

Protesters focus sights on

Melbourne could well be the scene of one of the biggest protests in Australia, when the heads of some of the world's richest companies and countries gather at Crown Casino for the World Economic Forum in September. With violent images fresh in the minds of the public from similar forums overseas, the protest movement faces a huge job in convincing the public their protest will be non violent. AMANDA HURLEY reports.

COME September, all eyes will turn to Australia, and it will not be just for the Olympic Games. This side of the Murray River, Melbourne will be host to several major events, including the World Economic Forum meeting, held at the Crown Casino, September 11-13.

Similar meetings of the World Economic Forum - a self-appointed global body which counts among its members the heads of 1000 of the world's richest companies and countries - have attracted much protest internationally by those concerned about the effects of globalisation.

And Melbourne promises to con-

tinue the tradition with a week long protest of its own.

For the past six months, members of trade unions, peak welfare groups, environmental organisations and social justice groups have been meeting to discuss how they will register their disapproval to the actions of the WEF.

One grouping - the S11 Alliance - aims to shut down the meeting by surrounding the Crown Casino to prevent WEF members from attending the conference. Another - Public First - will hold a People's Conference in the days preceding the WEF meeting to discuss alternatives to globalisation. Trade unions plan to down-

tools to stage a stop work meeting on September 12 and other groups, such as Jubilee 2000 are planning community celebrations. Behind the scenes, organisations such as Friends of the Earth and AWOL - the Autonomous Web Of Liberation - have been co-ordinating much of the organisation of the protest. Welfare groups such as the Brotherhood of St Laurence and the Victorian Council of Social Services (VCOSS) have also supported the campaign.

Yet internally, all is not well within the movement, with trade unions already distancing themselves from the S11 Alliance.

Members of each group involved

in the campaign have pledged a commitment to a non-violent protest, but according to Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union secretary, Martin Kingham, the protest needs to be disciplined and well planned.

"As I understand, Trades Hall Council and the organisers of the protest have not been able to agree on a protocol and discipline," he says. "We want to know what their tactics are, but we haven't been able to reach that level of agreement with the S11 Alliance. There are lots of students and activists coming from interstate. If we're mobilising and convening a protest, we've got protocols with the police and we exercise our own discipline. We don't want to be involved in a bloodbath and have the trade unions blamed for it."

However, spokeswoman for the S11 Alliance, Claire Newman, says the popular perception of the protest as being unorganised and radical is wrong.

"While there are a lot of students and lefties involved, there are also a lot of people who feel disaffected by the situation and are keen to have their dissent heard," she says.

"We have a large support base - there are 60 people regularly at the (S11 Alliance) meetings and at least 50 people go to the Trades Hall Council meetings, which includes trade union members and people from the churches and welfare groups. This is a chance for all groups of dissent to show their opposition to this."

Ms Newman stresses the non-violent nature of the protest and says concerns that the protest will be a "bloodbath" are unfounded.

"We're not going to try and bomb the place, we're just planning non-violent direct action. (The numbers of police who will attend the event) is just a waste of money, really. It sets up a dynamic of fear among the protestors."

According to Victoria Police

deputy media spokesman, Kevin Loomes, there will be a strong police presence at the protest to prevent disruption to the WEF meeting.

"The bottom line is that we're working with all participants to make sure the forum goes incident free," he says.

"We respect people's right to demonstrate - that's a democratic right - but we're trying to set protocols so they can demonstrate, but not disrupt the conference."

Much of the media coverage about the WEF meeting has sensationalised the campaign, by drawing parallels with a protest against a World Trade Organisation meeting in Seattle last November.

Those involved in the protest have reacted angrily against such claims, emphasising their right to protest and their commitment to non-violence.

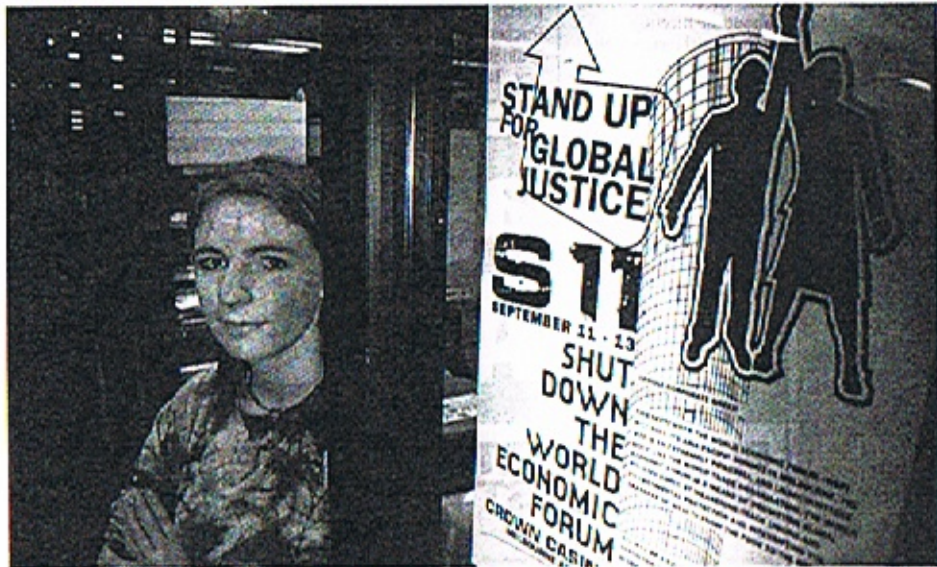
Jubilee 2000 spokeswoman and executive officer of the Good Shepherd Social Justice Network Jacinta Lithgow, says any violence at the protest would cancel out the message the campaign is trying to present.

"The protest is being dismissed as students and activists and rabble, but it's not that at all," she says.

"Contrary to the myths out there lots of ordinary people are involved and will be coming. Everybody knows who is involved in this is so committed to focusing on the message rather than sensationalism that they are forming very strong policies about non violence."

Welfare, environmental and social justice groups are united in their belief that there needs to be a re-think about who benefits from globalisation.

Friends of the Earth Australia national media liaison, Cam Walker, believes the roll-out of globalisation and the freeing up of trade barriers should be halted until its social, environmental and economic impact have been investigated.



S11 Alliance spokeswoman Claire Newman has emphasised the need for non-violent direct action. PICTURE BY DARREN JAMES

Melbourne in September

"It's like a science experiment where you are not testing how well it's going," Mr Walker says.

"This is a social experiment and there is no assurance that it can be reversed. Any forum which is a self-appointed elitist group that is not transparent or democratic does not have a right to direct the future of globalisation. They have no moral mandate. We need to stop the juggernaut for now."

Jubilee 2000's Jacinta Lithgow agrees.

"Essentially, for me, when we've got democratically elected govern-

ments we all share in the responsibility for policy and decision making," she says.

"More and more, those decisions are being made at a global level by corporations who are responsible to their shareholders, not global citizenship. And their decision making process is not transparent and they are not accountable. Of all the things that we are concerned about, it is the lack of transparency and levels of process."

However, the convenors of the WEF say they have moved to a more accountable agenda, with one third

of meetings devoted to social and environmental issues.

"There is a lot of confusion in the community that the World Economic Forum is the World Trade Organisation," Australian Davos Connection chief executive officer, Tom Peddersen, says.

"The World Economic Forum is a policy-making body which brings together people from various views. The director, Claude Smadja, has stated that globalisation as it is now is not necessarily appropriate and this is something that is being talked about."

Mrs Peddersen says that at the Melbourne meeting, delegates will discuss issues as diverse as the economic success of the Asia Pacific region, new developments in biotechnology, Australia's trading relationship with Japan, the partnership between business and governments, globalisation and its impact on the region, and transparency and accountability in the Internet economy.

"(The WEF) has consistently had people involved who are from the sectors outside business," she says.

"There are many members that the Australian people would not know from the environmental and social sectors. I think the information about what the forum is about is not getting out to the press (and the public)."

The conference has been welcomed with open arms by the Premier, Steve Bracks, who attended the WEF annual meeting held in Davos, Switzerland in January.

The September meeting is the Asia/Pacific regional meeting, and up to 1000 people are expected to attend.

Those on the guest list include Prime Minister John Howard, Microsoft head, Bill Gates, BHP managing director, Paul Anderson, and the financial heads from the Philippines, Japan, Hong Kong, New Zealand, Malaysia,



A week of protest

PROTEST against the World Economic Forum begins on Thursday, September 7 with a forum organised by the Australian Council for Overseas Aid.

On Friday, September 8, the Trades Hall Council and ACTU will hold a Trade Union Forum for members, while on Saturday, protestors are encouraged to attend a conference hosted by Public First at 300 Flinders Street, Melbourne.

On Sunday, a public meeting will be held at the Regent Theatre in Collins Street from 12pm, and at its closure about 2.30pm, attendees will join a

community festival, Other Voices, Other Values, staged by Jubilee 2000.

The main protest will kick off bright and early at 7am outside Crown Casino on Monday, September 11, with a rally scheduled to begin at 9am.

On Tuesday, September 12, Trades Hall Council has called a general stop work meeting and protest, which will be held at Northbank opposite the Casino from 10.30am.

A continuous vigil is expected to be held outside the Crown Casino for the three days of the World Economic Forum meeting.



Singapore, China and Vietnam.

The meeting, according to Mr Bracks, has received overwhelming support from Australian business and industry.

"By bringing together up to 1000 delegates from the world's leading businesses, this summit will offer an unparalleled opportunity for Victorian and Australian industry to develop new global business networks," he says.

"It will also enable us to explore new trade and export opportunities and showcase Victoria's strengths as a business partner... The summit itself will produce considerable direct economic benefits to Victoria, with the potential in the longer term to attract billions of dollars of new investment."

However, the Premier's welcome has attracted criticism from those who oppose the meeting, who have called on Mr Bracks to boycott the meeting.

"The majority of people who voted for him were against economic rationalism," S11 Alliance spokesman David Glanz says. "That he's supporting the conference is bizarre."

Not surprisingly, the Premier will not boycott the meeting, but his sup-

port for the World Economic Forum does put him at odds with much of his support base, notably Trades Hall Council and the Australian Council of Trade Unions.

A spokesman for the ACTU, George Wright, says as many as 300,000 jobs have been lost in the manufacturing industry over the past 10 years, due in part to globalisation.

Victorian Council of Social Services (VCOSS) chief executive officer, Dmitry Fifer, says a tenuous link can be drawn between globalisation and a reduction in manufacturing jobs in Victoria, but the main issue is the actions of multi-national companies.

"There are some benefits to globalisation - it can work for and against you," she says.

"We need to be more sophisticated than seeing it as a general evil. The rhetoric is starting to be there, there are people within WEF and WTO who are talking about these issues, but there are other global players who are there and sitting in the audience and letting it wash over them."

"This is a great time for the world to be acting collectively on this issue. We'd be looking for some concrete strategies (from the WEF). We'd like to see more than just words."