



Level 3, Suite 3B, 110 Kippax St
Surry Hills, NSW, 2010
Phone: 02 9212 7242
Fax: 02 9211 1407
Email: campaign@aftinet.org.au
ACN 097 603 131
ABN 83 659 681 462
www.aftinet.org.au

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1. Alternative APEC (APPEC) events a success

The events organised by the Asia Pacific People for Environment and Community were a great success with over 200 people attending both the forum and the conference to hear speakers from Australia and the region discuss alternative visions of fair trade to address the challenges of human rights, labour rights, poverty and environmentally sustainable development in the region. Congratulations to the AFTINET campaigners and volunteers who worked so hard to achieve this.

Although the media was dominated by fear-mongering about security threats and demonstrations, there was also media coverage of the APPEC alternative events, which provided some fair trade voices contesting the APEC vision. The speakers at the events and other AFTINET members were interviewed or quoted by 2JJJ current affairs, Sydney Workers Radio, ABC TV news, AAP, SBS Radio, ABC Current Affairs Radio, the **Sydney Morning Herald**, ABC Radio Saturday AM program, **Daily Telegraph** website, ABC NSW North Coast Radio, Radio 2SM, the **Australian Financial Review**, SBS Radio Philippines program, Philippines TV ABC 5, Philippines ABS-CBN and Sky TV.

Lori Wallach, Director of US Public Citizen's Global Trade Watch, who spoke at the Public Forum, was interviewed in a feature article in the **Sydney Morning Herald** and **Brisbane Times** on Saturday 1st September. The article is below.

2. Activist comes with a health warning

Andrew West, Sydney Morning Herald 1 September 2007

A leading US consumer advocate has harsh words for APEC leaders, writes Andrew West.

LORI WALLACH is in Australia to shut down APEC. But the organisers of the Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation meeting should not fear a hail of stones or petrol bombs. Violence is not Wallach's style.

The director of US-based Public Citizen, the world's biggest consumer advocacy organisation, believes fighting words can destroy the idea, which APEC leaders will embrace next week, that unfettered free trade is good for the public. And she believes that Australia, with its traditionally strong public services, is "playing Russian roulette" by succumbing to US President George Bush's free trade agenda. "Whole sectors of the service economy that we think of as a human right - health care, education, drinking water - become tradeable goods, with guaranteed rights for foreign investors to acquire and then operate them with minimum control," she warns.

"APEC is another delivery mechanism for a trade model that has proven itself a failure for most people, damaging to the environment and damaging to democracy itself."

Under free trade principles, Ms Wallach says, US-based health maintenance organisations - which dominate a health insurance system that leaves 52 million Americans without coverage - could demand access to Australia's market and undermine Medicare.

"The US-Australia free trade agreement is less draconian than others but the devil is in the detail," she adds.

Ms Wallach, a Harvard University-trained trade lawyer, says an even greater threat looms over Australia's Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme, which subsidises prescription drugs. She calls it "the smartest scheme in the world for consumers", offering prices half those in Canada and one-tenth those in the US. The Australian Government can refuse to subsidise a new drug if it is no better than an existing medication.

"Let's say you get a new drug from the company that has a 20-year patent on, for example, a diabetes drug," she says.

"That patent is running out and, by coincidence, they have a new one. But is it really any better? We know the old one is safe, but now they want us to pay \$1000 a month for a new treatment. Your system allows you to say this new drug is crap, a marketing ploy, and it's just big pharma ripping off the government.

"But the FTA allows for a 'review', so the US drug companies can challenge the decision. If I were still a trade attorney the best I could say to Australia, as my client, is that you have signed yourself up for a game of Russian roulette.

"There's a one in three chance that the disputes panel decides what you have done is okay, and there's the same chance the panel decides what you've done is outrageous and if you don't dump your review system you could face trade sanctions. Every granny, every kid with asthma could be affected by this."

Ms Wallach, who oversees Public Citizen's global trade division, is an increasingly powerful player on the US political scene.

At Harvard University, she was a classmate and friend of the Illinois senator Barack Obama, now a leading contender for the Democratic Party's presidential nomination. They shared an office in Cambridge, Massachusetts, with Obama editing the Harvard Law Review in one room, while she ran a public interest law centre in another room.

But she is not backing her old classmate, arguing he is too close to big American companies pushing free trade against the interests of American workers and those in developing countries. "We have lost 3 million manufacturing jobs since the North American Free Trade Agreement and WTO came in, and real wages have gone down to 1970 levels, despite productivity doubling," she said.

In the world's poorest countries, which are supposed to benefit from free trade, per capita income has slowed dramatically since the early free trade agreements of the late 1970s. In the case of sub-Saharan Africa, it has gone backwards.

As America's leading consumer advocate, running an organisation founded by Ralph Nader, Ms Wallach has tried to redefine consumer rights as more than simply access to cheap goods.

She believes consumers are threatened by a trade agenda that deregulates all controls on banking and foreign investment, protects monopolies on patents for drugs and eliminates domestic regulations on environmental, food safety and labour standards.

3. Did APEC achieve anything? By Pat Ranald

Most Sydney residents experienced APEC through the extreme multi-million dollar security measures, including increased police powers and the three metre high "great Wall of Sydney" that symbolized the isolation of the government and business leaders from their communities. The Chaser motorcade stunt, which was waived through barriers by the police, was hugely popular and showed that ridicule is a very effective weapon against security overkill. As in the past, the APEC meetings only involved business and governments, with no community involvement and no real discussion of issues like human rights, labour rights or environmentally sustainable development.

So did APEC actually achieve anything? The answer is not much. As predicted by AFTINET, APEC did not make any progress towards its extreme vision of zero trade and investment barriers in the Asia Pacific. Despite rumours of a move towards a legally binding Free trade Agreement of the Asia Pacific, supported by the US and Australian governments, the declaration said only that APEC would explore "incremental" options for such a possibility. Developing country governments in APEC are still resisting NAFTA -style binding agreements because of their negative

impacts on poverty and development. However, the APEC statement did mention ‘enhancing the convergence of trade agreements in the region’, which means APEC will continue to support the numerous bilateral FTAs being negotiated.

Nor did APEC succeed in kick starting the stalled WTO Doha Round negotiations. The APEC statement on the WTO merely urged WTO members to renew efforts to reach agreement on the basis of the current draft texts, which is unlikely given the large gaps that still remain between the interests of industrialized and developing countries.

Despite claims by the Australian government, there were no” breakthroughs” either on climate change. There was only agreement “to work to achieve a common understanding on a long term aspirational goal” to reduce carbon emissions in a “post 2012 arrangement. ” This tortuous wording is code for the failure of the US and Australian attempts to use APEC to undermine the UN framework and the Kyoto protocol, which they alone, of all industrialized countries, have refused to ratify. Developing countries in APEC rightly expressed a preference for the UN framework and insisted that the APEC statement recognize it as the appropriate forum for negotiations on climate change. Australia’s bilateral agreement with Indonesia for aid to protect native forests appears somewhat hypocritical in the absence of effective controls on illegal native timber imports and continued logging of Australian old-growth native forests. Australia, the US and Canada are also continuing their plans for a Global Nuclear Energy Partnership , rather than promoting safer forms of renewable energy.

APEC was also used for a series of informal side meetings and announcements including Australian sales of uranium to Russia, gas to China, and defence talks with the US and Japan.

The APEC documents can be found at www.apec.org

4. APEC fails to address sex slavery, people trafficking and worker exploitation ACTU Media Release, August 30, 2007

Unions called for stronger international efforts to prevent the exploitation of workers and to halt human trafficking and sex slavery in the Asia Pacific in the leadup to the APEC meeting.

Senior trade union leaders from Asia Pacific countries met in Sydney on Thurs 30th Aug to exchange information about human rights abuses among workers in APEC nations and to discuss reports that the Asian region is fast becoming a hub for the trafficking of women for sexual slavery.

A major research report has estimated 1.36 million people in the Asia Pacific region are victims of trafficking across borders for sexual or economic exploitation — with children accounting for up to 50% of trafficking victims.

Sharan Burrow, the President of the peak Australian union body the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) and head of the global union organisation ITUC, said today:

“People trafficking, the sex trade and the exploitation and abuse of workers, especially migrant workers, are the ugly faces of globalisation.

“These are important issues that affect all of the APEC member nations and should not be left off APEC’s agenda.

“In Australia this week we have seen disturbing reports of migrant workers from neighbouring countries, Indonesia, China, Singapore and the Philippines, who have been exploited, bullied or killed while working in sometimes slave-like conditions in Australia.

“Also, an important newly released Australian film – *The Jammed* – that is based on actual events and court transcripts of young women trafficked into sexual slavery in Sydney’s Kings Cross and suburban Melbourne has added to the growing public concern over the issue.

“Our regional leaders need to be coming up with new solutions to safeguard human rights and labour rights in the Asia Pacific and to prevent exploitation and abuse, especially among vulnerable migrant workers, women and children,” said Ms Burrow.

5. Foreign workers 'enslaved' by 457 visa

Matthew Moore and Malcolm Knox, *The Age*
August 28, 2007

CONDITIONS in remote Australian workplaces, where two foreigners died within three days in June, are so harsh that a leading immigration expert says they are "akin to slavery".

An investigation has exposed blatant breaches of the 457 skilled visa scheme and uncovered details of the deaths of the two workers in the Northern Territory and Queensland, and of a third man north of Perth.

The investigation highlights exploitation of overseas workers, too afraid to speak out, under a scheme that allows employers to sponsor thousands of foreigners to come into Australia and do jobs locals cannot or will not do.

It reveals the "extremely ugly face" of the 457 visa system, according to the immigration expert, Professor Bob Birrell, from Monash University.

The Age has learned that a university-trained Filipino farm supervisor, Pedro Balading, was thrown off the back of a Toyota utility and killed on an NT cattle station in June. A witness, who was on the back of the ute, says it was being driven fast on a rough road.

Mr Balading, 35, left behind a wife and three young children. His wife says that in the months before his death, he complained repeatedly that his working conditions were much tougher than he had been told to expect, and that he was forced to do menial work such as fencing, in breach of his skilled visa.

Two days earlier, a logger from Inner Mongolia, China, 33-year-old Guo Jian Dong, died in a remote state forest 700 kilometres west of Brisbane. A tree he was felling brushed a dead tree, which then fell and crushed him.

Although the visas only allow foreign workers into Australia to do jobs for which they are skilled, Jack Watson, the man who trained Mr Guo, says he had never used a chainsaw before he arrived in Queensland. Mr Guo left behind a wife, and a child he had never met.+

Others who work for NK Collins, the company that employed Mr Guo, are still living in western Queensland, including three who live in a caravan in a timber mill next to the Mitchell town dump, speak no English, and push a wheelbarrow nearly 3 kilometres to town to buy food.

"The specific instances ... are akin to slavery," Professor Birrell said. "That derives from the fact that these people are cowed into believing that if they move away from their contract they will have to go home. Employers are exploiting their power in the relationship."

In the other case that has come to light, a Filipino stonemason, Wilfredo Navales, 43, was crushed to death by two slabs of granite in a stoneworks north of Perth in March. Mr Navales's family says he died doing labouring he was forced into, rather than using the skills for which he was ostensibly brought to Australia.

The 457 visa requires employers to abide by strict conditions, but *The Age* found numerous breaches, including:

- Workers in positions that have no benefit for local workforces.
- Accommodation and meal expenses wrongly deducted directly from workers' wages.
- Workers employed in locations other than those stated on visas.
- Safety standards ignored.
- Overtime unpaid.

A Federal Government report into the deaths, due for release in mid-July, was still not finished, a spokeswoman for Immigration Minister Kevin Andrews said. But she flagged possible action against employers in the NT and Queensland. The 457 visas were originally designed for professionals, but recently had been "picked up by much more marginal employers", Professor Birrell said.

Another expert on the visas, former public servant Bob Kinnaird, of R.T. Kinnaird and Associates, said design faults in the scheme had set up a "race to the bottom in work conditions".

"People from low-wage countries, even if they are being underpaid by Australian standards, are still earning more than at home, so they will be tempted to put up with anything to stay here," Mr Kinnaird said.

The Immigration Department has just 65 officers to monitor compliance with visas, which makes it impossible to police more than 100,000 visa holders.

The Government says 20 people have died on 457 visas in Australia in the past five years, but only three in work-related incidents.

6. New Free Trade Agreements Update

India

The government announced in late August that it would be undertake a joint study into a free trade agreement with India. It was also announced that the federal government plan to sell uranium to the subcontinent, despite India not being a signatory to the International Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. The study will begin this year and be completed by 2009.

China

China has recently overtaken Japan as Australia's biggest trading partner yet the negotiations for an FTA with China, which began in 2005 have proved difficult and the April 2008 deadline for a conclusion looks likely to go unmet. Minister Truss admitted talks were hampered by disputes over a number of sensitive issues including agriculture and services.

Japan

Negotiations are proceeding slowly, and may be adversely affected by the recent Senate elections in Japan, in which the ruling party lost its senate majority. Opposition to FTAs was an issue in the election. Japanese farmer, consumer and peace organisations met with AFTINET during APEC and made plans for further campaigning to coincide with future rounds of negotiations . AFTINET will keep members informed about this.

Korea

The joint feasibility study for an FTA is proceeding.

Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)

The first round of negotiations were held in Canberra from 31 July to 1 August. Australia and the GCC agreed in principle that the second round of negotiations will be held in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia in the third week of November.

Chile

The first round of negotiations were held in Canberra in August with the next round being scheduled for October.

Pacific Islands

A report by Nathan Associates, based in Washington DC, titled **Pacific Regional Trade and Economic Cooperation-Joint Baseline and Gap Analysis** says some island countries stand to lose up to US\$10 million annually in revenue due to trade liberalisation with Australia and New Zealand. Such a loss may spell disaster for economies that currently impose high import tariffs.

For Tonga and Vanuatu for instance, tariff revenue makes up 33.3% and 27.1% respectively of their total revenue. "Fiji, PNG, Samoa and Vanuatu each stand to lose upwards of US\$10 million annually in tariff revenues currently collected on imports from Australia and New Zealand (ANZ).

Pacific Island countries are required to offer consultations with a view to negotiations on free trade arrangements with Australia and New Zealand because they have formally entered into substantive negotiations with the EU.

7. Union Aid Abroad-APHEDA Sydney Annual Dinner Wed 26 Sept

The Union Aid Abroad-APHEDA Annual Dinner will be at 6.30 pm on Wednesday 26 September, Paddington Town Hall, cnr Oxford St and Oatley Rd, Paddington

MC: Charles Firth, the Chaser

Tickets \$60* each or \$550 for a table of ten. Includes 3 course meal and wine
*\$20 of your ticket price goes directly to Union Aid Abroad

Bookings essential

Call 02 92649343 or email office@apheda.org.au

Union Aid Abroad-APHEDA is the overseas humanitarian aid arm of the ACTU, aiming to address poverty, injustice and inequality through assisting in skills training and strengthening the rights of workers in developing countries.

8. PIAC Conference - Working for a fair, just & democratic society in the 21st Century

2007 marks the 25th anniversary of Australia's first public interest legal and policy centre: the Public Interest Advocacy Centre.

25th Anniversary Dinner

Date: 18 October 2007

Place: The Dome Restaurant, Arthouse Hotel

Register now: www.piacconference.com

Conference: Working for a Fair, Just and Democratic Society in the 21st Century

Date: 18 & 19 October 2007

Place: Wesley Centre, Pitt Street, Sydney

Register Now: www.piacconference.com

Keynote speaker: Prof Larissa Behrendt, Director, Jumbunna Indigenous House of Learning, University of Technology Sydney

Topics include:

- * 2020 visions: Australia's emerging public interest issues.
- * Using new technologies in the public interest.
- * Reflecting on the campaigns: what has worked with Indigenous, environmental, human rights and consumer issues.
- * Overcoming barriers to the effectiveness of public interest campaign strategies: media and communications; politics; litigation; media and information.
- * Learning from the past, looking to the future, and
- * Safeguarding the public good: effective campaigns for the future.

9. John Pilgers new title 'War on Democracy' opens Nationally September 27



The War on Democracy is Australian writer-filmmaker John Pilger's first major feature film for the cinema, an extraordinary and illuminating documentary with Latin America at its heart. It explores people's yearning for democracy – government, for, by and of the people – and demonstrates the brutal reality of America's foreign policy of 'spreading democracy.' It also reveals the remarkable rise of true popular democracy and people power among the poorest on earth, the people of Latin America, whose grassroots movements are often ignored in the West.

Portraying the world, not through the eyes of the powerful, but through the hopes, dreams and extraordinary actions of ordinary people, *War on Democracy* will be released in Australian cinemas, September 27, 2007.