

**Transcript from APPEC Public Forum Sydney, September 1 2007**

**Sharan Burrow**

President of the Australian Council of Trade Unions and President of the Global Unions  
International Trade Union Congress

**'Labour rights in the Asia Pacific Region'**

Thank you and thanks for asking me. Let me acknowledge that we stand on indigenous ground of the elders for their custodianship and let me say that in this company, that demands of us even more solidarity with a group of our own brothers and sisters, our first nations people who themselves are finding their own rights simply destroyed by our government in the Northern Territory as we speak.

I wanted to say that on behalf of the trade unions and there area number of them from countries in the region here, with me tonight, we've had a quiet dialogue over the last two days trying to find out what exactly is it we can do to intervene in APEC and so when we leave a little later please forgive us but we have an ongoing discussion over dinner tonight. So I am sorry we won't be able to stay until the end.

So can I say that our view is that we need a complete u-turn in APEC policies. When you consider that the Pacific Rim is home to many of the fastest growing economies in the world, makes up 44% of the world's export of goods and services. Yet it also has seen the fastest rise in income inequality, the harshest de-regulation of labour markets, the largest polluters and governments with the most backward stance in on climate change, then you have to ask where do people fit. APEC is actually, the APEC agenda when you have a look at it, when we talked to the executive director today, when we talked with the head of the business advisory council, who happens to be one of our Macquarie Bank folk, then the APEC agenda without a doubt amounts to little more than unfettered trade and investment liberalization.

You just have to think about the language, they call themselves member economies, not nations, they actually engage with business, not labour, they have a bureaucracy that actually lives to produce what is called model clauses all related to trade and investment liberalization. They say that their tariff ambitions, you remember the Bogor Declaration that said that tariffs would fall by 2020 for all countries, by 2010 for developed countries, well they're no longer too worried about that because tariffs have now gone down from about 17% to about 6% in many many cases, so while they will tell you that that is a major agenda, really the world has moved on. We saw the glee this afternoon in Mark Johnson's eyes when he read the Costello declaration in the papers today, where Peter Costello wants to put the bond markets on the agenda. Goodness knows if there were sensible regulation and transparency we might want that too, but you'd

have to wonder with the developments to date just what they would mean. They also say that beyond the border issues are now as important or if not more important than tariffs, and that goes toward most of what Lori was talking about, the sort of services regulation the protection of public education of health, of water, of infrastructure those areas that relate to what these leaders would see as barriers to trade. There's a little bit of a problem, I think, for the business community, which you would have to call the investment community or the multinational company and investment community, because there is not a lot of representation of the broader business community at all, but they are facing the fact and you are seeing now with some of the road humps in trade discussion that developing countries aren't quite as stupid as they might have thought they are because services and the protection of services means something to those governments as it means to the people, so we might be able to get some discussion back on the agenda about that. They're also dealing with climate change, which is designed not to deal with Climate change at all, but to undermine Kyoto, to actually undermine the commitment to doing something about it. Our own Prime Minister is talking about aspirational targets aspirational targets, to deal with one of the most urgent issues on our agenda anywhere in the world and of course Don will say more about that. And now there is this nebulous structural reform, well structural reform could mean anything, but trying to find people in this show, and you can't find any real mention of them. Why isn't decent work on the agenda, why aren't migrant flows, why aren't slavery and trafficking on the agenda, where's the millennium development goals, food security, the risk of pandemic disease and the result in quarantine standards that we just keep us wide open here to equine flu, and of course none of these are even on the agenda.

Yet if you have a look at our region it is actually all about our people, it's all about some pretty disturbing stuff. We've got 3 million people in the Asia Pacific Region, who flee from their homes every year because they can't make a living, they can't survive on decent work in the countries in which they are citizens. That figure is rising annually by 6%, they're large now, but you start seeing those figures rise by 6% and the issues we are facing right now become even more stark. Yesterday we actually talked about the positive side of migration, because we are very proudly a multicultural country, yesterday we talked about the contribution that migrants make. Nevertheless we also talked about the worse or the uglier side of globalization and we stood with the producers in Australia of 'Jammed', the film about sex slavery in Australia, which of course you all should see, should be on the 'I want to be depressed one more time' list, but it is an incredibly powerful piece, and of course their title is 'slavery in the lucky country.' We had a really courageous worker Mohammad Naeme who the CFMEU have been supporting and he told the story of being forced to spend \$12, 000 in Singapore to get a Visa, illegal under international law but a service fee to get a visa comes to Australia under a temporary migrant visa, called the 457 Visa, is bashed bullied intimidated, sacked and of course at risk of deportation, because he hasn't got other employment at this point. But how does he go home, when he's got such a huge debt that he can't even pay off the amount of money that he paid to come here.

We're seeing an emergence right here of a black labour market, where workers are paid between \$8 and \$12 an hour, under our minimum wage and indeed with no other entitlements at all, no workers compensation, no superannuation, no leave loading, no overtime, none of those things. Not even on a formal employment contract. So we're actually seeing now the rise of working arrangements that are forced labour or worse and yet it's not on the agenda even in our country where it's been encouraged by our own governments deregulation of the labour market, let alone in developing countries where we know that the picture is even worse. We have of course the majority of the people in this region 52% comprise the working poor, 52% of the population of the Asia Pacific are working poor, they earn less than \$2 a day, you would think that alone, in the face of an increase in profits of 46% in the APEC countries, compared to 36% in non-APEC countries, would be an issue for governments. Why is it that 52% of our people are still living on less than \$2 a day when profits as Lori said are sky rocketing.

In fact if you think about growth generally in our region, then what we're seeing is jobless growth, we are actually seeing well two things, one is jobless growth and of course to give you an illustration of this the most stark one in China, where it took a 3% increase in output to generate a 1% increase in employment in the 1980s. While in the 1990s more than twice as much of that, between 8% and 9% of growth was necessary to achieve the same 1% employment growth. In addition to that you've not only got jobless growth but you have got so much disparity between those that are working in conditions that are just inhuman 16, 18, 20 hours a day to meet production spikes demanded by the Multi Nationals and at the same time you have the people who are under-employed and can't get enough money to make ends meet. The estimation of the ILO is that up to a quarter of all the workforce is now in labour market distress. Now when you put that together with the 52% or the majority of people in the region being working poor what you have is a recipe for civil unrest. Civil unrest, because people are watching what's happening in terms of inequality and saying, we've had enough.

The other aspect of course is the aspect that Lori touched on and that as wages have stagnated and corporate profits have soared. Indeed Lori's figures are even more stark, but certainly here not since the 60s have we seen profits as high in percentage growth terms and yet wages stagnating or declining. However when you look at the share of national income going to wages, it's been stagnating or declining now for more than a decade. In fact it's the lowest share for labour income since that same date of 1996 and that's now increasingly in developed nations a phenomena and of course and we will see that spread to developing nations. So far from sharing the profits of corporate growth, what we are seeing is a trickle down theory simply doesn't work. The trickle down theory is dying if not dead. Even the UN has recognized that it doesn't work they need a new development model they need a model where fair globalization must equal full employment and decent work so that's the conversation going on between the UN Economic & Social Commission and the International Labour Organization, while we've got these vacuous leaders right here right now talking about unfettered trade

liberalization without any concern for those dramatic issues that are affecting our people. Let alone some of the things we might want to talk to them about, building welfare, social security and a pension entitlement, building a decent system of labour mobility with migrant rights, building employment entitlements that people can share across the base. You know that Australian workers are in the struggle of their lives when you think that our government, the government of a rich nation tore up workers rights, tore up workers fundamental rights. Yesterday you probably saw it sink to an all time low, it probably passed a lot of people by but my mouth fell open when the Prime Minister actually condemned the fact that if the labour party were to win we might see a situation where again collective bargaining rights would be re-established and 'watch out,' he said, 'Unions with only one member would have a say in pay negotiations.' What he is really saying, if you strip that away, is that this is a Prime Minister who heads up a democracy, who is actually the Prime Minister of a democracy who just said he does not believe in freedom of association and the right to representation. That's a fundamental human right, so if our own Prime Minister has no support for fundamental Human Rights like freedom of association that sit there with freedom of speech and political freedom then how shocking was it for us today to think what it is like for our brothers in Malaysia. We talked about our campaign showed our advertising and research and my brother from Malaysia said, 'that is just fantastic and I congratulate the Australian workers, but you know we couldn't even get through the censorship laws the authority to advertise on Television.'

Now we have so many issues of fundamental rights, we have huge growth and people are simply not on the agenda, well 'basta' is a good work Lori, it is time that we called enough, but between now and Peru next year, and I'm proud to say I have a brother from the CPT in Peru with us today, between now and Peru we have to make a case for people in the APEC framework that is just undeniable right throughout our country. So lets hope it never does get a legitimate framework for further trade deliberation or those binding rules Lori talked about but at the same time let's expose Prime Ministers and Presidents of democratic nations who in fact have so little concern for the plight of 52% of the regions people living on \$2 a day. That the word people doesn't even appear on their agenda, shocking, shameful unacceptable and I congratulate you for being here.