

Top Stories

Thailand forces registration of prepaid phones to thwart insurgency



New rules begin today to regulate anonymous cell phone use in three provinces.

Hundreds of thousands rally in Australia against IR legislation



People rallied in 300 locations across Australia today to protest the Federal Government's WorkChoices

proposed changes to industrial relations laws.

Featured story

Chinese hunger strike continues at Australian detention centre



Three Chinese men being held at Sydney's Villawood Immigration Detention

centre have ended a four-week hunger strike. But another three detainees are continuing to refuse food for the 25th consecutive day. The men began their hunger strike on October 20 to protest Australia's Mandatory Detention policy.

Wikipedia Current Events

- Mid-November 2005 Tornado Outbreak: Many tornadoes (at least 18 so far) have been reported during the afternoon and evening across central North America, stretching from the Great Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico. Damage has been reported in many areas, although there have yet to be any fatalities reported.
- 173 detainees found in an Iraqi government bunker in Baghdad were found starved, beaten and tortured.
- A car bomb explodes outside a KFC outlet in Karachi, Pakistan around 08:45 (UTC+5). At least three people are killed and eight others wounded.
- 2005 Sanriku Japan Earthquake A 6.9-magnitude earthquake, as determined by the Japan Meteorological Society, occurred off the northern coast of Japan near Sanriku at 6:39am Japan Standard Time (UTC+9), prompting a tsunami warning to be issued in Japan and the western coast of the USA.
- Sayako, Princess Nori of Japan marries a commoner and thereby leaves the Imperial Family, taking the surname of her husband.
- The French Parliament permits President Jacques Chirac's government to extend emergency powers for three months to quell civil unrest.
- Conferences of the CDU, CSU and SPD approve a coalition deal that will see Angela Merkel become Chancellor on Nov. 22.

Author Vine Deloria dies at 72

Native American author and activist Vine Deloria died Sunday. He was 72.

Deloria's books *Custer Died For Your Sins* and *God Is Red* came out at the height of the Indian rights movement. *Custer Died For Your Sins* initiated drastic changes in the way anthropologists and government officials interacted with Native Americans, including the movement to return artifacts to tribal officials.

In addition to writing and lecturing, he was former executive director of the National Congress of American Indians and a political science professor at the University of Colorado.

Thailand forces registration of prepaid phones to thwart insurgency

In a move aimed at hampering the near-daily bombing attacks in southern Thailand, all owners of prepaid phones are required to register by midnight local time today or face being blocked.

Originally scheduled for implementation at the end of last year, the move was deferred to allow people more time to register their phones. The policy only applies in the three southernmost provinces which border Malaysia — Pattani, Narathiwat, and Yala — formerly the Malay Pattani kingdom.

Thais from other parts of the country with prepaid phones will

also be required to register should they wish to visit the region. When doing so their calls will be treated as roaming, a feature of GSM which allows a user to make and receive calls on a network other than that of their service provider.

Many of the bombs used in the south are believed to be detonated by mobile phone, although most of the more than one thousand casualties in the region have been from drive-by shootings and stabbings.

It is reported that 65% of the near half-million prepaid phones in the region that this would impact have been registered. Prepaid phones are commonplace throughout Thailand and estimates put the number in use throughout the whole country at approximately ten million.

Other efforts to deal with the insurgency in the predominantly Muslim area include an announcement yesterday that approximately 20,000 local villagers will be given training and small arms to help defend their villages. Both men and women will be eligible, and those accepted into the programme will be put onto the government payroll.

Globalization and trade deficit are connected says Greenspan

"The rise of our deficit and our ability to finance it appears to coincide with a pronounced new phase of globalization that has emerged in the past decade," the U.S. Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan said in a speech delivered today to the Banco de México. "This phase is characterized by a major acceleration in U.S. productivity growth and the decline in what economists call home bias, the

parochial tendency to invest domestic savings in one's home country."



Alan Greenspan

"To date, despite a current account deficit exceeding 6 percent of our gross domestic product, we -- or more exactly the economic entities that comprise the U.S. economy -- are experiencing few difficulties in attracting the foreign saving required to finance it, as evidenced by the recent upward pressure on the dollar," he said.

"Of course, deficits that cumulate to ever-increasing net external debt, with its attendant rise in servicing costs, cannot persist indefinitely," he added. "At some point investors will balk at further financing."

"A nation's current account balance thus is essentially a market phenomenon that is not readily subject to rebalance by targeting one or more policy variables such as the exchange rate," Greenspan said. In the speech Greenspan said interest rate increases nor cuts in the US fiscal deficit would result in large reductions in the current account deficit. These are the three standard ways the government controls the economy.

The deficit last year widened to \$665.9 billion from \$530.7 billion. It totaled \$195.7 billion in the second quarter, or 6.3 percent of

gross domestic product.

Greenspan did said he did not think that the dollar would lose its dominant position in the global economy "any time soon" and that economic flexibility would help the United States should the dollar lose its status.

Hundreds of thousands rally in Australia against IR legislation



An estimated 150,000 protesters in Melbourne fill Federation Square blocking roads in all directions.

People rallied in 300 locations across Australia today to protest the Federal Government's proposed changes to industrial relations laws, WorkChoices. According to police, around 150,000 people congregated in Melbourne, from where speeches were broadcast throughout the country. In Sydney, thirty thousand gathered in Belmore Park and Martin Place to watch the broadcast before marching to Chifley Square.

Sharan Burrow, President of the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU), said that under the changes many working conditions would be under threat, including "penalty rates, public holidays, overtime pay, control over rostered hours, shift penalties, even 4 weeks annual leave." The government has claimed, despite various expert assesment to the contrary, and opposition from

major Australian religious and charity organisations and some concern from its own backbench, that the IR changes will improve the economy and ultimately benefit workers, and dismissed the protests as having "little effect".

Ms Burrow said that the union movement was "standing up for the values that shape the way we care for each other," and criticised the proposed legislation, calling it "an attack on living standards, community, and family life."

The IR changes were also criticised by a number of church leaders. George Pell, Catholic Archbishop of Sydney, said "I'm not a supporter of the radical weakening of the unions," and Anglican Bishop Phillip Higgins called them "disturbing and unwise."

Ms Burrow also criticised the Government's public relations campaign, calling it a waste of money. "They spent \$55 million of our money trying to convince us that everything was okay," she said.

Greg Combet, Secretary of the ACTU, linked the struggle to past wars in which Australia has fought. "They fought and died in wars for this country. They do not deserve to have their rights taken away." He said that, for many, workplace changes would come quickly, especially for the most vulnerable. He also argued that some employers would be forced by competition to reduce wages and working conditions. "Even the best employers can be driven by competition to lower their labour costs. We will end up with an army of working poor, like the US," he said.

"We will hold the government to account for the human cost of

these laws," Mr Combet said.

Former Labor Prime Minister Bob Hawke said that the struggle was about what he called "the essence of Australian character - the fair go." Opposition Labor leader Kim Beazley declared that if returned to government at the next election, Labor would repeal the legislation. "This legislation is gone with the election of a Labor government," he said.

Prime Minister John Howard predicted that the protests would have little effect. "It is my view that after they (the laws) have been implemented for a period of time, most Australians will look back on the criticisms and objections ... with a sense of bewilderment," Howard said.

"The sky will not fall in, weekend barbecues will not be abolished, parents will still be able to spend Christmas Day with their children."

The Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations, Kevin Andrews, echoed the Prime Ministers sentiments. "Well the Government's not going to be distracted by rallies and hysterical overreaction," he said. Mr Andrews defended the Government's record, arguing that it has been responsible for an increase in wages over the past ten years.

"Well what I would say to Australians, whether they were the people on the streets today or the probably 95% of Australians who were in their workplaces today working, is that firstly, look at the record of this Government over the last 10 years. That record speaks for itself. We've seen a 15% increase in real wages and we've seen a 1.7 million increase in jobs in Australia," he said. Mr Andrews also said that the

industrial relations changes were about creating the conditions for a strong economy.

"So what we've been on about is bringing about the economic conditions that we can have a strong economy which ultimately is the only guarantee of jobs and wages in Australia."

The claims of the Government are highly debated and not supported by some independent expert assessment. Professor Mark Wooden from the Melbourne Institute said, "There is no economic sense in it." A report issued by 17 independent experts in industrial relations from Australian tertiary institutions stated that there "is no convincing evidence that the proposals will generate jobs," and that the "claim that individual contracts deliver a higher productivity is highly questionable."

The IMF said in its 2005 review of the Australian economy that "the implementation of this package of reforms to widen employment opportunities and raise productivity by enhancing flexibility in work arrangements" was important for Australia's economic future, contradicting Prof. Wooden's claims.

The OECD also supports reform to the Industrial relations system, claiming in its 2004 Review of the Australian Economy "To further encourage participation and favour employment, the industrial relations system also needs to be reformed so as to increase the flexibility of the labour market, reduce employment transaction costs and achieve a closer link between wages and productivity."

Before marching to the Carlton gardens, a live video hook-up was

established between the major state capitals of Australia, plus smaller regional centres.

Melbourne's city streets are denuded of traffic to allow the protest against IR reforms

Some 150,000 marched from Federation Square to Royal Exhibition building to protest the proposed IR legislation and voice opinion, vastly in excess of original union estimates of 60,000. The crowd spread through the streets of Melbourne as far as the eye could see - a seemingly endless mass from the ground. The march stretched eight city blocks; when the first marchers had reached the end at the Carlton Gardens, the tail end was just starting.

For the marchers, the consensus was that the negatives of the legislation outweigh the benefits; that it will affect the poorer working class and the middle class long into the future unless the legislation is rolled back. One issue of concern was that the Government has not accepted that the minimum wage needs to rise with inflation, rather its position appears to be to allow for the possibility that the minimum wage could fall in real terms. Another was the loss of the safety net protecting workers from contracts offering less than award conditions.

Public transport was stretched to capacity and car parking was almost impossible to find. Inclement weather ultimately became fine. See the photo gallery for more photos

At 10am the estimated 30,000 protestors moved from Belmore Park down Hay St onto George St, chanting slogans and waving union banners.

Led by a fire truck, traditional Korean drummers and the Unions NSW campaign bus, they stretched nearly six city blocks along George Street, chanting their opposition to the changes.



March proceeding through Sydney streets

Meeting with the rally from Martin Place, the combined march then moved on to Chifley Square, where another stage was set up, and more speakers were heard, including Peter Garrett, Federal member for Kingsford-Smith.

Garrett spoke mostly about the dispute between Boeing and 28 aircraft engineers at its Williamstown site. The workers are on strike to obtain the right to enter into a collective agreement negotiated by their union, rather than independent agreements. The strike is now in its fifth month.

Up to 100,000 people in NSW took part in 227 separate stopwork meetings throughout the state, linked by a nationwide Sky Channel hook up. The M4 motorway was also blocked off for nearly an hour, by transport workers and police.

In Brisbane, Queensland, organisers have claimed success after more than 15,000 people turned out to protest against the industrial relations laws. Federal Opposition Leader Kim Beazley joined the workers, including

representatives from 40 unions, who rallied at South Bank before marching to the Queensland office of the National party.

Mr Beazley told the South Bank rally that one of the first things he would do as Prime Minister would be to put in place "a fair system".

Queensland Premier Peter Beattie said the State Government will push ahead with its High Court challenge to the Howard Government's proposed changes to industrial laws.

Rallies were also organised for the Gold Coast, Bundaberg, Gladstone, Rockhampton, Townsville and Cairns.

In Adelaide, the SA Premier Mike Rann told a rally of around 10,000 workers that the State Government will fight the proposed new laws all the way to the High Court. "This is the most systematic attack on the values of Australian people that we've seen since the Second World War," Mr Rann said.

In Perth WA commuters experienced transport disruptions today as the city came to a halt for the Rally. Police estimates put the crowd at 10,000. UnionsWA secretary Dave Robinson told those assembled near the foreshore of the Swan River that it was a historic day. Premier Geoff Gallop, WA Employment Protection Minister John Kobelke and federal Labor industrial relations spokesman Stephen Smith also spoke at the rally.

The government earlier today revealed that Solicitor General Robert Meadows, QC, would lead WA's High Court fight, mounted in conjunction with Queensland and NSW. Mr Kobelke said the action

would seek to save 100 years of cooperative Australian industrial relations based on conciliation and arbitration.

According to the ABC, 4,500 people rallied in the Tasmanian city of Hobart. Unions say 3,000 workers have rallied at Thoroughbred Park in Canberra. In Darwin, nurses, teachers, public servants, construction workers and entire families have turned out to show that not only workers will be affected by the Federal Government's industrial relations reforms. Traffic blocked the roads leading the Fannie Bay Racecourse. Crowds jostled for space to see the satellite fed telecast from the Melbourne rally.

Wellington, NZ also showed solidarity as some 200 people demonstrated outside the Australian Embassy.

Thousands of Australian workers set to rally against IR reform



Melbourne, Australia 150,000 turnout for Protest

Police and union leaders across the country expect big crowds during today's National Community Day of protest against the Federal Government's WorkChoices proposed changes to industrial relations laws.

The Australian Council of Trade

Unions (ACTU) predicts hundreds of thousands of people will demonstrate in Sydney and Melbourne. Protest meetings in other capital cities are expected to attract workers in their tens of thousands. The rallies will take place in 300 regional sites across Australia.

Labor's opposition spokesman on industrial relations, Stephen Smith says, "The more people become aware of the nature of the changes and the detail of the changes, the more they realise how vulnerable they are and the more they want to do something to prevent the changes."

Mark Bethwaite, from Australian Business Ltd, believes most people will go to work as usual. "Because frankly they are not convinced by the scare campaign the ACTU has been running," Mr Bethwaite said.

The Federal Government has been accused of instructing agencies to refuse staff leave to attend the rallies against its IR changes and says it will not be affected by a rally of one person or a 100,000.

The Federal Department of Workplace Relations has issued advice to other departments that employees wanting to attend the National Community Day of Protest should be denied leave.

State and territory leaders intend to mount a High Court challenge to the Federal Government's proposed industrial relations changes.

The ACTU say, "the IR changes are not just an attack on workers – they fundamentally undermine the values that make Australia great. Beneath all the glossy advertising are proposals that will unfairly curtail your rights at work, cut the

amount of time you can spend with family, and erode your job security."

The federal government have spent over fifty million dollars on promoting the radical new changes.

Unions say the changes will make it easier for workers to be sacked; cut take-home pay and reduce minimum standards; change the way minimum wages are set to make them lower; replace the award safety net with just five minimum conditions; restrict access to unions; make it harder for employees to bargain as a group; and reduce the powers of the independent Industrial Relations Commission."

In Melbourne, Australian Education Union's Mary Bluett said the IR legislation "is not the legacy we want to leave our children." About 12,000 public servants, 10,000 building workers and hundreds of nurses are also expected to join the protest, but workers operating road, train, tram and bus services will remain on duty to allow commuters to travel free to the rally.

Sky News estimated the number attending the rally in Melbourne as 175,000.

The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry labelled the rally "a tired union stunt".

Today in History

- 1384 - Jadwiga was crowned "King of Poland", although she was a woman.
- 1532 - Sapa Inca Atahualpa (pictured) was captured by Francisco Pizarro in the Battle of Cajamarca.
- 1885 - Louis Riel, Canadian rebel leader of the Métis and "Father of Manitoba", was executed for high treason.
- 1979 - The first line of the Bucharest Metro was opened in Bucharest, Romania.
- 2002 - Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) was first recorded in Guangdong, China.
- November 16 is International Day for Tolerance; Loy Krathong (Thailand)

Quote of the Day

"From each as they choose, to each as they are chosen." ~ Robert Nozick

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