 14 per cent who voted no and the 4 per cent of blank ballot papers submitted, those who voted yes are in a minority. In Pando, absenteeism almost reached 50 per cent, which would have made the referendum there invalid.

Some communities burned boxes that arrived already filled to the brim with pro-autonomy papers. There were also reports that "autonomistas" went to communities to "encourage" people to vote yes.

Meanwhile, in cities around the country there have been massive marches in favour of democracy and the "proceso de cambio" (pro-

.....  
The autonomy movement began in 2003, after powerful landowners and business leaders sensed their dwindling political power

cess of change). In Cochabamba, 500,000 people gathered declaring support for the government and the democratic institutions.

On May 25 the racism that underpins the autonomy movement was on gruesome display in Sucre, Bolivia's judicial capital. President Evo Morales was due to go there to commemorate the 199th anniversary of Latin America's first steps towards independence.

More than two dozen of the campesinos that went to support Morales were blocked from entering the city. They were then captured and beaten by armed civilians. After being stripped down to their underwear, they were forced to apologise for coming to support Morales.

However, the mass turn-outs in favour of democracy and against the "autonomistas" show that the social movements, who were responsible for the groundswell that ousted previous corrupt neo-liberal governments and got Morales elected in the first place, are still a force to be reckoned with.

# Lessons in New Labour's failures

By Judy McVey

WORKERS IN Britain woke up with a big shock after council elections on 1 May, as the Tories pushed Labour into third position.

The results reveal a Labour Party in deep crisis. Overall, they polled 24 per cent, losing 331 seats, the worst result in 40 years.

Even Labour's traditional supporters came out to send a strong message to prime minister Gordon Brown that they had had enough.

Ken Livingstone, a left leader who opposed the Iraq war, lost the London Mayor position to anti-union Boris Johnson after a well-orchestrated Tory campaign, at a cost of 1.5 million pounds, assisted by Lynton Crosby, the political consultant behind John Howard's election victories.

Respect, standing under the name Left Left, George Galloway's new party and the Greens were all squeezed as most of the left unsuccessfully rallied around Ken Livingstone.

Even worse, the Nazi British National Party (BNP) won a net gain of ten council seats nationally, including a place in the London assembly.

Since the election, Labour lost a by-election in Crewe, a safe Labour seat, with the Tories winning 49 per cent to Labour's 31 per cent.

Most people blame Gordon Brown's leadership, but the problem is far deeper.

## Labour's rightward shift

This election followed ten years of privatisation in public services like health, housing, education and postal services.

In 1997 Tony Blair defeated Margaret Thatcher and the Tories after years of vicious attacks.

Rather than undo the Thatcher legacy, Tony Blair and Gordon Brown championed the so-called "Third Way" between the Tories and "old" Labour.

"New Labour" adopted neo-liberalism, pioneering "public-private" funding and continuing privatisations, along with a new politics of symbolism rather than substance. This included reform of the House of Lords and devolution of government to Wales and Scotland.



**Above: National Union of Teachers national strike, April 24, part of a series of actions against the neoliberal policies of New Labour**

Blair championed "humanitarian intervention" strategies, helping make it acceptable to invade other people's countries, culminating in the war in Iraq. Islamophobia reached new heights as the war on Iraq progressed particularly after the London bombings of 2005.

The victims of these policies are usually the working poor, who soon saw there was little to differentiate Thatcher from Blair, nor Blair from Brown, in terms of their living standards.

It's no coincidence that these victims are often the targets of policies of a new moralism, particularly targeting and scapegoating young people (for binge-drinking), poor families (for being "problem families") and immigrants (for not speaking English).

This was an attempt to discipline the people who responded in the "wrong" way to the economic agenda.

Those looking for an alternative are bitter and angry. No wonder some turn to the Nazis in the BNP. It is despair of poverty and disempowerment.

Unless a left political alternative to Labour is strengthened and cohered, further disastrous election

results are likely in the national elections in 2010.

## Looking backwards to the future

Blair's strategy took something from Australia's Labor governments from 1983 to 1996, when Bob Hawke and Paul Keating pioneered an economic rationalist agenda. They privatised the Commonwealth Bank and Qantas, while undermining the influence of trade unions with the Prices and Incomes Accord and attacks on the building unions.

Workers were then saddled with enterprise bargaining and real wage cuts, and the bosses increased their share of national wealth.

These policies are the result of a major shift in social democratic politics since the 1980s, as they more and more adopted the neo-liberal agenda.

Without their own economic strategy and in the context of the collapse of "state socialism" in the Stalinist countries, the left of the ALP is following this trend.

Even though profits will continue to rise over 18 per cent in 2008-09, nothing in the ALP's strategy hints at an attempt to redress the increasing levels of inequality in Australia.

Yet in defeating Howard, Rudd's ALP raised the promise of better lives for Australian workers, particularly as it was workers who carried him to victory.

Just like New Labour in Britain, it is this contradiction that will define this government.

Even as Labour took a hammering in the polls, across Britain hundreds of local campaigns were fighting the government over everything from post office and hospital ward closures to those opposing racism, war and privatisation.

Public sector unions are gearing up for a struggle to win wage rises greater than inflation. Around 100,000 attended the Love Music Hate Racism carnival last month.

There are important lessons in the British Labour Party's experience that should point social democratic parties in the direction of undoing the damage caused by previous neo-liberal agendas. Much is at stake in continuing down the path of Howard's legacy.

# 'PEOPLE ARE STARVING—TH

A delegation from Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory who are campaigning for a National Aboriginal Conference in late May. Below *Solidarity* reprints what two of them told the conference.

.....  
'You've got business managers there making the decisions themselves'

**BARBARA SHAW, MT NANCY TOWN CAMP NEAR ALICE SPRINGS**

With the health checks on our kids, they were testing our kids for any STIs or sexual abuse. All up the kids that have had health checks is nearly 7500 and only 39 [may have been] abused, from what doctors are saying. That comes as a bit of a surprise to me because of the [claims that] children that lived on Aboriginal lands were always sexually abused and neglected.

We're going to keep fighting for our Aboriginal land. We want to stay and maintain and practice our culture.

We've gone north and done surveys at Tennant Creek, and Darwin mob are also going to go down to Katherine to do surveys. The communities need to know their rights. They need to know that they can stand up to this big fight if they want to. But it's a bit hard when you've got business managers there making the decisions for the communities themselves. It's taking control away from the Aboriginal people who want to be able to run their communities.

There's more of an urban drift now—a lot of people are coming in from [remote] communities. We've always had urban drift but the intervention [has] made it worse so there's more people coming and going.

We've always had overcrowding and with the intervention it's caused [more] problems with overcrowding. With our income management you get store cards at Centrelink. If you haven't allocated your 50 per cent to the community store you can have it in the nearest township [to] where you live. That's causing people to come in and shop. We've got a problem with prices of food so they're coming in for cheaper food.

[People travel] from a different community to the next for ceremonies and sorry business. And they go through towns to the hospital or to see their children that are



June Mills from Darwin (left) and Barbara Shaw from Mt Nancy town camp near Alice Springs

## Aboriginal Rights Conference charts

MORE THAN 100 people came from all corners of the country to Redfern, Sydney for the Aboriginal Rights Coalition "Black and White, Unite and Fight" conference on 23, 24, 25 May. The conference has put the campaign on stronger footing to build opposition to the intervention. A public meeting on the Friday night attracted over 160 people.

Indigenous representatives from, Yuendumu, Alice Springs, and Bagot in Darwin gave first hand accounts of the impact of the intervention on Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory and the growing grassroots resistance there.

Speakers from every state reported on the campaign so far—Centrelink protests, collecting surveys in Darwin, union and Labor Party branch resolutions and public meetings to help get the facts and the real story of the intervention more widely known. The conference endorsed a call out for the 21 June rallies and called for ARC groups to be established as open democratic organising committees of all supporters, black and white, in every city.

Following the nationwide rallies on June 21, the campaign is set to focus on the review of the intervention by the Rudd government which is shaping up to be a whitewash. The three member board and 11 mem-

# WHAT'S THE REALITY OF THIS'

campaigning against the intervention travelled to Sydney for the Aboriginal Rights conference.



Alice Springs (right) at the conference

going to school. With Alice Springs being a special place through the Yipirinya dreaming you're not going to stop people coming to Alice Springs—that's a sacred place to Aboriginal people.

We pulled into a mango farm [near Tennant creek]—they produce their own alcohol [using] mangos. It just amazed me so I pulled it off the shelf and said "Hey look what they're selling here".

And then the lady behind the counter says "We don't sell that to your kind of people... we don't sell to Aborigines". Then Marlene [who is white] goes "Will you sell it to me" and she says "No because you're in company of an Aborigine". So we said we don't feel hungry now and walked out and left our food on the counter.

## JUNE MILLS, LONG-GRASS ASSOCIATION, DARWIN

You can't spend [quarantined welfare money] anywhere, it's only at specific stores. If a store doesn't want to take that card you've got to go somewhere else.

Adelaide river is 120 kilometres out of town. They refused to accept

that card [there] because along with the cards there are obligations of reporting [on the stores]. There's some stores that were quite happy to make millions of dollars for years off our people who all of a sudden don't want to know about it.

So people have to go to some other store that can deal with the reporting they have to do.

People have to get a taxi into town if they have a card to use it at Woolies.

That's probably over \$100 on the taxi fare. At Wadeye which is [420 kilometres] south of Darwin the roads up until two weeks ago were still blocked because of the rain [Wadeye is cut off for five months every year during the wet season].

People couldn't spend their money on the cards at the Wadeye store, they had to go to Katherine or Darwin. You couldn't travel on that road; you can't fly out, it's too [expensive].

So people were actually starving at Wadeye. The only way they were getting supported was through a food program at the school feeding other people from the community.

Sometimes when they get the card it's not active for four or five days. People are starving—that's the reality of this so-called income management.

Even if you talk about a simple phone call. A simple phone call is not a simple phone call if you've got to ring Centrelink to get help [from a remote community].

Centrelink don't give a damn. They're trying to go through with this program and they're not stopping unless there's a mass revolt. They don't give a damn how our people suffer.

I think the government design is to pressurise everyone so they move off the communities. If you look behind it that's what it is—you don't want to be Aboriginal and you don't want to live on your country.

## course to fight the intervention

ber expert group that will conduct the review, and report by September 30, is stacked with people who are pro-intervention.

There is no announced process for the review and The Minister Jenny Macklin has asked the panel to investigate whether there are any "unintended consequences have emerged" and continues to peddle the myth that the intervention is about "combating child, alcohol and drug abuse."

For the next phase of the campaign against the intervention, ARC plans include a nationwide petition to be presented by Northern Territory Labor MP, Trish Crossin; a particular focus on extending union op-

position and the round of student conferences during the semester break and another national day of action later this year. Fact sheets debunking the myths that still surround the intervention are being compiled to raise public awareness. The conference called for a convergence on Canberra for the opening day of the parliament in 2009.

## Young Labor Left opposes the intervention

One of the immediate outcomes of the conference has been a discussion at a national meeting of Young Labor Left which carried a resolution opposing the intervention and endorsing the June 21 rallies.

## Demonstrate to mark one year of the intervention

### National day of action Saturday June 21

**Sydney** 11am, The Block, Redfern  
**Alice Springs** -Mbantu 2pm Court House Lawns  
**Darwin** 10am Raintree park  
**Perth** 11am Wesley Church, cnr Hay and William Sts,  
**Brisbane** 11am State Parliament,  
**Melbourne** 12pm State Library

# IRAQ IN CRISIS: RUDD'S 'WITHDRAWAL' AND THE NEW US PLAN

**Robert Nicholas** explains the realities of Rudd's "withdrawal" from the occupation of Iraq and the new US bid for ongoing control of the region.

ON JUNE 28 in Brisbane Kevin Rudd will attend a parade in the streets of Brisbane to welcome the 550 Australian soldiers withdrawn from Iraq. The parade forms part of a broader attempt to establish that Australian troops have done a "good job" in Iraq, masking both the bloody realities of the war and substantial, continuing Australian involvement.

Since the US troop "surge" which began in early 2007, political leaders and the mainstream media have pushed the idea of a "relative calm" across the country. However, as Australian troops parade, Iraqis will continue to suffer under a siege taking place in Baghdad's Sadr city which has already killed over 800 people, the imposition of "security accords" that allow the establishment of 400 permanent US military bases in Iraq and relentless bombing raids.

As the US continues to lose on the ground they have, as in Vietnam, increased destruction from above, with aerial bombardments increasing 500 per cent through 2007. The real story of the occupation is one of escalating violence from occupying forces, continuous attempts to divide Iraq along sectarian lines and a suffering population growing increasingly restless.

Close to 1000 Australian military personnel will continue to participate in this brutal occupation including running "surveillance aircraft" to map out bomb targets despite the claimed withdrawal of combat forces.

## **Assault on the Mehdi Army**

The current siege of Sadr City began in the aftermath of a failed



assault on the southern city of Basra by the US and the Iraqi government. The Basra operation attempted to crush resistance to the occupation there, led by Moqada al-Sadr's Mehdi Army.

On March 28, the occupation's major assault was repelled by a mass uprising across Southern Iraq and refusals to fight and defections by Iraqi police and soldiers. The Association of Muslim Scholars, the mainstream political front for the Sunni based resistance groups, pledged support for the rebellion, showing that resistance to occupation can overcome sectarianism.

The fighting stopped after aides of Iraq's president Maliki succeeded in negotiating a ceasefire with

**Above: An Australian soldier (centre) trains an Iraqi soldier (left) in techniques to "deal with the public"**

al-Sadr via Iran on March 31. This came despite Maliki pledging "no negotiations" six days previously. The Basra assault was a major defeat for the puppet Maliki government as they were forced to drop demands that al-Sadr's forces disarm, leaving them relatively intact. Izzat al-Shahbander, a pro-occupation Iraqi MP, admitted to the Reuters news agency, "What has happened has weakened the government and shown the weakness of the state. Now the capability of the state to control Iraq is open to question."

Occupation forces then turned their attention to Sadr City, the major stronghold of the Mehdi army and home to 2.5 million Iraqis.

Sadr City has been completely

cut off from the rest of Iraq. The siege is aimed at economically strangling the area, an act of collective punishment against all residents. Already comparisons have been made with Israeli attempt to strangle Gaza. The US is now in the process of erecting a two-mile concrete wall that will separate the southern quarter's Thawra and Jamila districts from the rest of the city. What cannot be defeated, they will attempt to imprison.

On April 23, the International Committee of the Red Cross reported that the siege caused hospitals to run out of basic necessities such as dressings and anaesthetics. The destruction of the central market has precipitated a food shortage.

The siege is accompanied by consistent US bombing runs aimed at the most densely populated area in Iraq. In the latest incident, US warplanes leveled a five story apartment block and a hospital, killing an untold number of civilians. Despite the barrage, only a small southern section of the city was under control of the occupation forces.

But in late May, al Sadr announced a cease-fire with the Iraqi government which has since poured thousands of troops into Sadr City as the Mehdi Army withdrew armed fighters from the streets although it did not disarm. The Iraqi government forces have been carrying out raids against offices of the Mehdi Army and have even fired into crowds outside mosques. It remains to be seen if al-Sadr, who has also technically held to a ceasefire with occupation forces since August 2007, will be forced to unleash the Mehdi Army against these attacks.

While al Sadr retains mass popular support, the formal truce has thrown a lifeline to a Maliki government, which has staked its future on crushing the resistance. Maliki has threatened to ban political forces with militias from contesting the October provincial elections.

US and Iraqi Government forces have two aims in attacking the stronghold of al-Sadr's movement. With the elections coming up, the attacks on Sadr City and Basra are an attempt to smash al-Sadr. His popular appeal among downtrodden Iraqi Shi'ites threatens to unseat the joint dominance of Maliki's Dawa party and the Supreme Islamic Iraqi Council (both of which favour the continued presence of American



**Above: Ten of thousands of Iraqis take to the street to protest the new "security accords"**

troops) in the October elections.

Al-Sadr has always been outspoken in his demand the occupation come to an end. The uprising in support of the Mehdi Army after the attack on Basra shows the mass appeal al-Sadr has, as the only credible anti-occupation figure in the Shia religious establishment.

The US is also trying to secure the "green zone" in Baghdad. In April alone over 700 rockets and mortars were fired into the green zone. The US must stop these attacks from the resistance if their new plan for the zone can proceed.

Now re-branded the "international zone", it is to be packed with luxury hotels and offices, surrounded by a 15 foot concrete barrier, razor wire and armed troops. This will further cement it as a permanent US base, fitting with George Bush's new plans for Iraq.

### The New US Plans

George Bush has revealed plans to impose new "security accords" on Iraq that exposes the myth of Iraqi sovereignty. The secret treaty known as known as the Status of Forces Agreement has even has the puppet Iraqi Government and other pro-occupation forces balking. Tens of thousands of Iraqis took to the streets in early June as the "provisions" were leaked to the Arabic newspaper, *Al-Hayat*.

Bush wants to establish 400 permanent bases that will exist for the next 15-20 years. Included in the treaty is the right for the US to launch wars on "third countries" from Iraqi soil.

The treaty entrenches immunity for US troops and the mercenary

contractors operating in Iraq. All deals and undertakings for reconstruction contracts negotiated since the occupation began will become null and void, clearing the way the way for a US monopoly over the economy. Prime minister Nuri al-Maliki is due to sign the accords before the end of July.

However, the US has underestimated the resistance it will face to the new accords. Moqtada al-Sadr has described the accords as "a project of humiliation" and the Association of Muslim Scholars, described the accords as total "military, economic and cultural domination" of the country.

Significant pro-occupation figures have also come out against Bush's new plans with Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani, the highest Shia Muslim authority in Iraq saying he would not allow Iraq to sign such an accord "as long as he was alive". Faced with growing resistance, US ambassador Ryan Crocker threatened to strip Iraq's puppet government of any authority if the accords weren't rubber stamped.

The Rudd Labor government remains a key ally in the US plans for endless war in Iraq and their broader imperial goals in the Middle East. The brutality of this war will continue to breed strong resistance movements and a permanent state of crisis.

Building support for those resisting occupation and resisting the propaganda offensive about the "good job" our troops have done in Iraq remains a key task for activists fighting to expose the realities of Rudd's continued support for this disastrous occupation.

# CLIMATE CHANGE AND CAPITALIST

Capitalist production has developed along carbon intensive lines.



Measures that could genuinely tackle rising carbon emissions are being held back by the desire of individual countries not to harm their economy's global competitiveness, writes **Shannon Price**

FROM EGYPT to Bangladesh to Somalia, hundreds of thousands of people continue to protest over the rising price of basic foods. In early May, cyclone Nargis killed over 130,000 people and left hundreds of thousands more homeless across the Irrawaddy Delta in Burma.

Global warming was not the sole cause of these crises—but they

have given us a clear indication of what global warming will mean to people in the poorest parts of the world.

In Australia, the rising cost of basic foods, eating into the household budgets, gives us a similar indication of what is to come.

Professor Ross Garnaut has been commissioned by the state,

territory and federal governments to write a report examining “the impacts, challenges and opportunities of climate change for Australia”. Garnaut is set to hand down his draft review on June 30 and his final review on September 30.

There is a significant debate brewing about how the Rudd government is going to respond to

# E, POVERTY DEVELOPMENT

the mounting scientific evidence of what type of change is needed. Garnaut's interim report, delivered in April, illustrates the significant economic pressures on the Rudd government to remain inactive in the face of global warming. It is up to us to challenge the government to take real action.

## The system needs carbon emissions

Capitalist production has developed along carbon intensive lines. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Fourth Assessment Report (2007) says that there is a greater than 90 per cent chance—that “the global average net effect of human activities since 1750 has been one of warming”.

There is an overwhelming amount of evidence that human activity and production since the industrial revolution has put us in the position that we are in today. The level of CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere has increased by 36 per cent since 1750 (from 280 to 385 parts per million). It increased by 70 per cent from 1970 to 2004.

Out of the ten biggest corporations in the world, six are oil companies and three are car companies. If they were to acknowledge the extent of climate change, and take the kind of action science demands, they would face a massive threat to their capital.

But it is not just individual companies making profits that are at stake. Entire economies are built around carbon intensive energy, transport and production systems. Competition is inherent to the capitalist system and making the switch to less carbon-intensive production would mean a loss of competitive edge on the global

market. It is this competition that characterises the Marxist understanding of imperialism.

Powerful nation-states are both responsible for the infrastructure of domestic economies, and struggling for the interests of nationally based companies on the world stage. We see this happening through the obvious means, such as struggles for control of oil reserves in the Middle East, as well as through bodies like the World Trade Organisation and the International Monetary Fund instituting “free trade” policies that benefit the economies of world powers.

Faced with the realities of climate change these major states, willing to wage war for economic power, are doing everything possible to avoid meaningful action.

Imperialist competition also means that powers callously use the developing world as a pawn in competition.

Over one million people have been killed in Iraq to ensure US control. Likewise Australia has historically dominated the region, using the South Pacific as a tool to demonstrate its power to the rest of the world, exploiting its resources and locking its people in poverty to gain advantage.

The process of “addressing” climate change is no different. The western economic powers, led by the United States and Britain are now routinely blaming the developing world (especially China and to a growing extent India) for the acceleration of climate-related problems and demanding they pay for the crisis.

Developing countries are no more able to escape this cycle of competition than the developed world—but the onus can not be on

these countries, held down by years of exploitation and exclusion, to initiate the reforms needed.

## Garnaut's Emissions Trading Scheme—stabilising Australian imperialism

The interim Garnaut report, released in April, foreshadows Garnaut's central proposal for dealing with global warming—an Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS). Garnaut's ETS does not challenge the way production is organised in Australia.

There will be no major shifts in public investment towards public transport or clean energy infrastructure. The scheme is geared towards stabilising the Australian economy, minimising the impact on profit margins and ensuring Australia's continued dominance in the region.

Garnaut's interim report rightly states that, “Climate change can only be addressed by effective global action.” He also recognises that, “In general, developing, poorer countries will suffer proportionately more, and be less well equipped to adapt.” But the core proposition of Garnaut's proposals, the idea that an ETS will solve climate problems, contradicts these basic premises.

Garnaut proposes a “targets and trading” approach, which would establish national benchmarks and enable international trading of what are effectively carbon credits, the gap between what emissions a nation produces and what emissions they are allowed to produce.

This model is essentially geared towards the developed world using the developing world as some kind of carbon sink, with incentive to keep down per capita emissions, while continuing business as usual

.....  
The western economic powers, led by the United States and Britain are now routinely blaming the developing world for the acceleration of climate-related problems

The core strategy in Garnaut's ETS remains ensuring that developing countries can sell their surplus emissions to the big polluting countries



**Denying countries like China the ability to expand their economies would leave people in poverty**

in the developed world, where per capita emissions are soaring.

As Garnaut discusses per capita use in the region, the effect of the scheme becomes clearer. Papua New Guinea is a larger per capita emitter than Australia because of “land use change”—deforestation fueled by the needs of an economy that has been suffocated by years of Australian imperial dominance. Virtually none of their emissions are due to fossil fuel use.

Garnaut essentially advocates an immediate end to deforestation in Papua New Guinea and Indonesia—not inherently a bad thing—with the undertone that it could look to Australia as a potential future buyer for carbon credits. The fact that it is deforestation, not fossil fuel emission, that constitutes the emissions of these countries, is telling enough.

It is years of global imperial play that has forced these economies into reliance on deforestation as a source of income. Garnaut's system replaces one source of oppression with another. Garnaut's proposal would mean that Australia could retain much of its

carbon-intensive economy whilst buying carbon credits from its neighbours.

Despite the complexities that Garnaut himself acknowledges (including the unevenness of historical carbon emission and the disproportionate rate of suffering from the effects of climate change), he still proposes that the fairest way to allocate budgets for carbon emissions on a global scale will be on a per capita basis.

Garnaut's “per capita” model is premised on the basic notion that there is an equal responsibility spread across the globe to deal with the problem of global warming.

It is true that per capita emissions targets will give us a greater sense of who is actually doing the emitting—and as we will see, this is the developed world—but such a model does not allow for centuries of global economic and military dominance of the West. The industrial system that has created the problem must also bear the cost of fixing it.

Garnaut himself makes some concession to this fact, but through

concern about the practicalities of implementation rather than any notion of justice. He argues, “to be considered fair, (the ETS) will need to give much weight to equal per capita emissions rights. To be considered practical, they will need to allow long periods for adjustment towards such positions.”

In Garnaut's plan there will be some room to adjust the per capita model to allow for developing countries to emit above the target levels, linked to GDP growth levels, for a period until they reach agreed benchmark levels. He argues that high per capita emitters, like the United States and Australia, will have to curb emissions at a steeper trajectory than countries say in Europe, where per capita emissions are lower.

But despite this rhetoric, the core strategy in Garnaut's ETS remains ensuring that developing countries that are low per capita emitters can sell their surplus emissions to the big polluting countries.

The problem with this, is that it is geared towards protecting the economic interests of countries like

Australia and changing precisely nothing in methods of production.

### The actual state of emissions

Garnaut's approach, shirking Australia's responsibility and pushing it on to developing neighbours, is not unique. Last year it was announced that China had streaked into first place as the world's largest emitter of carbon dioxide.

Tony Blair, who used the last of his term as Britain's prime minister to attempt carve a name for himself in the fight against climate change, said outright that, "If we shut down all of Britain's emissions tomorrow, the growth in China will make up the difference within two years. So we've got to be realistic about how much obligation we put on ourselves."

Even if we were to discuss emissions from the false premise that the only model for development is the emissions-intensive model of the west, handing China the "world's largest emitter" trophy is based on a very selective reading of the available science.

Per capita emissions paint a very different picture to the country-by-country statistics. India emits 1.1 tonnes of carbon dioxide per person, China 3.5 tonnes, Britain 9.6 tonnes and the US 20.2 tonnes per person. The global average is 4.2 tonnes—much higher than both India and China. As Garnaut notes in his interim report, Australia is one of the highest per capita emitters.

On top of this, economic expansion in China and India is driven by western multinationals that are looking to the developing world to provide not only new markets, but also cheap labour and resources. This means that much of the emissions in countries like China come directly from the production of firms based in the US, UK and other western countries.

The rapidly expanding automotive industry in India is a key example of western-based multinationals shifting production (and emissions) overseas. Companies shifting the weight of their production to India include Ford Motors, Fiat, Nissan, Renault, Volvo, Volkswagen, Suzuki and Hyundai.

This is not to detract from the basic fact that the majority of emissions-intensive production and consumption occurs in the developed world. Nor does it make a case that

it is a good thing that standards of living across the developed world are so low.

But it illustrates clearly the hypocrisy of Blair's argument, a popular one amongst many Western leaders, that development in the bulk of the world—where the standard of living is far lower than in the developed world—is what is accelerating climate change. The clear implication is that rising living standards across the global south can be the sacrificed in order to allow business as usual in the imperial centres.

There is of course an element of truth to this argument. In its rush to compete with Western economic powerhouses, China is developing along a carbon-intensive path. The likes of Blair point to the rapid burst of coal-fired power plants built in China over the recent period—more than two-thirds of the 560 new coal-fired power plants built between 2001 and 2006.

But the crucial thing is that China is doing this precisely in order to compete with a carbon-based economy in the developed West. The United States is looking to add 37.7 gigawatts of new coal-fired generating capacity over the next five years. It is still the developed West that is increasing its generating capacity and it is the developed West that has still far and away the largest per capita emitters.

Improvements in standards of living are not inherently counterposed to fighting climate change. The vast bulk of the world's population cannot be held to account for the completely unsustainable and irrational production of corporations rooted in the developed world. Some argue that subsistence lifestyles in sections of the developing world are a model for low-emissions lifestyles. But holding down increasing production—production that sees reliable sources of food, shelter and jobs—is not the answer.

The technology to pursue sustainable development already exists. Renewable energy could power growing cities, built along rational lines to cut down long commutes. Public transport infrastructure could be developed globally—within national borders and to replace unnecessary aviation. The capacity for such solutions to the problem are virtually endless.

But to implement solutions, both in the heart of the West and

## The developed West is increasing its generating capacity and has far and away the largest per capita emitters

in developing countries, means a serious challenge to the logic of capitalist competition, the logic that Garnaut and all major world leaders accept wholesale. It is up to us in the West to push our governments to take serious action to curb emissions and begin to implement real solutions. Mass action demanding change in the heart of the industrialised world is needed to shift the logic of global production and challenge the racist conception that the developing world must pay for global warming.

### Turning Rudd's conclusions on their head

With all of this discussion about who is to blame for climate change there is a conspicuous silence about who is already feeling its effects. Cyclone Nargis in Burma demonstrates the way in which extreme weather patterns affect countries with poor infrastructure.

We saw a similar phenomenon for the poorest parts of the globe's richest country with Hurricane Katrina in the United States. The destruction of crops due to drought and flood across Asia and Africa is becoming an all too familiar story.

Penny Wong and Kevin Rudd want us to believe that they are making some big—and tough—decisions in the fight against climate change. But the report Garnaut is set to deliver is not going to start a debate about serious action from the Australian government.

Imperialist competition between world powers is responsible for major the tragedies that have confronted human society in the modern era—from world war to mass famine. Understanding how this dynamic is both fuelling global climate change and shaping our rulers response to the crisis will be crucial for effective action.

As previous anti-war movements have led global revolts against governments to force peace, we need to build a climate movement capable of forcing governments to fundamentally shift methods of production and support sustainable development worldwide.

In Australia this means rejecting schemes which put the onus on countries in the region that have historically been dominated by imperial powers—and placing our demands for change squarely on the Rudd government and their corporate backers.

# UNIONS VERSUS LABOR FIGHTING A LOW WAGE STATE: THE 1948 RAIL STRIKE

**Mark Gillespie** looks at the Queensland rail strike of 1948, when the Communist Party led workers in a vicious battle with a state Labor government determined to keep down wages.

IN EARLY June, Dean Mighell, Victorian secretary of the Electrical Trades Union wrote in *The Australian* that Kevin Rudd didn't understand unions or unionists and was "not much of a true believer," for leaving the bulk of Howard's WorkChoices laws in place.

Both Kevin Rudd and Julia Gillard have also insisted that workers will have to show wage restraint even though steep price rises are pushing the cost of living up and up.

There is a long history of Labor governments profoundly disappointing their supporters once in power. As we saw with the years of Labor under Hawke and Keating, such disappointment can lead workers to become cynical about change and shift their loyalties back to the conservatives.

But another response has been for workers to use their industrial strength to go into direct struggle against a government that is meant to be "theirs". The 1948 Queensland rail strike is an example of such a fight. As construction unions begin to campaign to force the Rudd government to abolish the Australian Building and Construction Commission, the pro-employer building industry task force, there is much to learn from the five week rail strike

The 1948 Labor government of Ned Hanlon had followed a deliberate policy to keep Queensland a low wage state, to boost profits to attract investment to Queensland and to keep down wage costs for the government itself.

Once on strike the rail workers found out just how brutal a Labor government could be. But the workers responded to each wave of repression by widening the dispute,



**Above: Scenes from the St Patrick's Day march in support of the railway strike and against the Hanlon laws**

eventually winning an outright victory.

The outcome of the dispute, however, was not a foregone conclusion. The story of the 1948 rail strike is also the story of "breaking bad laws" and the political role played by the Communist Party and rank and file militants in shaping the strategy and tactics of the strike.

## Labor in power

In the sixteen years prior to the rail dispute Queensland was run by a series of right wing Labor administrations. One indication of just

how right wing they were was the introduction in 1938 of the State Transport Act.

Once a government declared a "state of emergency" under this Act, they had the power to do what they liked. These powers were used against the striking rail workers in 1948, but also meat workers in 1946 and shearers in 1957. They were retained and used by the conservative governments that followed, including Bjelke-Petersen during the Springbok tour in 1971.

During the depression and the war years workers had made enormous sacrifices. In the post

war reconstruction years, however, there was a new mood of militancy. Over ten million working days were lost in industrial disputes between 1945 and 1950. A six month long dispute in Victoria in 1946-47 saw metalworkers on Federal awards win increases of between 16 and 11 shillings. Metalworkers, and rail workers, on state awards soon demanded and won the same.

Queensland, however, was the exception. The Queensland government saw themselves as responsible economic managers and was concerned that any increase for rail workers would flow on to every other worker in the state and undermine their "low wage" strategy for developing the state economy.

### Arbitration

In October 1947 the Queensland rail unions covering rail workshop employees made a claim to the state arbitration court for the increase but they were not confident of success. The courts had already established a number of guiding principles that worked against them.

The courts, too, were frustratingly slow. A claim for weekend penalty rates—another demand in the dispute—had stalled in the courts for seven months.

The wage hearing came before the court on December 21, but was adjourned for two months. This was the catalyst for the unions deciding to forget about arbitration and use direct action to secure a deal directly with the government.

In January 1948 a series of workshop meetings voted overwhelmingly to take industrial action if their claim was not agreed to by January 31.

### The Communist bogey

Throughout the dispute the Premier, Ned Hanlon—backed by the corporate press—portrayed the dispute as a communist inspired assault on the democratic institutions of government and arbitration.

While some union leaders were members of the Communist Party, the majority of unions involved were affiliated to the Labor Party.

In the beginning, too, it was the tactics of the labor officials that dominated. These officials believed that their connections with the Labor government would soon result in concessions.

Even after their lobbying failed,

they still rejected a motion from communist officials for a general stoppage across the entire rail network, in favor of a more limited stoppage in the strategically important workshops and running sheds.

But as the Labor government became more repressive and it became obvious that different tactics were needed, the influence of the Communist Party grew—in the disputes committee and in the workshops and pickets.

### Lock out

The response of the government to the limited strike on February 3 1948 was to try and bully the workers back to work. An earlier offer of six shilling a week was abruptly withdrawn and workers were told the dispute would only be resolved in the arbitration court once they returned to work.

To break the effectiveness of the strike the government began implementing an emergency transport plan. They also deliberately held up food distribution, but blamed the strikers.

They also tried to create divisions amongst rail workers by seeking (and winning) permission from the courts the power to stand down workers not gainfully employed.

The Federal Labor government did their bit by putting bureaucratic obstacles in the way of the stood down workers from getting any social security. Meanwhile the strik-

ing workers were told they risked forfeiting their jobs and accrued leave entitlements.

The corporate media did everything they could to play up the issue of communist influence and turn the public against the strike.

The government hoped these measures would demoralise workers and force the unions to retreat. But the resolve of the workers only grew.

### Complacency

The Communist Party played a key role in preventing any retreat. In particular, Ted Rowe, a federal official with the Amalgamated Engineering Union—one of the key workshop unions—had been sent to Brisbane to help organise the dispute. There was much valuable experience from the 1946-47 Victorian metalworkers' dispute to pass on.

Rowe argued vigorously on the Central Disputes Committee and at mass meetings against the view the dispute could be won with a "short sharp strike". Rowe pointed to the implementation of the emergency transport plan and argued the unions had to get serious. The Communist Party argued for an active strike—sending speakers interstate to raise funds, building local strike support groups and to extend the pickets of stood don rail workers.

The *Courier Mail* reported one meeting that Ted Rowe addressed: "Five hundred strikers and

**Below: Premier Ned Hanlon, second from left, in a Labour Day parade in 1946**





**Above: Police attack striking workers and their supporters on St Patrick's Day**

long strike...Mr E.J.Rowe urged that the disputes committee set up a larger propaganda committee and a panel of speakers be selected to address workers in other industries..."

In the second week of the dispute Alex MacDonald, a communist official from the Ironworkers Association was made full time secretary of the disputes committee—another indication of the growing influence of the Communist Party.

Under Communist Party influence, the unions not only prevented a retreat but went onto the offensive. On February 19 the AFULE—the main train drivers union with a history of sectionalism—were convinced to join the dispute. Then on February 23 the disputes committee decided to pull out workshop workers on Brisbane's tramways.

### The big stick

When threats failed to end the strike, in early March the government changed tactics to use the big stick to force them back.

First they secured a "return to work" order from the arbitration court and then declared a "state of emergency". New laws now made it an offence to refuse the direction of the court; counsel strike action; or to picket. Any workers that didn't return were told they'd be sacked.

The anti-communist hysteria coming from Hanlon now reached new heights with talk of the dispute having all the "elements of a

civil war". Backed by the press, the government was trying to use fear and intimidation to create a stampede back to work.

Again this completely failed, and again it was the strong and decisive leadership of the Communist Party that was crucial.

Hanlon declared the "state of emergency" on the Friday and expected the workers would run back to work on the Monday.

The Central Disputes Committee met on the Saturday and voted to defy the law and stay out until their demands were met. They also voted to strengthen the pickets and to broaden the dispute to wharfies, coal miners and more. A meeting of the Trade and Labor Council on Sunday backed the Disputes Committees stand.

At the Ipswich railway workshop—a key workshop—on the Monday morning over 2000 workers turned up to picket. While a few workers did return they soon came out again once they realized how solid the strike was. They were greeted by an enormous cheer. All the workshops picketed that day produced similar results.

At 10am that morning, mass meetings of rail workers across the state voted overwhelmingly to continue the strike. Wharfies' mass meetings up and down the coast also voted to join the strike. The Seamen's Union placed a ban on all shipping into Queensland.

In the following days, coalminers met, voting to black ban coal

trains while rail workers in NSW, Victoria and South Australia joined the campaign to isolate Queensland.

### Police Violence

When the "state of emergency" had failed to break the strike, the government tried even more draconian laws. They were still under the illusion that workers weren't returning because of Communist Party coercion. The truth is that they had well and truly lost the argument.

Their next move was to pass the Industrial Law Amendments Act. Under this Act all activity designed to prolong the strike was illegal. Those arrested faced a fine of up to 100 pounds or six months imprisonment.

Police were given the power to arrest without warrant, issue instructions to prevent a breach of the Act and to forcibly enter meetings and homes. "No more picketing—police get wider power by new law", screamed the *Courier Mail's* headline the next day.

While the Act failed to gain any return to work, it did lead to police using their new powers to regularly assault union pickets and protests. One infamous incident was the bashing and hospitalization of the Communist Member of State Parliament, Fred Paterson.

Paterson was the only Communist ever elected to Parliament in Australia and he used his position effectively to put the workers' case. Paterson was also a barrister and had been very successful in finding loopholes in the state of emergency anti-picketing regulations. So successful in fact, Hanlon described the Industrial Law Amendments Act as "the Paterson Bill".

On March 17, St Patrick's Day a group of strikers marched from the Trades Hall in Edward Street, with a coffin with the words "Trade Unionism" on it.

About 200 metres down the road they were brutally attacked by hundreds of uniformed and plain-clothes police. Fred Paterson, who was acting as a legal observer, was bashed from behind and almost killed when his skull was fractured.

This savagery, however, backfired on the government badly and helped the unions revitalise the dispute. The unions responded by calling a demonstration in King George Square on March 19. A permit was refused and the govern-

ment and the press threatened a bloodbath if the law was defied.

But the law was defied. The day began with a march of 500 wharfies straight down the main street for the entire length of the CBD. Seeing the wharfies march past Edward Street with their bag hooks swinging on their belts gave the rail workers the confidence to march from the Trades Hall, arriving at the square simultaneously.

Jean O'Connor, a Communist Party member, describes what it was like to be there that day:

"It was an inspiring, emotional moment...and one of my most treasured memories. A great cry rang out, 'Here come the wharfies,' as we watched the [march]...swing into view...this huge contingent of trade unionists who walked towards us with such determination, pride and dignity. The railway workers were filling the Square, coming from the several directions at the same time, being welcomed by thousands of citizens already there. The air was electric. Can you imagine what it was like to be part of some 20,000 people crammed into the Square that day in a momentous display of working class solidarity and unity of purpose?"

This was the high point of the strike. State violence and intimidation had failed to break the strike. At the edges there were some signs of weakening. The AFULE drivers returned on March 15, while coal miners lifted their bans on March 23. But the strike front remained solid enough, with more than enough economic clout to force the government to negotiate.

On April 1 the government met with the disputes committee to reach an agreement. Skilled workers would receive a 12 shilling and fourpence rise, with proportional increases for semi skilled and non skilled workers, backdated to September 16. The government also conceded the claim for weekend penalty rates, leaving the courts' endorsement a formality. And there would be no victimizations.

Later that year the Industrial Law Amendment Act was repealed. Unionists who were jailed either had their fines paid anonymously or were released.

This was a fabulous victory for workers and a great moment in



**Above: A cartoon from the period**

Australian labour history.

It demonstrated the collective power of workers; exposed the role of the state and arbitration; exposed the role of Labor in power, but also demonstrated the importance of political organisation.

The Communist Party had no illusions that workers could rely on Labor governments or the arbitration system and looked instead to mobilising the power of workers, even if that meant defying the law.

While there were deep flaws with the politics of the Communist Party by the late 1940s, particularly the blind loyalty to Stalin and to Russia as a model of socialism, it none-the-less had a commitment to working class struggle.

It was the party at the time which won the allegiance of militant rank and file workers looking for an alternative to the system and

to Labor governments that were running capitalism by attacking unions and forcing down wages.

It was Communist Party members in the rail workshops who carried the arguments to extend the strike and picketing.

Communist Party members in mines, on ships and the docks were crucial to winning the argument for solidarity with the rail workers.

Unions today face both federal and state Labor governments willing to turn on the unions and workers who put them in office. The 1948 rail strike shows that by looking to the industrial power of the unions—and with politics and organisation—it is possible to fight and win.

You can read the 1948 Communist Party pamphlet on the rail strike at: [www.takver.com/history/railq48/railqld.htm#JE4](http://www.takver.com/history/railq48/railqld.htm#JE4)

## Hero fights for the US war machine



Iron man develops his superhero suit to fight for the US in Afghanistan

**Iron Man**  
Directed by Jon Favreau  
In cinemas now

Andrea: "Unhappy is the land that breeds no hero."

Galileo: "No, Andrea: unhappy is the land that needs a hero."  
—*Life of Galileo* by Bertolt Brecht

*IRON MAN* is the latest superhero to get his own film as Hollywood continues to loot the pages of comics in a desperate search for a blockbuster.

In box office terms a blockbuster is what they've produced, as it's one of only ten films ever to have taken more than \$100 million in the first three days of its release.

Fans of the comic series will be pleased to discover that the mak-

No early Marvel comic was without evil commissars challenging the all-American Marvel heroes

ers have been faithful to the character and to a mythology which stretches back over 40 years. But that's actually a problem.

Marxist criticism has often been attacked for interpreting cultural products in a crudely ideological and economic fashion.

The 19th century Italian Marxist Antonio Labriola contemptuously dismissed those critics who could read Dante's *Inferno* as an expression of the economic activity of "wily Florentine cloth merchants" in the Middle Ages.

However, an equal danger would be to ignore the ideological content clearly present in popular culture.

Iron Man was one of the stable of superheroes created by writer Stan

Lee and artist Jack Kirby for Marvel Comics in the early 1960s.

All the Marvel heroes created then—the Fantastic Four, the Hulk, Spider-Man and the X-Men—were Cold War warriors.

So no early Marvel comic was without evil commissars challenging the all-American Marvel heroes, and *Iron Man* was one of the most ideological strips Marvel ever published.

Caricatures of Nikita Khrushchev, Fidel Castro and Mao Zedong would appear in the pages of his comic to direct their agents against Iron Man. His main enemy was the Mandarin, a Chinese character drawn in a disgracefully racist style.

The first Iron Man strip was published in *Tales of Suspense* in

March 1963 and described how weapons manufacturer Tony Stark falls into the hands of the Vietnamese Communists while he's over there testing his weapons.

He's injured fatally but escapes by making a chest plate which keeps him alive and is the central unit of his superhero identity as Iron Man.

The film updates this original story from Vietnam to Afghanistan with little trouble—such is the nature of US imperialism.

The catalyst for his transformation is that he falls victim to his own weapons—now in the hands of nasty foreigners in an Al Qaida like organisation.

This plot device has led some reviewers to argue that the film is against the military-industrial complex and charts Stark's redemption for his past crimes.

But not really. The film is not against arms manufacturers. It's against "bad" arms manufacturers. The film isn't against military intervention in other people's countries. Iron Man may save a handful of helpless "good" Arabs but in the process he gets to beat up lots of "nasty" Arabs.

And he does it with clean, smart, targeted weapons. This is a film with Jeremy Clarkson's appetite for flash cars and shiny military toys. It's also got his social conscience.

"Nuff said," as they said in Marvel comics.

**Sasha Simic**  
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# Underbelly: entertaining series fails to probe crime's roots

## Underbelly

Produced by Greg Haddrick and Brenda Pam  
Out now on DVD

UNDERBELLY, THE TV series that dramatised the long-running drug wars in Melbourne, has been a huge hit for Channel Nine.

Despite a Supreme Court decision which prevented the show from going to air in Victoria (where it might have pulled up to a million viewers), *Underbelly* was one of the most popular shows of the first half of the year. The series has just been released on DVD and Nine Network bosses are now looking to expand the franchise with a prequel.

Nine was always on a winner with the concept: A show about gangsters with lots of drugs, sex and violence has all the elements for a ratings success. But plenty of other high-profile Australian dramas have been launched in recent years only to crash and burn on account of poor writing—so it comes as a relief to be able to say that *Underbelly* is actually pretty good. It's great entertainment, with clever dialogue and plotting, terrific production, a cool soundtrack and top-notch actors.

Telling a true story has its advantages, giving events a compelling realism. But this can also create a problem because most people know what's going to happen; in this case nearly every episode ends with someone being killed!

The writers overcome this hurdle by finding interesting and varied ways



Vince Colosimo as Alphonse Gangitano Photo: Channel Nine

to tell similar stories.

The major weakness of *Underbelly* is that it doesn't tell us anything new about crime. It doesn't explore the social context in which the gangland killings occurred.

A major factor in the Melbourne killings was the explosive growth of "recreational" drugs such as ecstasy in the 1990s. Rising players in Melbourne's underground were suddenly flush with cash, contested territory and had the money and motive to order the assassination of rivals.

The illegal drugs market follows the same competitive dynamics as the legal capitalist economy; it's just that failure often has a greater degree of finality: death or a long jail sentence.

One of the reasons socialists argue for the

A major factor in the Melbourne killings was the explosive growth of drugs such as ecstasy in the 1990s

decriminalisation of drugs is that it would lead to a drop in violence and allow for a more sensible public discussion about the social causes and health effects of drug use.

Another problem with *Underbelly* is its failure to examine the nexus between organised crime and police. The show paints the cops as good guys with a few bad apples, a typical TV representation of police.

It touches on police corruption, referring to the prosecution of drug squad detectives that allowed two of the major protagonists in the gangland wars, Carl Williams and Jason Moran, to walk out of prison and continue their violent behaviour.

But there's a much bigger story here that is yet to be told. Victoria Police has recently been

rocked by a scandal involving an assistant commissioner, media director and the head of the Police Association. They are implicated in the leaking of information to a detective suspected of carrying out a gangland murder.

*Underbelly* is definitely worth a look—it's one of the better Australian dramas in recent years.

But for a more sophisticated inspection of organised crime and its role in society, I would recommend two superb US dramas: *The Sopranos*, which is told through the eyes of a New Jersey mafia family, and *The Wire*, which examines the drug trade in the city of Baltimore and the failure of police, politicians and the media to address the poverty and alienation that sustains it.

**Jarvis Ryan**

## The changing state of things?: Globalisation, nations and economics

The argument that globalisation has weakened the nation-state and its control over the economy has been repeated consistently in recent years, but this has not made it true

**Rogue Economics**  
Loretta Napoleoni, Allen & Unwin, \$29.95

WHAT LINKS the growth in sex trade in Eastern Europe, fishing piracy in the North Sea and professional players of the online computer game *World of Warcraft*?

According to Loretta Napoleoni they are all examples of the rise to dominance of a terrifying form of economic activity which she calls rogue economics.

In this ambitious work she attempts to show, through a wide ranging account of contemporary organised crime, that the period since the fall of the Berlin Wall is defined by the dominance of economics over politics.

According to Napoleoni, "Rogue economics is not exceptional but endemic, a dark force encrypted in our social DNA, constantly lurking in the background of the societies in which we live."

Napoleoni sees a constant fight in history between politics and the tendency of rogue economics. At various times political institutions have reined in rogue economics, and given people some control over it.

However, the fall of the "communist regimes", she argues, unleashed rogue economics on an unprecedented scale.

The fall of these regimes is combined with the spread of globalisation and the weakening of the nation state, which erodes politics even further in its fight



The Berlin Wall coming down

against rogue economics.

Despite Napoleoni's dramatic and innovative language, these are not new ideas.

The argument that globalisation has weakened the nation-state and its control over the economy has been repeated consistently in recent years, but this has not made it true.

Her separation of politics and economics also misrepresents dramatically the nature of the economy.

### Neo-liberalism

The spread of neoliberalism did not involve a retreat of politics and the nation-state. Rather the policies that drove back gains in wages and working conditions and spread privatisation both within the West and in the developing world were driven

through politically.

They required conscious political interventions by states and governments on behalf of major corporations.

By concentrating explicitly on the criminal aspects of global economics, Napoleoni detracts from this bigger picture.

For Napoleoni the nation-state is clearly the most important safeguard against the damaging rise of rogue economics. This makes her political analysis very shallow.

The actions of nation-states are consistently seen as innocent attempts to challenge rogue economics that lead to unfortunate consequences.

Her fondness for state control seems to generate nostalgia for the Soviet Union and its satellites,

which doesn't help her case.

The book builds towards a preposterous conclusion, in which she predicts that Islamic finance will gradually come to dominate the economy and drive out rogue economics, and the Third World will come to dominate the globe.

This will carve out a new world order which "will be ruled by an invisible axis stretching from Beijing to Cape Town. Europe and America will lose out".

Sadly, despite the wealth of research and information about sectors of the world economy that are relatively unknown, this book is badly let down by its poor analysis and over-ambitious claims.

**Dan Swain**  
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# Letters

We welcome letters. Send us your feedback, views and ideas. Letters over 250 words may be edited for length.

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## Time for an end to 'wage restraint'

Kevin Rudd and Julia Gillard talk a lot about working families. But when Qantas workers, university workers or teachers ask for wage increases to match inflation, Kevin Rudd and Julia Gillard reply by going on about the need for wage restraint. However, the Budget papers revealed just how much wages have already been restrained while the profits at the top end of town have been growing spectacularly over the past few years.

The Budget papers forecast that the wages share of national income will fall to just 46.9 per cent this year—the lowest level in recorded history! They predict that by next year, this will fall further to just 43.1 per cent. At the end of the Labor government in the 70s, labour's share was around 56 per cent.

According to a Latrobe university study, a grand total of \$69.7 billion will be transferred away from working families to profits over the next year. Suddenly a 5 per cent a year wage increase seems the least that we should be demanding and the best way for workers to really fight inflation.  
Ian Rintoul, Ipswich

## Rudd refuses to move Palestine motion

At long last, we have received a reply to our appeal for a Palestine Motion from the Prime Minister's office. The answer in a nutshell is that the Australian Government does not consider that the Parliamentary motion "would contribute to the peace process currently underway between Israel and the Palestinian Authority."

We believe that the letter we received did not address our concerns and that we were, therefore, entitled to request the Prime Minister to reconsider on the indisputable facts presented of Israel's violations, which are not only



Cartoon © Pope/The Canberra Times

contrary to international law and human rights conventions, but clearly detrimental to the peace process itself.

For those who have not followed the developments leading to the above situation, please go to our webpage <http://1948.com.au/2008events/national-events.html> for a brief overview and then click on the links "Improper Motion needs Proper Action" and "Palestine Motion" to see how the two campaigns have unfolded since March 2008.

We particularly wish to thank every person who has supported the appeal for a Palestine motion and who has contributed to our newspaper ad campaigns. We could not have done it without the generous support of so many wonderful Australians who can see the injustices that Palestinians continually must suffer to bolster Israel's shaky credibility as its immoral deeds become evermore visible and indefensible.

Australia's Palestine advocacy and support groups will continue to provide a voice for Palestine at every

opportunity until a just peace is finally negotiated and accepted by the Palestinian people under occupation as well as the millions of refugees who for 60 years have been denied their right to go home.  
Sonja Karkar,  
Women for Palestine, Melbourne

## Jobs, services threatened by 'Melbourne model'

The University of Melbourne Arts department is going through yet another round of destabilisation where both academic and administrative workers are being asked to put in nominations for voluntary redundancies.

But this is not only happening in Arts. Every faculty and division that covers IT and the library has been asked to cut their spending drastically.

In reality the kind of services offered by the university has narrowed horribly. It used to teach, for free, advanced Excel and Word use, as well as a whole host of other IT skills necessary for PhD completion. The centre that used to provide these

services was abolished.

Lab time has decreased in the sciences, and it is reported that the type of coverage in the University's model "new gen" degrees are being taught at a very basic level.

In the Arts faculty a recently circulated draft proposal asked support staff who believed their position did not need to be replaced, or could be replaced by a more junior employee, to apply for a voluntary redundancy.

Last week University management gave the NTEU their plan to "improve" the Melbourne Experience further. They are proposing an "Administrative Improvement Plan" to get rid of "duplication" and "improve flexibility". The union understands this code to mean further cuts and increased workloads.

Last year Creative arts and gender studies students, with the support of other staff and students, held successful protests against the model. These protests must continue.  
Melanie Lazarow, NTEU, University of Melbourne (edited for length)

## HENSON PHOTOS CONTROVERSY

# ARTISTS REVOLT AGAINST RUDD'S MORALISM

By Jean Parker

"I FIND them absolutely revolting... Whatever the artistic view of the merits of that sort of stuff—frankly I don't think there are any—just allow kids to be kids." This was Kevin Rudd's assessment of photographer Bill Henson's latest exhibition.

His response, which has helped boost right-wing moral hysteria, will be a shock to those who had hoped for a break with the Howard government's conservative social agenda.

Rudd's comments came after police raided the exhibition at its opening and seized photos featuring a naked 13 year old girl and others depicting a 12 year old boy.

NSW Premier Morris Iemma called from China to join the attack on Henson's work, labelling it "offensive and disgusting".

Bill Henson is a world-renowned photographer with more than 250 photographs in major Australian galleries. In 2005 more than 115,000 people viewed a major retrospective of his work presented at the Art Gallery of New South Wales and the National Gallery of Victoria.

Scenes of police raiding galleries around the country and removing artworks as "evidence" have sent a wave of shock through the artistic community.

Forty-five of the 102 hand-picked "creatives" who attended the "Creative Australia stream" of the 2020 summit—including Cate Blanchett, the icon of the summit—have signed a letter condemning the response, noting:

"[T]his action will encourage a repressive climate of hysterical condemnation, backed by the threat of prosecution.



Police raid the gallery containing Bill Henson's latest exhibition  
Image © Newspix/News Limited

We are already seeing troubling signs in the pre-emptive self-censorship of some galleries."

Henson's opponents argue that the photos are pornographic, exploit the children depicted, and that pedophiles will use the web images for sexual gratification and be encouraged to attack children. Jenny Macklin justified the police's actions with a general denunciation of the sexualisation of children in the media.

But Henson's work is not responsible for encouraging the exploitation of children, either by individual pedophiles, or by the advertising companies who are cultivating an ever younger and thinner ideal of female beauty to sell their products.

His photography explores the human body and the transitions between childhood, adulthood and old age. He has

photographed children on the cusp of puberty exploring adolescent sexuality. This is sometimes confronting because it exposes society's discomfort with the combination of childhood innocence and adult sexuality that characterises adolescence.

This is a world apart from images portraying children as sexual objects. As the 2020 protest signatories argue:

"The work itself is not pornographic... It is more justly seen in a tradition of the nude in art that stretches back to the ancient Greeks, and which includes painters such as Caravaggio and Michelangelo."

Henson was, after 15 years of producing such works, threatened with a possible 10-year prison sentence. Police talked about charging him with "publishing an indecent article" under the Crimes Act.

The owners of the gallery which held the exhibition were also thought to be facing a possible five years' imprisonment.

The case has all but collapsed, with the Department of Public Prosecutions set to advise the NSW police there is no case to answer and the Australian Federal Police announcing no charges would be laid over images in the National Gallery. The Classification Board declared the images "mild" and appropriate for children.

### Rudd's social conservatism

The Prime Minister's outrage has lifted the veil on what his social conservatism will mean. He has seized on the Henson raids to assert his version of family values. This is a vision of Australia where "kids are kids", marriage is between a man and a woman and social problems are caused by the "break-down of the family".

But as his recent budget showed, Rudd's concern for child welfare doesn't extend to policies that would lift children and their parents out of poverty, or re-fund essential social services slashed under the Howard government.

The populist moralism which former British Labour prime minister Tony Blair perfected as a cover for his neoliberalism is being embraced by the Rudd government.

But Rudd has misjudged the public response to Henson's arrest. With the artistic community and the Law Society already prepared to throw their weight behind Henson we can hope this episode helps take the sheen off Rudd's government, and prepare us for the campaigns we will need against this new agenda of social conservatism.