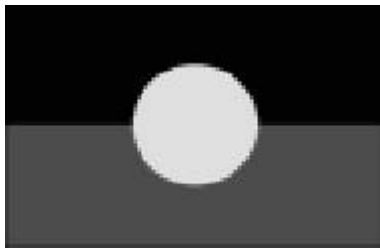




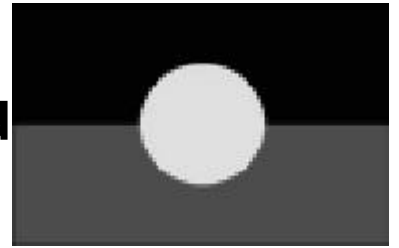
Asian Workers Organising

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Black GST: A Call To Demonstrate at the 2006 Stolenwealth Games



**Genocide to end
Sovereignty acknowledged
Treaty to be signed**



The Black GST campaign to boycott and protest during the 2006 Melbourne "Stolenwealth" Games was launched on 26 January 2005 in Melbourne, at the "Invasion Day" concert in the Treasury Gardens. The Campaign's call: Genocide to end, Sovereignty acknowledged, and Treaty Now - is a rallying call to get behind the Black GST, and to protest the Stolenwealth Games.

The campaign came about as a result of the low profile in recent years, given to Aboriginal issues on the left-wing activist agenda. It is also a direct protest against recent governmental attacks against Aboriginal people like the decommissioning of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, the defunding of Aboriginal legal services across Australia and the land rights battle of the Yorta Yorta people through the Australian legal system.

The campaign emphasises that the conditions in which Aboriginal people live today are a direct result of racist colonisation. Until this history is formally acknowledged, and a treaty made, Aboriginal people will continue to be over-represented in prisons, they will continue to die earlier than their non-Aboriginal counterparts and die of preventable diseases. The Black GST links all of these issues and more, under the banner of Genocide to end, Sovereignty acknowledged and Treaty to be signed.

The campaign group, established and maintained through Aboriginal leadership has chosen the Commonwealth Games on which to converge here in Melbourne, because of its international profile. On Invasion day (commonly known as Australia Day), Aboriginal leaders in Melbourne went up to Canberra to the Tent Embassy and the site of the sacred fire. From there, people have been travelling along the Murray River, and out to other Aboriginal Communities in NSW and QLD, inviting people

to Melbourne for the convergence. This process has seen the development of a sister Black GST group in QLD. Once in Melbourne, a camping ground will be established where the sacred fire will burn and where decisions about what actions to be taken during the Stolenwealth Games will be made.

But while there are real issues against which to protest during the Stolenwealth Games (like the profits the State and Federal Governments stand to make on tourism off of the backs of stolen land), the Black GST's political agenda is much broader. The campaign will continue until their three key demands are met - Genocide to end, Sovereignty acknowledged and Treaty Now!

To get on the Black GST email list (low traffic, campaign updates only, no forwarding is possible on this list) please visit this website and enter your email address: <http://lists.riseup.net/www/subrequest/blackgst>

For further information about the Black GST campaign, go to: www.kooriweb.org/gst

Tune in to Community Radio 3CR 855 am

Fire First - Wednesdays 11am
News and information from the Black GST campaign

Asia Pacific Currents - Saturdays 9am
News and current affairs from the Asia Pacific region, brought to you by Australia Asia Worker Links



The Whole World's Watching WTO in Hong Kong



Seattle, Melbourne, Montreal, Cancun...Wherever the World Trade Organisation (WTO) meets, a strong, solid mobilisation of angry protesters seems to follow. And this was more than obvious in Hong Kong between December 11 and 18 2005, the most recent mass meeting of the WTO.

In preparation for the meeting, activists from the broad spectrum of politics came together to form the Hong Kong People's Alliance (HKPA). The HKPA's aims and objectives were to organise a series of events and demonstrations during the meeting of the WTO in mid December, but to also build an on-going campaign against the WTO and to monitor Hong Kong's activities within that international organisation.

Australia Asia Worker Links had participated in some of the organising meetings of the HKPA in the early months of 2005, and ultimately sent a delegation to the anti-WTO protests. Both Alex McCallum, ETU assistant secretary and Karen Moran, CFMEU forestry were a part of that delegation.

More than 7,000 people participated in the month long activities, and in particular, in the protests during the week of the WTO ministerial meeting. People from right across the Asia Pacific Region, from Europe, North and South America and Africa all participated, acknowledging that where there is a meeting of the capitalists, so too must there be a people's resistance.

In keeping with their objective to demonstrate against the WTO, the HKPA organised a four week program for the month of December, which included workshops, forums, concerts, demonstrations and other grass roots activities. The HKPA were extremely organised making extensive reservations in a number of cheap hotels, in preparation for the flood of international participants. However, the Hong Kong government was equally prepared for the protesters, and prior to the arrival of a number of international visitors, pressured hotel owners and operators to abandon those bookings. The HKPA rallied its legal team and most of the bookings were recovered.

The Government's offensive remained strong. A number of the leaders of the Philippines-based Kilusang Mayo Uno were detained on arrival at the airport, and questioned for seven hours. Again, the HKPA rallied its legal team, and no charges or deportations resulted.

On the ground, the police tactic was clear. They had designated "protest areas" within which demonstrations and events were allowed to take place. The biggest "protest area" was Victoria Park. National groups were separated by tape and in the case of the Korean delegation, which numbered 1250, were allocated their own stage and part of the park. The police regularly made unannounced visits to various groups, and randomly questioned people.

All activities occurred on Hong Kong Island and the area around the Convention Centre was quarantined. Public transport was curtailed with the ferry shut down for the duration of the conference (ferries run at a quarter of the cost of the train service, and is the most affordable transport for Hong Kong locals).



A full program was planned highlighting the major issues with seminars and marches around particular themes. Some of these issues included the rights of migrant workers; the concerns of farmers; and the attack on workers' rights world-wide. One of AAWL's objectives that came out of our October solidarity visit, which included delegates from Korea, Thailand, Japan and Malaysia, was to participate in a regional media workshop, looking at communicating more effectively through mediums such as the internet. While a workshop as such didn't happen, some progress has been made on this issue. AAWL's objective was also to further our work with the Asia Monitor Resource Centre based in Hong Kong. We attended their workshops, which focussed on migrant labour. We also had an opportunity to meet with our Filipino comrades, who have been under severe attack in recent years. AAWL proposed an International Day of Action in solidarity with Filipino workers and this idea was taken up by acclamation.

On Saturday 17 December, the police offensive intensified. The Korean delegation marched to the Convention Centre, sat down and refused to move. As the hours went on, transport to Hong Kong Island was cut off and the police began to respond. Gas, pepper spray and water cannon. People were then arrested one at a time. Locals, despite being trapped with no public transport, responded with kindness and support, providing water for protestors' gassed eyes and words of encouragement. Almost 1000 people were arrested during this demonstration.

It's curious why the mass arrests would have occurred on the final day of protest. Like most meetings of the WTO, the key negotiations occur at the bar or over coffee, rather than on the conference floor. Protesters became aware of a critical discussion culminating in a decision to be taken on the final day of meeting, Sunday 18 December. The protesters had so far been successful in stopping official WTO proceedings to occur, and so, the police offensive on the Saturday was aimed at reducing the number of available protesters, and scaring the others, to allow for these key decisions to be made.

Despite the arrests, no major resolutions were made during the Hong Kong WTO meeting in December 2005. All but 14 of the protesters were released 24 hours later, and a further 11 were released on 13 January 2006, following a court hearing. A campaign continues for the three Koreans still detained in Hong Kong. For more information about the campaign, visit <http://daga.dhs.org/hkpa/index.html>.

This visit was extremely valuable, both in terms of continuing AAWL's support for the work of the HKPA, and in terms of strengthening our contacts in the region. One of our most important tasks in the coming year, arising from this visit, is co-ordinating the International Day of Action in support of Filipino workers along side labour movement organisations in the Philippines.

Not all our stated aims and objectives were met as the situation in HK was constantly changing. It is important, however, that AAWL continue to support the three WTO arrestees, and keep up the pressure to ensure all remaining charges are dropped.

Karen Moran, AAWL delegate to Hong Kong



malaysia solidarity visit

In November 2005, Malaysia Project Co-ordinator, Pier Moro, visited Malaysia and caught up with some old comrades, as well as meeting new ones. He writes the following:

Malaysia is classified as a semi industrialised country that is seen as playing a leadership role in the region. While the country can boast impressive economic credentials and is seen favourably by the international investment community, the reality for workers is very different.

Malaysia became independent from the United Kingdom in 1957, and as the English had been fighting a communist insurgency, the new state inherited a whole series of state security laws. These laws were used to neutralise workers organizations in the 1960's and in to the early 1970's.

Malaysia is composed of three main cultural groups, the native Malay, comprising around 50% of the population, the Chinese Malay, around 40%, and the Tamil Malay, around 6%. In 1969, a series of episodes of civil unrest swept the country, often becoming racialised in a struggle between the various communities.

In the aftermath of this unrest, there was a further strengthening of internal security legislation and stronger state intervention in the economy to favour the rise of a native Malay capitalist class. These events led to a situation where labour organising faced heavy repression as well as producing a working class divided along racial lines.

The work of AAWL in Malaysia began in the early 1980's focusing on the organising of workers in the electronics industry. With the arrest of trade unionists under the Internal Security Act (ISA) in the second half of the 1980's, AAWL then forged links with progressive human right organizations like SUARAM and began to campaign on the impact of repressive state laws on workers.

Earlier in this decade, AAWL had an ongoing campaign for the release of Tian Chua, a labour activist, who had been detained for two years under the ISA. The campaign was successful and Tian Chua was released in 2003. The ISA allows people to be detained without trial for two years, upon which the Home Minister is able to reimpose another two years of detention as many times as the Minister sees fit.

The current 'war against terror' has severely affected the political climate in Malaysia and SUARAM feels that it is now harder to campaign for human rights, and against preventative detention laws, as people seem to be more prepared to sacrifice civil liberties for the sake of 'security'.

The ISA is now being used in conjunction with the Public Order and Preventative Ordinance (POPO), introduced in 1969 as a 'temporary' measure following the racial riots, to detain people without trial. Currently there are around 70 people who are being detained without trial, most of whom have been accused of being Islamic terrorists.

There is also an ongoing campaign against the number of people who 'die' while in police custody and the total impunity that the police enjoy in these cases.

The economy of Malaysia, under the impact of globalisation, is attempting to move from an agricultural and simple assembly economic base, to a more high technological based economy. One of the earliest industries was the palm oil industry that employed many Tamil

Malays. The conditions in these plantations were often very primitive, both in the working conditions and the housing that workers were provided.

This has seen the establishment of a new organisation focussed on community development. This group has not only focussed on organising the palm oil workers to improve their wages and conditions, but has also campaigned around the issue of housing conditions.

While some successes have been achieved, the palm oil industry is shrinking (being moved to Indonesia) and most of the workers are being lured into the manufacturing and electronics sectors. As a result of this, the group has started doing much more work in this sector, while still maintaining its campaigns in housing and the community areas where the workers live. Its main demands focus on wages, length of workdays, overtime and retrenchment issues.

They try to work in coalition with other groups wherever possible, and one of the main stumbling blocks is the low rate of unionisation among Malaysian workers (around 8%) and the difficulty in forming new unions.

The government recently expelled hundreds of thousands of Indonesian migrant workers and as a result, Malaysia is currently suffering a big deficit in workers, especially in the construction industry. Due to this recent wave of expulsions, the Indonesian government is halting its workers from going to Malaysia. The Malaysian government is now looking at Cambodia and Vietnam as a source of cheap workers.

Even when migrant workers are allowed into Malaysia, the conditions they endure is a very big issue, but for many reasons, it has been hard to organise this sector.

Syed Shahir, the recently elected progressive leader of the Malaysian Trade Union Congress (MTUC) would like to implement more international work and the MTUC is already working on a joint meeting between Malaysian and Thai auto car workers. Australian representatives may be asked to join in the near future.

Given Malaysia's low unionisation rate, Syed is keen to learn from examples like Australia's 1998 maritime dispute where there was co-ordination between the community and workers.

The media in Malaysia is tightly regulated by the government, and in the last six years an independent news service, Malaysiakini, has grown as an internet based news service. Due to commercial reasons, the Malaysian government has been unable to control the flow of information over the internet.

Malaysiakini is produced daily in English, Malay and Chinese. It averages around 50,000 hits a day. It can only be accessed by people subscribing to it and paying a yearly fee. It is seen by many people as the most reliable, and free of government interference, of all the media in Malaysia.

This latest visit to Malaysia was very successful in strengthening AAWL's work within the region, and a number of proposals for joint projects will be considered by AAWL in the coming months.

Piergiorgio Moro
ASU - SACS Division
Workplace union delegate

Demonstrators in Melbourne and Sydney oppose Race Riots in Cronulla



On November 15 2005, 500,000 workers took to the streets Australia-wide in opposition to Australia's new wave of industrial relations reforms. Less than four weeks later, on December 11 2005, already existing racist tensions exploded in the NSW beach-side suburb of Cronulla.

A racist mob of about 5,000 punched, beat and stomped on people who looked Middle Eastern or Muslim. These riots were both racist and sexist, with men on both sides referring to "their" women. References were made to the well-publicised gang-rapes in Sydney in 2000. This was where 14 sexist men orchestrated three gang rapes in August 2000 against teenage girls. Because the rapists were Lebanese, the capitalist media in Sydney successfully racialised the attacks. Race became the issue, not the obvious violence against women.

But though this display of overt racism and sexism took media commentators by surprise (at least those reporting rather than inciting the riot), labour movement activists were less so.

The policies of the Australian Government, led by Prime Minister John Howard, for the last ten years have steadily steered this Australia Ship towards the shores of racist social division. Even multiculturalism seems to be a radical idea within the Howard Government's race policies.

The Federal Government's mandatory sentencing of refugees, its bizarre war on terror (or being more explicit, war on Islam), its commitment to the war in Iraq and no doubt any other illegal war embarked upon by the USA, and so on, have all served to sow the seeds of the fear of the other.

Alongside this othering, John Howard himself paints the picture of a truly patriotic Australian. At the moment it's anybody who is draped in the Australian flag, but in general it's usually a non-unionist, law-abiding, anti-abortionist, sports loving, oblivious person (preferably male). On this platform, the Liberal party with the docile support of their major opposition, the Australian Labor Party, has set up legislation to detain and control the behaviour of these "others", under the guise of security and anti-terror laws. It is precisely the targets

of these Acts of Parliament who became the targets on Sydney's beaches.

In response to the abhorrent display of overt racism, 3,500 anti-racist protesters took to Melbourne's streets on December 15, highlighting the links between Howard's war on terror, war on workers, war on migrants and refugees, and war on civil liberties in general, and the explosion of racism in Cronulla. The rally was initially called by the Civil Rights Defence collective to highlight the ongoing abuses under the wave of laws curtailing civil liberties, but the political platform of the rally expanded to accommodate public anti-racist sentiment. Two days later, the same number rallied in Sydney.

It is not a coincidence that racism "exploded" at the same time that pro-worker, anti-racist and anti-war sentiments are growing. The ACTU's campaign against the IR laws has been quite successful in challenging the lie that workers will benefit from weaker conditions, less pay and less bargaining power with the bosses.

Knowing that our strength is in our unity, and our unity is growing, it was clearly time to tap into the divisive tendencies already prevalent in this country. Racism, as one tool of many to divide the working class, is the basis of the democracy we call Australia. We all know that Australia was founded on a genocidal war, a war that continues today, but uses prisons instead of tanks, missions instead of bombs, and ancient diseases like leprosy instead of bayonets. The leading article in this edition of Asian Workers Organising is a call for activists to refocus on the issue of this country's history, reminding us that Genocide is still happening.

While the mobilisations in Melbourne and Sydney have added strength to the movement and from outward appearances, caused the racists to retreat, it is likely that we will be challenged again in this way. Building this working class movement and fighting racism and sexism in all of its forms is the only way forward.

Workers Change the World.

