



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. Trade policy in the elections: still plenty of work to achieve trade justice
By Pat Ranald

Neither of the major political parties sees trade policy as a major issue in the elections. This article is based on existing policy documents and speeches made by the Minister and Shadow Minister for Trade.

The Howard government's trade policy has been influenced by its overall uncritical support for US policy, symbolized by its participation in the Iraq War, which has undermined its independent position in multilateral organizations like the United Nations and The World Trade Organisation (WTO).

The government's trade policy supported the new round of WTO negotiations from 1996 aimed to extend its existing agreements on trade in goods, trade in agriculture, the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) and Trade-related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS). It also supported US and EU proposals for new WTO agreements on Investment, Competition Policy and Government Procurement, despite strong opposition by developing country governments, which led to the collapse of the talks at the 1999 Seattle Ministerial Meeting and again at the Cancun Ministerial in 2003

Developing countries were wooed back to the WTO negotiations at the Doha Ministerial Meeting held two months after the attacks on the US of September 2001, by promises that the negotiations would recognise their special needs for economic development. The US combined these promises with threats of withdrawal of aid and other economic support, when the US President made it clear that the slogan "those who are not with us are against us" would also apply in trade policy. The negotiations were relaunched as the "Doha Development Round", but the US also

intensified a series of bilateral negotiations based more openly on its military alliances.

The Howard Government's main focus in the WTO negotiations was on further liberalisation of trade in agriculture, through its leadership of the Cairns Group of agricultural exporting countries, including many developing countries. The Government supported the demands of developing countries for reductions in the US and EU unfair agricultural export subsidies, but not for special and differential treatment, a principle recognised in WTO rules. This and the failure to support their legitimate objections to new WTO agreements undermined Australia's position in the Cairns group. This emerged dramatically at the 2003 WTO Mexico Ministerial Meeting, when to the surprise of Australian negotiators, most of the developing countries in the Cairns Group joined the G20 group led by Brazil, India and China. This group questioned the sincerity of the "Development Round," demanded genuine special and differential treatment for developing countries and rejected the proposed new WTO agreements, leading to the second collapse of the negotiations. The Howard government's continued failure to support developing countries' demands as the negotiations collapsed again in 2006-7 further undermined its role in the Cairns Group.

This dependence on US policy was also shown by the Howard government decision to follow the US strategy of preferential bilateral agreements, beginning with the Singapore, Thai and US Free Trade Agreements. This was a move away from Australia's previous bipartisan policy of multilateralism.

The AUSFTA led to the most widespread community debate in Australia so far held about a trade agreement. AFTINET argued that greater rights for corporations to charge higher prices for medicines and reduction of government's ability to regulate in other areas would diminish democratic rights and result in greater social and economic inequality. This debate succeeded in reducing support for the agreement shown in opinion polls to minority levels, and in persuading the ALP and minor parties to adopt policies critical of it. The ALP was influenced by the community debate, and for the first time set conditions for its support of a trade agreement. It moved successful Senate amendments to the implementing legislation on medicines and local media content, but the majority right wing prevailed in its final support for the amended legislation.

Despite the majority community opposition to the AUSFTA, and a growing trade deficit with Singapore, Thailand and the US, the Howard government has embarked on many more FTAs. Negotiations are proceeding with China, ASEAN, Malaysia, the Persian Gulf States, Japan and Chile, and feasibility studies are underway with South Korea, Indonesia, India and the Pacific Islands. The most significant of these is with China, which is already Australia's largest trading partner. However, the negotiations with China and most other countries are proceeding very slowly, as these governments are aware that rapid reduction of agricultural tariffs could result in rural unemployment and social unrest. Without commitments from any of these governments to internationally agreed labour rights and environmental standards, free trade simply increases competitive pressures and drives a race to the bottom on those standards.

The collapse of the WTO negotiations also led the US and Howard governments to focus on the APEC meeting of 21 Pacific Rim governments in Sydney as a possible

vehicle for an Asia Pacific Free Trade Agreement. However, this failed, as did the attempt to use the meeting to discredit the UN Kyoto protocol and promote “clean” coal and nuclear energy as solutions to climate change. The Howard Government misrepresented the APEC statement, claiming it was a breakthrough on commitments to address climate change. In fact, developing countries insisted that the statement clearly endorsed the UN as the appropriate forum for further negotiations on climate change.

What of the other parties? While the ALP policy generally embraces free trade rhetoric, there are some differences in its approach, with the possibility of more independence from US policy, as in its opposition to the war in Iraq, and endorsement of the UN Kyoto protocol. The policy places more emphasis on multilateral rather than bilateral agreements, with a pledge to review existing bilateral negotiations. There may also be more attention to issues raised by developing countries in the WTO to regain credibility in the Cairns Group. Pressures from unions led the ALP April 2007 National Conference to pass a consensus resolution that placed conditions on its support for a China Free Trade agreement, and to express in principle support for commitments from governments to abide by labour and environmental standards as part of trade negotiations. The ALP also made commitments not to endorse trade agreements that would undermine regulation of essential services like health, education and water, and made commitments to Australian industry policy. The Greens and Democrats have clearer fair trade policies, having voted against the AUSFTA implementing legislation and supported a more open and democratic process for trade policy.

In summary, a change of government would provide some possibility of a more independent approach in foreign policy and trade, and greater commitment to multilateral institutions. But it will take continued strong community campaigning to ensure that better policies are actually implemented, and to achieve fair trade rather than simply free trade policies.

2. Human Rights Body Uneasy About Impacts of CAFTA-DR in Costa Rica

Geneva 6 November 2007 – As furore continues in Costa Rica about ratification of the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA-DR), members of a leading UN human rights body have been expressing their concern to Costa Rican officials today in Geneva, about the human rights impact of the trade agreement.

Members of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (Committee, or CESCR) raised concerns about the effects of CAFTA-DR on human rights, particularly on the rights to health, to food and to water, with a Costa Rican delegation this morning.

In response to the question of the extent to which the Costa Rican government plans to compensate those Costa Rican citizens most affected by the trade agreement, the delegation responded that the government will try to ensure that those who would be most adversely affected by CAFTA-DR are compensated so as to suffer less than they would without compensation.

‘Is Costa Rica rushing into the economic development trap without examining the implications on economic, social and cultural rights?’ one Committee member asked.

'The Committee's questions to Costa Rica this morning imply that the negotiators of the trade agreement did not sufficiently take their ICESCR obligations into account, as they should have, and that the government should do so now, before CAFTA-DR is ratified,' said a close observer of the process.

By having ratified international human rights treaties, including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the Costa Rican government has committed itself to guarantee rights including the right to food, water, health, housing and social security to its people, as well as to ensure that policies in all areas – including trade – do not undermine enjoyment of these rights. The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights is a body of independent human rights experts, charged with monitoring the implementation of economic, social and cultural rights in the 157 countries around the world that have ratified the ICESCR.

3. Small scale sustainable farmers are cooling down the earth

This is an edited version of a *Via Campesina* background paper.

www.viacampesina.org

Current global modes of production, consumption and trade have caused massive environmental destruction including global warming that is putting at risk our planet's ecosystems and pushing human communities into disasters. Global warming shows the failure of a development model based on high fossil energy consumption, overproduction and trade liberalization.

Farmers - men and women - around the world are joining hands with other social movements, organizations, people and communities to ask for and to develop radical social, economic and political transformations to reverse the current trend.

Farmers - and especially small farmers - are among the first to suffer from climate change. Changing weather patterns bring unusual droughts, floods and storms, destroying farmlands, stock and farmers houses. Farmers have to adjust to these changes by adapting their seeds and usual production systems to an unpredictable situation. Moreover, droughts and floods are leading to harvest failures, increasing the number of people going hungry in the world. Studies predict a decline in global farm output of 3 to 16% by 2080.

Corporate food production and consumption are significantly contributing to global warming and to the destruction of rural communities. Intercontinental food transport, intensive monoculture production, land and forest destruction and the use of chemical inputs in agriculture are transforming agriculture into an energy consumer and are contributing to climate change. Under neo-liberal policies imposed by the World Trade Organisation, the regional and bilateral Free Trade Agreements, as well as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, food is produced with oil-based pesticides and fertilizers and transported all around the world for transformation and consumption.

Globalized agriculture and corporate food production create global warming

1/ By transporting food all around the world

Fresh and packaged food is travelling around the world. In Europe and the USA, for example, it is now common to find fruits, vegetables, meat or wine from Africa, South

America or Oceania; and we find Asian rice in the Americas or in Africa. Fossil fuel used for food transport is releasing tons of CO₂ into the atmosphere.

2/ By imposing industrial forms of production (mechanization, intensification, use of agrochemicals, monoculture...)

The so called “modernized” agriculture, especially industrial monoculture, is destroying natural processes in soil (which leads to the storing of CO₂ in organic matter) and replaces them by chemical processes based on fertilizers and pesticides.

3/ By destroying biodiversity (and carbon sinks)

This carbon cycle has been part of the climate balance for hundreds of thousands of years. Corporate agribusiness has now shattered this balance by imposing widespread chemical agriculture (with massive use of oil-based pesticides and fertilizers), by burning forests for monoculture plantations and by destroying peat lands and biodiversity.

4/ By converting land and forests into non-agricultural areas

Forests, pastures and cultivated lands are rapidly converted into industrial agricultural production areas or into shopping malls, industrial complexes, big houses, large infrastructure projects or tourist resorts. This in turn causes massive carbon releases and reduces the capacity of the environment to absorb the carbon released into the atmosphere.

Via Campesina believes that solutions to the current crisis have to emerge from organized social actors that are developing modes of production, trade and consumption based on justice, solidarity and healthy communities. No technological fix will solve the current global environmental and social disaster.

All around the world, we practice and defend small-scale sustainable family farming and we demand food sovereignty. Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally-appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems. It puts the aspirations and needs of those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations. Food sovereignty prioritizes local and national economies and markets and empowers peasant and family farmer-driven agriculture, artisan-style fishing, pastoralist-led grazing, and food production, distribution and consumption based on environmental, social and economic sustainability.

We urgently demand of local, national and international decision makers:

1/ The complete dismantling of agribusiness companies: they are stealing the land of small producers, producing junk food and creating environmental disasters.

2/ The replacement of industrialized agriculture and animal production by small-scale sustainable agriculture supported by genuine agrarian reform programs.

3/ The promotion of sane and sustainable energy policies. That includes consuming less energy and producing solar and biogas energy on the farms instead of heavily promoting agrofuel production as is currently the case.

4/ The implementation of agricultural and trade policies at local, national and international levels supporting sustainable agriculture and local food consumption. This includes the ban on the kinds of subsidies that lead to the dumping of cheap food on markets.

For the livelihoods of billions of small producers around the world,
For people's health and the planet's survival:
We demand food sovereignty and we are committed to struggle to achieve it collectively.

4. World Trade Organisation Update

The WTO continues to publicly comment on the progress of the Doha round of negotiations but little progress seems to be happening. The deadline for conclusion of the round continues to shift position with, some saying that early next year is the latest possible chance to conclude talks. New texts for services, agriculture and manufactured goods were due in mid November but that has been pushed back to early December

The renewed discussions around a Services text for the Doha round has started. It is expected that the new text will reconfirm the commitments made in the Hong Kong Declaration (an increase in market access for service provision). There is some concern about whether those previous commitments will be the goal or the starting point for greater liberalisation. The "request-offer" negotiation process lies at the heart of the new talks.

There was little progress on Agriculture as a result of concerns from countries in other areas like manufactured goods. Developing countries want more time from the head negotiator as they find the broader consultations far more inclusive. The issue of "Special Products" (products that countries can exempt from the general WTO tariff cuts) is a sticking point, with many developing countries wanting greater exemptions.

On the issue of manufactured goods there has been little new input into a new text. Developing countries are asking for more flexibility on all fronts with regards to manufactured goods. Bolivia was the only developing country to reject the new texts saying that any cuts to tariffs were politically unacceptable for their country.

It appears that with the revised texts the December General Council meeting could be the point at which countries are pushed into accepting the modalities set out in the revised texts.

6. FTA Update

Indonesia FTA

A feasibility study will soon start on a FTA between Australia and Indonesia. In late November, AFTINET will be present at a public consultation between DFAT and the wider community and will also have a one-on-one meeting with DFAT to express our concerns over such an agreement.

Submissions for the Feasibility Study are due by the 14th of December.

Japan FTA

The next round of negotiations is expected to be held in mid November.

China FTA

The latest round of negotiations have just concluded in Canberra. The government is reporting some success but not a great deal. There has been some movement in areas like construction, architecture, and engineering, and transport and logistics but nothing very substantial. On most issues China seemed to be unconvinced of the proposals but wasn't ready to disengage from them.

In the area of finance China indicated that it was not willing to go beyond its WTO commitments but still happy to engage in the process.

On the regulatory issues with telecommunications, tourism and traditional Chinese medicine, Australia agreed to provide a checklist to China on the classification of new environmental services before the next round.

Despite reports from the government about some progress in clarifying concerns over access to mining, China has recently come out and said that it will not be encouraging investment in mines. Currently foreign companies are not allowed to invest in minerals that cannot be recycled. Foreign companies will be allowed to form mergers with local companies though.

Chile FTA

Negotiations were scheduled for mid October but no word has come out if they occurred.

6. A sip for global justice

Tradewinds Tea and Coffee Pty Ltd is a non profit organisation, formed in 1977 to help alleviate global poverty in practical ways. Tradewinds works in poor communities to achieve sustainability and self-reliance within those communities - by assisting with development of products and finding markets for those products. This approach replaces the traditional 'handout' model, which sets up dependency and is ineffective in reducing poverty in the longer-term.

Tradewinds pioneered the ideals of 'poverty relief through trade' and 'fair trade' - which are now widely practised. Tradewinds was the first supplier to Australians of fair trade tea.

Tradewinds specialises in tea and coffee. It imports and distributes tea and coffee products from communities in East Timor, Papua New Guinea, and Sri Lanka.

Tradewinds' mission and values

Consumers are increasingly concerned about product provenance and the social and environmental impacts of big global business. In response, Tradewinds will continue to contribute to the development of a fair trade strategy in the Asia-Pacific, and to form business-charity partnerships for project work. There are now many for-profit companies marketing under the fair trade banner. By contrast, Tradewinds is a non-profit brand that offers an alternative to multinational commodity trading.

All Tradewinds' surpluses are channelled back into community projects supporting sustainable agriculture and production infrastructure, to assist with capacity building in source communities. Tradewinds imports value-added products wherever possible so that the full economic benefits remain with producers. Tradewinds is proud of its history assisting producer communities to access the Australian market. In markets such as East Timor, where value adding has not yet occurred, Tradewinds is considering ways to assist the attainment of this goal.

Community aid and project work

Tradewinds has been able to support its source communities each year through community aid projects. Tradewinds has provided funding for Dr Dan's clinic and The Mary McKillop Foundation in East Timor; the cultivation of vanilla beans in Papua New Guinea; and, in Sri Lanka, education projects with partner Satyodaya on nutrition of women and children, sanitation and the rights of women; education of farmers to grow organic produce and forest gardens; to provide water resources to people in the south of the country; and tsunami relief.

Fair trade and organic certified

Tradewinds is a member of the Fair Trade Association of Australia and New Zealand (FTAANZ). Certified fair trade products guarantee a higher return to the grower and assist the equalisation of trading disparities between the developed world and the poorer producing countries. Tradewinds has products that are organic-certified by NASAA. It has had a commitment to sustainable development and agriculture over many years.

Stable supply relationships

Tradewinds' teas are from a single supplier and origin – Stassen in Sri Lanka. Tradewinds has purchased teas from Stassen for over thirty years because it is totally Sri Lankan-owned and is committed to raising standards in employment, education and health of its workforce and local communities. Similarly, Tradewinds' has had the same PNG supplier for the past 15 years.

Tradewinds is an ethical brand; it exists 'for good', not for profit. It targets the ethical shopper.

Contacts: visit our website www.tradewinds.org.au ; phone 92525265; fax 92514542; PO 3424 Sydney 2001.

Lynette Robinson The Indigo Group Pty. Ltd. Marketing Consultants

Upcoming Events

Against the NT Intervention: Family gathering and rally

Where: Redfern Community Centre

When: 10am, Sunday 18th November, 2007

Rally: along Cleveland Street to Victoria Park

Speakers: Shane Phillips & NT community representatives

WEAR RED AND BRING YOUR BANNERS, YOUR FLAGS, PLACARDS AND MOST OF ALL, YOUR MOB!!

On Saturday 24th a new Federal Government will be decided. This meeting and rally, one week out from the election, is our chance to ensure Aboriginal voices are heard loud and clear and the injustices of the Government's invasion of Aboriginal communities in the NT are known about.

Of all the criticisms of the 11 year Howard Government, their legacy in Indigenous Affairs will surely be remembered as a low point in the history of this country.

They were elected in 1996 on a wave of racism sparked by the former Liberal candidate Pauline Hanson and have since been unrelenting in their attacks on Indigenous rights and politics. We can see this in their approval of the Hindmarsh Island Bridge, amendments to native title after Wik, the Reconciliation convention, the mounting of legal action defending past Government's removal of children, the white-washing of Australia's history, abolition of ATSIC, axing of the CDEP and now with the measures in the NT to name only a few.

In the NT the Government's so-called emergency intervention followed the Anderson & Wild report on the Protection of Aboriginal Children from Sexual Abuse in the NT. The Federal Government initiated an 'emergency response' and have since passed several laws giving them wide ranging powers over Aboriginal people's lives, land, resources, stores and enterprises. These include new powers to manage welfare benefits of all Aboriginal people in the NT, changes to land rights (eg axing of permit system to communities), assumption of 5 year lease over Aboriginal land and greater controls by the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs (eg Minister can determine who can live in the community) and changes to bail and criminal law.

The Anderson & Wild report noted serious issues and the need for an urgent community led response. No-where did it recommend taking Aboriginal land, abolishing the CDEP or control of the lives of Aboriginal people as if they're children. This intervention has been criticised as compromising human rights, democracy, freedom, self-determination and Indigenous rights. Others have said if these powers can be exercised over Aboriginal communities in the NT it can happen in NSW as well.

Come along to this family friendly gathering at the Redfern Community centre where we will walk along Cleveland St to Victoria Park and join up with other events are being held in the Park. Meet 10am, Sunday 18th November, 2007.

www.womenforwik.org

ANTaR's 10th Anniversary of the Sea of Hands

Sunday 18th November 11am-3pm, Victoria Park, Camperdown (Cnr Parramatta & City Roads)

2007 marks the 10th Anniversary since the first Sea of Hands, Australia's largest public art installation and representation of support for the generation of moral and legal recognition of, and respect for, Indigenous Australian's Rights.

It has been a trying, eventful, uplifting and at times disappointing ten years of striving for social justice for Indigenous Australians! Many people have said 'Sorry', such as many local and all state governments, while some refuse.....

Then, in the year 2000, five hundred thousand of us came together to walk across the Sydney Harbour Bridge in support of Reconciliation.

Local reconciliation groups and other grassroots organisations have worked hard and made great changes in their local communities, but at the same time, many government decisions have actually obstructed the reconciliation movement. Now, seven years later, in this crucial time in Australia's history, particularly just before the Federal election, it's time once again for all of us to put our Hands Up for Indigenous Rights!

It's time again to reaffirm our commitment to Social Justice for Indigenous peoples, to celebrate ten years of hard work, and to ensure that we communicate to the rest of Australia, that in another ten years we will see a positive change for the lives of Indigenous Australians.

So, please join us on Sunday the 18th of November, 11:00- 3:00pm, in Victoria Park, Sydney (corner of Parramatta and City roads) . It's going to be an awesome day of live music, speakers, food, and the lovely company of many people who believe in the Rights of Indigenous Australians, and want to show it! Please bring family, friends, colleagues, and anyone you know who may be interested, and forward this e-mail on to let others know.

8. Celebrate International Human Rights Day with the Iranian democratic movement

Saturday December 8, 2007, 6pm-10pm
Granville Library Function Room
(Carlton St, Granville - next to Town Hall)
Music, food, speakers

No War, No Nukes - democratic option for Iran

For more information: Peter Murphy 9211 4164