Unions demand change to
 Gillard workplace agenda

Bob Briton

The Australian trade union movement is anxious about the direction the Rudd government is taking in industrial relations. This was made very clear to ACTU President Sharan Burrow’s address to the National Press Club last week. Just weeks after Julia Gillard used her lunchtime address at the same venue to launch what has been termed “WorkChoices Lite”, Burrow set out the misgivings.

“Unions are concerned about:
- Genuinely free collective bargaining
- The strength of the independent umpire
- The right of workers to representation
- Rights and safeguards for independent contractors
- Award modernisation not disadvantaging any workers
- Protections from unfair dismissal
- Equal rights for all Australian workers, including workers in the building and construction industry.”

That’s a concern regarding just about every aspect of the Gillard vision. There was praise for the multi-employer collective bargaining system for the low-paid and its potential to stop the race to the bottom brought on by wage-cutting in industries like commercial cleaning, child care and aged care support. But the lack of powers conferred on the new Fair Work Australia agency – the system’s “independent umpire” – means that it will be ineffective against “serious and persistent breaches of ‘good faith’” and will not have the “power to determine an outcome from bargaining.” A tete-a-tete of the Forward with Fairness IR package for all workplaces is that the federal government will not force an agreement on pay rates where they don’t agree.

“I have repeatedly said in the last week that you wouldn’t send an umpire into the grand final without a whistle and expect them to make the game work fairly so why would we do that to the industrial umpire,” Burrow commented.

Burrow questioned the Rudd government’s decision to continue the practice of the Howard and Keating years of restricting the scope of collective bargaining. “Why should there be any limit on what workers and their employers can agree about?” Why can’t there be an agreement on workforce planning, skills of the future, the number of apprentices, a commitment to employ Aboriginal Australians and so on? What about saving waste, reducing energy consumption and other measures to spare the environment?

What Burrow held back from saying is that the Rudd government is sticking to the ruling class ideology that workers and their unions must leave their social concerns at the workplace entrance and that bosses must show discipline and solidarity to their class on this question; that employers must not give away strategic ground taken in the battle of ideas in recent decades.

The ACTU President complained that four hours’ pay will continue to be docked (by law!) from workers’ pay packets for “unprotected” industrial action no matter how brief the absence from work. She pointed out the gaping loophole in the proposal to maintain the denial of the right to unfair dismissal procedures in workplaces with nominally less than 15 employees for workers during the first twelve months of their time on the job. Medium sized businesses will simply keep large numbers of casual workers on their establishments to get round the need to justify the sacking of workers. Burrow insists Fair Work Australia should be able to look into all aspects of a dismissal and not just tick off on an administrative checklist.

Another shortcoming of Forward with Fairness that Burrow spent some time on was the neglect of contractors. Outsourcing and the use of contractors has grown exponentially in recent times and, while states have taken some steps to stamp out some of the more glaring abuses, Burrow sees a role for the new national IR system in protecting these vulnerable workers.

The ACTU President gave mild praise for the Productivity Commission’s recommendation for 18 weeks paid maternity leave at the minimum wage level and two weeks paternal leave (see story page 3). She gave quite a lot of detail about how Australia’s women workers are still worse off than their male colleagues. On average they are paid 16.3 percent (or $195 per week) less.

In light of the seriousness of the problem, the brake it puts on productivity and the way it impacts on skills shortages, she believes the country’s bosses are getting off lightly with the maternity leave scheme. On average it will cost them less than $50 a week to keep each of their women employees’ superannuation contributions going and there is no obligation to top up their pay. The ACTU wants paid maternity leave included in the new National Employment Standard.

Of course, the federal government uses the same rhetoric to describe the need for a system of taxpayer funded maternity leave. Their reliability as champions for the reform is doubtful, though. Rudd has already warned that paid maternity leave and more help for stay at home mums might have to be put on the back burner in view of the ongoing global financial crisis.

Burrow expressed frustration at just how far Australia is falling behind comparable economies in creating “green” jobs – jobs in sustainable industries. The Australian Conservation Foundation and the ACTU are releasing a report soon on this situation and how it might be overcome. Throughout Burrow’s address was the sense that countries like Germany, Sweden, Finland, the Netherlands and the other models held up by social democrats are doing so much better for their workers and the environment.

At the same time, there was a confidence in the address that the social and economic system in Australia is sound and, aside from some recent off-road excursions under Howard, essentially just, a conclusion based on the false premise that Australia is somehow immune from the increasingly unstable world capitalist economy.

Australia needs to toughen its regulatory regime over the financial sector, she said. During her long preamble to her contribution to the discussion on IR, she included the demand in a three point proposal to protect vulnerable working families. When the federal government’s $4 billion taxpayer gift is doled out to the country’s beleaguered non-bank lenders, she wants priority given to those that provide lower interest rates, along with other steps taken to prevent a wave of foreclosures.

According to Burrow, the problems besetting capitalist economies now are the consequence of unbridled greed, “casino capitalism”. She devotes some time to the description of a stable financial architecture that the trade union movement has an interest in upholding. “Containing the inflationary threat of the ‘80s through the Accord’ between the union movement and the Hawk-Keating governments was said to be part of a contribution from the movement to preserving the integrity of the system rather than a mechanism that allowed the grab back of the wages share of GDP that Burrow described so tellingly.

Burrow is far from the worst spokesperson from the trade union movement in this regard but her address was peppered with reference to “our economy” and other music to the bosses’ ears.

Class struggle and the need for workers to vigorously defend their own interests did not get a look in. “Getting the new IR laws right and establishing a fair and robust national system will be an important micro-economic reform that will set our economy up for this century.” If the workers of Australia are to avoid being saddled with Gillard’s WorkChoices Lite system on industrial relations, the trade union movement will have to get angrier than that!
The Guardian

October 8, 2008

Rudd gives banks green light

The social priorities of the Rudd government are once again indicated by the green light given to the banks that they will not be expected to, or required to, lower home loan interest rates should the Reserve Bank decide to cut the interest rates by 0.5 percent.

It is clear that the banks are not going to pass on this cut to mortgages and this may have considerable political spin-off for the government and the banks.

The same message from the government was conveyed to the banks when they put up interest rates above those decided by the Reserve Bank. The Federal government did nothing except deliver a few smacks with a feather duster.

These two experiences show that the government’s priority is to look after the interests of the banks ahead of those of working families who have home mortgages. They are now suffering not only “mortgage stress”, but also the steady rise in the prices of consumer goods, medical care and other services.

The “fair go” promised during last year’s election has evaporated.

When the economic crisis broke in the US, PM Kevin Rudd immediately supported the Bush bail-outwithout calling for any amendments, despite even many members of the US Congress doing so. He did not listen to the angry voices of the US public who saw through the intention to hand over billions of dollars of taxpayers’ money to the banks and finance institutions.

The objective was the same – priority to save the financial giants without regard to the loss of their houses by many mortgagees and now, their jobs as well. This will push tens of thousands of American workers into poverty, a process that is already well underway.

The economic crisis has already turned into an international one with banks in a number of countries going belly up unless they are bailed out with taxpayers’ money. The only policy being advanced by governments is different forms of bail-out using taxpayers’ money.

These policies must inevitably lead to severe cut-backs in social welfare service – medical care, affordable housing, education, pensions, unemployment benefits, etc.

That is where the priorities should be but that will not be the case in any of the developed capitalist countries.

There are a number of other “straws in the wind” which show the direction the Federal government is taking. It is already indicating its intention to retain the real fangs of the Howard government’s Work Choices legislation and a specific anti-union police force, simply giving the Australian Building and Construction Commission another name.

Pensioners are going to have to wait until some time next year for a pension increase even though a $4 billion hand-out to buy up allegedly “good” mortgages was found without discussion or delay. It remains to be seen whether there is any substance to the talk of paid maternity leave. Again it is something for next year.

There are no foreign policy changes. The Rudd government is slavishly following Bush’s lead in every major respect. One wonders what changes will flow from an Obama victory in one month’s time and how this might affect Australia’s foreign policy in the future.

Times are changing rapidly and the Australian government will be forced to change as well if it is not to be left on the sidelines. In the meantime the economic crisis is likely to starkly reveal the pro-bank and pro-capitalist, anti-worker and anti-trade union orientation of the Rudd government.

Cuba - Solidarity Call

Cuba has been hit hard by hurricanes Gustave and Ike, which has damaged hundreds of thousands of homes, cut electricity throughout the country and ruined crops. Over one-fifth of Cubans were evacuated.

Make cheques out to the Communist Party of Australia and send to 74 Buckingham Street, Surry Hills, Sydney, 2010

In Memory of Tom Simmons

FAREWELL GOOD COMRADE

Farewell good comrade farewell to you

Your long life’s good work is over now so farewell good comrade farewell to you

I’ve been told by some that you swore to stay so never took the road of any other ways

So farewell good comrade farewell to you.

Yes, a stalwart were you so ever true and may we always remember in days to come of your long life’s good work and the grand deeds you’ve done

And may we always be inspired in our uncountable days to come of your long life’s good work and the grand deeds you’ve done

So farewell good comrade, farewell to you Farewell, farewell to one so true.

DE Holland

Sydney

Afghanistan is not a “good war”

PUBLIC FORUM

6.30pm Monday 20 October UTS Broadway campus (Rm 2.4.11)

Speakers: Afghanistan eyewitnesses Martin Reus & Carmela Baranowska

Information: Marlene 0401 758 871, Alex 0413 9767

October 2008 marks the seventh year of the invasion and occupation of Afghanistan.

The NATO led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) is made up of over 2,000 NATO troops, of which about half are US soldiers. Australia, under “Operation Slipper”, provides 1,080 Australian soldiers.

NATO has killed more civilians than the Taliban. On 22 Aug 2008, 95 civilians were killed, among them 60 children. On 1 Sep 2008, 70 civilians were killed. These crimes didn’t make the Australian media headlines.

The US alone spends $100 million a day in Afghanistan’s war, while total international aid comes to $7 million a day. The US puppet regime of Hamid Karzai exerts control over no more than 30 percent of the country according to the CIA website. After the US-led invasion Afghanistan has become the ‘oil-pump capital of the world’ and foreign soldiers are much involved in opium trade as the warlords. The 2007 Afghanistan Human Development Report shows some catastrophic development indicators: access to water is at 32% of households; life expectancy is 43.1 years; adult literacy is 23.5%; 50% of Afghan children under five are malnourished; while 6.6 million Afghans do not meet their minimum daily food requirements.

Violence is up by 50% in a country where suicide bombings had never been seen before December 2005.

RAWA, the lead Afghan women’s rights group, says the US backed regime in Kabul is no improvement for Afghan women.

Malalai Joya, a leading Afghan politician also called the ‘bravest woman of Afghanistan’, has denounced the warlords; Karzai and the endemic corruption. Malalai has also called for all US and foreign troops to get out of Afghanistan and allow Afghans to run their country.

J oin our call to: BRING THE TROOPS HOME!

StopWarCoalition.org malalaijoya.com rawa.org asia-pacific-action.org/taxonomy/term/11

PRESS FUND

Have you ever noticed that in photographs of the Wall Street Stock Exchange the building is always draped in a huge US flag? Now, does this mean that the occupants are always acting in the best interests of taxpayers’ money to the banks and finance institutions?

This is slavishly following Bush’s lead in every major respect. One wonders what changes will flow from an Obama victory in one month’s time and how this might affect Australia’s foreign policy in the future.

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PRESS FUND

Have you ever noticed that in photographs of the Wall Street Stock Exchange the building is always draped in a huge US flag? Now, does this mean that the occupants are always acting in the best interests of the nation, or that the place is, in practice, the headquarters of the nation’s real government? For the answers to these and other very important questions you should keep on reading The Guardian, and if you want to help us to produce the paper, you should send us in a Press Fund contribution for the next edition. Meanwhile, we offer our thanks to this week’s three supporters (where is everyone else?), as follows:

R Givran $10, Mark Window $10, Anne Junor $12, “Round Figure” $13.

This week’s total: $45 Progressive total: $9,490.

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Beyond Occupation? Examining the New Reality in Israel and Palestine

A talk by renowned Jewish-American scholar Dr Sara Roy

6.30pm Thursday October 9 Social Sciences Lecture Theatre University of Western Australia

Dr Roy is a senior research scholar at the Centre for Middle Eastern Studies. She has written extensively on the privations of economic life in Gaza and has just released a new book Failing Peace: Gaza and the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict. She will be visiting Perth on behalf of Friends of Palestine WA.

Entry by donation - Drinks and nibbles will be provided

Co-hosted by Friends of Palestine WA and the Centre for Muslim States and Societies
Paid maternity leave - a step in the right direction

The Productivity Commission's recommendation of 18 weeks of paid maternity leave for new mothers exceeded the expectations of some, were way overboard for the miserly few, yet still far short of the World Health Organisation's recommendation minimum.

Recommended:
• 18 weeks for mothers
• Two weeks for fathers
• Rate of minimum weekly wage – 52 weeks for mothers
• Pension and family allowance – if paid leave and many return to work

Inescapable result
The escalating world depression is an inescapable result of the function of capitalist industry and society. Marx found that wage workers produce the value of their wages in only a part of the day; the rest of the working day produces surplus value for the employer, his profit. But the wages of the worker can only buy back part of the consumer goods he produces, and finally there is overproduction.

The Australian Financial Review gave figures that showed the exploitation of US workers. They divided the GDP by the number of workers employed and found each produced US$635.85 an hour, or US$53.65 an hour. But pay rates were only US$15 an hour, with employers paying US$250 an hour as profit. The worker could only buy back 42 percent of the value of the goods he produced. When industries are sent to developing countries with low wages the degree of exploitation is increased.

Australia
Our way out

Vic Williams

We must plan our way out of the depression for the capitalists' wars means much pain and suffering for us. It is a deepening crisis for the working people all around the world.

The central problem is the breakdown of the consumer market. In the USA it is more than two-thirds of the economy. Working people are the main part of the consumer market, the buyers of houses, of cars, of clothing, of food. There are 4.5 million unskilled houses, General Motors can’t sell cars, has closed factories and sacked thousands. Ford lost US$7 billion in a quarter and was forced to mortgage its factories.

Coca Cola sales dropped 9 percent, oil and food prices are climbing. Unemployment is growing with 600,000 sacked in four months. For seven years Bush has been dragging taxes out of working people to pay for wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. In this time wages have stalled. The US has an impoverished working class. The consumer industry is slowing down, and the industry for making the means of production is getting fewer orders from the consumer industry. Since October 2007 the industrial average is down 20 percent. The huge companies and banks can no longer suck profits from the drying consumer market and many of them are crashing to be swallowed up by the biggest ones or rescued by their close friends in Congress.

The latest rescue bid of US$700 billion is on the rocks, with trade unions and the CodePink peace movement campaigning very strongly against it in the streets. Politicians due up for election in a few weeks are pretty wary in supporting the bonanza for bankrupt companies.

The Australian people, the bulk of the consumer market, are being hit. Consumer sales are down 36% from last year. Perth prices in 12 months went up, 14% for milk, 8.8% for bread, 6.3% for vegetables, 24% for rent, and 20% for petrol. Costs of living went up 54% a week. To pay for this, 14.1 million credit cards were overdrawn a record US$800 billion. The Reserve Bank of Australia found 14% of Australian incomes were going to pay interest, the highest on record. Unemployment grew by 60,000 in three months to 1.67 million. Inflation is the highest in 15 years, price of houses fell 8 percent in a year, and the building of new houses has stopped. British companies and banks are crumbling because they can no longer suck profits from the working people, the consumer market.

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There is overproduction of consumer goods and the producers cut production and sack workers. The makers of the means of production lose part of their market – the producers of consumer goods – and shut down factories and sack more workers. This only deepens the depression. The capitalist’s way out of the problem is to put more of the burden on the backs of the workers.

We must find our own way out. In the face of the disintegration of the capitalist economy, of evictions, of repossessions, of sackings, we need to build up our organisations to resist and defeat them. Shelter is a human right. We must cut our unions free from the steel nets of the IR laws so that unions are free to strike to bring in the wages we need to live.

We must build a mass people’s organisation, a united front to be a government that will nationalise all the banks who rob us with rates and mortgage interests, to nationalise the industries that exploit and sack us. We have before us the example of Venezuela who are nationalising industries such as oil, giving the workers a say in management. Cuba has joined with other Latin American countries to set up the Bank of the South and have moved off the grip of the IMF and major US banks and toward alleviating poverty.

We must look for our own way out of the depression.
Cleaners pay hike falls short

From October 1 most office cleaners around Australia should have received the $0.57 per hour Fair Pay Commission pay increase but the LHMU – the cleaners’ union – says this increase fails to cut the cost of ending poverty for cleaners.

“Cleaners work an average of 15 hours a day and $302 per week. On average cleaners will get an extra $8.55 from the Fair Pay Commission’s increase. Cleaners welcome this increase but it isn’t enough to end the cycle of poverty and the unworkable workloads they live with every day,” says Louise Tarrant, LHMU National Secretary.

“Contract cleaning is in crisis and cleaners are feeling it. That’s why we are on negotiating a new Clean Start collective agreement with cleaning firms. It’s the only way to achieve fair wages and working conditions,” says Tarrant.

Recently, Rose Cleaning Services in the ACT didn’t get the right thing and became the first contractor in Australia to sign the collective agreement. Last week, another ACT contractor signed up.

Canberra cleaner Christine Wagland said, “Rose Cleaning Services has signed up to make sure their cleaners are treated properly at work. This agreement means these cleaners will get decent pay, realistic hours, job security and respect for their work.”

“We are waiting to hear what other cleaning firms around the country are doing. I work for one of Canberra’s largest cleaning contractors and it’s time they did the right thing too. We’re prepared to stand together to win fair jobs and decent pay for all office cleaners,” said Wagland.

“Right now, I don’t have enough money to live on,” Hobart cleaner Brenda Krushka said. “If I was on my own I would get by, but I have family to provide for, so it’s hard to make ends meet. I try to pick up extra hours and more work where I can and do as much overtime as possible but because of this I don’t have a life and I’m always stressed.

“I’m working at nights and trying to sleep through the day. I’m often too tired so there’s no real time with my family. I have injured myself several times trying to rush to get the job done because the workloads are really stressful.”

Brisbane cleaner Stephen Duggan shows his support for Clean Start.

“The fair pay commission increase isn’t enough – it won’t solve the problems in cleaning because fair wages for us is not just about the cost of living going up. It is about having a proper weekly wage and right now we don’t get enough hours to live on.”

Added Brenda Krushka, “I think it’s time for cleaning contractors in Tasmania to do the right thing so we can have decent pay, realistic hours, job security and respect for their work.”

Nurses ask Deputy PM – “help save our nursing awards.”

The Australian Nursing Federation (ANF) and nurses are worried that, as part of the federal government’s award modernisation process, the future of their nursing awards is at risk and they are calling on Julia Gillard to reiterate her support for occupational awards.

As part of a united national campaign run by the ANF, over 6,500 petitions have been signed by nurses appealing to the president of the Australian Industrial Relations Commission (AIRC) to consider maintaining a nursing occupational award.

Ged Kearney, ANF federal secretary said nurses are concerned that the AIRC will make the decision to replace nursing awards with generic industry awards.

“Nurses want to work under an occupational award because nurses contribute to all areas of health care, including working in businesses, aged care, the community and hospitals,” Ged Kearney pointed out.

“Also, importantly, many nurses can be employed in multiple areas, for example aged care and community care or public and private sectors and they identify strongly with their nursing profession wherever they work.”

If nurses are forced into generic industry awards with non-specific career structures and minimum conditions of employment, health care standards, patient and resident care standards will be further reduced, particularly in aged care.

“The best way to protect nurses’ wages and conditions is by continuing under a nursing award. This is supported by the ACTU who support the status quo where possible, and therefore support maintaining an occupational award for nurses.”

Ged Kearney said that aged care is of particular concern with the pay and conditions of all aged care nursing employees, including registered nurses, enrolled nurses and assistants in nursing, being far behind that of their colleagues in other sectors.

Nurses know their awards are the safety net that links all nurses as one profession protecting important things like career structures and minimum conditions, wherever they work.

Proper right of entry laws needed

Brisbane company Geon forced its workers to meet their union official Danny Dougherty under a holding pen made of tape and wheelie bins in a car park.

The right of union organisers to be able to speak to workers is being undermined by the Australian Industrial Relations Commission has heard in a case brought forward by the ACTU.

An Australian Manufacturing Workers’ Union (AMWU) organiser in Victoria, Harriet Stewart, was prevented from handing out leaflets outside the gate of a caravanserai in Williamstown, Victoria whilst in Brisbane, AMWU officials were forced to hold a meeting in a dangerous car park where there was traffic from large trucks.

The cases are being used as a test case to highlight the lack of political rights of unions when it comes to right of entry to workplaces and talking with employees. The Rudd Labor government has indicated it will keep the Howard government’s laws on the issue. This has provoked unions into action.

AMWU national secretary Dave Oliver said the case demonstrated the need for “proper right of entry rules”.

“Our experience over the last few years is that employers have severely restricted the capacity of employees to access unions in their workplaces,” he said.

Mr Oliver said the laws allowed employers to nominate inconvenient places for people to meet such as toilet blocks, loadings bays or the bosses’ office.

In the Jaya case, AMWU Harriet Stewart was told earlier this year by the company that she was no longer allowed to hand out leaflets to employees at the factory gate – despite it being a common practice in manufacturing.

Due to the layout of the large Jaya factory, the only other place she could hand out material to the workers was at a dangerous corner of a public road and the service road.

Ms Stewart said Jaya, which employs more than 600 people, had been traditionally non-union. But a leaflet campaign and petition asking for higher wages – she says the workers are poorly paid – had seen the AMWU sign up more than 30 members earlier this year.

Since then attitudes from management have changed. Ms Stewart said, and they were told they needed to give 24 hours notice before handing out leaflets as outside the factory gate was a private road.

She was then told she could only hand out leaflets in a train room, not on the front where there was far easier access to employees.

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September 11th
The questions keep coming

Harry Goldstein

Why ask questions? You only get answers. Berthold Brecht.

According to the US government’s explanation of the events of September 11, 2001, the aircraft which attacked the World Trade Centre (WTC) and the Pentagon, as well as another which crashed in Pennsylvania, were all commercial airliners carrying passengers, and they had all been hijacked by fanatic Muslim fundamentalists wielding knives and box cutters. The aircraft which hit the Pentagon was obliterated by its burning fuel, and the impacts weakened the WTC twin towers, causing them to collapse. Many of these assertions are totally incorrect.

The Pentagon attack

The mass media has consistently ignored evidence which demonstrates conclusively that the Pentagon was not hit by a hijacked Boeing 757 aircraft, but by something much smaller and extremely powerful.

Whatever hit the building left no wrecked fuselage, seats, wings, rudder, tail, luggage or equipment, nor any human remains. It penetrated the outside walls of the building, as well as two reinforced concrete inner walls, each of which is about 900mm thick. It left plenty of smoke damage, but it also made only one 5 metres hole (much smaller than a 757 fuselage), and left no evidence of the impact of four- to six-tonne engines.

A 36 metres wide 757 could not have fitted into the impact breech, and fast-burning airliner fuel would not have vapourised the steel and titanium engines or the other wreckage.

A single turbo-jet engine was indeed retrieved from the building, and a photograph of a component from this engine exists in the public domain. Rolls Royce has stated that the component was not from one of the 757 engines, which they had manufactured. Aviation security consultant Karl Schwartz claims that it belonged to an A3 Skywarrior missile.

Staff from the office area adjacent to the point of impact were transfereed to the other side of the building a week before the attack. According to the official story, the 757 did a very sharp turn at high velocity before it hit the Pentagon, but aviation experts have said that this would have resulted in a crash long before the building was reached.

The sole eyewitness described the aircraft involved as “like a cruise missile with wings”. After the attack, government officials collected small metal fragments from the lawn in front of the impact point. Pentagon staff later stated that they could smell cordite, a military explosive.

The collapse of the WTC towers

If the WTC towers had been weakened by the attacks, they would have fallen sideways, away from the directions of impact. The impacts certainly caused them to sway, but they then righted themselves. According to Dylan Avery’s film Loose Change, the buildings had previously experienced even greater movement during wild winds.

Modern skyscrapers are designed to withstand enormous lateral forces and to move under stress, in order to resist high winds or earthquakes, and the WTC towers actually stood for a considerable period after the attack. However, they then collapsed, straight down onto their own footprints, just as a precisely controlled demolition or an “implosion”.

Even in a controlled demolition, this is difficult to achieve. As US architect Richard Gage noted, buildings tend to collapse “in the direction of least resistance”, and the vertical collapse of a building only occurs when all the column-to-beam connections fail within seconds of each other.

If the WTC towers had been weakened to the point of collapse by the impacts, they could not have righted themselves. Moreover, the structural damage to each connection would have varied enormously throughout the buildings, so that the connections would have failed (if at all) at different rates.

The chance of the towers collapsing straight down as a result of the impacts is therefore virtually zero. So what did destroy them?

Firemen claimed that a series of explosions took place just before the collapse. In TV news footage of the events, small particles can be seen flying from the sides of the buildings just before each floor crashes down onto the one beneath. This is characteristic of controlled demolitions, in which “sajibs” (particles from explosive charges) are ejected from the building as it collapses.

The Building 7 mystery

Building 7, a 47-storey building which stood alongside the WTC towers, was occupied by the CIA and the New York Office of Emergency Services. It collapsed several hours after the collapse of the twin towers, even though it had not been attacked. A fire alarm test was held on the morning of the attack in Building 7, and it was not occupied. The building’s sprinkler system failed to operate when a fire commenced later that day.

No multi-storey steel-framed building in the US had ever collapsed because of fire alone. One New York building survived after more than 18 hours of fire, whereas the fire in Building 7 had been blazing for less than seven hours when it fell.

Moreover, if the fire was not respon- sible for the collapse, the building would presumably have fallen towards the eastern side, where the heat from the fire would have softened the steelwork. Instead, it fell suddenly and vertically, just like the twin towers.

The insurance on the WTC site was said to be US$2 billion. In less than seven hours when it fell, the building would have softened the steelwork.

Whatever hit the Pentagon building left no wrecked fuselage, seats, wings, rudder, tail, luggage or equipment, nor any human remains. It penetrated the outside walls of the building, as well as two reinforced concrete inner walls, each of which is about 900mm thick. It left plenty of smoke damage, but it also made only one 5 metres hole (much smaller than a 757 fuselage), and left no evidence of the impact of four- to six-tonne engines.

A 36 metres wide 757 could not have fitted into the impact breech, and fast-burning airliner fuel would not have vapourised the steel and titanium engines or the other wreckage.

A single turbo-jet engine was indeed retrieved from the building, and a photograph of a component from this engine exists in the public domain. Rolls Royce has stated that the component was not from one of the 757 engines.

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Nuclear energy and class

Ann Rogers

Britain's nuclear power program was intended from the very start to produce plutonium for the manufacture of nuclear weapons. This purpose was played down and the publicity focussed on energy production and what was dishonestly referred to as "the peaceful uses of nuclear power".

Today's drive for a new generation of power plants is no different, even though the proposed new plants are expected to be Pressurized Light Water Reactors (PWRs) rather than the old Magnox type.

This is not surprising since nuclear weapons need a long-term source of plutonium and the ruling class need to be in control of its production.

Unlike those countries which have nuclear power for energy but no nuclear weapons, Britain has the facility for uranium enrichment, which can then produce plutonium. The Thorp plant at Sellafield in Cumbria is such a place – or it would be if a pipe failure in April 2005 instead of forcing it to temporary closure.

The pipe was carrying spent fuel nitric acid. The 83,000 litre spill was contained in the cell but the incident was rated three on the International Nuclear Event Scale. The spilled liquid was recovered two months later and the British Nuclear Group (the decommissioning and clean-up arm of British Nuclear Fuels – BNFL) was fined A$10 million in October 2006.

Thorp (thermal oxide reprocessing) is the third reprocessing plant built at Sellafield, though the initial ideas for it go back as far as 1974. It was granted authorisation to begin operating in 1994.

As well as plutonium from uranium, Thorp was supposed to make money. It contracts to accept spent nuclear fuel rods from countries that don't have reprocessing plants of their own and reprocess it for a price. This means countries such as Japan and Germany could sell their nuclear waste to Britain.

Since the leak at Thorp the imported fuel has just been piling up – the contracts have not been voided. And even when the reprocessing is functioning there is a serious matter of safety because of the distances the fuel has to be transported.

Only about half of the 2,160 tonnes of fuel from advanced gas-cooled reactors (AGRs) has so far been reprocessed. As of the middle of last year, 1,500 tonnes of AGR fuel was planned to be reprocessed at Thorp and a further 4,500 tonnes by the end of the working lives of the AGRs was earmarked to be stored.

Even with land burial it has to be remembered that high-level waste is literally hot for 20,000 years and has to be stored for 50 years to allow it to cool.

There already is a site for low-level radioactive waste at Drigg in Cumbria and this is at present is the responsibility of the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority (NDA). The NDA is now planning deep geological repositories for high and intermediate waste – it is claimed to cost some A$15 billion.

Not surprisingly people are not happy to live near the chosen sites. So in June last year there was a public consultation around the idea of "partnerships with potential host communities that allow issues and opportunities to be fully discussed and evaluated". Oh, how Blairie!

More recently there has been talk of offering local communities cash incentives to agree to these plans.

In pressing for nuclear power the government argues that nuclear power plants do not emit carbon. That is little comfort if the long-term problem of nuclear waste creates something far worse. The government also claims that we need nuclear power in order such as wind, solar, tidal, hydro powers and even cleaner use of fossil fuels. In addition there is now technology being developed to retrieve carbon and bury it – preferable to burying nuclear waste.

At present these alternative sources are a drop in the ocean and will not meet current and future needs. But there is no reason why this technology cannot be developed. It would require both capital investment and investment in further research and development.

The problem is that this is not likely to be achieved if the nuclear option is taken.

Back in the mid 1980s, when Thatcher was busy destroying our coal industry, the miners' union argued then for investment to be made in coal-fired power station design to enable coal to be used without the emissions of ash and particulates. As we know, the miners were ignored.

The thrust now is all on nuclear. There are two main reasons:

1) The link between nuclear power and nuclear weapons;
2) The prospect of big profits for capitalist enterprise.

As always capitalism is the problem – its process: the European-based Aneva, the US-based Westinghouse and Canada ACR and the US-based General Electric. By January of this year the French state-owned EDF and the German company E.ON threw their hats into the ring.

E.ON claimed it could finance the project without government help, but most independent nuclear experts do not think nuclear energy can be financially self-supporting. They point to the A$7 billion government bail-out of British Energy.

We now know that it is most likely that EDF will gain the contract and they are planning to build 10 new nuclear power plants – though this is currently on hold for further haggling over money.

The British working class will ultimately foot the bill. This will include A$140 billion for decommissioning the existing nuclear plants and at least a further A$650 billion for burying the existing nuclear waste.

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So, whether nuclear fuel is reprocessed or not, the problem of nuclear waste remains.

It cannot be got rid of – ultimately it can only be buried, either under the sea or in underground storage.

And given that some radioactive elements take generations to decay (for instance the most stable isotope of plutonium has a half-life of 25,000 years) and that these elements are highly toxic carcinogens which can never leave us, it means the problem is terminal.

The latest thinking on nuclear waste seems to be to find a geologically suitable single depository. Britain has already tried a deep ocean site before 1982. But following protests from other countries the practice was subject to an international ban in 1993.

According to the government the electricity gap will occur over the next few years, accounting for about one third of our current energy supply. Nuclear power will not solve this immediate problem since not one new nuclear plant will be operational for at least 10 years and the plan to build up to 10 stations will not deliver until at least 2025.

The alternatives to nuclear power are the clean electricity-producing renewable sources to close the "energy gap". First of all the term "energy gap" is misleading because the gap is not on all energy but only in electricity production. Nuclear power will not lessen by nuclear power.

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As in everything else, privatisation has been gaining a momentum in the nuclear industry for years. Nuclear plants (apart from Magnox) were put into the private sector in 1996 under British Energy (BE). The then state-owned BNFL took over the Magnox plants. BNFL later bought Westinghouse.

When economic conditions in the industry changed BE turned to the public purse for help. Between 2003 and 2005 it was restructured and the government took a 64 percent share. The following year the government sold this down to 39 percent.

The list of companies coming on and off this stage and the wanderings in and out of government support are too long to give here. But the nub of the matter is that capitalism wants all it can get when the government is prepared to pick up the tab for fluctuations in the industry and difficult problems that arise and wants to walk away if it proves less profitable than expected. So promises by firms like EDF to be self-financing may not prove true in the long term.

Everyone can see what privatisation has meant in other industries – Network Rail, water companies and their leaks, the London Tube tube maintenance and so on. And in the energy industry itself we are acutely aware of the massive rise in bills to customers.

A new generation of nuclear power plants in private hands is against the interests of the working class. It means there is no democratic control of the industry. It means we get to pay for it all while the private owners take all the profits. And it means that other energy solutions will be sidelined, under-funded and largely under-used.

New Worker, New Communist Party of Britain. ☯
Why the bail-out will fail

Peter Symon *

After unparalleled stampeding and pressure, Bush’s bail-out of his corporate mates – the banks, financial institutions, insurance companies, etc. – has been signed into law. There are to be two oversight committees. One is to be made up of government appointees, the very same people who concocted the plan in the first place. The other oversight committee is to be made up by the House of Representative and Senate leaderships from both parties. (A short summary of the amended version can be found at CNN website.)

The initial response to the passing of this bail-out has been anything but enthusiastic and many (including economists) are skeptical about it working. And they are right!

The bail-out does not alter the fundamentals of capitalism in any way. These fundamentals have been at work ever since the beginnings of the capitalist era and have been responsible for the continuing cycle of crises from the early 1800s in capitalist Britain, to the 1930s world-wide Great Depression and the periodical crises in all capitalist countries up to the present time.

Daddy of them all

The present crisis is perhaps the daddy of that time, but that is not the whole story. That causes the same remain and are not removed by Bush’s bail-out. In fact, the problems are becoming more intensified.

The current crop of politicians and most economists do not understand or acknowledge how they work but, even if they did, they remain slaves to “the system”. There are quite a few today who say that it is the fault of “the system” but do not explain that “system” and do not have any means to change it.

The best they can do is to make some amendments as has happened with Bush’s package – some tax cuts, tightening up corporate laws, but all of these are improving oversight and other concessions. But this changes little and certainly not the fundamentals. That is why the antidote to the economic crises is that the workers will not work in the long run and probably not in the short run either.

Capitalism has been built on the exploitation of the labour of the working people. This simply means that the working people never receive the full value for what they produce in the course of production. This value is paid by companies.

Furthermore, those who produce the commodities for the market do not own any part of them nor have any control over the prices charged for these commodities. Ownership remains with the owners of the land and price is also determined by these same owners.

This is what Marx and Engels called surplus value – the hours of unpaid labour. Marx did not invent surplus value. All class societies were built on the exploitation of the workers of the times who, as a result, remained in poverty. Slavery society was built on the exploitation of the workers of the time who, as a result, remained in poverty. Slave society was built on the exploitation of the workers of the time who, as a result, remained in poverty.

Superannuation

This transformation would bring an end to the exploitation of the working people by a small group of corporate controllers. There is much more to be said about the solution to the capitalist theft of the wealth created by labour but that is the occasion for another time.

There is another capitalist principle that contains within it the same idea of exploitation. Never use your own money when you can use someone else’s say the capitalists. Hence the concept of borrowing.

Superannuation incorporates that principle. Superannuation has now built up funds to about $1 trillion in Australia. It is workers’ money from wages not paid since the scheme was made universal and compulsory by the Hawke/Keating Labor government.

Supernannuation is nominally in the name of the individuals but it is “managed” and reinvested by “fund managers”. It could be invested in bank bills or term deposits but because the profits from shares have been higher (so far) it is more often invested in private company shares. If profits decline so does the value of the investment of super funds. If a company is bankrupted the fund may lose the lot or at least a proportion of it.

This huge pool of worker’s money is today a principle source of investment capital. In the current severe economic crisis the returns on super investments have shrunk and some have lost their entire super savings.

GST

The introduction of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) transformed the taxation system. All consumers were forced to pay taxes, even those who had previously been exempt under PAYG taxation. Distinct taxes were replaced as was company taxation. The GST is paid by consumers for the purchase of consumer goods and services and they are mainly the working people. The single family with one wage earner whose income is paid by companies in the course of production is recouped from the Taxation Department.

It was from the point of introduction of the GST that huge budget surpluses were built up to the current level of about $20 billion. This is now going to be poured into the pockets of the big construction companies in infrastructure projects. It will also be used to bail out banks and financial institutions if necessary.

This is another form by which wealth has been diverted out of the pockets of working people and into the accounts of corporations. The direction of things to come is indicated by the statements by both Kevin Rudd and Wayne Swan that they will not insist on banks passing on any interest reductions decided by the Reserve Bank.

Finally, new technology used in production has sharply increased the rate of exploitation of the working people. In many industries the number of workers required has dropped to 20 or even 10 percent of their former level. The reduced number of workers can produce the same quality of commodities but they are often of better quality.

The working people never receive the full value for what they produce in the hours of labour that they expend in making commodities and providing services.

These are some of the means by which surplus value, expressed as company profits, is taken out of the hides of all working people.

The reality of exploitation of labour, inherent in and fundamental to every capitalist economy, is neither recognised nor addressed by the US bail-out scheme. It will continue to operate and accumulate its consequences which remain the main cause of periodical economic crises.

The working people will never receive sufficient pay to buy back the commodities and services they produce and this situation will inevitably break out in the form of economic crises such as is now being experienced.

That’s why the bail-out will not work in the long run irrespective of how much money is poured into the rescue plans of capitalist banks, financial institutions, insurance companies, etc. – has been signed into law.

The Guardian

* Peter Symon is General Secretary of the Communist Party of Australia.
US union leader: “This is our fight for democracy”

Bruce Bostick

At organised labour’s Get Out The Vote mobilisation, Ohio AFL-CIO President Joe Rrugola announced that his state was “in play,” giving the labor policies of the Bush administration a once thought safe haven, stopping at shut-down facilities, to publicise the over 122,000 jobs lost in that state due to the policies of the Bush administration. The “Walk for Economic Justice” kicked off on October 5 in Youngstown with a public rally at one of the many closed steel mills in the Mahoning Valley. Over 1,100 Ohio plants have been closed during the Bush administration, due to anti-labour policies that un-ionists really understand. We can’t back up a step and it’s now or never. We need to defeat the anti-union Army General Phil Sheridan, when he rallied retreatung Union troops in the Shenandoah Valley, Rugola yelled: “Fight, dammit! Don’t cheer, FIGHT!”

“I no longer speak of this election as ‘historic,’ which, of course, it is,” said Rugola, “I really believe that it is special. We are now at a watershed moment in our nation’s history, much as the time that brought Lincoln into office to lead the fight to defeat slavery, or Franklin Roosevelt to the presidency, to defeat fascism and help us build our labour movement. This election will set our nation’s, and the world’s, direction possibly for the next century.”

Rugola’s Walk for Economic Justice passed over 100 miles across the state of Ohio, and involved 20-30 rallies and other media events. Organised labour used the events to build the ongoing labour walks for Barack Obama/Joe Biden and union-endorsed candi- dates throughout Ohio. “We’re seeing some real shifts in our direction,” said Glenn Sheed, director of organised labour’s GOTV efforts in Columbus. “With the attention now on the economy and the economic disaster the Republicans have created, working folks are coming home. Who’s a pig, who wears lipstick and what McCain did 40 years ago matter little to someone who is losing their job and their health care,” he said.

“Make no mistake,” said Rugola, “This is our fight! This is our fight for democracy, as well as economic justice. And union- ists understand democracy, real democracy that says that you and I, regular working folks, get a real say in what happens to us and our families. That is what we are about, what we are based on, down to the soles of our feet. When I was in elementary school, I remember learning about real democracy around my dinner table – when my dad, his brothers and many of the other coal miners in that small Western Pennsylvania mining com- munity discussed real life, and what they needed to do to solve real problems. That’s real democracy,” Rugola said.

Closing the event, Ben Waxman told the audience that they will make history, one way or the other. “Let’s make history that we’ll be proud of,” said Waxman. “There are over 2 million Ohio unionists, white and African American. We’re calling to show the world that white unionists are going to vote in their own inter- ests and elect the first African-American president, Barack Obama, to help us bring about the changes we need for us and our families, our communities.”

People’s Weekly World
Japanese PM preaches about virtue of Japan-US alliance

Aso Taro delivered his first speech as Japanese prime minister at the United Nations General Assembly on September 25. It was an extraordinary statement that enthused the virtue of the Japan-US military alliance, not of the United Nations, as the most important aspect of Japanese diplomacy.

Aso stated, “Japan has come a long way, with the Japan-US alliance and our ties with other Asian nations.” Although he went on to say, “Japan strongly emphasises its commitment to the United Nations,” he stopped short of referring to the raison d’etre and the role of the United Nations in international law and peace for human dignity. The ruling Liberal Democratic and Komei parties on September 23 agreed to continue with their coalition government, stating that they will “develop a proactive diplomacy that puts emphasis on the importance of the Japan-US alliance as the ‘unbreakable cornerstone’ of Japanese diplomacy. This amounts to proclaiming that Japan’s emphasis on the United Nations and Asian diplomacy depends on the Japan-US alliance. What is more, he said, “I am determined to work in solidarity with countries holding fundamental values in common,” thus defying the concept of developing “dialogue between civilizations with different values,” a concept presently discussed and promoted in the United Nations.

Aso’s UN speech can be seen against the background of his perverted view that the Japan-US military alliance is of absolute necessity. He defines the Japan-US alliance, which was founded by his grandfather and ex-Prime Minister Yoshida Shigeru, as an asset shared by Asia and the rest of the world. He says that Japan should no longer be a follower of the United States and that the two countries should jointly be in charge.

This is the position from which Aso at the UN referred to the Japanese Self-Defense Forces’ refuelling operation in the Indian Ocean to assist in the US-led war of retaliation against terrorism. In defiance of the Japanese people’s and opposition parties’ strong objections, Aso internationally pledged to continue the fuelling mission, saying that Japan would “stand side by side with the international community and participate proactively in the fight against terrorism.”

The Guardian

Disarmament advocates vs US-India nuclear deal

Marilyn Bechtel

Peace and disarmament activists are warning that an agreement now before the US Senate to let India buy nuclear fuel and technology from the United States for civilian purposes could make it easier for India to build more nuclear weapons. They say the pact also undermines the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty because it would let India participate in international nuclear trade even though it developed nuclear weapons outside the NPT framework and won’t sign the treaty.

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Japan Press Weekly

Global Briefs

SOUTH AFRICA: New South African President Kgalema Motlanthe gained wide praise last week for dismissing AIDS-denying health minister Manto Tshabalala-Msimang, replacing her with a woman who is likely to take the more scientific approach to fighting the HIV virus. And then ended an era of AIDS treatment given over to what former UN Special Envoy for AIDS Steven Lewis called the “lunatic fringe.” Recently displaced President Thabo Mbeki had discounted the HIV virus as causing AIDS and advocated nutritional treatment. His government began supplying public AIDS clinics with anti-retroviral drugs only in 2003, and according to the Treatment Action Campaign, Tshabalala-Msimang failed to push implementation.

BELGIUM: European Union interior ministers agreed on September 27 to institute a “blue card” category under which educated foreign workers with special skills could enter the 27 member states. The ministers also ruled against mass amnesties and laid plans to create an asylum system. Blue card workers will be required to earn 150 percent of the average wage in countries where they work, 120 percent if labour shortages prevail. The initiative, propelled by France and taking effect in 2011, will be ratified this month. European nations will be using the proposed system to compete with the United States for foreign workers. French Immigration Minister Brice Hortefeux explained to Bloomberg News that the ministers sought “a way between creating a fortress and a sieve.”

IRAQ: A recent report on envirosagainst-war.org documents grim conditions at Baghdad Medical City. Only one of 10 elevators serving the 18-story complex works. Most physicians have left, many are dead. Dr. Samir Abdul Zahra told reporters Arkan Hamed and Dahr Jamail that the nation’s premier teaching and referral medical centre has “no qualified staff to serve patients, no antibiotics, and sometimes not even basic material for intravenous treatment.” Most medicines are out of date, according to a pharmacist. Electricity is intermittent, water for hand-washing scarce, and air conditioning nonexistent. Azzaman reported, however, that “hundreds of medical doctors,” attracted by Health Ministry bonuses, have returned to their former posts. Surgeons receive US$1,000 per operation.

LAOS: Rising oil and natural gas costs and concerns over climate change have cast the Mekong River, the world’s tenth longest, as a regional source of hydroelectricity. Nongovernmental organisations, private corporations and officials from Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam – plus Chinese observers – met in Vientiane on September 27 under the auspices of the Mekong River Commission to plan for multiple dams. Advocates touted hydroelectricity as clean and accessible, while critics noted hazards dams pose to the environment and human ecology. Inter Press Service quoted Carl Middleton, representing the US group International Rivers, as criticising dam-building corporations from Thailand, Vietnam, China, Russia and Malaysia, whose “accountability, environmental and social cost standards are low.”

A child participates in a protest against the US-India nuclear deal, in New Delhi.
Letters to the Editor

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Wake up call for Premier Rees

Recently I read a quote by renowned American political essayist Gore Vidal: “...there is only one party in the United States, the Party... and it has two right wings: Republican and Democrat. Republicans are a bit stupider, more rigid, more doctrinaire in their laissez-faire capitalism than the Democrats, who are cuter, prettier, a bit more corrupt – until recently... and more willing than the Republicans to make small adjustments when the need, the black, the anti-imperialists galvanize, or a crisis, or a revolution, or a movement. There is no difference between the two parties.”

I read this immediately brought to mind the NSW Labor Government under Premier Morris Iemma.

Long story short, there were local government elections held in NSW last month. My wife and I; Labor Party got well and truly thumped.

Every month, the CPA Branch that I belong to had a film screening in the Party building.

Last month, the film was an American documentary on one particular aspect of big business and the environment. The audience was small, but appreciative of the film’s content and the skill with which it was made, so it then finished and we dutifully remained seated and watched the end credits roll. And roll, and roll. It was enough to try the patience of a saint. And this was a documentary feature made for television with much shorter credits than a theatrical feature film.

The most obvious element in all theatrical films today just go on and on; even the theme music usually runs out well before the credits finish and some additional anonymous music is tacked on just to take the film out.

My wife and I make it a habit to watch the end credits right through. (It’s a hangover from our film school days.) However, this invariably means that we are the only people left in the theatre, except for the baffled staff who wish we were the next mob. And it is a habit, so everyone else so that they can get out with cleaning the theatre before leaving.

And who can blame the public for their unwillingness to stay to watch an interminable list of people, many of whom had no creative involvement in the film at all. What creative part do the unit accountants play? Or the caterers, the publicists, the stills photographers? If there is a child in the film we get a credit for the “tutor”, no doubt a necessary post under OHS’s regulations but hardly a position that will influence the look or the content of the finished film.

Such credits are just meaningless statistics. No wonder the public can’t wait to get up and leave.

There are an enormous number of jobs that help to keep a film production company running, and yet make no real contribution to what finally appears on the screen. Why do film companies stick long lists of them on to the ends of their films?

Is it really, as some contend, a tactic for clearing theatres in readiness for the next session? It wasn’t always like this. In the heyday of the Hollywood studios, film credits were usually at the beginning of films, and they were short. Only the principal creative people received any screen credit; the supervising make-up artist, the senior costume designer, the cinematographer, the composer, the conductor, the film editor, the scriptwriter.

All the myriad technicians who assist these people – the make-up artists, the electricians, the carpenters, the set decorators, the focus pullers, the lighting technicians, etc – were listed separately in special supplements to trade publications like The Film Daily.

When anyone in the industry wanted to know who were the members of the team responsible for (say) the lighting on a particular film, they could just look it up.

But when the studio system was broken up, everyone became effectively a free agent, and they deemed it desirable to have their contribution noted in the credits. Film producers probably saved themselves some cash by pushing the line that a credit was a form of advertising and hence was equivalent to actual money.

The perpetuation of seemingly imminemable, arcane and frankly dull credits has now reach its inevitable reward: television, with its feverish desire not to lose its audience during the transition from one program to the next, has gone through several manicures that are all variations on dumping the credits. These include rolling the credits so fast they cannot be read, squeeze them into the bottom third of the screen while running an ad for the next program above them, or drowning out the end-title music in order to play a voice-over ad for another program following or later that night.

Channel Ten has now announced it will cut the credits altogether.

The most obvious element in all these variations is total contempt for the wishes of the original filmmaker and the integrity of the film or television production. Commercial television, however, has long ago shown that it has as little regard for the makers of its programs as it has for the television audience.

The ghastly practice of super-imposing plugs for up-coming programs over the visuals of the program currently running is now commonplace. But what else can you expect from people so debased by pursuit of the mighty dollar that they think it is right and proper to insert advertisements in films every few minutes – the more important the film, the more ads and the more ad-breaks.

But, as we have said before, commercial television is not about entertainment, still less about art and education. It is a branch of the advertising industry. It is about gathering a definable group of people together in front of their TVs at a given time in order to sell those people to advertisers anxious to show them their commercials.

The movies and other programs on TV are just there to entice people to tune in so they are ready to receive a dose of commercials. If the networks could persuade people to watch just commercials, that is all they would run; they would ditch the programs altogether. (Late at night, some of the stations do just that now.)

So, while movie credits have unquestionably got out of hand, the solution cannot be left to the insensitive hands of commercial television, whose overriding interest is not the public good.

In Hollywood heyday only the principle creative people received a screen credit – Katharine Hepburn.
The Galápagos Islands have been studied by scientists more or less continuously since Charles Darwin first went there in the Beagle and made the observations that, when published as The Origin of Species, changed forever the way people saw the world. The islands are a living laboratory – a geological conveyor belt that has given birth to, and seen the death of, many species of plants and animals.

The Galápagos can no longer be described as an archipelago. The volcanic islands of the archipelago are joined by Taida Swinton.

The origin of the word Galapagos is from an Aborigine perspective, so for once the hype is reasonably accurate. It is a major event.

Six years in the making, with its various episodes directed by different leading filmmakers, the series blends beautifully filmed landscape with Indigenous art, first-hand accounts by whites and blacks, interviews and a remarkable stock of archival material.

The series traces Australia’s history, and in particular Aboriginal history, from 1788 in Sydney, to 1993 with Koiki Mabo’s legal challenge to the British occupation of the continent.

The real test of the series will come once we have moved on from the first couple of episodes, and we will be able to see what extent the series distinguishes between the invaders’ ruling class, to whom the Indigenous peoples were merely a nuisance and an impediment to exploiting their new acquisition, and the white working class whom the invaders brought with them, often in chains.

Every year, vast areas of rainforest in Indonesia and the Amazon are cut down and burnt to clear land for cash crops such as palm oil or coffee. This ‘burning season’ makes Indonesia the third largest producer of carbon emissions in the world.

The poor farmers have little choice but to join in the destruction: how else will they earn enough money to live? It is an environmental disaster that cannot be allowed to continue or the rainforest, will simply disappear.

However, capitalism knows only one way to approach such fundamental questions: what’s in it for me?”

Destruction of rainforest to grow palm-oil plantations makes money for someone. Preserving the rainforest does not. Ergo, get rid of the rainforest.

Only capitalists refuse to accept that we must cease this senseless destruction. Ordinary people are well aware that what’s good for big business is not necessarily good for the world’s people. So how to stop capitalism from destroying the planet?

In The Burning Season (ABC Tuesday 8.30 pm), young Australian filmmaker, who styles himself an environmental entrepreneur, which is surprising in terms, pitches a solution: a plan to sell the carbon credits represented by large forest areas to big polluters in the West.

Until socially responsible governments become the norm, making things like rainforests profitable in this way might just be the only viable solution if we are to prevent capitalism sending us all to hell in a handbasket.

The Intervention (ABC Thursday 9.25 pm), was produced by Taida Zubrycki and written and directed by Julie Nimmo. Tom Zubrycki is a progressive filmmaker with a string of award-winning films to his credit.

The film’s subject is the impact of the Emergency Intervention by the federal government in the Northern Territory region of Katherine and the surrounding communities of Besswick, Barunga, Eva Valley and Binjari.

The Intervention was shot over an 8-month period and features the lives of ordinary community residents as they experience the Intervention first hand, as well as the various government and business workers who all come together to implement it.

Julie Nimmo seems to have been thrown by the fact that the latter group (police, army, health workers, etc) are filled with good intentions. They really did hope to make the Territory a better place for Indigenous children.

What the film fails to adequately show, I think, is that those were not the hopes of the people behind the Intervention, the Howard government. Their attitude to land rights, their treatment of Aboriginal organisations, had clearly shown that the federal government shared the views of the big mining companies. Indigenous people and organisations were simply a pest that interfered with the all-important task of exploiting Australia’s natural resources for maximum profit.

The ‘sexual abuse of indigenous children’ provided a golden opportunity to eliminate public support for Aboriginal people and their organisations, to seize control of their communities and their institutions, such as they were.

To imagine for one moment that the Howard government, the government that became notorious for incarcerating the children of refugees, cared one iota for the safety and welfare of Indigenous children is laughable.

The Intervention was and remains a grubby for land and power. This program gives the grabbers just too much benefit of the doubt.

Cold Tea for Brandy $35 (p/p $8.50)

By Joan Cossedge

Joan did not grow up on easy street. She started life in the Depression years in Ballarat and knows what it is to be evicted and to go without. Alcohol and gambling ate up the meagre family income. This personal, lively account of her early days is a reminder to older readers of those tough times and for younger readers a powerful picture of those days and how much has been achieved since then by the labour, women’s and other social movements.

One of the many books available at SPA Books

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October 31

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Two sides of Mexico

Steve Mather

If Mexico makes the international news sector more than a backwater, it is usually for all the wrong reasons. Recent reports are no exception.

Mexico is one of the most unequal societies on the planet, with the filthy rich living alongside the impoverished. A recent spate of kidnappings is one of the appalling social consequences of such injustice.

Last month, a 14-year-old kidnapping victim died from his injuries, the latest in a long line of such tragedies. The Mexican government has been criticized for its failure to address the root causes of this crisis.

In other words, US companies are selling refined Mexican oil back to Mexico and making a tidy profit in the process. All sections of society acknowledge that something must be done. Their favoured solution, however, depends on which side of the political divide they stand.

The leading personalities are the very same people who fought over the hotly disputed presidency in 2006. On the right is the proponent of the privatisation plan, President Felipe Calderon of the National Action Party (PAN). Dull as they come on a personal level, he droned on in a manner whereby he attempts to justify his position, arguing that the only way to introduce the necessary investment and technology into the oil industry is by attracting capital-rich foreign, mainly US, oil companies into the country to exploit Mexican oil. Bizarrely, he claims that he is not privatising the industry by doing so.

"Our proposals will strengthen not privatising Pemex and I consider it an affront to my patriotism that anyone should say otherwise," he blustered in a party political broadcast on Mexican TV last month.

On the left is the charismatic Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador. The ex-mayor of Mexico City and a leading member of the Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD), he acknowledges that serious reforms are needed in the oil industry but he believes that privatiisers should play no part in the exploitation of Mexico's national resources.

Along with other members of the PRD and a significant number of left-wing academics, he is promoting a plan to keep Pemex public and to use national resources to make the company more efficient and to begin oil exploration.

In the middle of these two parties is the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), whose position is more in line with that of the government. While PAN has no overall majority in the congress, it could push an unpopular policy through with the help of the PRI.

But this is a danger that Obrador has anticipated. He is currently attempting to mobilise Mexicans through his National Movement in Defence of Oil campaign.

In April, it organised a sit-down protest outside the Mexican Congress and padlocked the doors. Its actions shut down the government for a week.

On August 23, a march organised by the PRD set off from Cardenas's resting place in Mexico City towards the main square, the Zocalo.

Guadalupe Acosta Naranjo, the PRD mayor of the city, was on the march. "Pemex is in trouble, I don't doubt it, Cardenas's proposal is not new," he said. "Foreign companies will simply come, take our oil, invest nothing, then leave when there is none left. We need to use our resources to develop the economy."

A week later, on August 31, Obrador spoke at a massive rally at the Monument to the Revolution in Mexico City. He said that the movement must prepare itself for a "third phase" of peaceful, civil disobedience.

"From today, we declare ourselves in a state of alert and we are ready for any call. "If they try to impose a Pemex privatisation reform, whether openly or disguised, we are going to find it necessary to mobilise."

Sadly, the PRD is having to campaign without the help of the oil workers' union, whose leadership is mired in corruption, divorced from grass-roots workers and supports the PAN privatisation plan.

The campaign could do with the help of the anti-kidnapping protesters too, but most of them would probably be against the PRD position.

Ironically, although they don't realise it, the wealthy families of kidnap victims would also benefit from the redistribution and investment in infrastructure that a properly functioning, publicly owned Pemex could bring, bringing with it the prospect of more jobs and less crime on the streets.

It is safe to say that the right-wing privatisation agenda will not benefit Mexico nor hardly any Mexicans. Most of the oil profits will remain in the country in the hands of the elite, exacerbating the already obscene levels of poverty and inequality.

Obrador has labelled September the month of "la patria". If the left can succeed in this battle, then not only would Pemex be saved but it could give the PRD a head start for 2012 presidential elections.

Obrador recently said that he would be willing to be a candidate again, provided that the right haven't "destroyed me politically". If his party can pull it off, it may mean that Mexico, which has traditionally been dominated by its northern neighbour, would start looking south for more equal partnerships with countries such as Venezuela.

There, under President Hugo Chavez, the popular government has displayed the same spirit of independence about its oil that ordinary Mexicans seem to have about theirs.

The company has been the focus of a great pride among Mexicans and an essential source of revenue for successive governments. There is even an annual holiday on March 18 to commemorate its 1938 nationalisation.