

Green

the magazine of the Australian Greens

SPRING 2005

ISSUE 17

COVER STORY

**The Howard
Ascendancy**



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Knight's Creek, Tasmania. Photo: Philip Sloane

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Cover image of John Howard

Kathleen Gordon photographed the well-known 'head of Howard' used by the Queensland branch of the MUA. MUAQ Secretary Mick Carr described the subject as 'criminal in his intent, ideologically driven and plain hateful of the working class'.

green

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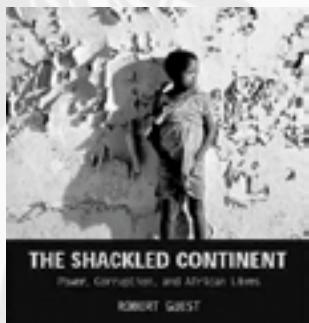
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Please provide a graphic if possible. Send article in body of email or as an 'rtf' file.

editorial

This editorial is being written at the end of the first week of the new parliament, with PM John Howard having control of both houses. The government's first act this week was to reduce the number of questions allowed to the opposition and the minor parties, effectively reducing the accountability of its ministers. One of John Howard's last acts for the week was to tell Indigenous communities in central Australia that they needed to accept greater responsibility for the petrol sniffing epidemic they were suffering. This was in spite of the fact that these communities had made it clear to the prime minister what they wanted – the government to provide an \$8.9 million subsidy for non-sniffable Opal petrol.

Unfortunately, these two cases probably indicate very clearly the priorities of the Howard government over the next two years. Now that it is free from the hassle of minor parties having the balance of power in the Senate the Coalition government is likely to force through policy that advantages big business and disadvantages the marginalised, provides half-measures at best to address the destruction of our forests, rivers, wilderness and marine areas and sides with unilateralist American imperialism rather than supporting global collective security.

Most of the essays in this edition analyse the nature of the Howard government and the likely directions it will take over its next term. None of this is good news for progressive politics but the one thing that permeates the contributions to this edition is an understanding of the limits of John Howard's power and a determination to campaign for a democratic and humane alternative.

**Drew Hutton and Brian Hoepper
Co-editors**

letters

Iraqi resistance : Should the Greens support it?

Dear Editors

The mainstream media constantly repeats the mantra about 'terrorist attack', 'foreign fighters', 'insurgents', 'anti-Iraqi forces' etc. as though it was all disconnected from the brutal occupation of that country, the pillage of its resources, and the humiliation and impoverishment of its people. So it comes as no surprise that the public, even some social justice activists, get confused and disoriented. So it is with 'Can we support Iraqi insurgents?' in the Autumn edition of Green.

The conclusion the author draws is that there is no actual resistance to the US occupation, rather an 'insurgency' against a supposedly free and democratically elected government. The reality is somewhere else.

The US has pursued a policy of controlling Iraq's political transition whilst making it appear as though it is driven by Iraqis. Indeed, those steps towards democratic governance that have taken place - such as the deeply-flawed election in January - have had to be forced on the occupying powers by Iraqis. Whilst the US, its coalition and the media portrayed the election as delivering democracy to the Iraqis, and the high turnout as a vindication of the occupation, the truth is to be found elsewhere. The high turnout was in spite of the occupation, the people overwhelmingly voting to be rid of the occupiers, in a hope born of desperation, as pointed out by such independent observers as Fisk and Pilger.

We owe it to the anti-war movement, as well as to the Iraqi people, to support their resistance.

Mirek Szychowski, Canberra ACT
[Eds: Mirek submitted an article too lengthy for publication in this issue. The complete article will be published on the Australian Greens website at the Green Magazine link.]

The Iraqi resistance

Dear Editors

I am writing to express broad support for the views concerning Iraq expressed by Drew Hutton in the Autumn edition of Green magazine.

A significant majority of Iraqis braved threats of insurgent violence to turn out to vote in the recent Iraq federal elections. Consequently the new democratic government must be seen as legitimate.

The insurgents, mostly Islamists and Baathists, have used indiscriminate bombing that has killed thousands of their fellow citizens. It is beyond me how anyone who professes a commitment to peace and democracy could express support for these people. Those in the 'peace movement' who support the insurgency are almost invariably Marxists or fellow travellers who possess an almost pathological hatred of the United States.

However I disagree with Drew's view that activists should call for the rapid removal of coalition troops. If coalition forces are withdrawn too hastily Iraq could easily slide into civil war and become another failed state.

I believe the role of activists now should be to pressure coalition forces to make every effort to minimise civilian deaths, ensure prisoners are treated according to the Geneva Convention and ensure that unexploded bombs and depleted uranium contamination are dealt with expeditiously.

Steve Munn, Thornbury Vic

Tsunami and climate change

Dear Editors,

Paul Carrick (letters, Autumn 2005) suggests that the Indian Ocean tragedy 'must convince both Australia and USA to sign the Kyoto Protocol on climate change'. What's the connection?

The tsunami was caused by an under-sea earthquake. The waves - barely perceptible in mid-ocean but rising to immense proportions when stopped by the land - did the damage. Neither earthquake nor tsunami was caused by climate change.

Global warming will, however, result in slowly rising sea levels (because of melting polar ice) and increasingly extreme weather - storms, cyclones. Together these will particularly affect coastal communities. Most Australian capital cities are on or near the coast, and the recent tsunami did remind us how very vulnerable such communities are.

Communities everywhere will be affected, in different ways and in varying degrees, by global warming. And if Australia and USA - two of the biggest per capita polluters - still refuse to sign up for Kyoto phase 1, how can we expect countries of the developing world to join phase 2?

David Teather, Canberra ACT

[Eds: In his letter, Paul did use the term 'avoidable' to distinguish between the Indian Ocean tsunami and the threat of climate change.]



Hinze Scratch | www.scratch.com.au

The end of oil Dear Green

Most people, including most Greens it seems, have a poor understanding of energy and how our personal survival and that of our civilisation are absolutely dependent upon it. This is not surprising since all living Australians have been born into an era of unbelievable energy abundance compared to earlier ages. We take abundantly available energy utterly for granted. Our entire mental model of how the world works has been shaped by this abundance. So much of what we blithely assume is ordinary and possible (such as eating canned food, taking aspirin, drinking piped water or commuting to work) would be impossible without cheap, abundant energy. Possibly the best way to understand this is to say that the lifestyle of each and every average Australian is supported by energy equivalent to the continuous work of over 200 slaves!

Seventy percent of this civilisation-sustaining energy comes from burning oil and gas. The rest comes from sources such as coal, hydro, wind and sun that cannot be accessed without oil and gas (to mine the coal, build the dams and powerlines, transport the components etc.). Interestingly, our financial system - where fractional reserve banking allows banks to create money by making loans - would collapse without the continuous economic growth that is dependent upon increasing energy use.

Senior petroleum geologists and physicists now agree that oil and gas production will soon decline leading to economic collapse. Australia's diesel-dependent food production system will falter as farmers succumb to ruinous debt and cannot afford the fuel to drive their tractors and harvesters. Most non-local food distribution, processing and storage will also become uneconomic. Huge numbers of unemployed will find themselves in the outer suburbs of our sprawling cities with nowhere to go, no way to get there and little or nothing to eat.

Hard to believe? This description may be too mild! Environmentalists including the Greens need to realise that their ability to pursue their current social and environmental goals are all predicated on abundant energy use. Therefore, it was very disappointing to see absolutely nothing on oil depletion in the last issue of Green. There is enormous political opportunity for the Greens in being the first political party to establish their credentials on this issue before the economic effects of oil depletion become extreme.

The NZ Greens have seized this opportunity. Why do the Australian Greens continue to live in denial?

Stephen Gloor, WA; Marie Johnston, Qld; Peter Kelly, SA; Russell Kilbey, NSW; Dave Kimble, Qld; Michael Lardelli, SA (Greens signatories) and Liam Cranley, Ivanhoe, Vic; Andrew Green, Grovely Qld; Sherry Mayo, Notting Hill, Vic; Claudio Natoli, Glenwood, NSW (non-Greens signatories).

*Letters do not necessarily reflect the views of the Australian Greens.

Gunns 20

Campaigners for Tasmania's forests and wildlife are celebrating the Victorian Supreme Court rejection of Gunns' claims. Judge Bongiorno's ruling described Gunns' claims as 'incomprehensible', 'embarrassing' and 'unintelligible'. On 18 July Gunns was given just 4 weeks to resubmit its claim in an acceptable form. For updates go to Senator Bob Brown's website - <http://bobbrown.org.au>.

Get Up!

One creative reaction to the Coalition's new control of the Senate is 'Get Up'. This web-based activist site - <http://www.getup.org.au> – invites Australians to express their concerns directly to Coalition senators. Already, the extraordinary response by tens of thousands of citizens has overwhelmed senators' email inboxes, with one minister (predictably!) attacking the messages as 'spam'!

Kiwi Green in OZ

Large numbers of Kiwis live in Australia, and they are twice as likely to vote Green as their stay-at-home compatriots! New Zealand Greens co-leader, Rod Donald - in Australia in early August for the Now We the People conference in Melbourne - visited state capitals to whip up support from Kiwi voters in the forthcoming NZ elections. The elections are due about the time this edition hits the streets so we hope our Kiwi friends have done well and that there are plenty of Greens in the parliament. Well known NSW Greens activist James Diack is a Greens candidate and is coordinating the Australian end of the election. These efforts may just make the difference between a seat lost or gained.

The Day After

The day after the election
it rained
early morning joggers
splashed their way home
the pigeons
were feeding in the square
the bus was late
a dog was hit by a car
the newspaper was delivered as usual
The day after the election
we woke up sad and sorry
but the sun was still there...

– john knight

Peak oil

Even US oil giant Chevron is coming out about oil depletion. See the quite unexpected websites at:

http://www.chevron.com/about/real_issues.asp

<http://www.willyoujoinus.com/>

The second site includes a counter indicating how many barrels of oil and gas have been consumed during your visit to the site. Sobering!

Woolworths and community :

Woolworths has attracted nationwide criticism for pressing ahead with a supermarket development in Maleny (Qld) against community wishes and environmental advice. Activists in this vibrant community in the Sunshine Coast hinterland have invited all concerned Australians to convey their opposition to Woolworths CEO Roger Corbett at rcorbett@woolworths.com.au. For more information – including calls for a national boycott - go to <http://www.malenyvoice.com>.



Nicholson of 'The Australian' newspaper: www.nicholsoncartoons.com.au

Getting over John Howard

BEN OQUIST

Is John Howard the master manipulator of Australian politics, the man who has single-handedly marginalised progressive politics over the last nine years? Would an alternative conservative leader use a majority in both houses to unleash a similar raft of ultra-conservative policies on the country? Ben Oquist answers these questions and points to prospects for change.

I met a young Green voter the other day. First year in university. Loved the Greens for the optimism they helped put into her life. She said she was over John Howard. Over him? 'Yes, I don't really remember ever not having John Howard as Prime Minister and I am over him', she said.

Barely 8 years old when Keating was Prime Minister, this bright young woman couldn't really remember any PM except Howard. Yet she could see the future beyond Howard better than most. She went on to say 'I am getting on with making Australia better despite the fact that John Howard is Prime Minister'.

It is, of course, easy to become obsessed with Howard. He was a key mover in the sabotage of the republic referendum. He converted the culture wars skirmish begun by conservative intellectuals into a full-blown political campaign, sinking the Reconciliation process along the way. He recognized the political potential of Pauline Hanson's fearful constituency and tapped into it with his dishonest and manipulative handling of the Tampa and Children Overboard affairs. He has recognised the importance of fear and insecurity in the current mood of the electorate and used the threats of 'terrorism', 'illegal immigrants' and rising interest rates to scare voters into sticking with the conservatives.

At the same time, of course, he joined the US-led invasion of Iraq, a move that made Australia a much higher profile terrorist target but assuages Australians' fear by falling back on that useful old pillar of the Australian Settlement – dependence on a great power. John Howard has read the current trend of international forces which tends to favour imperial domination in the control of global resources rather than the free play of market forces and, on the domestic front, the imposition of moral conservatism rather than a more free-flowing liberal values system.

In the 'breakout' articles accompanying this cover story, a range of writers analyses the way the PM's political priorities have played out in such key areas as industrial relations, education and energy policy. Those effects seem sufficiently profound and pervasive to warrant the label 'Howard's Way'.

But Howard's position is not so ascendant or so secure and the interminable debates about who will succeed him actually miss the point for progressive Australia. There's a popular saying - When the prime minister changes, so does the country. Certainly John Howard has evoked the intense dislike of those progressives who see him as personally responsible for the conservative onslaught since 1996. But the dynamics of political change are more complex and the political agenda certainly does not lie fully under Howard's control. Some recent events demonstrate that.

Just a year ago it seemed impossible to even imagine that it would be under John Howard that all children and families in asylum seeker detention centers would be released. Much more needs to be done - and the Nauru camp remains a burning scar on the nation's conscience - but the release of those families didn't have to wait for John Howard's departure. It was years of campaigning by the Greens and the community - combined with a few Liberal dissidents - that forced Howard's hand.

Similarly, earlier this year the Prime Minister announced that large tracts of Tasmania's forests would be saved. It's barely a quarter of what needs to be protected. But it is a significant win for Greens and conservationists who had been told for years by the Tasmanian Government that it was simply impossible for one more tree to be protected.

And of course there was John Howard's revisionism on East Timor. A huge outpouring from the Australian community and spirited campaigning action saw the Prime Minister - after a lifetime of appeasing the Indonesian dictatorship - adopt the Greens policy of independence for East Timor.

None of this is to suggest that John Howard is an asylum seeker-loving tree hugger (although he did once claim to be 'greenish'). Far from it, of course! But John Howard is a politician. And successful campaigns – those that generate community support and turn that support into action – have an uncanny way of turning even the most obstinate politi-cian around.

... rescuing the Senate from one party's control is the greatest progressive challenge in the lead up to the next election.



*Nicholson of 'The Australian' newspaper:
www.nicholsoncartoons.com.au

So what would happen if the progressives' dreams came true and all John Howard's lies and deceit suddenly caught up with him, forcing him from office? Would we be left with Peter Costello - the Treasurer who says John Howard's industrial relations changes don't go far enough? The man who wants to abolish unfair dismissal laws altogether? A man who is cosy with the right wing Christian fundamentalists from Hillsong.

Even while contemplating that dismal prospect, we need to remember something that's perhaps more important. Getting rid of John Howard would do nothing to alter the dynamics in the Senate. And rescuing the Senate from one party's control is the greatest progressive challenge in the lead up to the next election. More important than who is Prime Minister – Howard, Costello, Beazley, Rudd or Carr – is who controls the Senate. That is the dynamic that will most shape Australia.

Imagine the conservatives having another term with the Senate under their control. The current wave of reforms being proposed would look like a picnic. And even if the ALP were to win the next election, how many progressive initiatives would pass the parliament if the Coalition still had Senate control?

But imagine a Senate with the Greens – not Family First or Barnaby Joyce – holding the balance of power after the next election. We would see a wealth of positive progressive initiatives, ideas and debates taking centre stage in Australian life.

This is something within the grasp of the Greens and something almost wholly for the Greens to determine. Lifting current support for the Greens by a few percentage points could deliver this. Then it would matter little who was leading the federal Coalition. Greens support will grow if policies are comprehensive and convincing, if the four Greens senators perform effectively in the chamber and in committee, and if the Greens generally can 'bullet proof' themselves against the inevitable, somewhat familiar attacks.

The next general election (and half-Senate election) will be held between 4 August and 15 December 2007. With the Government now in control of the Senate, that election will undoubtedly see a focus on the upper house beyond anything experienced in past elections. The Senate has so often been the brake on unpopular initiatives that an over-zealous government would have otherwise passed into law.

It will be critical to get the message to all Australians about how important their Senate vote is and how dangerous it is to allow one party to control the Parliament. It will be a message that many people will be ready to hear - a message about ensuring the electorate can have a say between elections.

For the Senate to be rescued from government control at the next election, the Government would need to drop from 39 seats to 37. A relatively small swing in the Senate vote (of less than 5 per cent away from the Government and towards the ALP and Greens) could produce four non-Coalition seats in at least three states and possibly one territory. Such a swing would return the Coalition to minority status in the Senate.

In specific terms it means that, for a start, the Coalition must be prevented from winning four of the six available Senate seats in any state (something it achieved in Queensland in 2004). Then the Coalition must be limited to winning only two Senate seats in at least two states (or in just one state if, at the same time, the Coalition loses a Senate seat in the ACT; Territory senators are elected for three year terms only, with seats 'spilled' at each election).

Getting over John Howard requires moving beyond him. He thrives on the attention and power we assign to him. Too much focus on John Howard prevents Greens and like-minded Australians doing what they do best - forging a brighter, environmental and progressive future for Australia no matter who is Prime Minister.

Ben Oquist is political adviser to Greens Senator Bob Brown.

Howard's war on the environment: hocking the future

JOHN KAYE



Its fundamentalist belief in market solutions and its disdain of collective values inevitably put the Howard government at odds with the essential solutions to the environmental challenges faced by Australia.



Australians recently learned of Australia's new 'partnership' with the major polluting nations of the Asia-Pacific area. This is the latest episode in a sad saga of global environmental damage. John Kaye describes the continuing disgrace of Coalition energy policy and the tragedy of lost opportunities.

Even by the Coalition's standards, the Howard government has displayed a remarkable enthusiasm for delivering for the big end of town. It has also demonstrated a willingness to debase Australia's political discourse by injecting misinformation, pandering to ignorance and playing on fear and insecurity. This is as true of its track record on the environment as it is of its attacks on Australia's workers, asylum seekers and public sector workers.

Whether it is Tasmania's forests, water conservation or climate change, the Howard government has stymied quality public debate. While this country faces urgent environmental challenges, the opportunities to respond in a way that both creates jobs and protects the next generation's inheritance are being squandered.

One outrageous example is Australia's undermining of the international agreement on reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Howard's representatives played a spoiler role during the negotiations leading to the Kyoto protocols, forcing concessions and weakening the final agreement, which the government then refused to sign. Along with the USA, Australia is holding out against a comprehensive international agreement. While Kyoto does not go nearly far enough, it at least represents recognition that global problems demand the acceptance of collective responsibility.

In late July it emerged that Australia has for some time been negotiating in secret to create an Asia-Pacific 'partnership on clean development and climate' with China, Japan, South Korea, India and the USA. These are all major coal users or exporters with significant investment in frustrating the formation of an international approach to averting climate chaos. Not surprisingly, the partnership lacks targets or regulatory mechanisms and is based on the illusion of clean coal technologies.

Australia's greenhouse record is appalling. We are the world's largest per capita polluters yet the one national program with any promise - the Mandatory Renewable Energy Targets

Scheme (MRETS) - lacks teeth, sets the bar too low and is due to expire at the end of this year.

The Howard government has consistently refused to engage with any mechanism that would significantly reduce national greenhouse gas emissions. The Coalition and its corporate allies have been a major force behind the slandering of carbon taxes. It has also frustrated attempts to create a national system of carbon credit trading which, while seriously flawed, would at least give some incentive to large polluters to reduce emissions.

Growing public awareness of the consequences of global warming and a prolonged drought affecting much of the east coast of Australia have succeeded where the overwhelming majority of scientific opinion appears to have failed. They have constrained the ability of Howard government ministers to hide behind greenhouse scepticism. Despite these developments, the federal government continues to push the so-called clean coal options.

Coal dominates Australia's exports as well as the generation of electrical energy in the mainland states, which accounts for thirty five percent of Australia's net greenhouse gas emissions. Weaning ourselves off coal through a massive growth in renewable energy and energy efficiency is central to creating a climate-friendly future. It will also offer an incubator market for Australian innovation in technologies that will inevitably be in high demand around the world.

Yet despite those immense economic and environmental benefits, the Howard government continues to find excuses for the coal industry. Its advocacy of clean coal technologies such as geosequestration – burying the carbon dioxide produced by power stations – is an embarrassment. The technology has little chance of succeeding and would in any event be prohibitively expensive. It would create an ongoing risk to future generations of leakage back into the atmosphere.

Howard and his ministers probably know all this, but they need to buy time for the coal industry. By creating the apparition of clean coal, they are taking the pressure off the industry and diluting the sense of urgency for developing truly sustainable alternatives.

The Coalition's AusLink transport package announced during last year's federal election gave roads almost seven times the funds that were allocated to fixed rail projects. Transport accounts for fifteen percent of Australia's greenhouse emissions and a transition to public transport and freight rail is urgent.

The Howard government's policy bias to the big end of town at the expense of the public interest is paralleled by generous campaign donations from corporate Australia. Yet this only partly explains the Coalition's extraordinarily bad environmental track record. Its fundamentalist belief in market solutions and its disdain of collective values inevitably put the Howard government at odds with the essential solutions to the environmental challenges faced by Australia.

Howard's current dominance of federal politics creates a large but not insurmountable barrier to building a sustainable future. With little coherent opposition from Federal Labor's leaders and a rampantly pro-business media, the solution lies with a well-informed and active population demanding a much better deal for their future and for that of their children.

John Kaye was the Greens NSW 2004 lead senate candidate. He teaches engineering and his research focuses on sustainable energy policy.

EDUCATION – PRIVATE CONSUMPTION OR PUBLIC GOOD?

SANDRA TAYLOR

The government has championed 'choice', but the reality is that many have no real choice.



Since its election in 1996, the Howard government has pursued an extreme version of neo-liberalism in its approach to education. The government has subjected education to market forces, and has made competition, choice, and accountability central priorities. These policy directions have affected all sectors of education in detrimental ways.

The agenda has been taken up in narrow ideological ways and has threatened the social-democratic traditions in Australian education. For example, the government abolished the successful Disadvantaged Schools Program, but has made funding available for a flag pole in every school yard! In general, we have seen a shift from a view of education as a public good - central to the operation of a civil society - to a view of public education as a safety net operating in a system characterised by competition, stratification and individualism. The policies have reshaped public education - built on notions of universal access, diversity and democracy – and have marginalised programs addressing educational inequality.

By changing school funding arrangements, the Howard government encouraged the proliferation of new private schools. At the same time, it reduced funding in real terms to public schools, thereby increasing pressures on public schools for 'market share'. It also helped to create distrust in public schooling through allegations of so-called 'falling standards'. In the longer term, an education system that is under-funded becomes a residual service for those who cannot afford the alternatives. Thus education becomes a private consumption item rather than a public good. The government has championed 'choice', but the reality is that many have no real choice. The public funding of private schools has been a significant factor in maintaining inequality in Australian society. We need a strong commitment by governments to ensure that the provision of high quality public schooling is a priority – so that those who can afford to choose private schools do not do so because the public system is not good enough.

In higher education we have seen a similar shift away from a view of education as a public good. For example, when Minister Brendan Nelson was recently asked in a television interview, whether he thought that a university education was a privilege or a right, he answered without hesitation that it was 'a privilege'. Government funding of higher education has been drastically reduced over the Howard years, and there has been a kind of 'privatisation by stealth'. Universities are now kept afloat by fees from domestic and international students, and universities compete with each other for their research funding. As a result of funding shortfalls, class sizes and staff workloads have increased dramatically, with impacts on quality teaching and learning. And the increasing financial burden now borne by students means that a university education is not accessible to all. And the move to voluntary student unionism will impact on the provision of student services on campus - a further example of the ideologically-driven agenda of the Howard government.

Education is increasingly important in a globalised world. The future generation needs vocational education and skills to contribute to economic development. But even in this respect the Howard government has failed to take a longer view and resource TAFE and higher education adequately. So it is hardly surprising that there are skills shortages now! The new proposal for Australian Technical Colleges is too little, too late.

Together with a focus on economic development, we also need an emphasis on social equity and sustainable patterns of production and consumption. Education, particularly public education, has a crucial role to play in fostering these aspects in local communities and in society more broadly. It also has a central role in preparing the next generation for democratic citizenship and in fostering the values of inclusivity and social justice.

Sandra Taylor is an Associate Professor in the School of Cultural and Language Studies in Education at QUT Brisbane.

Coalition government is a health hazard

KERRY NETTLE

The Greens health policy promotes a positive vision of wellness and quality of life.

The Coalition government spent \$19.2 million of public funds last year trying to convince voters that the prime minister no longer wanted to dismantle Medicare. Health Minister Tony Abbott consistently says that 'the Howard government is the best friend that Medicare has ever had'. But it's all about trying to create an impression that the Coalition supports Medicare and the ideal of universal access that underpins it. In reality the Coalition government is dismantling our public health system. In just nine years it has set about undermining a system that is strongly supported by the Australian public.

Firstly it shifted out of public health around \$3 billion a year to prop up the private health insurance industry which overwhelmingly benefits high-income earners. Next it withdrew funding for a public dental scheme for low-income earners. In the area of pharmaceuticals, there were two assaults - increasing the patient charge for essential medicines by 70 per cent and substantially increasing the safety net threshold for high users of the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme. Further, the Coalition exposed the PBS to the power of US pharmaceutical giants through changes under the Australia-US Free Trade Agreement (AUSFTA). In two key areas, it failed to allocate adequate funding to address the severe deficit in spending on Indigenous health and on mental health care. And it entrenched inflationary out-of-pocket expenses for primary care through the Medicare safety net and shifted millions out of the public hospital system. There is more in store. Minister Abbott has signalled that he'll consider extending private health insurance beyond hospital services. And we have yet to see the full impact of the FTA.

The task of rescuing public health care is essential. Preventative health care is common sense. In Indigenous communities where health problems are dire, the government



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has been forced to recognise the value of preventative health programmes. This common sense message needs to spread to the broader health arena, otherwise we face the prospect of a nation divided into those who will be forced to pay higher and higher costs for essential medical and health care and those who simply miss out because they cannot afford the costs. The result will be greater illness, higher complications, increased hospital admissions, and all the social problems that arise from inadequate access to high quality health and medical care.

The Greens health policy promotes a positive vision of wellness and quality of life. We need to continue to promote this fresh approach to the provision and funding of health care. The recent decision of the Council of Australian Governments to look at health reform provides a context for advocating a better way. Taking the Greens message to the community is vital to build the momentum for change.

Kerry Nettle is an Australian Greens senator for New South Wales.

Your rights at work – worth fighting for

GREG COMBET

ACTU secretary Greg Combet outlines the nature of the industrial relations 'reforms' which are likely to be the first of many policies to pass through the new federal parliament and fundamentally divide the country.

John Howard claims that industrial relations is the most pressing economic issue facing the nation. But his workplace agenda does not address Australia's real economic issues. It is simply a plan to deliver power to business and diminish the rights of every Australian worker.

The Government wants to remove unfair dismissal protection for those in businesses with 100 or fewer staff – 99 percent of Australian companies. Abolishing this protection is unwarranted and will encourage poor treatment of workers.

The Government is also proposing to fundamentally change the rules for agreement making and bargaining. The Government plans to scrap this award safety net for workplace agreements and instead rely on just five minimum conditions: minimum wages starting at \$12.75 per hour; 4 weeks annual leave (two weeks of which may be 'cashed out'), sick leave, hours of work, and unpaid parental leave.

This will allow employers to remove most work rights without compensation, like redundancy pay, overtime pay, and weekend and casual loadings. Many people will lose take-home pay.

The greatest threat to take-home pay will be individual contracts – what the Government innocently calls Australian Workplace Agreements (AWAs). AWAs have been used to undermine union representation and cut pay and working conditions. The inherent problem with AWAs is that individual employees don't have equal bargaining power with their employer. That is why collective bargaining is an internationally

recognised right, providing a better balance of power in the workplace. But not in Australia.

Minimum wages will also fall in value. The Government has publicly said minimum wages should be at least \$50 a week lower than the current full time rate of \$484 per week – so it is setting up the deceitfully titled Fair Pay Commission to take over the setting of minimum wages.

These changes are profoundly biased towards business. The Government claims business can be trusted to do the right thing. Tell that to James Hardie's asbestos victims. Workers' rights are not charity to be granted at the discretion of business – they must be enforceable legal rights.

The union campaign is designed to make the Government think again. Now that the Government has control of the Senate, it will be able to decide which legislation to pass. But it will also have to get re-elected and has to listen to the voice of the people if it wants to do that.

The unions are also encouraging all Senators, including Greens, to oppose these bad laws. Their principled stand is an important message to the Government.

Unions have stood up for the rights and living standards of Australian working people for over 150 years. We believe workers' rights to be worth fighting for – and fight we will.

To find out more about the union campaign to protect rights at work, go to www.rightsatwork.com.au or call the ACTU on 1300 362 223.

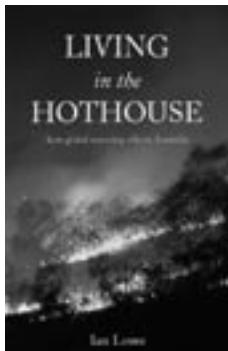
Greg Combet is the Secretary of the Australian Council of Trade Unions.

'Women in Docs' (Chanel Lucas and Roz Pappalardo with Silas Palmer instrumentalist) at a recent IR Rally.
management@womenindocs.com
Photo: Kathleen Gordon



book reviews

Here's a taste of what our reviewers have said about these four books.
You can read the complete reviews on the Australian Greens website: www.greens.org.au



Dr Philip Nitschke
& Dr Fiona Stewart

killing me softly

Voluntary Euthanasia and the Road to the Peaceful Pill

Living in the Hothouse

IAN LOWE, 2005
Scribe Publications, Carlton North
232pp.

ISBN 1 920769 41 2 RRP \$26.95

I hope conservative columnist Christopher Pearson has a house on a canal estate, 30 centimetres above the high water mark. If so, he should live long enough to see the first lot of tidal surges, caused by sea level rises, take out his home. He deserves this fate because of his ridiculous assertion in the pages of *The Australian* that human-induced climate change is scare-mongering by environmentalists ...

Ideologically-driven tirades or self-interested rationalizations by industry groups are in marked contrast to the balanced, intelligent and characteristically wry presentation of the topic in Ian Lowe's latest publication *Living in the Hothouse*.

Fifteen years ago Professor Ian Lowe published *Living in the Greenhouse*. Then there was still scientific debate about climate change. Now in his new book he asserts that the debate is all but over, and he wants the political debate about our responses to begin in earnest.

The book outlines the current state of scientific understanding of the enhanced greenhouse effect and forecasts the climate changes likely to occur in Australia and their major impacts. In the face of these forecasts Australians need to respond urgently and intelligently by curbing our extravagant use of energy. *Living in the Hothouse* points out that the lack of political will – not the lack of technological options – is Australia's main obstacle to good public policy on energy.

Drew Hutton

The Shackled Continent: Africa's Past, Present and Future

ROBERT GUEST, 2004
Macmillan, London. 280 pp.
ISBN 1 4050 3388 6

African specialist and journalist Robert Guest catalogues the corruption, poverty, cronyism, woeful governance, inter-tribal feuds and genocides of the African sub-continent in a fast, easy-to-read account. While acknowledging the exploitation of Africa by Western imperialist countries, the author focuses mainly on the abuses of power by Africa's often corrupt leaders,

such as the large volumes of foreign aid that have spectacularly failed to achieve its aims of alleviating poverty and hardship for Africa's approximately 800 million people. The spread of AIDS, particularly through southern Africa, is covered in detail. As well as the need for far-reaching domestic political and economic reforms, Guest controversially advocates the wholesale adoption of the 'free' market as the surest way to modernise Africa, with particular emphasis on South Africa and Zimbabwe. Renegotiating terms of trade and removing protectionism - which still heavily favour the West - are hailed as being the surest ways to unleash Africa's potential and 'unshackle' the continent from what Guest regards as its economic backwardness. The author is at his strongest when diagnosing Africa's many ailments, but is less convincing in his choice of remedies. Nevertheless, this is a fascinating read and one that maintains an optimistic tone despite the often harrowing subject matter.

Kevin Judah White

The Little Green Handbook; a guide to critical global trends

RON NIELSON, 2005
Scribe Press. 384pp.
ISBN 1920769307 RRP \$35.00

The Little Green Handbook is a comprehensive guide to the current state of the planet. It is 363 pages packed full of data covering environmental degradation, population, land resources, water resources, atmosphere, energy use and more. Although this book describes the global situation it also provides a host of facts and figures about Australia ...

The chapter about population explains succinctly the relationship between the global population and the state of our planet and how the human population is at the core of its ills. ... In the chapter on diminishing land resources the author states that 'with the present global availability of arable land we can support three billion people on the diet of industrialized countries, 7.5 billion on a simple diet and up to 20 billion starving people'. ... In another chapter Nielson describes the ever-increasing use of water around the world and how we are reliant more and more on underground aquifers for this precious resource. The book also covers climate change and the latest research on predicted temperature changes.

One of the most interesting chapters in the book is the concise listing of critical global events ...

I believe this book is a must read for anyone concerned with the fate of the planet.

Karl Tschugguel

Killing Me Softly: Voluntary Euthanasia and the Road to the Peaceful Pill

Philip Nitschke & Fiona Stewart 2005
Penguin Australia
ISBN 0 14 300303 8 RRP \$32.95

The heart of this passionately written book is Nitschke's insistence on the right of the individual to make their own decisions and, most important of all, to retain control of their own lives.

He advances incontrovertible evidence that many people wish to make their own decision about how and when they die, and details (in the last chapter) the lengths to which the Australian Government is prepared to go to overturn even freedom of speech in order to prevent these people from achieving their goal. Case study after case study in the book demonstrates the horrific consequences for terminal sufferers and their families of this denial of individual rights.

Nitschke carefully and comprehensively demolishes the arguments for denying help to those who wish to die, particularly the view that making information or assistance available will increase the number of suicides or put the vulnerable at risk.

Parts of the book may be a little extreme (and) despite some careful disclaimers, it also leaves the impression that this is an issue between Christians and non-Christians, which is not the case.

Nitschke says that he has lost hope in a legislative solution and describes his journey towards supporting interested individuals and groups in their attempts to develop peaceful means of suicide that cannot easily be banned. Whether this is a wise strategy is open to argument.

... this is a book that all concerned citizens should read.

Bill Godfrey



Stewart Jackson

The last few months have I think been some of the most satisfying for me, as well as some of the busiest, as the party moves forward once again. The employment of Mark Jeanes as National Officer to run the projects of the party means that we have a full-time person employed to work on party matters nationally. Mark is a highly competent and professional worker and members can expect to both hear and see much more of Mark in the coming months.

One of the key activities consuming Mark's time in the next few months will be the party's Strategic Planning process, agreed to at the last National Conference but only now getting fully underway. As part of that process members and state parties will be involved in working through what it is we want for the party in the short to medium term. This will mean thinking really hard about where we want to position the party, and what concrete outcomes we wish to achieve in the next two election cycles.

I for one hope that members think it important that we construct a party with a solid administrative base to support not just the work of all our elected representatives at the local, state and federal levels but also the campaigns that we hope to pursue to success. This may mean making some sacrifices to ensure that we have the office space we need to house our materials and meetings, but also realising that we do have considerable political capital in the community that we need to tap into.

This will also mean that, as well as looking to our federal and state MPs for leadership, we need to look closer to home, to our local councilors and members for the ideas and drive to engage people in campaigns. It doesn't matter whether the campaigns are about a very local matter such as a patch of bushland or larger global issues like climate change; it is important that we engage the community in these issues through debate and discussion. We can be at our strongest at a local level, and if we are strong at the grassroots we can weather any storm.

We should also remember that coordinated decisions made at a local level can have enormous impact on a state and federal level. If we can engage local councils in opposing Howard's Industrial Relations agenda we can harness the latent community skepticism to build a significant campaign. Coordinated action on planning issues - particularly along coastal regions - can lead to state governments legislating to preserve coastlines for all the community not just for greedy developers. And concerted local action can remind divisive politicians and parties such as John Howard and the Liberals that their agenda will not be swallowed easily and will be rolled back when and where it can be.

Over the next few years I expect the Greens to change from being an oppositional party - pleased to elect MPs but focused on opposing governments - to one focused on winning elections and to being in Government, yet still remaining committed to radical social change. It is possible: we just have to make it happen.

Stewart Jackson
Convenor, Australian Greens
convenor@greens.org.au

ACT *Winter in the ACT*

We're in a bit of post-election winter quiet here in the ACT. A small team of enthusiasts is keeping most balls in the air and focusing on some interesting activities for fellow members as well as getting a few more much needed dollars coming in (we're learning how to run quiz nights!) and not forgetting braving the cold of a weekly (outdoors!) market to chat with the locals.

Our office has a new manager – Jacqui Cooke – and we think she's wonderful. If you're in the ACT, make sure you come in and say HI (and as a bonus, say HI to the Australian Greens team at the same time).

Deb Foskey and her team in the ACT Assembly have been working really hard – it's no easy task for one MLA to cover all the portfolios - but Deb and the team are doing a fantastic job of it. Some of the bigger issues that they have been focusing on include the 2005-06 budget, funding of government housing, ACT town planning and planning reforms, supporting the community sector in the face of reduced federal funding and reduced facilities in the ACT, water catchments management and conservation initiatives, and tabling a number of bills including a stop on SLAPPs (Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation) and much much more.

We've had really interesting speakers at our monthly general meetings over the past months and with our AGM coming up in August, we're preparing for a bit of change in the team with a few people taking well-earned breaks.

And we're looking forward to spring

Helen Woittiez: Convenor, ACT Greens

NSW *Sudden by-election opportunities*

There is no shortage of campaign opportunities in NSW. With the resignation of the Premier and two ministers, there are three by-elections coming up, including in the seat of Marrickville where the Greens polled 28% in the 2003 state election. The state government continues to peddle crazy solutions to the significant issues of water, energy and transport. Instead of a desalination plant, coal-fired power plants and more motorways, The Greens are out and about with positive options like water recycling, renewable energy and public transport.

Members in regional centres are also organising community forums on a range of issues including refugees and mandatory detention, jobs and the environment, voluntary student unionism and industrial relations. Our state and federal MP's offices continue to provide plenty of resources for community-based campaigns.

On the local level, many of our 58 councillors recently came together for the annual Greens NSW Local Government Forum. Overdevelopment remains a key campaign in most urban areas and it was boldly highlighted at the inaugural Bad Developer Awards hosted by the Greens in August.

As well as reaching out with campaigns, we are looking to revitalise our meetings and communications to ensure that members throughout the state are participating actively in decisions on policy and process.

Lesa de Leau: Convenor, The Greens NSW

NT *Our most successful campaign yet*

The recent NT election has proven to be the most successful election campaign yet for the NT Greens. Whilst much attention has focused on the large swing to the ALP and the subsequent decimation of the CLP opposition to 4 MLAs, the other big winner was the Greens.

We contested a record, 11 out of 25 seats, and achieved an average 9.5% in the seats we contested and 4.2% across the Territory. Other results included 15.7% in the seat of Nightcliff and 13.4% in the seat of Arafura. Based on last year's federal results there were at least three more seats in which we could have achieved 10% or more. The Greens in Alice Springs fielded and supported a number of candidates for the first time at a Territory election.

After three election campaigns in the past twelve months, coupled with solid growth and increased involvement in the party, our challenge now is to maintain the momentum.

Simon Niblock: Convenor, NT Greens

QLD *Green immersion in Qld*

More than one hundred and thirty Greens members and supporters joined in a recent three-hour Greens Immersion Program. The program was designed for members both new and old to engage with the depth and breadth of Greens culture, policy, action and future aspirations.

The history of the Greens was painted by Drew Hutton. The world premiere of the Baxter 05 video documentary was introduced by Elissa Jenkins. Juanita Wheeler delivered the good oil on how to get involved and election campaigning. There were fifteen Information and Conversation Stalls ranging across industrial relations, on-line branch meetings, refugees, education, community development as a campaign approach, branch action, globalization and consumerism, transport and plenty of others. The day concluded with a Café-style workshop. Mike Kane and a great group from Toowoomba North organized this raging success of a day. Plans are underway to refine the process and take the show on the road to regional Queensland.

To complement the Immersion Program the Queensland Greens will be taking to the streets on October 15 with a statewide Greens Day Out. Through street stalls, shopping centre stalls, roadside signs and leaflets, the focus will be on the community connecting with the Green agenda by an election-style campaign that focuses on local, state and federal issues. And we hope for better than usual media coverage. Perhaps it's an idea that could be taken up by the Australian Greens.

Outside of this, the Queensland Greens have almost completed a nine month Strategic Planning process. We are currently assessing the Australian Greens strategic planning framework to ensure meaningful integration of state and national plans. Meanwhile, our special Constitutional Conference in May saw some significant changes to the way we govern ourselves.

The good word seems to have got out about the Queensland Greens; our membership is climbing steadily and branch involvement in Greens activity is strengthening.

Howard Nielsen: Convenor, Queensland Greens

TAS Planning for National Conference... and more!

The past few months have been busy ones for the Tasmanian Greens. As I write, Christine Milne is preparing to make her maiden speech in the Senate, and we are finalising preselection for candidates to represent the Tasmanian Greens in the October local government elections. We plan to run candidates across the state, and, given the excellent polling achieved by the two Greens candidates who stood for the Legislative Council earlier this year - Scott Jordan and Glenn Millar - we hope to increase our representation at this very important level.

Planning is also well under way for the Australian Greens National Conference, to be held in Hobart on November 11, 12 and 13. The venue, Hadleys Hotel, is in central Hobart, and we suggest that you book early if you would like to stay in the hotel itself. It's a lovely old building, with very friendly staff and excellent facilities. Visitors will have the opportunity to take guided tours through some of our iconic forests like the Styx and the Tarkine. There's plenty to see and do down here, so we encourage you to make a holiday of it! Further details will be available on our website

- www.tas.greens.org.au.

Karen Cassidy: Convenor, Tasmanian Greens

VIC Changes to upper house will favour Greens

Preparations are well under way for elections to be conducted in 54 local government areas in November this year. This will be the final round of 'split' local government elections to be held Victoria. From November 2008, all 79 local councils in Victoria will go to the polls at the same time. This time, two of our sitting local councillors are up for re-election in the City of Maribyrnong and we have preselected candidates in several other metropolitan and regional areas. We are aiming for increased representation in local government to achieve and build upon Green outcomes in local government and to set the scene for the next state election in November 2006.

Draft boundaries have been released for the historic transformation of the Legislative Council (upper house) of the Victorian parliament. At the next state election, Victorians will elect, by proportional representation, forty members - made up of five representatives from eight electorates - to the Legislative Council. There has been much speculation about what the change will mean for the Greens. The new system certainly improves the chances of Greens and other minor parties having repre-

sentatives elected to the Legislative Council. In addition, the change will increase accountability in the Victorian Parliament. For the first time, the upper house will be more representative of the electorate and will be able to function as a true house of review. The final boundaries will be announced in October.

We are also in the final stages of a wide ranging strategic review in the lead up to our State Conference on 10 and 11 September.

Sue Pennicuik: Co-Convenor, Victoria

WA Focus on water, energy and resource use

After a six year break, the Greens (WA) returned to the Senate on the 9th of August, doubling the strength of the Australian Greens team.

Our three elected representatives - Senator Rachel Siewert, Paul Llewellyn (South West Region) and Giz Watson (North Metropolitan) are working with the membership to re-focus their parliamentary and campaigning work.

The re-focus is intended to ensure that the Greens (WA) remain effective despite our reduced state representation, that we prioritise key issues (and that we are clearly identified with these issues), and that we actually achieve some agreed targets and outcomes.

The State Government has stated it will be prioritising education and training.

They are again pursuing disaggregation of Western Power into four new corporations under the Electricity Corporations Bill and it looks like they'll succeed this time around with the Liberals indicating their support. The Greens are hopeful that the debate will provide an opportunity to obtain a commitment from the Government for a mandated renewable energy target.

The Government also has promised a Biodiversity Conservation Act, a Sustainability Act and a new Waste Act - all vital issues that the Greens will seek to shape.

The Greens (WA) intend to be leading the debate on harnessing WA's resource boom to invest in long-term sustainability in water, energy and resource use – and keeping uranium mines out of WA!

Robin Chapple; Co-convenor Greens (WA)

JOIN THE GREENS

To become a Greens member either:

- Fill out and return the coupon to receive a membership form in the post OR
- Go 'on-line' to the Greens website: www.greens.org.au and select your state or territory

For further membership information call **1800 017 011**

Yes, please send me a membership form

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state _____

postcode _____

email _____

Post or fax to your local state or territory party office
(see page 16 for listing)

national officer's report



Mark Jeanes

The Australian Greens are entering a new and exciting phase of change, growth and consolidation.

I write this report having just returned from an historic two-day meeting at Parliament House with the four Senators and their talented new staff members, one week before incoming Senators Christine Milne and Rachel Siewert walk into the Senate to

deliver their maiden speeches. The meeting crackled with excitement as new strategies were discussed, systems were put in place and fresh ideas were shared.

Howard's control of the Senate is lamentable. But, in a way, the prospect of not spending energy on negotiations with the Government affords the Greens a rare opportunity - to consolidate and to concentrate on how best to deliver core messages to the electorate.

With this in mind, my broad goals as the new National Officer are to help strengthen the national organisation and to position the Australian Greens for outstanding success in the upcoming state elections, the 2007 Federal Election and beyond.

My first task is to run Project Focus - the development of the national strategic plan to map the way forward for the Australian Greens in the coming years. Work on this very exciting initiative is already well under way. By the time you read this, you should have had the opportunity to contribute to Project Focus through a workshop with your State or Territory party. The final plan, to be presented for ratification at National Conference in November, will largely determine the work of the National Office.

Meanwhile, since I arrived in late June, work has begun on other initiatives including preparation for the South Australian elections in March next year, focus group research, hiring a new National Policy Officer, website redevelopment and so on. Importantly, over the next six months I would like to find concrete ways to share materials, ideas and resources between the States and Territories to reduce duplication of effort and to make the best use of the resources we already have.

Thanks to Stewart Jackson, Sean Downes, the Senators and others who have made my start in this position smooth and full of learning. It's a privilege to work for an organisation that stands up so strongly for social and economic justice, environmental sustainability and government accountability in the face of Howard's dishonourable Ministers who continue to deceive, duck, weave and debase our democracy.

If you have any useful information, concerns or ideas, I would like to hear from you. My office number is 02 6162 0036.

Mark Jeanes

Australian Greens National Officer
nationalofficer@greens.org.au

national office report

It's been just over three months since I took on my new job, following Scott Oates' departure. I'm still on a steep learning curve - exciting and at times daunting - Scott's shoes are hard to fill! My tasks fall into five main categories: management of the National Office; being a first contact/information source for the public, like-minded groups and media/governmental organisations; acting as a day-to-day 'conduit' between all elements of the party across Australia; maintenance/development of central party resources like the national website and publications; and serving on national bodies such as the Communications Working Group and the Australian Greens Co-ordinating Group.

Since I started, there's been a lot to engage with. Apart from the plethora of regular issues, people and tasks, three of the notable things have been preparing for the arrival of Mark Jeanes, our new National Officer; building relationships with the State party offices; and the doubling of our Senate team to four. I've very much enjoyed working with Bob Brown's and Kerry Nettle's offices, and it's been particularly exciting to support Rachel Siewert and Christine Milne and their fantastic staff as they commence their Senate campaigns. And with Mark's commencement in June, we've shifted up

a gear in creating a more focussed body, better able to respond to the challenges and opportunities that 'Howard's Australia' presents us with. I look forward to working with and in close support of Mark.

I'm elated to write this, my first report for Green. If there's anything you'd like to pass on or ask, or if you'd just like to get in touch, I'd be delighted to hear from you. You can contact National Office on (02) 6162 0036 or greensoffice@greens.org.au.

Sean Downes

Manager National Office

communications group report

Communication is the 'oxygen' of the Greens – communicating with our members, our voters and the general Australian populace is vital to our effective operation as a political party. At last November's national conference the coordination of the Greens' communication was given a more national footing than it had had in the past with the setting up of a national communications working group. The group has been very active with phone link ups held every three or four weeks. Our three priorities have been to better organise and lift the standards of Green magazine and of

the Australian Greens' web page and to develop a national communications strategy. Drew Hutton and Brian Hoepper have done a fantastic job with lifting the standard of Green magazine with this edition and the previous one. By the time this edition is out we will have appointed longer-term editors of the magazine for the next two years. On the web page front we have recently appointed Elena Jeffreys as our web editor to source new and exciting content for the web page and over the next few months the Australian Greens' webpage will be re-developed in conjunction with the develop-

ment of a new webpage for the four Green senators. We have also recently put together a national communications strategy which, amongst other things, recommends that the party host a new website for the Asia-Pacific network of Green parties, that Green magazine be taken by all members of the party on an opt-out basis and that we standardise the party's use of logos. The group has put some good runs on the board but has many more to hit.

Greg Buckman

Convenor, Australian Greens Communications Working Group



Hello from the Global Greens. As the world continues to chug along in 'business as usual' mode, Greens around the world continue in their eternal work of lifting the green agenda into mainstream consciousness. To be sure there are some positive results, some defeats, and much in the netherland in-between area where we are no doubt making a difference, yet this difference remains difficult to quantify or demonstrate.

From COP to 'MOP'

For example, Greens in Europe unanimously decided at a meeting in Latvia, in May, to adopt climate change as a major focus for a common campaign in Europe. Now it seems that climate change has finally been noticed by the mainstream to the point of making it onto the agenda of the G8 meeting – they have reached the stage where they can no longer ignore it, but the point is that we in the global green movement and Greens parties said it first! But watch this space (<http://www.globefox.com/cacc/globalclimatecampaign.html>)!

In November this year Greens from around the world will be at a major Climate Change meeting, the 11th Conference of the Parties (COP) of the Climate Change Convention in Montreal, Canada. There has been an international call to action - demonstrations on the same day in as many countries around the world as possible - on Saturday 3rd December 2005, timed to coincide with the 'MOP' Climate Talks (28th November to 9th December) in Montreal. These demonstrations will demand that the USA and Australia ratify the Kyoto Protocol immediately, and that the entire world community move as rapidly as possible to a stronger emissions reductions treaty that will be both equitable and effective in stabilising 'greenhouse' gases and preventing dangerous climate change.

Globalisation 6 times lucky in Hong Kong?

The anti-globalisation campaign will be furthered at another important meeting involving Greens, during the Sixth WTO Ministerial Conference in Hong Kong from 13th to 18th December 2005. The Heinrich Böll Foundation which substantially funded the Asia-Pacific Greens Network conference in Kyoto will be funding some Greens participation in this meeting as well. Keep your eye on Hong Kong this coming December, or take all your friends down there for another WTO GIG. Oh and don't forget to bring your Green triangles.

Greens after Kyoto

Rafique Sulayman, who joined our Kyoto Greens meeting earlier this year, has written a soon-to-be released book about his experiences there entitled 'Road to Kyoto' (see Wahid Kaiser, <http://www.greens.org/media/displayarticle.php?mediaID=3516>). It's a travelogue describing his experiences in Osaka and Kyoto. His representation at the Kyoto meeting was the first ever overseas participation by the Bangladesh Greens. A known writer and art-critic of Bangladesh, Rafique Sulayman has authored successful books like 'Welcome to my

Insanity' and 'Meet Beverly'. This book is dedicated to Satomi Oba, a well known anti-nuclear activist of Japan who passed away recently to the great sadness of many who had loved and respected her so greatly. She had acted as chairperson of the peace-building session at the Asia-Pacific Greens Kyoto meeting.

Global Greens Conference, 2007

A second major Global Greens Conference (the first was in Canberra in 2001) is now being planned for 2007 in Africa. Proposals have come from Cameroon, Kenya, Morocco and South Africa. The Global Greens Coordination Group is currently gathering information about resources on the ground in these places to help them make a final decision about where and when the conference will be held. If the conference is in Kenya it could be scheduled to coincide with the World Social Forum meeting in January 2007 in Nairobi, which also happens to be the home city of Nobel Prize winner Wangari Mathai from the Green Belt Movement in Kenya.

Come to our GIG!

If you would like more information on global greens matters, would like to receive the global greens updates (courtesy of Deb Foskey – thanks Deb!), would like to receive our report (with photos) from Kyoto, or you're interested in getting more involved as a global green yourself, send me an email to miriams@netspace.net.au and I can add you to the GIG email list. We've had some teething problems with this list – with our capacity to verify that individuals are members of the Party. It should be working now however.

Or you could get involved too with our networking. If you have any greens contacts overseas, get them to drop me a line to share information, ideas and campaigning suggestions. Or better still, send suggestions to all of us yourself on the GIG email list. Then we can all GIG our hearts away together!

Miriam Solomon, International Secretary Australian Greens

Contact Miriam Solomon, Australian Greens International Secretary, at global@greens.org.au if you'd like to be on the email list for global green news, a bi-monthly compilation of articles about Green politics and issues around the world.

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Democracy without community voices?

Joan Staples

Since its election in 1996 the Howard government has acted to weaken the role of non-government organisations (NGOs) in Australian society.

Joan Staples traces this continuing government attack and signals its potentially dire consequences for Australian democratic life.

Underlying the NGO policies of the Federal Government is what is known as 'public choice theory', first spelt out by Mancur Olsen, then elaborated by Brittan in 1975. It claims that interest groups form because individuals want to gain special benefits at the expense of the many and in so doing stifle economic growth. Politically, it results in interest groups being described as self-seeking and un-representative, and a belief that their existence will only distort the market. It is a purely economic analysis, and like so many theories or models, it ignores the detail of the reality. Understanding this theory gives clues to Federal Government policy towards NGOs, as well as important pointers to an appropriate strategic response.

Immediately the Howard Government came to power in 1996, a number of key NGOs were de-funded. Last April, another round of de-funding cut Grants to Voluntary Environment and Heritage Organisations for those engaged in any public advocacy. This has had a particularly significant impact on state Conservation Councils, supporting hundreds of smaller community groups.

In 2003, after an Inquiry, the Treasurer tabled the Definition of Charities Bill which would have prevented non-profit groups that advocate, promote or lobby for change from being defined as 'charities' and hence having tax deductibility. The Bill was withdrawn prior to the 2004 election. However, its measures are now being implemented by a ruling from the Tax Office, with groups having to satisfy the ATO that they do not engage in significant amounts of public advocacy. This will have an enormous impact on many key NGOs which have built up a support base independent of government grants. In contrast, businesses can claim tax deductions for promoting, advertising and lobbying for their own interests.

For the past 5 years, the Institute of Public Affairs has conducted a campaign called the 'NGO Project', aimed to actively discredit NGOs and to argue against their having any advocacy role. Their publications are based on public choice theory, and they attack NGOs on the grounds of un-representativeness and lack of transparency. Moreover, they appear to have close ties to the Coalition, as was shown when the IPA's Director, Garry Johns, was appointed by the Government to head an inquiry into NGO/Government relations. The Inquiry's report, *The Protocol: Managing Relations with NGOs* (2004), has a highly bureaucratic focus on government depart-

ments/NGO relationships. Threaded throughout is an implied criticism of NGOs having too much policy influence or 'special status'. There is no recognition of a model of democracy where many voices are appreciated in developing public policy, and there is no criticism of corporations being players in developing public policy. As well, the irony of the IPA being an unelected, unrepresentative NGO, whose publications address the Commonwealth Government, seems lost on both IPA and Government!

At the same time as NGO voices are being silenced, there are moves to co-opt NGOs as part of government services. This has been most notable in the social welfare area, where funding has been provided for the delivery of services previously provided by the bureaucracy – for example, as employment agencies.

In the international development sector, there has been more and more regulation, with 'capacity statements' and service agreements pushing aid organisations into delivering part of the Government's agenda, and less general AusAID assistance being available for aid agencies. At the same time, AusAID's use of commercial contractors has been increasing.

The study *Silencing Dissent*, published by the Australia Institute last year, interviewed almost 300 NGOs which engage in some sort of advocacy and found that 76% felt that the current political culture discouraged debate.

NGOs face a crisis. They can respond to the demands of the Government - which are based on an economic model of public choice theory - by defensively moulding themselves to this market-oriented agenda which says their aims distort the market. Alternatively, they can promote a different democratic model whereby the richness of many voices - NGOs and others - is used in a dynamic process of establishing public policy. Whether the NGO sector can collectively articulate and can sell this alternative democratic model to the Australian people may well decide the future health of Australian democracy.

Joan Staples is an academic who teaches public advocacy in the Faculty of Law at the University of NSW. Her current area of research is in the role of civil society in democratic processes.

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Under Howard's new rules, NGOs supporting popular public rallies risk de-funding for engaging in 'public advocacy'. Photo: Kathleen Gordon

Can rock'n'roll change the world?

In the aftermath of Live8, one metropolitan daily's editorial exclaimed 'Rock 'n' roll can change the world'! To get an insider's view Green editor Brian Hoepper interviewed Ty Noonan, singer/songwriter/instrumentalist in the Aria award-winning band George (www.george.net.au) and jazz/latin/soul band Palimpsest (www.palimpsest.com.au)

BH Do you see yourself and the band as 'political' in what you do?

TN Yes, I guess I'm the most political animal in George, having experienced the last throes of the Bjelke-Petersen semi-fascist regime. It was a very surreal, violent, oppressive but revolutionary and exciting time.

There is a political bent to some of my songwriting. The most refined example of that would be the song 'One', a direct response to strong issues at the time including the lies about Tampa and the fall of the former Archbishop and Governor-General Hollingsworth.

And I don't really want to grandstand but George has been involved for many years with organisations such as Amnesty International, The Wilderness Society, Greenpeace, The Cerebral Palsy League of Qld, the Queensland Cancer Council.

BH Do you believe that musicians can have a strong influence on the ideas, beliefs and values of young people?

TN At some point in a young person's life, music can have an amazing impact. I was largely into stuff like the Beatles and Electric Light Orchestra as a young kid (and still am), I suppose due to having been brought up with 'classical ears'. But then at 10 years old I discovered stuff like Talking Heads and punk rock and heard Queen's 'A Night At the Opera' at my auntie's place, and my thirst for musical knowledge really began then. Bands like The Smiths and The Cure wrote songs that let you feel it was okay to be a bit weird and/or nerdy and/or shy, while punk music like The Saints and The Dead Kennedys appealed to my teen needs for visceral anger release and my natural taste for the political, influenced by events under the Joh regime and from my dad's position as a journalist. Another big influence was the Go-Betweens. I watched them rise from Brisbane to the top of the pile in London and Europe. I know that gaming and other entertainment options have perhaps diverted some of the passion for music that young people feel these days, but I still see that passion and neo-tribalism in music scenes like hardcore and emo.

BH Some critics claim that young people today (in countries like Australia) are not interested in 'causes' or are turned off by 'old-style' politics. What do you think?

TN I think we live in very interesting times; it really seems like the moral façade at the top end of western society is slowly but surely crumbling - 'the truth is out there' as they say ... and the internet has become a powerful tool for communication/information. They say the 80s was the last age of innocence and I guess we now have a choice of being apathetic or militant, or something in between. Carrying the weight of the world on your shoulders can be debilitating; I think that it's only by almost completely disconnecting from the 'weight' of these problems that you can build your own personal power to focus your attention on one small area to affect real positive change. I've received many emails and had chats with fans about the political messages in our songs, and that's awesome.



I'm encouraged by the recent success of US bands such as Green Day - 'American Idiot' was a huge hit and a fantastic diatribe on the current scene in the States ...

BH Do you think that events like Live8 can have a positive effect on world problems such as poverty and debt?

TN I think that events like Live 8 can have a fantastic impact, forcing these issues to the top of the media pile, at least for a short time. That campaign was about awareness. Unfortunately it didn't seem to have enough of the desired impact at the G8 summit, and the awful London bombings took some of the sting out of the campaign. There still remain the problems of corruption and continual human rights abuses in Africa, Mugabe providing the most obvious and horrific current example.

BH Music today is 'big business'. Does that mean that some rock stars are hesitant to critique 'the system'? And that record companies are reluctant to publish 'political' work?

TN If you come out strongly in support of political or social causes, you run a risk of alienating your potential audience - something bands like Midnight Oil know about. At the moment there does seem to be a lack of political music out there, but I think the 'Big Business' model of the music industry has had some serious dents put in its armour in recent years. I'm encouraged by the recent success of US bands such as Green Day - 'American Idiot' was a huge hit and a fantastic diatribe on the current scene in the States ... 'I must be a faggot American; I'm not part of the redneck agenda'. Nice one!! I am also encouraged by the fact that there is some more positive and uplifting music getting out there.

Howard's War on Terra

CHRIS GRAHAM

Australians have waited anxiously to see the effects of the scrapping of ATSIC and the appointment of a National Indigenous Council. As Chris Graham explains, the NIC looks set to rubber stamp Howard's plans for a new 'War on Terra'.

Virtually all of the Howard government's recent Indigenous affairs policies – such as Shared Responsibility and the abolition of ATSIC – are about ending the notion of Aboriginal Australia being 'separate'. Howard has wooed the One nation constituency and having black Australians electing their own leaders would affront many of these voters.

After the abolition of the democratically-elected ATSIC, the Howard government appointed the National Indigenous Council (NIC), a hand-picked, part-time advisory board. The great fear in the appointment of the NIC was that it would simply become a rubber stamp for the excesses of the Howard government. The NIC's recent adoption of a set of 'Indigenous Land Tenure Principles' has done nothing to alleviate that concern.

In the interests of economic development, the NIC has recommended that the federal, state and territory governments change existing legislation to allow for the compulsory acquisition of Aboriginal land, where traditional owners 'unreasonably refuse' a request for a private lease on communally-owned land.

It's extraordinary advice. Nowhere on earth has any Indigenous group ever urged a government to legislate against Aboriginal land rights. The NIC/government spin on this issue revolves around the notion of private home ownership lifting Indigenous Australians out of the mire of poverty.

It is a furphy! Almost all regional/remote communities have no real economy due to decades of government neglect. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the average national weekly income for an Aboriginal household in 2001 was just \$364. In very remote areas, it was \$267. On this basis, can you imagine any bank anywhere in the world lending money to an Aboriginal person to buy a home? Then factor in the average life expectancy of an Aboriginal person in a regional/remote community -under 50 years. So the majority of borrowers wouldn't live long enough to service a 30-year home loan unless they borrowed before they turned 20.

Sustainable wealth creation depends on numerous factors, including good health and a vibrant economy. Aboriginal Australia has neither. The government has put the cart before the horse, which begs the question: Why?

Because to enable private home ownership on communally-owned Aboriginal land means you'll first have to - in the words of the Howard government - make some 'minor technical adjustments around the edges' of the various native title and land rights legislations. In other words, home ownership is the 'Trojan horse' to reworking Aboriginal land rights and native title laws.

Can anyone seriously believe that, having gained a majority in the Senate, the Howard government will resist the urge to also do some minor 'tweaking' to other parts of the legislations? Let's not forget the government's objectives (nor



If you still need convincing that the Howard government is going to launch an assault on Aboriginal land rights, then recent history provides a very helpful precedent.



Aboriginal tent embassy
Canberra's famous Aboriginal Tent Embassy is an enduring reminder that justice for Indigenous people remains an unfulfilled commitment.
Photo: Kathleen Gordon

least of all its conduct) in the lead-up to the 1998 amendments to the Native Title Act. The goal was to wipe out the Aboriginal 'right to negotiate' and Howard nearly achieved it.

This is a man with a short memory on past atrocities towards Aboriginal people, but a very long memory when it comes to fights he's lost.

If you still need convincing that the Howard government is going to launch an assault on Aboriginal land rights, then recent history provides a very helpful precedent. Consider the Howard government's conduct in relation to the abolition of ATSIC. Here's what former Minister for Indigenous Affairs Philip Ruddock had to say in April 2003, when the government announced sweeping changes to ATSIC which were supposed to strengthen the nation's peak Indigenous body.

'Today's decision [does] not entail 'mainstreaming' ATSIC's programmes, nor their transfer to a department....'

There will be very little change for ATSIC's elected arm, its staff, and the organisations who receive funding or services from ATSIC. In particular ATSIC will remain the Government's chief Indigenous source of policy advice and Regional Councils will continue to play a central role in this process.

The new structure [will] free ATSIC's elected arm to focus on big picture policy issues.'

And here's what the Prime Minister had to say at the recent Reconciliation Australia workshop in Canberra, held on May 31, while he was trying to sell Aboriginal people the notion of the Great Australian Dream of home ownership:

'... the Government does not seek to wind back or undermine native title or land rights. Rather we want to add opportunities for families and communities to build economic independence and wealth through use of their communal land assets. We want to find ways to help Indigenous Australians secure, maximise and sustain economic benefits. We want to make native title and communal land work better.'

Howard's War on Terra is the next big battlefield in Indigenous Affairs.

Chris Graham is Editor of the National Indigenous Times
<http://www.nit.com.au>.

The Senate and electoral democracy

MARIAN SAWER

The Howard government's proposed changes to the Commonwealth Electoral Act threaten to weaken accountability and reduce participation in the democratic process. One of Australia's foremost analysts of democratic institutions, Marian Sawer, examines these proposals.

The Government gained control of the Australian Senate on 1 July—in the sense that the Coalition parties now have 39 seats out of 76. Some speculate that having a majority of one will not necessarily signify control, as it will give individual government backbenchers greatly increased bargaining power.

Individual backbenchers have given no sign, however, of rebellion concerning the government's foreshadowed changes to the Commonwealth Electoral Act. The Special Minister of State, Senator Eric Abetz, has announced that the government will push through a range of electoral amendments previously rejected by the Senate. These include closing the electoral roll on the day the writs are issued for an election rather than a week afterwards, as now.

Judging from recent elections, to close the roll when an election is announced will disenfranchise about 80,000 new voters and cause difficulties for a much larger number of voters who have moved house. Many put off enrolling or changing address details till an election is announced. Other countries are trying to increase, not reduce, the electoral participation of young people. Canada, for example, allows them to enrol when they turn up to vote. The biggest impact of this change will be on young people.

The reason given for closing the roll early is to ensure no one gets away with enrolling at the wrong address in the rush after the calling of the election. There has been much urban mythology about fraudulent enrolments in marginal seats, but given the size of federal electorates (averaging 87,000 voters), combined with compulsory voting, there is little possibility of affecting the outcome.

In response to concerns of some South Australian MPs, the Australian Electoral Commission undertook intensive checks of all enrolment changes made after the issuing of the writs for the 2004 election. Out of over a million enrolled voters in South Australia two voters were found who had moved to a new address during the close of roll period and then subsequently back to an old address. Further investigation of these two cases, however, did not reveal any evidence the enrolment changes were fraudulent.

The Government will also disenfranchise all those serving a prison sentence, of any length. This flies in the face of what is happening in other democracies, where voting is seen as part of the rehabilitation of prisoners into the rights and responsibilities of citizenship. In 2002 the Supreme Court of Canada found that disenfranchisement of prisoners under the Canada Elections Act violated the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, while in 2004 the European Court of Human Rights found that the United Kingdom's denial of voting rights to all prisoners was arbitrary and harsh, and hence in breach of the European Convention on Human Rights. Disenfranchisement of prisoners has a disproportionate impact on Indigenous Australians, who are 11 times more likely to be in prison than non-Indigenous Australians and again makes us a less inclusive democracy.

In addition to early closing of the rolls and prisoner disenfranchisement, Senator Abetz has also stated he would like to raise the threshold at which political parties are required to disclose donations from \$1500 to \$5000. Already there is a loophole in disclosure requirements whereby a party can claim a cumulative benefit of nine thresholds, one for each federal, state or territory division. This would mean under the change that theoretically a party could receive almost \$45,000 before it would be required to disclose the donor.



Australia already has the most laissez-faire regime for regulating party finance of all the democracies we usually compare ourselves with. Anyone can donate to parties, including overseas interests or government contractors. Companies are not required to seek shareholder approval before giving money to political parties. Unlike other democracies, there is no limit in Australia on how much can be donated or how much can be spent by parties, including on buying television time. In fact there is very little attempt to ensure a level playing field for electoral competition, apart from public funding (which comprises less than 20 per cent of major party finances) and the disclosure provisions which the government now wishes to water down.

Key members of the government, including Senator Abetz, Senator Nick Minchin and the Chair of the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters, Tony Smith, are also outspoken supporters of voluntary voting. Just when more overseas countries, including the United Kingdom, are looking at compulsory voting as a way to counteract declining voter turnout, we are at risk of losing it. Compulsory voting has been a great strength of Australian democracy, ensuring that governments have to be responsive to all sections of the community and not just to those most likely to turn out to vote.

Those least likely to vote under a voluntary system are those who are young or socially marginalised. The Youth Electoral Study auspiced by the Australian Electoral Commission has recently shown that only about half of young voters would vote if they had a choice. Judging by the effects of voluntary voting in the USA, one consequence would be more government generosity to the elderly—who vote in higher numbers—than to the young.

Australia was once a pioneering democracy and a model for arms-length and non-partisan electoral administration. Yet recently we have been going backwards rather than forwards. With minor parties no longer holding the balance of power in the Senate, we are dependent on government backbenchers breaking ranks to prevent further in-roads into democratic values.

Unfortunately in electoral matters party interests generally prevail and few will speak out against the fiddling of the system by their own side. Unless we can engage the public more successfully, the civic rituals of our polling day, now shared by almost everybody, might be destined for the social history museum along with conciliation and arbitration and other historic Australian achievements.

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Make poverty history!

MICHAELA SARGENT

In the time it takes you to read this article, 60 children will die from extreme poverty. Live8 recently drove home this staggering statistic. As Michaela Sargent explains, this tragedy is preventable. She details why the best hopes lie with the Millennium Development Goals.

In 2000, 194 of the world's leaders made a historic commitment to end extreme poverty by 2025, including halving poverty by 2015. This commitment to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) acknowledges that our generation has the resources and the technology to end the needless deaths from extreme poverty that occur every second of every day. If we do not do this, then history will forever remember us for what we didn't do, not for what we did.

The MDG compact commits developing countries to improve their economic and social governance, and it commits developed nations, like Australia, to work together with others to achieve fairer trade, debt relief and commit to more and better aid.

These eight Millennium Development Goals are to:

- eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
- achieve universal primary education
- promote gender equality and empower women
- reduce child mortality
- improve maternal health
- combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
- ensure environmental sustainability
- develop a global partnership for development.

Each goal is supported by targets and indicators that measure progress towards achieving the goals as a whole. The UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan commissioned a report on how these goals can be achieved - http://www.unmillenniumproject.org/reports/index_overview.htm

But that is not all. Back in 1970, the wealthiest nations committed to giving 0.7 percent ODA / GNI. In 2004 Australia gave just 25 cents in every \$100 of Gross National Income to international aid. For the first time in many years, in 2005, this rose to 28 cents due to increased aid to Indonesia. Australia is one of the few countries which has not committed to a timeline to reach the 0.54 percent needed to achieve the MDGs, much less the agreed 0.7 percent mark. Many countries have achieved or surpassed the 0.7 percent mark.

Australia has shown it is willing to take action with an 11 percent increase in overseas aid in nominal dollars this year. But, having benefited from years of economic growth, our international aid spending fails to reflect what should be our government's fair share.

The recent G8 summit in Gleneagles added a new dimension. It confirmed up to 100% multilateral debt forgiveness for Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC). This has the potential to deliver to up to US\$55bn in debt cancellations to up to 38 countries. Debt campaigners believe this figure will need to be extended to 62 countries to achieve the MDGs.

The US committed to doubling aid to sub-Saharan Africa from 2004 to 2010 including US\$1.2bn program to combat malaria. The EU committed to increase aid levels to an average of 0.56% of GNI by 2010 and 0.7 percent by 2015. Japan committed to



A dramatic MPH event in Melbourne's Federation Square.

Photo: Rob McKechnie

more than doubling its current aid budget by 2010. Though many campaigners feel that more commitments could have been made, most Live 8 organisers and lobbyists agree this is a step in the right direction. Australia is now one of two wealthy countries which has not yet committed to a timeline to increase aid.

"But, having benefited from years of economic growth, our international aid spending fails to reflect what should be our government's fair share."

The issue of corruption is a major obstacle for many people when considering increased aid. The Make Poverty History Campaign calls for 'more and better aid' because delivery and management of aid dollars can be further improved to promote and support good governance and prevent corruption. For example, well-targeted aid can ensure public servants are paid a fair salary, minimising motivation for accepting bribes. It can help build institutions capable of tracking and tackling corruption, including the judiciary. In Malawi for example, an aid agency has funded groups which tour the country's schools making sure educational materials paid for by foreign aid actually arrive.

We have the opportunity to make trade fair and to end extreme poverty in our time. We have a practical way forward to achieve this through the MDGs. But it needs the will of governments of both developing and developed countries.

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Convergence in a post 9/11 world

GUY RUNDLE

... for many the combination of media, consumer growth and radical individualism creates a situation in which it is impossible to imagine any other way to live.



Nicholson of "The Australian" newspaper: www.nicholsoncartoons.com.au

Guy Rundle analyses a post Cold War and 9/11 world of 'convergence' marked by the global spread of free-market capitalism and the co-opting of social institutions including universities and the media. In this world, once contradictory alliances are formed. For example, the search for security in such a world has seen the conservative Australian government under John Howard cosying up to the People's Republic of China. 'Convergence' poses profound challenges for civil society.

While the terrorist attacks in London and the consequent attack on civil liberties occur across the English-speaking world, a more dramatic and far-reaching process is going on. Terrorist attacks, spectacular as they are, are rarely genuine historical events, and they only become so if people have a will to make them so. Thus 9/11 would have remained at the status of a bizarre and horrifying event, had not the Bush administration decided to follow Osama bin Laden's script and turned it into the start of a war. That war – the invasion of Iraq and the guerrilla war now underway – is a genuine historical event, which has already had major consequences. It has helped push the price of oil to new heights, it is drawing the US Treasury further into deficit, it has prompted the election of a hardline Iranian president, and it has turned Iraq into a crossroads/meeting place/training ground for fundamentalist guerrillas. The recent death of King Fahd will put more pressure on the ramshackle government of Saudi Arabia, and we may see the whole region tip into a new round of conflict and disarray.

Yet ultimately it seems unlikely that the Muslim world in general, or the radical Islamic fundamentalist groups – those who take the floating brand-name Al-Qaeda – will provide a substantial challenge to US power. The very small but real chance of a nuclear or

large scale terrorist incident – the destruction of the lower part of Manhattan, or of the centre of Washington, or the financial district of London – would probably do it, with western governments imposing immediate martial law, and expelling large numbers of Muslims. Such an event is more unlikely than some of the faux-thriller writers of the papers would have us believe., Yet it is important to be mentally and politically prepared for it, and for the inevitable assault on free-speech and dissident opinion that would occur – an assault beyond anything we have yet experienced in the 'war on terror'. Furthermore, even such an extraordinary event as this would be cutting with the grain of a larger scale process that is occurring both within and without western societies. That process is one of multiple convergence of political, economic and social forces, a process that is happening as much in, say, China as it is here – and one which is transforming the terrain of politics as we have known it.

The most obvious example of the convergence process has been of course the spread of free-market capitalism to what were once state-run (socialist or state-capitalist, as you prefer) planned economies in the eastern bloc and China. It's fair to say that anyone who grew up in the period of the cold war and the existence of the USSR is likely to have not yet really got their head around this epochal shift. Nevertheless it can be seen as a continuation of a process that might have occurred in those regions in the 20s and 30s had not the October 1917 revolution occurred in Russia. The most bizarre result of the 20th century is that one of the processes described by Marx – the spread of capitalism into every region and every area of social life – was held up by a movement – Leninism – that claimed to be Marxist, but was directly contradictory to it in several respects. The process of capital's expansion is now back on track, and hence

"Civil liberties become a dead letter for many. What are they for? What possible use could they be?"

the sudden – to those who weren't watching – appearance of China as a place with a huge low-paid labour force, a rapidly expanding industrial base, and a burgeoning middle-class and hi-tech sectors.

In the west that process has largely occurred and the overall western economy has been steadily stagnating for some decades now, despite various peaks and troughs. Symbiotic to this process (which arose from the needs of World War 2) science, technology, the universities, and media systems have been drawn into a combined process of social reproduction. Thus universities, once substantially separate domains, now relentlessly feed into the creation of a hi-tech society which feeds back into it in the form of corporate start-ups, and a market-based (rather than reflective or critical) mindset. The media are ceaselessly revolutionised by this (TV, internet, mobile telephony), and – together with the development of transport, cities, etc – have profound effects. They change the way that individuals are shaped as children and young adults, and open out the social context they live in, creating a more mobile society of fleeting association, rather than one grounded in family, kin or neighbourhood. Part of this is liberatory – it allows for the development of movements (such as feminism) in which people redefine themselves and reject old and limiting social roles. But everywhere – here, China, Russia, wherever – it creates an enormous social and psychological dislocation. In places like Russia this is overlaid with enormous poverty – its economy having shrunk by 50 percent since 1991 – and in other places with excessive wealth. The latter creates problems of 'anomie' – a world where happiness is sought in individual protection and perfection via plastic surgery, pills, therapy, diets, celebrity, etc – while the former makes it more difficult for collective movements to arise as was possible in the earlier period of capitalism.

In such a world, the economic questions that became paramount in the 60s and 70s – are there other ways to live – can still be asked (eg in a book such as Clive Hamilton's *Affluenza*) but for many the combination of media, consumer growth and radical individualism creates a situation in which it is impossible to imagine any other way to live. Society increasingly becomes one of winners and losers side by side, and many people come to lack what earlier societies provided – mutual recognition and a sense of identity arising from life with others. Crime and violence – both the things themselves, and more importantly the perception of them – tend to rise, and a

sense of fragility and risk become dominant. It is in such a situation that the state becomes the only recourse that people can imagine, as a way to guarantee a stable social life. Thus the response to dramatic but isolated incidents such as the London bombings become a near-panic – led by politicians – and social life is reorganised along the lines of defence. People invite the state to enter major areas of their individual life, while the capacity to envisage or work for larger areas of democratic control – of the economy for example – becomes simply unimaginable. Civil liberties become a dead letter for many. What are they for? What possible use could they be? Many ask. Multi-party political systems become similar to one-party states, since there is no significant disagreement about the sort of society one is striving towards. Hence, as we have seen, it is a coalition government which is so happy to welcome the Chinese government, to declare their system (for trade purposes) a market economy, to allow their secret police to run security and so on.

Convergence is the dominant socio-political force of our time, yet to thereby believe that it is unchallengeable or even necessarily long-lasting would be the supreme illusion. Just as it begins its consolidation, one can also see cracks appearing – in the various revolutions and transformations that have shaken Latin America recently for example. Eventually, the larger power-blocs – the north versus the south – will come into conflict (violent or otherwise) over resources, global share, etc. None of this absolves us of the responsibility for making alternatives, political and social, but it does indicate the importance of understanding both the immensity and the provisionality of the forces dominating the way we live.

Guy Rundle is on the board of Arena Magazine. Readers who are interested in broader treatment of these ideas, should check the website (www.arena.org.au) to find out how to subscribe.

Why nuclear is not an option

IAN LOWE

"If nuclear power is the answer, it must have been a very silly question."

Why not use nuclear power as an alternative to greenhouse gas-producing fossil fuels? Ian Lowe tells us why.

The debate about nuclear energy is welcome recognition of the urgent need to respond to climate change. I welcome that awareness and the resulting debate. But the nuclear option is not a wise response. It is too costly, too dangerous, too slow and makes too little impact on greenhouse pollution. That is why most of the developed world is rejecting the nuclear option in favour of renewable energy and improved efficiency.

There is no serious doubt that climate change is real, it is happening now and its effects are accelerating. It is already causing serious economic and ecological impacts. So we should set a serious target for reducing our rate of releasing carbon dioxide, like the UK goal of 60 per cent by 2050.

The economics of nuclear power just don't stack up. Nuclear electricity is certainly more expensive than wind power, energy from bio-wastes and some forms of solar energy, even without including the huge costs of decommissioning power reactors and storing the radioactive waste. So there is no economic case for nuclear power. As energy markets liberalised around the world, investors turned their backs on nuclear energy. The number of reactors in western Europe and the USA peaked 15 years ago and has been declining since, while the amounts of wind power and solar energy are increasing at rates of 20 to 30 per cent per annum.

All forms of supply are more expensive than improving the efficiency of turning energy into services such as lighting, cooking and washing. Reducing energy waste is by far the cheapest way to reduce greenhouse pollution. Nuclear power is too dangerous. There is not just the risk of accidents like Chernobyl, but the increased risk of nuclear weapons or nuclear terrorism. The recent UN conference on the Non Proliferation Treaty ended in complete disarray. Most states holding weapons and some others aspiring to join the nuclear 'club' are in breach of the treaty.

Nuclear power also inevitably produces radioactive waste that will have to be stored safely for hundreds of thousands of



years. After nearly fifty years of the nuclear power experiment, nobody has yet demonstrated a solution to this problem. In the absence of a viable solution, expanding the rate of waste production is just irresponsible.

Nuclear power is too slow and too limited in its capacity to make a difference. Even if all government approvals were granted, it would still take about ten more years and several billion dollars to construct a power station and deliver the first unit of electricity. Wind turbines can be up and delivering power in six months. More efficient appliances can be

reducing pollution tomorrow.

Nuclear power won't stop climate change. The argument that nuclear power would reduce greenhouse pollution presumes high-grade uranium ores are available. Even with such high-grade ores, there is a massive increase in greenhouse pollution from mining, processing and reactor construction before any electricity is generated. The known resources of high-grade uranium ores only amount to a few decades use at the present rate, so expansion of nuclear power would see those resources rapidly depleted. The poorer grades of ore that would then be used require much more conventional fuel energy and release much more carbon dioxide.

To avoid dangerous further changes to our climate, we need to act now. Australia should not even be considering the option of nuclear power given its enormous potential for deriving energy from renewable sources. We should make a commitment to the sensible alternatives that produce sustainable cost-effective reductions in greenhouse pollution: wind power, solar water heating, energy efficiency, and energy from organic matter such as sewage and waste.

Nuclear power is expensive, slow and dangerous, and it won't stop climate change. If nuclear power is the answer, it must have been a very silly question.

Ian Lowe is Emeritus Professor at Griffith University, a former head of the Commission for the Future and well known writer on scientific themes.



Rachel Siewert



Christine Milne

Q. Could you tell us a little about your background before being elected to the Senate?

A. I was Coordinator for the Conservation Council of WA for 16 years. Prior to this I was a research officer on salinity and soil conservation for the Department of Agriculture - in the small town of Jerramungup in the southern wheatbelt of WA, having studied agricultural science at the University of WA.

As an environmental activist I worked on a wide range of campaigns including mining, biodiversity conservation, clearing of native vegetation, marine issues and air pollution - specialising in natural resource management and salinity. In my 'spare' time I also helped out on refugee and peace campaigns. I narrowly missed out on a Senate seat in the 2001 Federal election and was co-convenor of the Greens WA 2002 -2004.

Q. What issues do you think you are likely to focus on, at least early on in your term?

A. My portfolios include employment and workplace relations, family and community services, indigenous affairs, environment, agriculture and fisheries.

Obviously industrial relations and the Howard government's 'welfare to work' agenda will be immediate focus areas for me. We've already kicked off a postcard campaign and formed a national IR working group.

While I have some ideas about other campaigns, I'm currently talking to a range of stakeholders to help identify key campaign areas and priorities. Those identified so far include housing, poverty, mainstreaming of Indigenous services and Indigenous health, marine conservation, water, natural resource management and salinity, and the support and protection of community advocacy groups.

I'm also very keen to campaign around the values-based agenda. For too long the conservatives have captured the 'values' debate in Australia. There has been a deliberate long term campaign by them to set the terms of the public debate. We Greens must be articulating more loudly and strongly our values and proactively setting the terms of the debate.

I am therefore keen that an underpinning theme in all we do is to articulate and proactively talk about our core values. The decision to develop a values-based agenda is a longer-term strategic investment, which is more likely to succeed if the party engages with the wider progressive community to build and reinforce the message. We need to agree on our key messages and present a consistent front.

Q. Given John Howard will have a majority in both houses, what do you think you can do to exercise a strong Greens presence in the Senate?

A. We need to use every opportunity in the Senate that we can - such as question time, motions on notice, reviewing government documents, general business time, committee work and adjournments.

We also need to be identifying strategic 'wedge' issues where the coalition is vulnerable to public pressure, or where there are some potential cracks in their back bench. We need to be pushing them to take responsibility for their decision making on the issues that most affect their constituencies - rural development issues for country members and social justice issues for small 'I' Liberal senators.

But we must also focus outside Parliament on what we do well - grass roots activism and campaigning. Here in WA we have already met with a number of community organisations who are raring to go and are excited to have four Green Senators to work with.

Q: Could you tell us a little about your background before being elected to the Senate?

A: I grew up in Tasmania's north-west on my parents' dairy farm at Wesley Vale. I moved to boarding school in Hobart and after graduating from the University of Tasmania. I taught English, history and social science at high schools in Burnie and Devonport. In the 1980s I was arrested in the campaign to save the Franklin River and later led the campaign to protect Tasmania's north-west from the impacts of the proposed Wesley Vale Pulp Mill. I was elected in 1989 to represent the seat of Lyons in the Tasmanian House of Assembly and I held a seat in the state parliament until 1998. From 1993 I was leader of the Tasmanian Greens. The Greens lost four of their five seats at the 1998 election when the Labor and Liberal parties changed the Constitution, without a referendum, to lift the quota required to secure election. I went on to work as an adviser for Bob Brown and became involved in the World Conservation Union (IUCN), of which I am currently vice-president.

Q: What issues do you think you are likely to focus on, at least early in your term?

A: I will be promoting the need to reshape Australia's economy to address the greatest environmental challenge that the world faces - climate change. My portfolio responsibilities cover the range of areas where action is needed and where potential lies for success in the transition to a low-carbon economy - energy policy, rural and regional affairs, transport, tourism, small business and the new economy. I will also focus on challenging the claim of conservative parties to hold a monopoly on values, by promoting the values that underpin the Australian Greens policy platform, including equality, justice, compassion, fairness, participatory democracy, government accountability, peace and hope. In addition I plan to work on a range of Tasmanian coastal and forest campaigns that are seeking to protect our unique natural environment, and to foster a new cultural and economic framework to ensure prosperity that is shared fairly and that respects the principles of ecological sustainability.

Q: Given John Howard will have a majority in both houses, what do you think you can do to exercise a strong Greens presence in the Senate?

A: The Greens have always worked in the community as well as the parliament to advance our vision for Australia and the world. Parliament will remain an important forum for our work. The government's slender majority means that the Senate will continue to be a key focus of national political affairs because success or failure hangs on one vote. We can use the Senate to expose the coalition's short-term thinking and political expediency, through questions, estimates hearings, amending legislation and introducing private members bills. We can seek to work with progressive members of other parties to push for inquiries. The Coalition backbench has already demonstrated it will stand up to the Prime Minister over mandatory detention of asylum seekers. It is important that the Greens demonstrate that we are critical if the government is to be held accountable as we are the only opposition party prepared to challenge the government's response to the critical issues of our time - climate change, poverty, terrorism and the war on Iraq.



At Parliament House : Our team is Prue Cameron, Adam Burling , Lauren Van Dyke, Michelle O'Toole, Bob Brown, Ben Oquist.

Ben 'up and going'

Ben Oquist, my good friend, adviser and media officer these last 10 years is thinking of returning to his home city of Sydney and nominating for the Greens for the NSW Legislative Council. Before coming to work with me in 1996, Ben worked in the NSW parliament as environment groups' liaison officer and then for the Greens' first Legislative Councillor, Ian Cohen. (Stop press. He has just taken a post with Ian again.). Ben's skills and his remarkably adept role in promoting us Greens in the National Press Gallery, and in Sydney and the national media, have been important to our rise to national prominence. The latest Nielsen Poll has us on 11 percent: Ben can take his share of credit for that.

Mark off and Running

Talk of splendid parliamentarians in the making: E.D.O. lawyer Mark Parnell has been picked to head the SA Greens team for their state's Legislative Council (upper house) in the elections next March. In 1994, at a national Landcare conference in Hobart, Mark suggested to me that it was time for a South Australian Greens party - a ripe idea for the time. For 2006 he has a great team; Clare McCarty, Jake Bugden and Sarah Hannon-Young. The Green team needs 8.5 percent of the vote for Mark to win a seat and 17.0 percent for Clare to join him.

Off the Sniffing

With Prue Cameron, I've spent a night in the great outback under Centralian skies, by the campfire, talking about the scourge of petrol sniffing with the Warlpiri people. Petrol sniffing causes violence, mental and physical destruction and death. Now BP has invented a vapourless petrol called

Opal Fuel which is a little more expensive. I'm seeing Treasurer Costello next Thursday to ask if the 8 or 10 million dollars per annum needed for Opal to replace the old petrols, from Coober Pedy to Tennant Creek, can't be found. The annual diesel fuel rebate for miners, loggers and other truckers each year is about \$3,000 million.

Down they go

Gunns shares, at \$4.56 when they issued us with their \$6.3 million writ before Christmas, have just hit \$3.75. Mercy. Where is the shareholders' loyalty?

Wielangta: National Showdown

I have launched a federal court challenge to Forestry Tasmania's logging of the beautiful Wielangta (pronounced why-lang-ta) forest on Tasmania's east coast. The logging threatens rare and endangered species, including Tasmania's Wedge-tailed eagle, the Swift parrot and the Wielangta stag beetle. The hearing is over two weeks from 24 October. In May, the Federal Minister for Forests and Conservation, Ian Macdonald, lambasted the challenge as 'a stunt' based on me suffering 'media deprivation syndrome'. Well, he's now treating it a little more seriously and considering having the Commonwealth enter the hearing – on the side of 'forestry' rather than 'conservation'. The case has ramifications for logging of wild forests right across Australia. You can help - see www.bobbrown.org.au.

Room at the Top

At Parliament House, Canberra, we have moved to the second floor of the West Wing. It gives a lovely view to the Brindabella Range. Do drop by. Kerry is next door and Christine and Rachel downstairs. In the Senate chamber, we have a wedge of Greens. The President was persuaded that his first plan, to put the lone Family First senator next to us, was daft. So Senator Fielding has Brian Harradine's old seat, across the chamber and next to the Nationals.

View of the Top

Our Hobart office, after a worryingly warm winter, has been looking out to a snowless Mt Wellington. But this morning there is snow down to 500 metres. There's a wild wind, lowering clouds and the late winter sunbeams breaking through. Buds are everywhere. In recent weeks there has been a seal splashing in Constitution Dock and whales have calved at Seven Mile Beach and Recherche Bay. Hobart is the divine city of the south!

***All my best,
Bob***

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