

# Front Line

Union Movement and Community Monthly

## Tax fiddle, Australia burns

*Is this really the best we can do as a nation?*

**W**e have just completed maybe the most important election for fifty years, the one that will take Australia into a new century and beyond: the election the papers called the 'Millennial' (1000 year) election. We're facing really important political, social and economic issues, real problems to be solved, real questions to decide about the kind of society we want Australia to be next century. And what is the critical issue that our politicians asked us to hang our future on, to inspire us into a new era, to focus our vision and our idealism as a nation? Whether or not to have a consumption tax.

*Is a GST necessary for a "fair and efficient" tax system?*

The Government claimed that its tax package is fair and efficient. It says that its 'reforms', and especially the introduction of a GST, are a necessary corrective to some serious problems in the 'structure' of the present tax system. Maybe after nearly 20 years we should be getting a bit suspicious of this word 're-structure'. It's important to distinguish clearly between the kind of tax reforms that a party with a New Right or Economic Rationalist ideology would necessarily want to make to the tax system (and have already been made in countries like USA, New Zealand and UK); and those which are genuinely necessary to produce a fair and efficient system that meets the country's needs.

*Continued on Page 8*

S.ROTH



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Inside This Issue:

**JABILUKA:**  
The Battle Goes On



## Editorial

## The real issues are yet to emerge

Voters don't need to feel guilty that they can't enthuse about the October election. So far it has been a non-event, with neither side dealing with the real issues that concern the people with such eagerness. Until now it has been all about tax and leadership and nothing about matters of real importance.

The whole tax debate is a red herring to hide the real intent of the Howard Government to introduce a GST which will make the poor even poorer and the wealthy wealthier, and to ensure that his rich mates maintain their lifestyle and profit, with the promise that if we take the bad medicine with the good, we will, one day, be able to enjoy the good life created by their spiralling profits.

No serious debate about the real crisis, that of declining services in every area of need and in the huge increase in poverty and declining living standards for the vast majority.

No serious debate or policies about the rising jobsless. Nothing about the destruction of the state school system. No real solutions to the declining hospital standards and lack of available and affordable health care. No genuinely expressed concerns about the deplorable dental standards which affect low income people's health. Not a word about the 300,000 at least, families waiting for 10 years or more for public housing, the only form of housing they can afford. Nothing about the position of people having to attend Court without any form of legal aid. Certainly no comments about the lack of hope, planning or commitment to any future by the majority of the population in this very wealthy 'lucky country' where the policies for saving our endangered environment and which Government will ensure that the original owners of this country receive the justice to which they are entitled?

The United Nations recently released its latest Report on Human Development. Its findings do little to encourage us to believe that those who control the world's economy will voluntarily relinquish their greedy control.

## The United Nations' Report found:

That in developing countries 1.3 billion people live on the equivalent of less than \$1 per day.

FrontLine is an independent, progressive, monthly newspaper supported by a number of unions and community groups. It is published 10 times per year and 15,000 copies are distributed each month to subscribers and around Melbourne and its suburbs and through country Victoria. FrontLine aims to promote a critical understanding of our society, help build effective community action, and project a new vision of the sort of egalitarian, collectivist and democratic society that ordinary people want to build.

FrontLine aims for a broadly based, critical and well researched writing that is neither dogmatic nor hectoring in style. FrontLine is produced by voluntary

And 32% in the more advanced nations have less than \$4 and 11% in the industrialised world (like ours) have less than \$11.

That the 3 richest individuals in the world possess more than the total gross domestic product of the poorest 48 countries, the 15 richest people have more than the total GDP of sub-Saharan Africa and the 32 richest more than that of South Asia. That for \$6 billion a year more, basic education could become universal. This is half the amount that the US and Europe spend on perfume.

That satisfying everyone's basic food needs would cost \$13 billion. In comparison Europe and the US spend \$17 billion a year on pet food. Europe's annual consumption of cigarettes totals \$50 billion, world drug taking accounts for \$400 billion and military expenditure \$780 billion.

Of the 4.4 billion people in developing countries three fifth lack basic sanitation, one third have no safe drinking water, one quarter have inadequate housing, one fifth are undernourished, and in the 'wealthy' countries (such as ours) 200 million were not expected to live to 60 years of age, 100 million were homeless and 37 million were unemployed.

The United States, the richest country in the world in terms of income per head, is last in a new UN League table of 17 developed countries for poverty. Anglo Saxon countries fill four of the bottom six places, and Australia is in 12<sup>th</sup> place.

So when we look at our election, which our Prime Minister claims is the most important election we have had for many years, think about the above and ask yourself, even though neither major Party has come up with solutions to all our real problems, which Party has the best interests of the majority of the people at heart? In our current economic crisis and its impact on Australia, we don't want what the Prime Minister calls the 'best economic managers', because they manage for the small percentage of the richest in our

labour, and all money raised is used to cover direct printing, production and postage costs. We rely on subscriptions and donations to keep alive. Can you help?

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FrontLine reserves the right not to publish letters or unsolicited articles, and to cut to length. Editorial Co-ordinator: Marion Harper.



economy, and the vast majority really don't count with the Liberal Party.

We need policies which will end privatisation and return those services sold to private enterprise to the people.

We want a massive injection of funds into public housing, so that no family in Australia is without a secure affordable home.

We want our state education system to be restored to its former position as the only taxpayer funded education system, free, secular, and compulsory, and those who wish to choose from a private alternative to do so at their own cost.

We want our public hospital system to remain public, and we want a restoration of staff to ensure that all those who need a bed are able to obtain one.

We want a system of nursing homes, government owned and funded, and we want those using those facilities to enjoy a peaceful, affordable and dignified final years in quality homes.

We want our taxes to be used to re-employ those workers at who were sacked from public service jobs, so that we can raise more efficient, affordable services and we want genuine employment in areas that provide for community needs.

We want unions to be respected and their conditions of work and their right to organise to be enshrined in law.

We want Local Government to be a third tier of Government, legislatively ensured and respected by other tiers of Government as an independent and publicly recognised form of Government.

We want the banks controlled so that they serve the communities whose money they use.

We want our environment protected and a ban on all uranium mining and on the destruction of protected areas. While we don't expect to get these policies under capitalism, nonetheless we demand them as the right of all Australians.

## Letters



## On Multinational Agreement on Investment (MAI)

13th October, 1998

Ron Neave, Glenhantly 3163

## Frontline,

I join those people who are seeking information about the Multinational Agreement on Investment (MAI). As I understand it, if ratified, the MAI would be the major international, legally binding agreement governing international investment flows. It would provide a 'free kick' to multinational corporations to ride over the top of local industry.

The Australian people must be informed about the details of the Agreement, which can have serious implications for the future of our country. The Federal Government must tell us what its position is in relation to this vital matter.

Shouldn't they let the Australian people know if they have any reservations about it? Shouldn't they outline what is the process of thorough public consultation to be followed prior to any decision to ratify the treaty?

Why the secrecy?

Are other countries and international companies to have the right to veto commercial and political decisions of Australia?

Are they to impose their will on Australia?

Isn't it time for the Government to come clean?

R.W. NEAVE

## "Let them stay!"

A combined network of over 10,000 Australians stand ready to help the Federal Law on behalf of East Timorese asylum seekers, but more help is needed...

"In East Timor they torture us physically; in Australia they do it mentally"

Henrique Lay, East Timorese asylum seeker

1650 East Timorese seeking political asylum in Australia, some having fled the Dili massacre of 1991, are still waiting to know if they can stay. For these war-traumatised people life in Australia continues to be full of uncertainty and powerlessness. Their testimonies of persecution in East Timor gather dust as the Government continues to argue that they should go to Portugal (the former colonial ruler of East Timor) for help. The absurdity and hypocrisy of this notion was not lost on Alexander Downer while in Opposition... "not one of these people is any stretch of Mr. Keating's vivid imagination, a Portuguese citizen."

The Sanctuary Network, an organisation initiated by Josephite nuns in Sydney, challenges the Government to honour its moral commitments to the East Timorese and presents a large scale, co-ordinated public pledge to illegally harbour them if necessary. Furthermore, the Network sees the Government's maltreatment of East Timorese asylum seekers as an extension of its shameful historical neglect of East Timor and believes that a just resolution for refugees will contribute towards a shift in Australia's obstructive position on East Timorese self-determination.

While the Sanctuary Network has been suc-

cessful in building potentially the largest civil disobedience campaign since the Vietnam war, deportation has been replaced with destitution as the more immediate threat to the East Timorese. The income support entitlements upon which asylum seekers rely, as they wait to be removed once the Government goes ahead and processes the cases as those of Portuguese citizens.

Additionally, Legal Aid funding for people wanting to challenge these decisions is soon to be abolished. The Sanctuary Network is seeking help for a vulnerable community facing a humanitarian crisis and is concerned that the Government may achieve a victory by defaulting the "voluntary relocation" of people beaten by the wear and tear of a protracted legal dispute and poverty. A national sponsorship scheme has been established to ease the financial strain and action must be taken to mobilise public sympathy into effective action.

Please consider joining the Network in some capacity at an individual or organisational level. For more information ring or write to:

Sanctuary Network  
22 Pitt Street  
Carlton, 3053 ph / fax: 9348 1261

## A mistaken opinion

Dear Sir,

Mr Kennett is of the mistaken opinion that reducing Victoria's debt is a great achievement when in fact it is a tragedy for the people of Victoria.

When the Coalition came into office the level of the debt was about 30% of the State's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) which by international standards is a very satisfying ratio. In fact during the Liberal Party's heyday under Bolte it was 60%, and nobody regarded it as anything out of the ordinary.

Nor is it, currently, The European Union (including Britain, France, Germany, Italy etc) wishes to introduce a common currency - the Euro - and one of the requirements of its members is that their debt should be less than 60% of their GDP. Unsurprisingly, many have sought off their debt in order to avoid suffering unemployment, many cases worse than Australia's.

If, as Mr Kennett claims, he has saved a packet of money in interest by selling off Victoria's assets why are we so short of cash for hospitals, schools, welfare etc? The answer is presumably, that together with the cash received from the sale of our commercial assets he has used it to reduce the State debt and involved the State in non essential activities such as the Grand Prix, exhibition buildings and sporting events to satisfy his own ego.

Isn't it time for a change?

Yours Faithfully,

Geoff S. Palmer

## Wouldn't it be luvverly

Howard's proposed income tax cuts give \$4,492 to incomes over \$100,000 and \$240 to incomes under \$10,000. Wouldn't it be luvverly if it were the other way around!

Then those who really need it could be given \$4,492 and those don't need any more could have the \$240.

And instead of talking about the politics of envy, government ministers could sing about Advance Australia Fair Go.

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## Land Rights

By Senator L. Allison

Does anyone care enough about the Howard Government's asserted crimes against the environment - particularly Jabluka - that their votes would change in the forthcoming federal election? The answer is no. If you listen to the well-paid finance writers and opinion makers, the environment is not an election issue. Toxic sludge and uranium mining are good for us.



Yet a Newspoll published in the Australian earlier this year put the environment alongside health and education as the three issues of most concern to Australian voters. And Australian Conservation Foundation polling found that 67 per cent of Australians are opposed to uranium mining at Jabluka.

Why aren't they listening? Time after time, we have encountered journalists who are frustrated with the market values dominating the editorial decisions of their employers. If an issue doesn't bring in the big-ticket advertisers - cars, coffee, champagne - then it will not get the exposure it deserves. Some have even asked us to put the word out to supporters to contact news organisations to ask for more environment coverage.

It sometimes seems that we are six nations rather than one on the issue of media coverage of Jabluka. My greatest regret is that Jabluka is not located in the outer suburbs of one of our capital cities, but is instead three hours' drive in relatively simple for ERA's Philip Shrivington to say, unchallenged, to possibly hundreds of thousands of listeners to the John Laws program that the Jabluka lease is outside or "next to" Kakadu rather than enclosed by it.

Many Australians will never get to see Jabluka and what is at stake. Most politicians will not have seen what they are signing away, because for them, wilderness belongs on a desk calendar. These politicians who are willing to collude with or remain silent on mining at Jabluka are the same ones who condone shale oil mining on the edge of the Great Barrier Reef. There is no way they would talk about our World Heritage Areas in the reverential tones that Americans use for Yosemite or the Grand Canyon. We have here the ultimate eco-cultural cringe.

My first visit to Jabluka in April this year was also

## JABILUKA: The Battle Goes On

my first to Kakadu. I was overwhelmed with the extraordinary beauty of the place - the vast green wetlands, framed by ancient rocky escarpments, diverse forests of paperbark, palm and sheoak; and teeming wildlife, especially birds. Two metre high termite mounds are an attraction to the many tourists who flow through the area. I saw places where barramundi leap out of very clear streams and where crocodiles lie in wait. You can look at this place and say it is untouched by European-Australian savours.

The vast wealth which has been extracted from the nearby Ranger mine, which has been in operation for 16 years, has not brought many benefits to the Mirrar people or other Aboriginal groups in the area. I saw a typical house; it was a small enclosure that looked much more like a chicken coop than a dwelling in which you would put people. Nevertheless, these houses are crowded, and this is one of the reasons why scabies affects 90 per cent of the children in this community. Scabies is a Third World disease which has been eliminated from most places on the planet - but not here in Australia.

And, of course, it is a disease that has long-term effects on these young bodies.

Jobs in the mine have largely gone to outsiders. The small amount of revenue from the mine flows to ATSC, to the land council, to tourism projects, and to fund services which we here in Canberra or Melbourne take for granted as being government services.

Ironically, among the top 20 shareholders in North, the parent company of ERA, are the Victorian Transport Accident Commission and the WorkCover Authority. It is a sad day when government-funded organisations ostensibly dedicated to public health invest in activities which damage the health of other Australians.

I saw a group of houses alongside a river into which sometime earlier the effluent from the Ranger tailings dam had been released. A 35-year-old woman from this area had died a week previously. I was told that people who live in and around Jabluka do not live much beyond the age

## Land Rights



Environmental rights and concerns group established the blockade of the proposed mine.

There are allegations of assault, holds and twists designed to inflict injury and pain, verbal abuse, delays in calling for an ambulance, confiscation of water supplies, protesters in cells having to toilet in full view of the opposite sex.

There is no doubt about it - putting in time at the blockade is hard work. It is remarkable that hundreds of citizens - students, professionals, and even an 85-year old woman in a wheelchair - have travelled by bus, sometimes over a period of 48 hours, from the major cities to join the blockade. They have shown incredible solidarity with the Mirrar people. Some international tourists have extended their trips to join the protest, in disbelief that uranium mining could occur within the borders of a World Heritage Area. Their dedication and willingness to put up with harsh conditions is a cause for hope in what we are being told is an era of apathy.

They know that the fight is not just about Jabluka but also about what will come after it. The Howard Government has well and truly let the uranium genie out of the bottle. The ALP had already loosened the cork with its three mines

of 40. People in this area use bore water instead of collecting rainwater from their rooftops; the reason is that the radon in the air is very dangerous. Jabluka and the township of Jabiru may be very beautiful, but they are also very deadly places in which to live.

The Howard Government's plans to grant statehood to the Northern Territory are extremely disturbing, given the territory's record on Aboriginal and environmental issues. Senator Hill has already flagged his intention of using the new Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Bill to give the Northern Territory representation on the Uluru and Kakadu boards of management. Given the Territory's history of opposing Aboriginal autonomy over their own lands, such a presence is likely to generate significant conflict.

The Democrats want three conditions attached to statehood: the provisions in Malcolm Fraser's 1976 Northern Territory Land Rights legislation should be maintained, so that the State Government cannot compulsorily acquire Aboriginal lands. Secondly, the environment should be protected. Finally, protection of human rights should be made a condition of statehood, with priority given to abolishing the Territory's Mandatory Sentencing laws, which have been used against some protesters.

The Democrats recently lodged a request with the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission for an inquiry into allegations of police brutality towards protesters. We called on HREOC to establish whether the Northern Territory police were breaching Australia's commitment to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which requires that no prisoner should be subject to "degrading treatment", and that "all persons deprived of their liberty shall be treated with humanity and with respect for the inherent dignity of the human person."



Traditional owner of the land: Yvonne Margarula

policy; now, there is a vast number of potential uranium mines dotted around Australia, from Beverley, Honeycomb, and Mt Painter in South Australia, to Maurean, Westmoreland and Valhalla in Queensland, and Mulga Rock, Angelo River, Turee Creek and Manganese in WA.

We are yet to see whether the late Margaret Mead's maxim that change has only ever come about through the efforts of small groups of committed people will be borne out by events in Jabluka.

"...the fight is not just about Jabluka but also about what will come after it."





## Stop the Jabiluka uranium mine!

There was a blockade of North Ltd in Melbourne on (31 Aug - 1 Sept). Over 500 came along to make the blockade as strong as possible. There were members from the CPSU, Em, CFMEU, ASU and MUA member, and student unions, as well as 100s of other people. This was enough to make North Ltd relocate from the premises for a whole day. During lunch-time, many more passers by stopped to sign the petition and show support for the cause.

From the outset the Mirrar Gundjehmi (the indigenous people of Kakadu) have made clear their oral opposition to the mine. "We will not agree to his mine, and we will take whatever action is necessary to halt the desecration of our country, our lives, and our future," said Jacqui Katona, spokesperson for the Mirrar.

Over 300 people have been arrested at the blockade in Jabiluka and many have been injured by police. "I knew people who'd been hit over the head with samurai and people who'd had their thumbs reamed by pressure holds. If we weren't having a major impact police treated us reasonably, but if we were the treatment got rougher," explained Mark.

ERA representatives and liberal Environment Minister Robert Hill deny that Ranger and Jabiluka will have any social or environmental impact. But radioactive tailings waste from the uranium mines will remain radioactive for more than 250,000 years, contaminating waterways in the national park that was of the Mirrar, diad and fish from. The proposed uranium mine will destroy sites sacred to the Mirrar people. Land where food is gathered has already been irradiated due to ERAS poor management of the Ranger mine. Jabiluka deposit is 10 minutes away from the Mirrar communities.

Kakadu is a wetland system underwater for much of the year. Jabiluka mine site is located within the boundaries of Kakadu National Park - one of only twenty places in the world to receive World Heritage listings for both natural and cultural values. Jabiluka uranium deposit is only 500 meters from the major wetlands systems.

Yvonne Margarula a senior Mirrar person has already been arrested for trespassing of her own and ERA will displace the Mirrar people from their home forever.

Every ounce of uranium mined is destined to become radioactive waste. Only 7% of ore ruined

"ERA will displace the Mirrar people from their home forever."

is fissionable and sold overseas, the other 93% ends up as tons of on-site solid and liquid radioactive tailings which remain potent and must be kept separated from living matter for over 200,000 years. ERA has used the Magella Creek, which flows into the Kakadu wetlands as a dump for their radioactive waste since 1982. This industry produces nuclear wastes some of the most toxic substances known to humanity. There is no safe storage or disposal of radioactive tailings. ERA will leave an estimated 60 million tons of tailings in Kakadu National Park. Old mine sites are radioactive and uninhabitable forever.

North Ltd is the majority owner of ERA. North Ltd also sold uranium to the French while they were testing nuclear weapons in the Pacific. Only 60 permanent jobs being created at the proposed mine.

It is the same Liberal government that walks all over Land Rights for Aboriginals that tries to destroy our health and education system and wreck our unions. We have every reason to join the struggle against this mine - to defend our all of our rights against the Liberal Government.

Unions have a proud history of opposing uranium mining. In 1975 the Qld branch of the Metalworkers Union said it would ban uranium mining if it got enough public support. In August 1975, the Qld Trades and Labour Council black banned uranium mining. On May 19, a shunter was sacked for carrying out these bans by refusing to couple up wagons full of sulphur for Mary Kathleen. The ARU (Aust. Railways Union) and AFULE (engine, A national rail stoppage followed on May 24 and produces leaflets explaining the situation. In the past there have also been bans placed on loading of uranium onto ships by Seaworkers.

Today unions are continuing to support the anti uranium and land rights campaign. The Victorians Trades Hall has passed a fantastic motion condemning the mine, and so have the CFMEU. Other unions, such as the ETU, ANF, and the MUA have donated money, printing costs, and sent delegations to the blockade of North Ltd in South Melbourne. If we are going to stop the mine going ahead it is crucial to have unions involved all the way with the campaign.

The 'Jabiluka Action Group' (JAG) is a voluntary group. While supporting the blockade at the site we also believe in spreading the campaign as widely as possible. We are currently organising a range of activities opposing the mine in Melbourne. These range from lunchtime weekly blockades outside the North Ltd building in South Melbourne to a Public Meeting on 24 September at the Richmond Town Hall with Charmaine Clarke (Aboriginal Activist and member of the Greens) and Dave Sweeney (Environmental Activist and Member of the Australian Conservation Foundation).

If you are interested in joining in to make the campaign stronger, or just want more information, please contact the JAG office on (03) 9417 6660, or admin@jag.org.au

### Unions in a Contrary World

The Future of the Australian Trade Union Movement

DAVID PEZZI  
Griffith University

Australia once had extremely high levels of trade union participation yet since the 1970s the number of union members has been falling dramatically. This book gives the clearest picture yet of why people do or do not belong to unions and, in a sophisticated way, examines the reasons for union decline. Uniquely, it considers both macro and micro levels, looking at the structure of the economy and the labour market, the ideological dispositions people have towards unionism, the role of the state and the political and industrial strategies of unions.

This important book has been anticipated among labour economists and industrial relations analysts for some time. It is one of those contributions that will set a permanent stamp on debate. Professor Ray Coore, Director, Employment Studies Centre, The University of Newcastle.

David Pezzi has made an important contribution to the debate about the future of the trade union movement into the twenty-first century. This scholarly and comprehensive analysis of the extent of union membership decline and the reasons for it is invaluable. It is most comfortable reading for union officials. I recommend David Pezzi's book to anyone interested in the Australian union movement, but particularly for those working to develop future strategies for union growth and effectiveness. *Jason Garry, President, ACTU*

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## GLOBAL SURVIVAL AND INDIGENOUS RIGHTS CONFERENCE

The 2nd Gathering in Solidarity  
with Indigenous People and  
the Earth

20th - 22nd November 1998  
Pipes Makers Park, Manlybong,  
Melbourne

The immense success of last year's Gathering in Solidarity with Indigenous People and the Earth conference prompted Friends of the Earth (FoE) Australia to organise a second gathering for 1998. This year's three day conference is focusing on Aboriginal land management practices and how non-indigenous people can work more closely, and effectively with Indigenous people and their decision making structures.

An advisory board of indigenous people are steering the conference to the main issues while abiding by the local Indigenous laws. The Indigenous representatives that will be attending this year's conference are coming from all parts of Australia as well as overseas. They will be sharing the issues that concern themselves and their communities, as well as their relationship to the land and knowledge of sustainability.

Indigenous people have managed their land under customary law since the time of creation. It is the conference's aim to depict the significance of this fact and to learn and be guided by the vast array of knowledge that such a history possesses. This conference aims to give participants the opportunity to gain an understanding of the many options presented by Indigenous and non-Indigenous land management practices, to learn from the mistakes of the past and to recognise the many positive examples of sustainable land management that do exist. The conference will further plan for long term sustainable land management in a way that embraces the need for social justice and secures rights for all people, especially Indigenous people.

(Immediately after this year's conference, the FoE International Annual General Meeting will be held in Melbourne. FoE has member groups in 58 countries. Many international delegates from FoE will attend and speak at the land management conference.)

The proceedings of the first conference are now available on the FoE Fitzroy homepage: <http://www.foe.org.au> For further information about the conference, bookings or how to get involved, please contact Anthony Arms or Cam Walker at FoE (03) 9419 8700.

## Delivering an unexpected blow to the privates

re-printed from Inside Corporate America by Gregory Palast

It has not been noted in the British press, but the US is in the midst of socialist revolution. Last month, the State of New York DE-PRIVATISED the Long Island electricity system, borrowing \$US 8 billion, the largest public financing in US history to buy out shareholders.

This followed government take-overs of stockholder water companies. State owned water authorities now serve eight out of ten US households and are heading toward total control of the market.

Yet for Britain's elite, it remains an article of faith that, world-wide, government ownership is on the run. One Financial Times headline: "Privatisation is an irreversible trend", is typical of the triumphant pronouncements of these UK free marketeers. While Tony Blair prepares to privatise tunnels, postal boxes and air traffic control towers, voters in the US are demanding expanded social ownership when private industry fails to deliver basic services.

Britain's mutuels are fighting against conversion. In the States, where merging banks have cast overboard low and middle income customers, federally insured credit unions have captured 74 million customers. Their assets are rising faster than those of the commercial banks.

By the end of 1997, the outstanding capitalisation

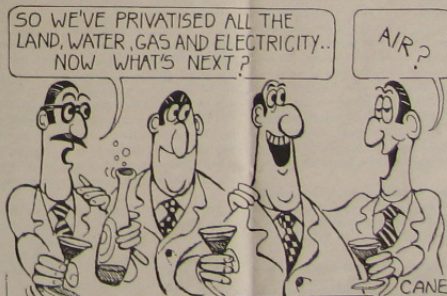
of the US's largest government supported enterprises, including the federal mortgage banks, surged to \$US 2.85 trillion four times Britain's outstanding government debt.

Right wing Republicans led the multi-billion dollar de-privatisation of New York's water and electric systems, a buyout demanded by manufacturers fed up with the poor service and high prices from stockholder utilities.

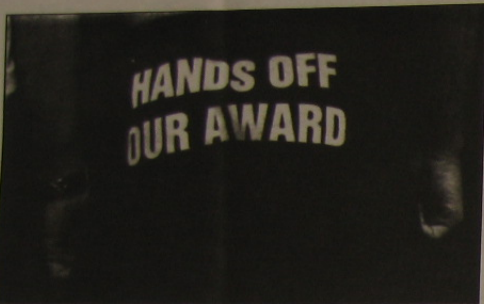
On the first day of the government take-over, electricity bills dropped 19.1%. It is now accepted that independent government enterprises can operate at a lower cost than private industry.

US consultants first peddled privatisation to the world. But for Americans it has become an export-only business. Energy, the power company that spearheaded US take-overs in Europe and Asia, was forced to offer its home utility to the municipal government of New Orleans after tens of thousands of Big Easy residents signed a Declaration of Independence demanding that government put Energy out of business.

This then is the new American revolution, the large scale expansion of social ownership. British privates will soon learn the folly of proclaiming their brief, 20 year moment in history irreversible.



# Tax fiddle, Australia burns



Continued on Page 1

### What is a Fair and Efficient System?

What is a fair and efficient system? Not just one that produces efficiency and predictability in the economy, but more importantly, one that generates the income we need to run proper community services, and that creates greater fairness in income, wealth and opportunities. What are these kinds of typical 'New Right' tax reforms? Broadly, they are those which cut government spending and reduce the size of the government; transfer the burden of tax from the rich to the poor; shift the main emphasis of tax collection from taxing income (which can be adjusted for fairness at the point of collection) to taxing spending (which cannot), and thus requires complex 'compensation' measures; and, more generally, those measures which 'free up the market' for business by moving tax away from the business and production end of the economic cycle and on to the consumption end; and by reducing the rates of company tax. The government package does all of these things. The Howard Government naturally emphasized the second set of reasons - the need for an efficient and fair system to replace an outdated and unfair one - as its dominant motive. So it's useful to compare the government's claims about the 'inefficiencies of the present system with its actual condition. For a start, the government says it need a major shift to a new GST, because of at least three problems in the present system:

1. Because Australian income tax levels are too high, and we are squeezing income earners too hard (and risk a 'loss of incentive' people will stop working)
2. Because in any case, it's becoming too hard to collect income tax because of much more sophisticated avoidance techniques, and GST

is much simpler to collect and harder to avoid and 3 Because we need a new tax that will grow as the costs of government grow, and GST is the best available. All of these reasons are dubious, when we look more closely at the actual structure of our present tax structure, and compare it to other similar countries (such as the 25 or so OECD countries of Europe and America which have developed industrial economies and a broad range of government programs).

### 'Structural' Problems of our Tax System

What are the real 'structural' problems of our tax system?

First, the stand out structural feature of Australia's tax system, compared with other OECD countries, is that the total revenue that our governments generate from tax and other sources (and therefore the total amount available for community and government services) is almost the lowest in the OECD. In 1995 our total public revenue was equivalent to about 35% of GDP (the value of total national economic output in one year), while the average rate for OECD countries was about 44% of GDP. This means in practice that if Australia's total revenue rates were raised to the level of the OECD average (a reasonable benchmark for fairness) we would have something like an extra \$40 billion (ie 40 thousand million) per year for schools, healthcare, social security, job programs etc. - some of the main areas of needed spending.

In fact we are (as Mr Keating boasted in his famous 1988 budget speech) one of the 'leanest' (and certainly one of the 'meanest') countries in the OECD. The effect of running such a low level of revenue is quite obvious. We are bound to achieve much lower levels of decent service provision than other countries. The government did not even

mention this huge shortfall, surprisingly. If it were really concerned with proper funding for good community services. But it's not surprising when you remember that, as Ken Davidson pointed out, since 1977, eight of the nine elections (counting the 1998 one) have largely been about cutting taxes for middle class swinging voters. There is one other consequence of having such a low tax base. It means we are less able to use the tax system to make a fairer society, by redistributing income and wealth. And this brings us to a second stand out feature of the Australian tax scene, which has also been carefully ignored by the Coalition and Labor.

### Australia Unequal?

In the past decade Australia has become one of the most unequal countries in the industrialised world in the distribution of primary (ie earned) income. Income inequality is normally measured by comparing the difference between the earnings of the top 20% of earners with those of the bottom 20%. Studies by the United Nations Development Program and the World Bank in the past few years show that the ratio for Australia is around 9.5 to 1 (ie, the top 20% earn nine and a half times that of the bottom 20% earn). This is the highest ratio of all OECD countries, higher even than the USA, and double the 'inequality ratio' of Japan (4.3 to 1) and the Netherlands (4.5 to 1). What this suggests for 'structural' tax reform is very clear. Our tax system needs to be much more progressive, ie to tax the income of the rich more and the poor less.

### Do we already collect too much income tax?

The Coalition says we can't collect any more income tax, that we're already squeezing this tax source too hard. Labor doesn't really disagree. Is this true? Largely, no. Australian PAYE taxpayers on low/mid income do pay similar income taxes to those in the OECD, but the total amount taken in income tax (including higher incomes and company profits) is significantly lower than the OECD. An important feature of OECD countries tax systems is that we don't have social security contributions, which are effectively a specialised tax on income to finance a particular social program (like Medicare). In the OECD, the burden on this contribution generally falls more heavily on wealthier taxpayers and on corporations. If you include social security payments in 'income tax', as Ken Davidson recently pointed out, income tax in OECD countries makes up about 62% of total taxes, compared to 53% in Australia. So there is definitely room to expand taxes based on income and earning, and to make them more progressive. The government says that higher tax rates would 'kill the incentive to work'. This is an old chestnut that is never broadly true except at the extremes, but in any case, conservative governments have never applied it equally in practice. Their usual approach to create 'incentives' varies according to

income, as Kenneth Galbraith pointed out some time ago. The rich need lower taxes, and the poor need lower wages. It's also hypocritical for the Coalition to claim (as Labor did before it) that we have to move to consumption taxes because days it's too hard to collect income tax when tax avoidance is so sophisticated. Who exactly are they talking about here?

For ordinary PAYE taxpayers (most of us), it's very difficult to avoid income tax and very easy for government to collect it. The people it's harder to collect from are the rich, the John Elliotts and Rupert Murdoch's, who boast about not paying tax, as well as the thousands of wealthy professionals with access to tax minimisation schemes like family trusts and tax havens.

In fact, it is quite possible to collect billions of dollars more in tax from these people, but the real reason why governments don't try, and must then exaggerate the difficulties, has more to do with not upsetting their rich and powerful mates than any technical problems. We might ask, for example, why the Coalition government wound up the special tax audit of Australia's 100 richest individuals set up (very late in the day) by Labor? As ACOSS pointed out, the actions proposed in the present package to hit tax dodgers and ban the main avoidance schemes are pathetically tokenistic. What about really punishing the notorious corporate 'transfer pricing' schemes and 'tax havens' by companies doing business in Australia? What about - total prohibition (backed up with prosecutions and jail sentences) of tax trusts that have no legitimate purpose other than avoiding what would otherwise be the fair and proper tax contribution of the avoiding taxpayer? But how likely is this when we discover that over half of the current Coalition Ministers themselves have family trusts?

### The real issues for the next century

It was bad enough that the Coalition carefully designed their tax package with the main purpose of making it the primary issue for an election; and bad enough that they called that election eight months early. It's bad enough that they dishonestly, and probably illegally, spent \$10-15 million of public

money to advertise what was, on their own admission, not a government program but a party policy for the coming election. It's bad enough that almost the entire media immediately picked up their cue and became the cheerleaders for a 'tax election', as if this was the only important issue Australia has to worry about. Forget chronic unemployment, growing inequality of income, wealth and opportunity and rampant racism, they're telling us. Forget the cannibalisation of our public health, education, transport and communication services and the dismemberment of industrial rights won over a century of struggle; forget the grotesque concentration of our media; forget the crying need for a new democratic constitution based on democratic citizenship; forget growing fears about the possibility of our independence to the lords of the global economy. All these will be solved with a GST. Perhaps what is most distasteful of all is hearing John Howard describe this pathetic bundle of bribery and ideology as 'visionary' and 'exciting' and even 'the key to the kind of society we want Australia to be'.

And despite its attempts to suggest that for the election there are wider and more important issues, Labor was all too ready to be drawn into the same game, of making it a 'tax election'; their tactic was to run a scare campaign against the GST and shy away from bigger issues. Either way, the citizens are being insulted. If all that's at stake in this election is a few dollars more or less from one or other tax packages, we might as well ask our neighborhood tax accountant to tell us how we should vote. Not only are there many more important issues to have an election about; there are far more important reforms to the tax system than either the Coalition or Labor was willing to put on the agenda. These are the real issues that will really determine the kind of society Australia will be next century.

These are the issues that face Australians and should have been addressed by both parties and the media in the 'millennial' election.

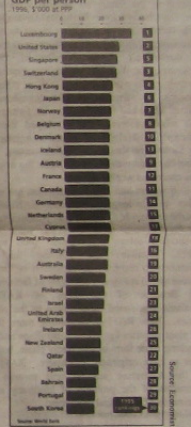
MICHAEL SALVARIK  
SENIOR RESEARCH FELLOW  
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## FOR THE RECORD

### RICH AND POOR

Tiny Luxembourg is the world's richest country according to the World Bank's latest World Development Indicators. Measured by purchasing power parity (which adjusts for differences in living costs), Luxembourg's GDP per head was US\$34,460 in 1996. America ranks second with a GDP of US\$24,020 per head. There are some 60 times higher than the GDP per head of the world's poorest countries: Ethiopia, Mozambique and Sierra Leone had a GDP per head of US\$500, US\$500 and US\$510 respectively. All three countries are in sub-Saharan Africa, the region with the lowest average GDP per head (US\$1,450). South Asia is the second poorest region, with an average GDP per head of US\$1,520. Average income is closely related to other indicators of development: sub-Saharan Africa, for instance, has the highest infant mortality rate in the world (51 deaths per 1,000 live births in 1996).

### GDP per person



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Education

Address to Union of Australian Women  
by Ann Taylor, Vice President, Australian Education Union

# SELF-GOVERNING SCHOOLS

## SCHOOLS OF THE THIRD MILLENNIUM



The Victorian Government's Education (Self Governing Schools) Act came into operation on 16 June, 1998. From that date, School Councils by majority decision can apply to the Minister for Education to exercise powers, including the power of employment, as a Self Governing school.

The Act represents the next step along the road to the privatisation of selected government schools. The legislation effectively amounts to the destruction of the state system of education which has served Victoria well for the past 126 years.

The Victorian Government has been gradually divesting itself of the other services such as electricity, gas and now transport and selected hospitals. It first places the service, or the profitable parts of the service, in a semi-autonomous 'corporatised' state. Then, when the politics and markets are right, it proceeds to full privatisation.

The Minister has described the Self Governing Schools Act, also known as Schools of the Third Millennium, as the 'natural extension of Schools of the Future'. It is following that pattern.

The architects of Victoria's Schools of the Future, Professor Brian Caldwell from Melbourne University and ex-Minister Don Hayward, in their recently published book, 'The Future of Schools', set out the next stages in the Liberal school 'reform' program - the introduction of compulsory school fees, the end of 'the great divide' between public and private schools and the transfer of selected government schools into private ownership.

Effect on the System

The Government is doing its best to downplay the radical nature of the move to self governing schools, stressing that these schools will remain inside the state education system. What it doesn't say is 'how long' and what the introduction of Self Governing Schools will do to the system itself.

The Minister is trying to give the impression that all stakeholders are behind this change. During the Second reading speech, he stated that:

*'There have... been... direct briefings and ad-*

*resses to all the major representative organisations in Government education...'*

The AEU was not consulted. This is despite the fact that this proposal has a direct impact on the terms and conditions of employment of our teachers in schools.

Even he has to admit that only 196 out of 1700 schools responded to a questionnaire sent out. The questionnaire deliberately did not ask schools if they supported Schools of the Third Millennium, so the mere fact of a response to the consultation paper was used by the Minister as evidence of support. Many of the schools which responded opposed the whole notion and Minister Guide acknowledged a general concern in the responses that it would lead to school privatisation and a break up of the government system.

Our objections to the Bill include the following:

- The legislation is clearly an attempt by the Government to break up the public education system by separating out the 'profitable' schools from the rest. It will create a two tier system of government schools between those that remain in a residual system and Self Governing Schools with the characteristics of a private school. It will totally undermine the notion of a government system of schools which provides equality of opportunity for all students. It is based on models from the UK, United States and New Zealand. In those countries self-governing schools intensify the destructive competition between schools and create enrolment imbalances in surrounding schools.

- The Educational Services Agreement signed between Self Governing Schools and the Department will require schools to implement the

common statewide curriculum framework. Despite the rhetoric, it may lock Self Governing Schools into the worst aspects of the central agenda even more tightly than other schools.

- The 'centres of excellence' are part of the Self Governing Schools marketing campaign rather than an identification of educational quality. The educational value of a school becoming a 'centre of excellence' in a specific learning area is unclear. It seems to be just another part of the exclusivity of Self Governing Schools and is likely to lead to further alienation of local students.

- The Government has claimed that Self Governing Schools are based on the TAFE model. The fact that this proposal has a direct impact on the most recent Commonwealth Grants Commission figures reveal that Victoria spends just 77.8% of the National average expenditure on TAFE Colleges and is the lowest spending State in Australia. In Victoria, it also has some of the worst employment practices in the education system and the lowest pay in Australia.

- The Act will have far-reaching consequences for staff employed in schools. It provides for unilateral changes to the conditions of employment and the traditional employment status that our members have had with the State of Victoria.

- The Secretary of the Department of Education will delegate to the School Councils of Self Governing Schools his employment powers with respect to teachers and principal class officers employed at the school under the Teaching Service Act.

- Once a school becomes Self Governing the principal becomes an employee of the School Council.

- Teachers currently employed under the Teaching Service Act who transfer or promote to a Self Governing School will become employees of the School Council rather than the State.

- Leading Teachers become School Council employees if their position is renewed at the end of their present tenure.

- Fixed term teachers, that is almost all young teachers in Victoria at present, will be School Council employees at the end of their existing contract.

- New employees will automatically be employed by the School Council.

- School Councils will have the power to fire staff.

- School Councils will be empowered to enter into work place agreements.

- The Bill states that new principals and staff will be employed under conditions that meet the minimum conditions of any industrial awards. However, at the moment there are no industrial awards applying to School Council employment. The terms of employment (salary, hours, leave and career path), will be determined by "negotiation". You do not need to have much imagination to see this as a means of substantially reducing the salary and conditions of those working in schools.

- The legislation also states that School Councils may enter into arrangements with any person, body or agency for the employment or engagement of teachers, principals or allied staff. This is the Patrick's clause that enables employees to be removed from the source of their employment. In the same way as a Patrick sham subsidiary, School Councils are obviously completely dependent on third party funding, in this case, the State Government. Also like Patrick's, the funding can be stopped at any time - leaving School Council employees high and dry.

- The Minister will have the power to sack a Self Governing School Council. If this happens, only those teachers formerly employed under the Teaching Service Act will have a right to return to a school under the control of the Department of Education. All other employees may be dismissed without any compensation or payment of accrued benefits such as LSL entitlements.

- There does not appear to be any mechanism by which a School Council who opts to become a Self Governing School can opt back, if it did not want to continue as a Self Governing School.

- It is inappropriate for School Council members to provide their voluntary labour to undertake the wide range of employment tasks currently performed by the Department of Education. It certainly isn't why parents stand for School Council.

- The Government has allocated \$3.6 million in 1998-99 and \$7.5 million in 1999-2000 so there will be initial financial inducements. After that, schools will be pressured to replace short-falls in government money with sponsorship and 'partnership' funds. Who will control the curriculum then? (e.g. currently - CSF, Coke Day.)

- The proposals were developed through the Business Advisory Committee on Education and all of the Working Parties were headed by executives from the private business sector. The Minister has stated that these schools will be encour-

Education

### "We have a serious fight on our hands"



aged to have more business people on their councils (rather than community representatives) and actively seek sponsorship (e.g. Charter Schools - real estate agents). The governing bodies will be able to buy property and enter into various commercial contracts. Schools will also be able to form contractual agreements with private schools to provide services and/or facilities.

- School Council members will be required to make decisions about matters which involve labour law, corporate law, contract and law of equity. They will become directly involved in industrial disputes. Council members will need to have an understanding of their legal liabilities and lawful obligations and the consequences of their acts, errors and omissions.

As you would understand, Self Governing Schools of the Third Millennium is not a "reform" designed to "strengthen the Government school system", as Victoria's Minister for Education claims. On the contrary, it is a trick, an illusion, designed to destroy the system and the rights of its employees.

The AEU's response has included working with the ALP in opposition to the legislation and its implementation, and to develop alternative policy if they get elected. We are also working closely with two of the three statewide parents' groups.

As well, we have had to educate our own members and school communities, many of whom were not getting the correct information through their own schools. It has become a battle of memos between the AEU and the Department.

On May 27th, stopwork meetings around the state rejected Self Governing Schools. Members agreed on a range of actions to try and stop schools choosing to become Self Governing including:

- activities at the school level;
- public meetings to inform the community;
- using local media; and

letterboxing school neighbourhoods.

Peaceful Assembly

Arising from the decision, our officers have been trying to address School Councils concerning taking this step.

If a school does vote to become a Self Governing School we will be calling on the Victorian Trades Hall Council and other unions to join us in a "peaceful assembly" outside that school (learned something from the MUA).

Trades Hall Council is supporting us and has agreed to participate in our action. It has also distributed articles for other unions' publications to inform their members. We are currently serving a log of claims on every School Council in Victoria as a first step in the legal process of obtaining an Award. This process may show some School Councils what becoming Self Governing means.

At this stage there only seems to be a tiny number of schools seriously considering becoming Self Governing but it is still too many. Our most recent polling demonstrates a very strong rejection of Self Governing Schools with 71% agreeing with the statement "This is simply an attempt to privatise schools". This result should also be seen in the context of numerous polls which show the Victorian electorate is opposed to privatisation. Voters also see Self Governing Schools as a mechanism for avoiding responsibility for fully funding schools (76.5%) and a surrounding 86% believe it will further expand the divide between rich and poor schools.

We have a serious fight on our hands. This legislation has given us another reason to ensure that our long term Public Education Campaign is successful, forcing a change of heart from this one when they realise that there are votes in it or leading to a change of government (which the polling shows we can do).

## THE COST TO TAXPAYERS OF HOWARD'S WIK LEGISLATION

By Vic Little.

With the help of renegade Senator Harradine, the Coalition Government pushed through Prime Minister Howard's 10 Point Wik Legislation, but one must ask, at what cost to the Australian people?

Both farmer and Aboriginal groups warned of a rash of court challenges in the future. Aboriginal groups throughout Australia were highly critical of the legislation, saying it effectively wiped out native title rights and wrecked the conciliation process.

The Government claimed the 10 point Wik plan, a 400 page legislation was the result of eight months consultation and was both fair to farmers, mining companies and Aborigines.

What the legislation did was tear the guts out of the Native Title Act. The 10 Point Plan means pastoralists' rights have been increased substantially and taxpayers will foot the bill for any native title compensation.

Under this plan, Federal and State Governments will pay compensation to indigenous people who can prove native title on pastoral lease land. The value of the pastoral properties will increase and it is therefore a wonderful profit for individuals paid for by the taxpayers.

### HOWARD HELPS THE BATTLERS.

Individuals who stand to gain include the world's wealthiest man, the Sultan of Brunei, whose Northern Territory pastoral leases of 6.1 million hectares, amount to an area five times greater than greater Sydney. Others who stand to gain are Janet Holmes A'Court, the nation's wealthiest woman.

Kerry Packer's Consolidated Pastoral Company has extensive leases among its 4.5 million hectares which are just under four times bigger than greater Sydney. Then there is Hugh McLachlan, the cousin of Federal Defence Minister, Ian McLachlan, the largest Australian land owner with 4.5 million hectares.

The Democrats last year asked in Parliament whether 31 named Federal politicians, almost all of whom were from the Coalition, and had pastoral leases, should be removed from the Wik discussions.

Mr Rick Farley, former Executive Director of the National Farmers' Federation, said back in May 1997 that Howard's 10 Point Wik would mean that pastoralists would get upgraded tenure and increased land values and that pastoralists rights would be increased significantly, from the right to pasture cattle to the right to undertake any activity covered by the definition of primary production under the Tax Act.

### 'WEST AUSTRALIAN' SHOWS HOW WIK 10 POINT PLAN WILL OPERATE

How this can operate was graphically illustrated last year in Western Australia when in the May 1st issue of "West Australian" W.A.'s leading newspaper, a front page headline which read "Pastoral leases break State law", went on to say more than 30 forest ventures were illegally operating on pastoral leases because the State Government refuses to enforce the law and went on to point out that pastoralists at the same time are given the discretion to deny Aborigines access to traditional land.

The Pastoral Board, which oversees pastoral lease management said "almost every tourist development on pastoral land would be breaching lease conditions, but it was reluctant to prosecute any".

Kimberly Land Council Executive Director, Peter Yu said it was hypocrisy on the part of the Court Government and an injustice that pastoralists did not have to obey the law like every other citizen.

Mr Yu said the W.A. Government's tolerance of the illegal activity was consistent with its push for validation of pastoral leases in response to the High Court's Wik decision, which found pastoral rights and native title could co-exist. Mr Yu said "they keep Aborigines locked out and keep padlocks on the gates and inside the gates they are able to continue illegal activities."

He went on to say the Federal Government's stance on Native Title would give a few thousand people in the pastoral industry the equivalent of freehold title to land with questionable scrutiny of their activities.

Howard's WIK 10 POINT PLAN now passed with the aid of the "Independent" renegade Harradine, who danced with the Aborigines in the gardens of Parliament, will now make legal the illegal activities of the pastoralists quoted from the "West Australian" as well as pastoralists throughout Australia.

Don't forget on October 3<sup>rd</sup> the Howard 1) POINT WIK PLAN can be reversed by throwing him and his henchmen and women out of office.



## GOVERNMENT RAILWAYS ABANDONMENT A NATIONAL DISASTER

by C.W. BOEHME

Recent years have seen the continued decline of the railway. As a result the highways are congested with semi trailers and road coaches. There are demands to return long distant transport back to the railways. Though railway sidings go into the oil refineries, steel works and big factories all over the country, many are not used and oil, steel and factory outputs are despatched by road.

The cause of the decline in the railways has been brought about by the multinational automotive manufacturing industry, tyre and oil industry. Super profits from these interests is the reason why the highways are utilised instead of the railways.

Once it was required to apply for a permit to operate against the government railways with road transport. In the last fifty years, with the penetration of foreign investment, governments in Australia have become compliant tools on behalf of these investors, the multinationals. The United States has become the real economic and political force in Australia. That is why, irrespective of whether a Liberal or Labor Government is elected, things remain the same.

In the last twenty years, thirty billion dollars of public money has been invested in roads, only six billion on the railways. Five times more on roads.

Road trucks, the prime movers are all imported, American, Japanese and European motor industries

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