

Behind the attack on public schools PRIVATISING EDUCATION

Tom Pearson

With an election looming the Howard Government has launched a vicious attack on Australia's public schools. The Government is hell bent on privatising education and its tirade in the mass media is part of an ongoing program to try to discredit the public system. But the swift comeuppance PM Howard and his ministers received from supporters of public schools has signalled that education will be no soft target in an election.

The Government's attack included a rant against the Australian Education Union (AEU) with accusations that it was "wielding too much power". PM Howard also said public schools were "too politically correct and value-neutral", though he would not give details of just what he meant by this. Ditto Education Minister Brendan Nelson, who failed to define the "Australian values" which he said should be taught in schools.

A pointer may be Nelson's push for the flag to be flown in school grounds and for the singing of the national anthem in schools i.e. the promotion of nationalism. Howard cited two public schools that banned nativity plays at Christmas and another that cancelled an Anzac Day ceremony.

The Government also wants to rank the performance of public schools claiming that it gives parents "choice". Its real aim is to provide a basis to further slash funding to public schools.

The AEU said the Government's offensive was an attempt to distract attention from its disgraceful education funding policies. "The Howard Government has been starving the public education systems of funds for schools, TAFE and universities while giving billions of dollars to private schools", said AEU Federal Secretary Rob Durbridge.

"Some elite schools have had over 200 percent increases in funding from the Commonwealth". The Government is putting two thirds of federal funding for schools into the coffers of private schools, including elite schools such as Geelong Grammar (\$4 million) and Trinity Grammar (\$5.5 million).

Public schools, with 70 percent of the students, receive \$1.7 billion, while private schools with 30 percent of the students receive \$2.9



billion. The AEU warns that as a result the Government is entrenching inequalities and creating a two-tier education system.

"It appears that Mr Howard intends to pursue the privatisation of education in this country over the next four years", said Mr Durbridge.

As far as values are concerned, Howard picked out the banning of a religious play and some Anzac Day activities involving a few public schools. These examples are targeted at particular audiences. They reflect Howard's rejection of the secular nature of public schools, where multiculturalism, tolerance, anti-racist values prevail in both the acceptance of students and the curriculum.

Text books that raise environmental questions, for example greenhouse gases and the sinking of islands in the Pacific; lessons about other faiths than Christianity; the recognition of Indigenous Australians; and peace studies are all an abhorrence to Howard.

These are the values that Howard rejects when he says teachers in public schools enforce "political correctness" and teach "neutral values".

What Howard overlooks or does not realise is that there are also many private schools that do not put on nativity plays or salute the flag on ANZAC day. Many of them even use the same text books as public schools.

Priority Public, a community organisation promoting public education, makes the point that there is little public knowledge about what private schools actually do, as they are by and large allowed to keep their business private.

Indigenous students attend public schools, as do the majority of physically and intellectually disabled students. "Private schools, regardless of what values they may preach, educate the majority of our most advantaged students", said Jane Caro. "It is impossible for private schools to be 'egalitarian', as Howard says. Private schools, by their nature, are exclusive."

Instead it is public schools that accept their responsibility to be egalitarian – and perform small

the 1950s and 1960s, when public school students recited "I honour my God, I serve my Queen, I salute the flag."

Every year on Empire Day, as a primary school student, Howard would have saluted the British Empire and its conquests, and learnt how the Whites Christianised and civilised the natives of British colonies.

It was when at school assemblies the national anthem was sung and the flag was saluted; corporal punishment was policy; cooking classes were compulsory and exclusive for girls, woodwork and metalwork for boys; scripture classes were compulsory for all.

These are the things the President of the NSW Secondary Principals' Council, Chris Bonner, recalled on hearing Howard's "insult" that public schools were too "politically correct".

"No parent has expressed concerns about political correctness to me in my 30 years of teaching", said Mr Bonner. "The Prime Minister's own conservative world view doesn't reflect the world I've known as a principal. It's very strange." ❄

Some private schools have had over 200 percent increases in funding from the Commonwealth

And as far as Nelson's claim that public schools are "hostile to Australia's heritage and values", Priority Public's Jane Caro points out that public schools "willingly and enthusiastically educate every child who comes to their door, regardless of race, religion, ability to pay fees or academic ability."

Furthermore, the majority of

miracles, given the grossly unfair funding system both federal and state governments force on them.

Sickening nostalgia

The values that Howard, Nelson, et al, are harping about involve a sickening nostalgia, a yearning for the past, which is typical of reactionaries. In this case it is for

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People's power and the 21st century

The leaders of the United States often talk about the 21st century being an "American Century" but it is more likely to become an "American nightmare". It will become a century of people's actions and people's power that will transform societies and overthrow capitalism in many more countries.

The break-up of the Soviet Union almost 15 years ago opened the doors to unprecedented attacks on the rights and conditions of the working people throughout the world. It also opened the way to the overthrow of socialist societies in East Europe and then to the wars to break up the state of Yugoslavia. Then followed the US invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, all steps towards the long-held US leadership's objective of world domination.

A savage attack was launched on the rights and working conditions of hundreds of millions of people worldwide and on the public sector. This involves the privatisation of publicly owned enterprises and the undermining of public education and public health in favour of private schools and private companies. Behind the "American Century" is the power and wealth of the transnational corporations.

But this capitalist offensive is only half the story. The wars and the attacks on the working people are bringing counter action and strong opposition.

This was most dramatically shown last year when the world witnessed the unprecedented demonstrations against the war in Iraq. Nothing like it has ever been seen before. The exposure of the US leadership continues with the confirmation that Bush, Blair and Howard lied about Iraqi weapons of mass destruction. Their main justification for the invasion and occupation of Iraq was a lie.

While this expression of people's power did not prevent the invasion it did show that millions of people have woken up to the despicable character of their leaders and that these leaders serve the shoddy profit interests of the armaments, oil and other corporations and not those of the people.

In Australia, in addition to the actions against the Iraq war, there has been a strong movement and many actions against the immoral and racist refugee policy of the Federal Government. The very people who have been turned into refugees by wars in which the Australian Government has joined, are refused refugee status in Australia, a right guaranteed under international law.

There is the stubborn struggle of Australia's Indigenous people, personified at the moment by the refusal of the elected Chairman of ATSIC, Geoff Clarke, to be intimidated by government ministers Ruddock and Vanstone. They are using the situation surrounding Geoff Clarke to wage an all-out attack on ATSIC and the Indigenous people in general.

There are the actions of teachers and students in the defence of public education and against the hike in student fees.

These struggles are all part of the growing people's movements and they will be multiplied many times over in the coming years.

At present, in Australia, they do not challenge the social system of capitalism but as time goes on it will become more widely recognised that bandaid solutions do not go far enough. The real source of the attacks on rights and conditions, the worldwide poverty and the wars that cause so much misery and thousands of deaths is to be found in the system of capitalism and imperialism.

In Latin America the people's struggles have reached a high level. Socialist Cuba has survived more than 40 years of threats, embargoes, attempted assassinations and other covert actions. The people of Venezuela defended the revolutionary government of Hugo Chavez while the people of Brazil have elected a left-progressive government. The people of Colombia continue to wage an armed struggle against fascist-type governments backed by US money and arms.

This is only a small part of the world-wide picture but it gives enormous encouragement to all who are on the side of the people and against the power of the transnational corporations and the despicable governments that they impose.

Rather than the claim of US leaders that the century is theirs, the 21st century will be a century of people's actions and people's power.

PRESS FUND

Over the summer break we received a marvellous group of contributions. These brought the total for 2003 to \$13,005. A great achievement! George Bush's New Year's recommendation for dealing with the USA's spiralling incidence of sexually transmitted diseases is - wait for it - abstinence! And this from the man with the most powerful job in the world! Alas, George, abstinence doth not make the heart grow fonder. If you'd like to help to introduce *real* solutions for dealing with the world's problems (like replacing capitalism with socialism), why not send us something for the Press Fund. This year the Press Fund target has been set at \$14,000. We gratefully acknowledge the following contributions: June Ayres \$50, R G \$100, Marie Lean \$11.30, R A Reed \$100, "Round Figure" \$8.70, Ray Scott \$20. Total for 2003: \$13,005. Larry Gowland, in honour of our union brother John Halfpenny, \$100. J Robson \$30, Bert Appleton \$120, Pio Pagliuca \$20, Paula Bloch \$100. Total this year: \$370.

Fire in Communist Party headquarters

In the early morning of Sunday December 14, our Party building in Sydney suffered a fire which appears to have been deliberately lit. There is no indication of any political motive. Substantial damage was done to the top floor and an attic type structure above the top floor was completely burnt out.

Both the fire brigade and the police acted quickly and the fire was soon put out. Their quick action prevented much more extensive damage. However, all floors suffered water, smoke and soot damage. For a time both the electricity and phones were cut off. A number of computers have been made unusable.

We have been informed that two persons have now been officially charged by the police over the incident and will in due course appear before a magistrate. One of the persons now charged suffered very serious injuries when he jumped from the roof of an adjoining building.

The Guardian and Party staff and other volunteers have worked hard to help clean the building

sufficient to enable *The Guardian* to resume publication and for the Party's work in our headquarters to continue.

We apologise for the one week's delay in publication of *The Guardian* but this is the reason.

Apart from the necessary cleaning and some essential structural repairs such as the replacement of damaged doors and the replacement of one computer, further structural repairs and replacement of equipment are awaiting an OK from our insurance company.

The full restoration of the building will probably take several months. However, this repair work is not likely to greatly restrict the work of either *The Guardian* or Party organisations.

One of the most serious aspects of the fire is the loss of most of the Party's archives which were stored in the attic.

We wish to convey our thanks to those who have assisted in the clean-up and to everyone who rang or otherwise conveyed their support and solidarity at this time. It is much appreciated.



Photos: Ana Pina

Further information will be conveyed to all Party members and supporters and to *Guardian* readers as developments take place.

The situation created by the fire will be considered by a meeting of the Central Committee Executive when it meets on February 14-15. By that time it is hoped that the response by the insurance company and the full extent of the repairs and their cost will be known. ✪



Obituary

Stanley Dingle

1st April 1920 - 6th January 2004

Stan's family did it hard like most working class families during the Depression. As a result he became a life-long, determined and committed activist and supporter of the workers and member of the Communist Party.

Stan's father was sacked from the PMG (now Telstra) at the start of the Depression because of a work injury. Stan grew up in the then working class Melbourne suburb of Middle Park where Stan's father after three years of unemployment found work as the caretaker of the local primary school. As a ten-year-old Stan went with his father to hear Party speakers at Red Square.

Stan had an interest in music and sport, playing for his beloved South Melbourne football club (now the Sydney Swans) at a time when they were winning premierships and supported the West Indians against the capitalist Australians in cricket.

Stan was good at art and drafting but had to take up a carpentry apprenticeship.

During WW2 he enlisted and became a member of the elite Australian Parachute Regiment.

Stan's war experience steeled his commitment and determination to return and struggle for a society and government of the people, not the bosses and imperialists.

There was no housing for returned servicemen and their families and Stan and his wife and daughter were sent to Camp Pell in Melbourne, an ex-army camp to live in tin huts that had no heating, cooking facilities or protection against the burning sun. The poor conditions in this camp resulted finally in the break-up of his marriage.

Stan became actively involved and worked with Doctor Gerry O'Day, in the Party's major campaign for the building of public housing.

At the same time, as a trade unionist, he was involved in the 1946, three-month strike in the Housing Commission. This dispute

won a number of significant conditions in the building industry including inclement weather provisions and smokos.

Stan became a shop steward and organiser with the then Building Workers' Industrial Union (now part of CFMEU) and worked for the Party.

Due to Stan's political activity and work-related injuries he found it difficult to get regular work and when his second wife died he, at 60, became responsible full-time for a young rebellious son.

This was followed a few years later by a stroke that partly incapacitated him.

Through all of these difficulties he remained committed, enthusiastic, and active and was a reliable participant in Party work until a second stroke a few years ago.

Our condolences go to his son Greg, his daughter in law Jane, his grandson Flynn, his sisters and family. ✪

Outrage at hospital under-funding

Andrew Jackson

Apologies from the Minister, the sacking of two senior public servants and "the biggest medical inquiry since the investigation into deep sleep therapy at Chelmsford", will not save NSW public hospitals.

The real problems are clear: chronic budget shortages have led to under-staffing, poor training and equipment shortages in public hospitals. Lack of access to general practitioners who offer bulk billing and underfunding of community services has led to a bull-rush on overcrowded hospital emergency departments.

This situation is inexcusable given the massive budget surpluses achieved by both Federal and State Governments:

The NSW Government proudly produces surplus budgets bloated by billions of dollars of gambling revenue and stamp duty on grossly over-valued real estate.

War, "border protection", and tax cuts take precedence over Medicare in the Federal arena.

Numerous revelations about the ailing NSW public hospital system have been made during the last month. Among them:

Camden and Campbelltown

Massive public outrage was directed at the two Sydney hospitals and the State Government after revelations that the preventable deaths of 19 patients and the further injury of many more were subjected to a cover-up.

The NSW Health Care Complaints Commissioner and the former General Manager of the Macarthur Area Health Service have both been sacked by the State Government, and the Independent

Commission Against Corruption has raided the hospitals and removed files and computers.

The scandal was first brought to public attention by five whistleblower nurses who claim "a whole lot more" than 19 patients have died.

The nurses allege they have been subjected to harassment and threats by hospital administrators and former NSW Health Minister Carl Scully.

Public donations pay wages

Westmead Children's Hospital used \$2.5 million in public donations to pay staff, including cleaners, security guards and even surgeons.

David Say, the Treasurer and 14-year member of the Hospital Board, resigned over the issue. "Short term, I'd like to see the Government immediately repay the money that has been spent from ... donations", said Mr Say.

"... it is unreasonable for the Government to go on putting additional demands on hospitals while simultaneously cutting their effective budgets."

Elderly "clogging up" hospitals

A survey conducted by the Prince of Wales Hospital of 100

patients over the age of 75 who had been admitted to the hospital through their emergency department found that:

- 79 would have been kept out of hospital if they had had earlier access to a GP
- 60 of the patients did not require hospital admission, but were admitted because there were no other services or accommodation able to take them.

• 19 of the remaining 40 who did require hospitalisation would not have needed an ambulance if other transport had been available.

Doctors' Reform Society (DRS) Specialist Geriatrician and author of the report Tuly Rosenfeld said "Every day in a public hospital a bed costs about \$600 – and for \$600 a day we could do an awful lot of alternative things for these people, including paying nurses to go to their home practically all day.

"The terrible stories we are hearing are about an under-resourced system failing to cope", said Tim Woodruff, President of the DRS.

"These problems are not restricted to NSW. The emergency departments of hospitals throughout Australia are feeling the pressure as chronic government under-funding takes its toll.

"More patients will die unnecessarily in public hospitals unless more funding is provided very soon", said Dr Woodruff. ☘

"... it is unreasonable for the Government to go on putting additional demands on hospitals while simultaneously cutting their effective budgets."



Failed "Pacific Solution"

Peter Mac

The Howard Government has acted to stifle revelations about its infamous "Pacific Solution" for asylum seekers.

When 45 Nauru detainees recently went on hunger strike over their incarceration, the Minister for Immigration, Amanda Vanstone, flew to Nauru.

Her objective was concealment. Treatment of the starving strikers was beyond the resources of the Nauru hospital, and the Australian Medical Association was preparing to send a medical team to assess their condition.

The Minister offered Nauru \$30 million in aid, and Nauruan President Rene Harris promptly announced that the AMA visit was "no longer necessary". Harris' rival, Nauruan Finance Minister Kinza Clodumar, hinted broadly that the offer was conditional on Nauru withdrawing the AMA invitation.

The strike highlighted the huge problems facing both the Nauruans and the detainees. The British Phosphate Company plundered Nauru's massive phosphate resources for decades. The ordinary Nauruan people derived little benefit from this industry, which left 80 percent of the island a barren "moonscape"

After mining ceased, the Nauruans won legal compensation for the Island's devastation and impoverishment. However, much of the compensation paid to date has mysteriously disappeared. Nauru now has little arable land or drinking water, and faces huge debts and the threat of rising sea waters.

The "Pacific solution" offered a financial lifeline for the Nauruan government, as well as concealment of the Howard government's asylum seeker treatment.

Australia has paid \$30 million in rent for the camp over two years, gives Nauru \$3 million per annum in aid, and will give another \$2.5 million in compensation for loss of phosphate revenues. But this won't be enough to save the Island.

The Howard Government could offer the Nauruans assisted migration, but this would contravene its own immigration policies. So instead of adopting this more

humane approach, the government is apparently investigating offering the islanders an uninhabited island in return for leaving their ruined homeland!

And where does this leave the detainees?

The hunger strike ended after the government was forced to offer the detainees some grudging assurances for their future. Some of them have been detained for more than two years. Virtually ignored by the mass media, their chances of gaining temporary protection visas are statistically about half those of mainland detainees.

Since the overthrow of the Taliban government, only eight Afghan asylum seekers have received visas. 435 applicants have been refused, of whom 356 are now appealing to the Refugee Review Tribunal.

However, Afghan warlord fighting has increased, and of 3368 boat refugees detained since the Tampa crisis, only 100 have returned (or been returned), including 33 who accepted government-assisted passage. Two have already died, including one killed by Taliban forces. Some 3000 Afghan asylum seeker cases are pending.

But there's hope.

Firstly, the Nauru detainees have lodged a Supreme Court claim of illegal detention. In order to win the case, the government must show that only Nauruans are detaining the refugees. The Government says the camp guards are acting as Nauruan police subject to Nauruan laws, but they're all Australians, paid by the Australian government or Australian companies. President Harris has also pointed out that Nauru's involvement is limited to supplying the land for the camp. The refugees therefore stand a good chance of winning.

Secondly, the federal opposition has at last promised to abolish temporary protection visas. ALP leader Mark Latham has pledged to end the "Pacific solution" and to get 90 percent of asylum claims determined in 90 days.

All this offers the refugees some hope. But of course the best hope of all lies in the struggle to eject the Howard Government from office. ☘

Dangerous lunatics

Tom Pearson

The Bush administration's space program with its bases on the moon and its mission to Mars is more than an election ploy. It is part of a broader strategy to station more military technology and weapons in space and to control space. The symbolism of a mission to the red planet – named after the ancient Roman God of War – is appropriate: George W Bush and his cohorts, including Australian PM John Howard, truly are dangerous warmongering lunatics.

Here on Mother Earth the Howard Government is turning Australia into a US military first-strike launch pad. The latest move in this direction is an agreement for a US training facility at Shoalwater Bay, near Rockhampton.

Shoalwater Bay is the site of annual joint US-Australia military exercises which last year involved 50,000 troops and 300 tanks. Singapore already has a permanent training facility on the site.

Australia is now enmeshed in the US missile program (Star Wars).

Australia's weapons systems technology is compatible and inte-

grated with that of the US. The Howard Government's purchase of long range cruise missiles which can carry nuclear, chemical and biological warheads, is part of this integration.

Such developments have rightly alarmed Australia's neighbours. The acquisition of the technology to operate weapons of mass destruction is clearly not for defence purposes: these are preparations for a first strike, invasion and occupation from Australian soil as part of a US pre-emptive attack, aimed primarily at China.

So, instead of policies of peaceful coexistence and economic relations based on mutual respect and equality, the Howard Government has turned Australia into a regional bully, a belligerent and aggressive thug.

Behind this bully stands a nuclear and military superpower that has embarked on a program of unprecedented militarisation, a militarisation that means more US military bases and troops on the territories of sovereign countries, which in turn will mean more camps for military tests and exercises.

It also means the placement of weapons and sensors in space.

The withdrawal by the US from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty and other agreements aimed at reining in the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction – and at the same time its introduction of new military technology – is a threat to all nations.

Thus, Australia has been locked into a deadly alliance by the Howard Government that is part of the imposition of a world order made by US imperialism at the service of monopoly finance capital.

The dangerous nature of this alliance was underscored earlier this month when Howard announced his government's commitment to the Star Wars program after meeting a meeting in Canberra with the chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Richard Myers. "This is a missile defence system against rogue states", Howard announced.

In this connection it should be recalled that shortly after the attacks on the US in September 2001, Bush spoke of the existence of more than 50 countries he said were "committed to terrorism". Paul Wolfowitz, a leading strategist in the Bush administration, states the objectives bluntly: "The United States must rely on its overwhelming military superiority and use it preventively and unilaterally."

This is what the Howard Government has committed Australia to. ☘

The Howard Government has turned Australia into a regional bully, a belligerent and aggressive thug.

Moomba gas blast – energy debacle continues

Bob Briton

On New Year's Day bleary-eyed revellers in South Australia (SA) woke to hear that a major explosion and fire had shut down Santos' gas plant at Moomba in the far north of the state. Unlike the case of an explosion in 2001 – when Colin James Sutton had died during maintenance work – nobody had been injured this time. Workers quoted in the media put this down to good luck rather than good management and went on to outline major shortcomings in the plant's safety arrangements.

The state's Energy Minister Pat Conlon had been up since 6am dealing with a new crisis in his nightmare portfolio. He had already spent much of 2003 trying to look like a victim of the big corporations behind the scandalous price hike for household electricity in SA. Authorities were soon on the phone telling the top 50 gas users in the state to cease production so that emergency and household supplies could be ensured.

Fortunately, the SEA Gas pipeline linking SA to Victorian supplies had been completed in the week prior to the blast. Those sources were able to replace about four fifths of what is normally drawn from the Moomba plant. Cooler than usual weather meant that gas-driven electricity generators were making only light demands on stocks.

Industry sources claimed that a stretch of three days above 32 degrees C in Adelaide would have caused the air conditioners to be switched on and brought the whole system crashing. Some big

manufacturers like Holden and Mitsubishi had not come back from their Christmas-New year break.

Moomba's NSW customers were able to get their gas from the Gippsland fields in Bass Strait via Eastern Gas Pipeline. The supply situation is still described as "tight".

Victoria was able to satisfy demand by increasing production at Esso's Longford plant. This facility was itself the site of an explosion and fire which claimed the lives of two workers and shut down gas supplies for two weeks in 1998.

What does the future hold?

For a long time Santos was unable to give Pat Conlon a time line for the completion of repairs. Initial reports put it at two weeks. Others said it could be six months. For the moment it seems that it will take until the end of March.

Moomba has partially restored production. It can now deliver about 40 percent of its normal summer production. The frustrated Minister has appointed Hans Ohff to oversee the job of repairing the plant. Ohff was managing director of the Australian Submarine Corporation at the time of the manufacture of the controversial Collins class submarines.

Mr Conlon is considering calls for an inquiry with the powers of a royal commission to investigate the disaster.

Early in the piece the SA Minister contacted his counterparts in Victoria, NSW, the ACT and the Northern Territory to deal with the crisis and, most importantly in these



A 1992 protest against the privatisation of SAGASCO

days of the wild corporate west, to prevent profiteering from the players in the gas industry. Mr. Conlon took a good deal of flack from business quarters for insisting that only large consumers would have to pay higher prices for their gas from retailer Origin Energy. They are not happy, either, that restrictions apply and that "intermittent shortages" are still on the cards.

NSW householders have been given no such assurances. In fact NSW domestic gas bills are set to rise by \$50 this year as a result of the Moomba emergency. The Hunter Valley Gas Users Group and Weston Aluminium claim that they are being charged extortionate prices for their supplies. They claim to be paying \$5.50 a gigajoule for gas from Victoria instead of the usual \$3.50 for the Moomba variety.

"That's a hefty slug", Weston Aluminium's Garbis Simonian told *The Herald Sun*. "It reflects a shortage but one wonders as to the actual prices that are being charged."

Duke Energy, which runs the Victoria NSW pipeline said it had not changed its transport charge of 65c a gigajoule since the fire. Esso denied that it was profiteering. It was still delivering gas at contract prices determined before the crisis. New non-contract prices reflect the cost of supply in the current environment. Nobody, it seems, is making a cent out of the higher prices.

The ministerial task force established to keep corporate behaviour within bounds appears to be toothless. The pipelines connecting the

various eastern states are not regulated. Companies have been on an honour system not to gouge more than they have from the market. Pat Conlon praised TXU, for example, for not charging more for the gas flowing from Victoria to SA. "Frankly, they could have charged whatever they wanted for gas", he said to the *Adelaide Advertiser*.

Industrial companies in affected states are reporting serious problems reaching their usual production levels. Pasmenco says it will have no choice but to cut output from its Port Pirie smelter. Onesteele in Whyalla is at full production but only by using dearer electricity instead of gas for its power needs. Tens of millions of dollars are said to be disappearing from the bottom lines of manufacturing companies.

Law firm Thomson Playford predicts multi-million dollar compensation claims coming before the courts for years to come. The effect on prices of all of this only can only be guessed at. A recent

letter to the editor of the *Advertiser* spoke for the majority of South Australians:

"Remember the good old days when [public utilities] ETSA supplied our electricity, SAGASCO our gas and the E&WS our water? At least you knew the only cost increases were due to your own usage."

Given the crisis-ridden nature of the state's power infrastructure, it is only a matter of time before such sentiments move from being a wistful sigh to an immediate political demand.

Union demands, as set out by the Australian Workers' Union, for legislation like the Major Hazard Facilities standards enacted in Victoria after the Longford tragedy must be met straight away before more lives are lost.

Of course, public ownership and control of the power industry with a large dose of re-regulation could put a halt to market manipulation and failure to maintain regular production and safety standards. ☺

*The Minister praised TXU for not charging more for the gas flowing from Victoria to SA:
"Frankly, they could have charged whatever they wanted for gas."*

One worker's death is too many

The National Occupational Health and Safety Commission (NOHSC) is proposing a "target" of 240 on-the-job deaths per year – a reduction of just 20 percent – by 2012. However, this announcement only covers "sudden" deaths, and does not include the almost 2000 other workers who die each year due to work-related causes.

The NOHSC readily admits there are over 2000 work-related fatalities per year. The majority of these deaths – caused by such occupational diseases as cancer – are not included in the strategy because they are not "compensatable".

With the interests of employers in mind, the focus is not on the death of the worker and the loss to the family – it is about how much

compensation money is paid out.

The NOHSC's media release lays it out: "Notwithstanding a fall of 10 per cent from the previous year, there were still almost 300 work-related compensated fatalities in 2001-2002". (emphasis added)

And on workers' injuries: "Every day in Australia on average 280 workers suffer a work-related injury or disease for which they receive compensation".

However, this modest "20 percent reduction by 2012" target will be achievable almost by default, as federal and state governments introduce laws to strip workers of their compensation rights.

As the NOHSC admits, the only tool it has to punish industries and workplaces which don't meet the

reduction target is "public shame".

Phil Davey, spokesperson for the Construction Forestry and Mining Union, said "The Federal Government has failed to deliver anything beyond platitudes".

Mr Davey said the millions of dollars used to persecute the Construction Union during last year's Cole Commission would have been better spent investigating workers' deaths in the industry.

A "zero-tolerance" target on work-related deaths must be adopted by governments in Australia.

This strategy must receive adequate funding and the NOHSC must be given the teeth to pursue and prosecute negligent companies and their directors. ☺

LABOUR NOTES

WorkSafe Victoria found retailer Clint's Crazy Bargains guilty of failing to provide a safe workplace, and failing to have a safe system of work for employees unpacking pallets in the storeroom. WorkSafe imposed a \$100,000 fine. The worker had been told to unload eight pallets of stock without assistance during a five-hour shift for two days in a row in January 2002. She suffered severe back injury and later required surgery. Acting Secretary of the Victorian Trades Hall Nathan Niven said that negligent employers should be put on notice following the WorkSafe prosecution.

The Australian Education Union is launching a \$1 million plus Federal Election campaign. The "Public Education – It is our Future" campaign will aim to ensure that all political parties have education policies that develop and grow public education systems. The campaign will include TV advertisements highlighting current inequities because of Commonwealth funding to private schools.

The Australian Services Union in the Northern Territory has gained a \$100 a week safety net increase and three additional grades in the award for NT clerical workers. Northern Territory Trades and Labour Council Secretary Lucio Matarazzo said, "This decision is about giving back dignity and better recognition of the worth and skills of thousands of predominately NT women office workers."

The NSW Teachers' Federation postponed a 48-hour strike due to take place on February 11 and 12 after the NSW Industrial Relations Commission made an interim decision. This decision gives teachers fully funded 5.5 percent salary increase on the expiry of the 2000 award without change to award conditions and an offer of three percent per year for two years. Existing bans relating to reporting of student work and other issues will remain pending the outcome of negotiations with the Education Department. The union expects a final decision fully recognising the work value of teachers before the 2004 State Budget is finalised, and undertakings from the Government to fully fund the final decision.

Voice your opposition to the FTA

Anna Pha

As negotiations were due to resume this week in Washington, the sealing of a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between the US and Australia kept running into the obstacles that have existed since it was first proposed. Both governments are under considerable pressure from farming and other groups not to make concessions.

In Australia there is a growing movement against the FTA, which would undermine Australian sovereignty over imports, foreign investment and quarantine regulations; lead to the destruction of the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS); result in the closure of many more farms; assist the privatisation of postal, health, water and other public services; wipe out local content requirements in film and television; see the end of media ownership laws; and seriously damage the economy.

This week is seen by both governments as the last opportunity before the US elections to stitch up a deal.

Prime Minister John Howard has graciously conceded that his "close personal relationship" with

President Bush might not be enough "to triumph over local and sectoral self-interest"! But if it can find a way the Howard Government will sell Australia out.

According to Australian Trade Minister Mark Vaile, the main sticking point is the US refusal to open up to Australian farm imports, which suggests that Australia has acceded to the demands of US corporations on other issues such as quarantine deregulation, pharmaceuticals, media, health, education and water.

The negotiations have been conducted under a veil of secrecy, with the big corporations in the know, but not Parliament or the Australian public.

Nothing the Howard Government has said can be believed.

For example, we are told that the PBS is not on the negotiating table, that it is safe. But in the US, Democrat leaders in the House of Representatives who were briefed on the discussions were so horrified at the plan to hit the PBS that they wrote to Bush urging that US Trade Representative Zoellick withdraw the proposal and replace it with one arrived at through dialogue with Congress.

They expressed concern over the consequences for the US and Australian people. "Key elements of the proposal appear designed to increase drug prices in Australia at a time when the Bush Administration has failed to reduce the drug costs of Americans", the Democrats' letter said.

"Moreover, given that far too many Americans cannot afford access to life-saving or life-prolonging medicines, it is astounding that the United States may seek to impose those shortcomings not only on Australia today but on the rest of the world tomorrow."

"The broad access [to affordable prescription drugs] that Australians currently enjoy would be undoubtedly threatened if prices increased."

The proposed FTA affects all Australians and all aspects of life. It will not go to Parliament for consideration, but Parliament will be expected to pass laws to make our legislation conform to the FTA's contents.

It is still possible that Minister Vaile will totally capitulate to US corporate interests and sign on the dotted line.

The situation is urgent. If you have access to the internet, visit <http://www.nofa.org> and cast a vote against this secretive, undemocratic and very destructive agreement.

Ring, fax, phone or email the office of the Prime Minister and Trade Minister and your local MP and Senators.

The pressure must be maintained. Make your voice heard in opposition to the FTA. ✪



A SMALL AMOUNT OF AUSTRALIAN CONTENT

The negotiations have been conducted under a veil of secrecy, with the big corporations in the know, but not Parliament or the Australian public.

Farewell great warrior

Sheila Suttner

The large crowds that gathered at a memorial service at the Gooniniup sacred site (old Swan Brewery/New Millionaire Apartments) and at Karakatta Cemetry for the burial of a great Aboriginal Warrior, were expressions of the sad note on which the year 2003 drew to a close in Western Australia.

The sudden, unexpected and premature death of Yaluritja Clarrie Isaacs, a tireless activist for the rights of Aboriginal People and oppressed people the world over, drew expressions of sorrow from all over Australia and all over the world. Clarrie had been a great traveller, seeking justice for his own people and sharing his experience and knowledge with First Nation people in the United States and Canada, at the United Nations, Brazil, Mecca, Libya, Baghdad and South Africa.

Nyungah Elder and Custodian of the Busselton and Margaret River Area, Western Australia, Clarrie Isaacs died on November 26, 2003 at the age of 55 in the midst of his Homegrounds where he had been preparing a protest against mining in the Ludlow Tuart forest.

The news brought shock and grief to the many people who loved and admired this man of many talents, endless courage, clever political strategies, quiet dignity and humour; a man who was kind and gentle, who deeply moved those whose lives he touched – a man who engaged his political opponents!

He was absolutely committed to human rights, protection of the environment, improvement of the lives of the Aboriginal people and

exposure of the greed and lies of the rich and powerful who he saw as responsible for the desecration of sacred sites and the perpetuation of racial disharmony in WA.

Clarrie grew up in a large family of 27. Together with his mother and siblings he was involved in the Aboriginal Legal Service and worked in soup kitchens.

Educated at Perth Modern High School, he studied Technical Drawing (a skill he drew on in creating his numerous, ingenious and hard-hitting T-shirts) and Clyde Cameron College, Wodonga where he honed his political skills.

In the '80s Clarrie was active in the trade union movement, serving on the Branch Executive and as a delegate to the State Council of the Federated Miscellaneous Workers Union.

As a radio broadcaster with Golden West Network and 6NR, his humour and political insight moved his supporters to gales of laughter, his opponents to fulminating rage. Nobody could block him out of late-night talk-back radio when he believed the listeners were really listening.

Clarrie was tireless in a variety of human rights causes: pro-Aboriginal, anti-racist, anti-war, pro asylum-seekers and detainees, conservationist, but he will best be remembered for his role in the struggle for the preservation of two sacred sites: Gooniniup, (the Dreaming and home of the Wagyl serpent), and the Rottnest Island Deaths Group.

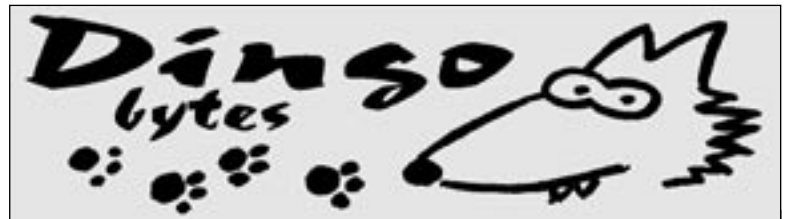
The Group was formed for the preservation and documentation of the graves of Aboriginal prisoners who had died brutally on the

concentration camp for Aboriginal people, the then Rottnest Island Prison – later a holiday resort affordable to most West Australians but (in the '80s) about to be "developed" by Bond Corporation into a playground for the rich and famous.

Every Tuesday, for 14 years, (together with a waxing and waning body of supporters), Clarrie protested against "development" of the brewery, (built in the 1890s over a water source sacred to Nyungah women), into luxury apartments and restaurant. The Nyungah people's wishes were simple: demolish the old buildings and establish a public park to restore the significance of the sacred site.

Clarrie also battled inside courtrooms against the development deal between the Lawrence Government and the rich and powerful Multiplex Construction. The thousands who supported the struggle will long remember his colourful tactics at the riverside site: the painting of park benches in red, black and yellow, the installation of a brewery site mail box (and insistence that Australia Post clear and deliver mail), the tying of the Aboriginal flag at the very top of an enormously tall Norfolk Island pine tree – all designed to keep supporters enthralled and dedicated to continue.

Clarrie was a tireless worker and an inspiring leader, often far from well, sometimes hungry, but always with an infectious and mischievous grin. The memory of this man with a warm smile, a stout heart, a brilliant mind and an Aboriginal flag in his hand will long be cherished by all who knew and loved him. ✪



The announcement by the National Occupational Health and Safety Commission that there will be a program to reduce workplace deaths by one fifth in ten years has rightly been greeted with derision by workers and their unions. The Commission has set the target in its latest report, saying that 297 people died as a result of workplace accidents in the financial year 2001-02, and that 138,810 were injured in that period. The Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union dismissed the numbers, which are based on claims for workers' comp, pointing out that every week a building worker is killed on the job. "The Federal Government has failed to deliver anything beyond platitudes", said the union.

So, PM Howard doesn't like the values being promoted in public schools, accusing them of being "too politically correct" and "incredibly antiseptic about a whole range of things". Let's list briefly the values that have flourished under Little Jonnie and his government: intolerance, commitment to endless war, growing poverty and unemployment, the imprisonment of innocent men women and children in refugee prison camps, widespread corporate corruption, ministerial nepotism...

Last week there was a very upfront cartoon in one of the daily papers following the introduction by the Bush Government of a raft of strict new rules for visitors to the US. It was of the Statue of Liberty holding instead of the torch a sign that said "Piss Off". The rules, part of the reactionary Homeland Security laws, cast a mighty wide net, as aging pop groupie Ian Meldrum found when he lobbied there to interview a band. He was refused entry and ordered to return to Australia because he was not holding the correct visa. Foreign Affairs Minister Alexander Downer, like his Government ever on the lookout for populist opportunities, said, "I'd like to do everything I can to help him." Ah, the humanity.

CAPITALIST HOG OF THE WEEK: is Labor leader Mark Latham. Mark has jumped on the security bandwagon, bringing to an end his brief period as a larrikin flouting conservative convention. He's now endorsing the mandatory detention of asylum seekers and he wants to introduce a photo ID for foreign workers. The card would contain name, nationality, and passport and visa numbers and be linked to the holder's fingerprints, eye and voice characteristics. In announcing the plan he wanted to appear tougher than the Government on "border protection", a bit like state Liberal and Labor when they do their law-and-order beat ups. There are illegal workers here and many of them are being exploited to the hilt by employers. But why has the Labor Party just discovered them? The suspicion is Labor's aim to introduce a national ID card has not been taken off the agenda. You may recall the attempt by the Hawke Government in the 1980s to introduce the Australia Card, which was defeated by grass roots public opposition and protest.

What the "war on terrorism" is really about

Peter Symon

The "war on terrorism", unlike previous wars, is not against any particular nation but against a shadow – terrorism. It is being used, however, against many nations as seen in the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq although not a skerrick of evidence has been brought forward to show that citizens from either of these two countries had any connection to the destruction of the World Trade Centre Towers on 9/11.

The "war on terrorism" is now being used to threaten Syria, Iran, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and others with pre-emptive strikes.

It is also the excuse used to justify the widespread restriction of democratic rights that has taken place in the US, Australia, Britain, Spain and a number of other countries that have joined the "war".

To keep it going and to keep the people ratcheted up with fear and concern, it is necessary to have a constant stream of shadowy threats and the occasional actual act of terrorism.

There has been a constant stream of alleged dangers and over the Christmas-New Year period. The United States was put on high alert although nothing eventuated. Recall the alleged danger from the spread of anthrax.

Under cover of such threats, the US was further militarised and democratic rights curtailed under the so-called Patriot Act. Armed troops patrol the streets in force.

Armed "air marshals" are being put on aircraft and demands placed on other countries that they must do the same if they are to fly into the US. Many other similar measures were implemented, including in Australia. Sydney's New Year fireworks display was also considered to be an opportunity for some terrorist act.

"Terrorism" was the excuse given for the inhumane and criminal incarceration of people at Camp X-ray in Guantanamo, for giving ASIO police state powers, and for many other similar acts in Europe, the US and elsewhere.

When anything happens it is always immediately asserted that al-Qaida or some organisation with an Islamic sounding name is responsible.

It is necessary to recall that al-Qaida is an organisation that was originally created and financed by the US to fight against the Soviet military assistance extended to the then government of Afghanistan.

It has been revealed that the organisation said to have been responsible for the recent bombings in Turkey was created and used by the Turkish Government to fight the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK). The bombings in Turkey came at a sensitive time – when the Turkish parliament was under pressure to provide Turkish troops to help the US out in Iraq.

What shadowy figures behind the scenes financed, armed and commanded those who did the actual bombings?

Have some of these organisations been deliberately used to



provide justification for the invasions and wars that were already planned?

There is now plenty of evidence that the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq were planned by the clique now in power in Washington long before the destruction of the World Trade Centre (WTC).

Consider the timing. To justify the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq which were of high strategic and economic importance to the US, a large scale provocation was necessary if the people of the US and other countries were to be persuaded that it was justified.

The destruction of the WTC and the attack on the Pentagon provided the justification although not a single one of the alleged participants in the WTC bombings came from either Afghanistan or Iraq.

Most of the American people, overwhelmed by the media hype following the atrocity, could not distinguish between Afghanistan

and Iraq on the one hand and Saudi Arabia and Egypt from which the pilots actually came.

Nor could they suspect that their own leaders were complicit in the atrocity. At least US leaders knew that it was about to take place and did nothing to stop it.

There has never been an investigation into the actions of President Bush on the day the destruction of the WTC took place or of the Air Force commander who was responsible for the air protection of Washington and the Pentagon and who did not act to put the designated fighter jets into the sky to intercept the high-jacked planes.

His name is Richard Myers. He was Acting Head of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff at the time. No doubt, for being one of those in the know about September 11, he has been promoted to US Chief of Staff. He recently visited Australia in that capacity.

It is important to ask the question: Who benefits?

And if terrorism is to be looked at objectively, it is clear that the objectives pursued by the US gangsters in power in the White House are being served by the terrorist acts that have taken place.

The powers that be are well aware that the people will quickly tire of the charade so it has to be beefed up continuously by a steady stream of alleged threats and the occasional incident to make it all look real.

With elections in the United States and most likely Australia this year, it would not come as a surprise if there were some significant incident to stampede the people into voting the Bush and Howard Governments back into office. This would enable them proceed with the real wars that they have in mind towards their shared objective of US imperialist world domination. ☛

What shadowy figures behind the scenes financed, armed and commanded those who did the actual bombings?

We finally got our Frankenstein... and he was in a spider hole!

Michael Moore

Thank God Saddam is finally back in American hands! He must have really missed us. Man, he sure looked bad! But, at least he got a free dental exam. That's something most Americans can't get.

America used to like Saddam. We LOVED Saddam. We funded him. We armed him. We helped him gas Iranian troops.

But then he screwed up. He invaded the dictatorship of Kuwait and, in doing so, did the worst thing imaginable – he threatened an even BETTER friend of ours: the dictatorship of Saudi Arabia, and its vast oil reserves. The Bushes and the Saudi royal family were and are close business partners, and Saddam, back in 1990, committed a royal blunder by getting a little too close to their wealthy holdings. Things went downhill for Saddam from there.

But it wasn't always that way. Saddam was our good friend and ally. We supported his regime. It wasn't the first time we had helped a murderer. We liked playing Dr Frankenstein. We created a lot of monsters – the Shah of Iran, Somoza of Nicaragua, Pinochet of Chile – and then we expressed igno-

rance or shock when they ran amok and massacred people. We liked Saddam because he was willing to fight the Ayatollah. So we made sure that he got billions of dollars to purchase weapons. Weapons of mass destruction. That's right, he had them. We should know – we gave them to him!

We allowed and encouraged American corporations to do business with Saddam in the 1980s. That's how he got chemical and biological agents so he could use them in chemical and biological weapons. Here's the list of some of the stuff we sent him (according to a 1994 US Senate report):

- * Bacillus Anthracis, cause of anthrax.

- * Clostridium Botulinum, a source of botulinum toxin.

- * Histoplasma Capsulatum, cause of a disease attacking lungs, brain, spinal cord, and heart.

- * Brucella Melitensis, a bacteria that can damage major organs.

- * Clostridium Perfringens, a highly toxic bacteria causing systemic illness.

- * Clostridium tetani, a highly toxigenic substance.

And here are some of the American corporations who helped to prop Saddam up by doing busi-

ness with him: AT&T, Bechtel, Caterpillar, Dow Chemical, Dupont, Kodak, Hewlett-Packard, and IBM.

We were so cosy with dear old Saddam that we decided to feed him satellite images so he could locate where the Iranian troops were. We pretty much knew how he would use the information, and sure enough, as soon as we sent him the spy photos, he gassed those troops. And we kept quiet. Because he was our friend, and the Iranians were the "enemy." A year after he first gassed the Iranians, we re-established full diplomatic relations with him!

Later he gassed his own people, the Kurds. You would think that would force us to disassociate ourselves from him. Congress tried to impose economic sanctions on Saddam, but the Reagan White House quickly rejected that idea – they wouldn't let anything derail their good buddy Saddam. We had a virtual love fest with this Frankenstein whom we (in part) created.

And, just like the mythical Frankenstein, Saddam eventually spun out of control. He would no longer do what he was told by his master. Saddam had to be caught. And now that he has been brought back from the wilderness, perhaps



Rumsfeld shook hands with his friend Saddam in 1983

he will have something to say about his creators.

Maybe we can learn something... interesting. Maybe Don Rumsfeld could smile and shake Saddam's hand again. Just like he did when he went to see him in 1983.

Maybe we never would have been in the situation we're in if Rumsfeld, Bush, Sr, and company hadn't been so excited back in the '80s about their friendly monster in the desert.

Meanwhile, anybody know where the guy is who killed 3000 people on 9/11? Our other Frankenstein?? Maybe he's in a mouse hole.

So many of our little mon-

sters, so little time before the next election.

Stay strong, Democratic candidates. Quit sounding like a bunch of wusses. These bastards sent us to war on a lie, the killing will not stop, the Arab world hates us with a passion, and we will pay for this out of our pockets for years to come. Nothing that happened today (or in the past nine months) has made us ONE BIT safer in our post-9/11 world. Saddam was never a threat to our national security.

Only our desire to play Dr. Frankenstein dooms us all.

Yours,

Michael Moore

www.michaelmoore.com ☛

The DSP's "final congress" – or is it?

Peter Symon
General Secretary Communist Party of Australia

It may come as a surprise to many that the January 14 issue of *Green Left Weekly* announced that the "final congress" of the Democratic Socialist Party (DSP) was held December 27-30. The DSP has changed its name to Democratic Socialist Perspective, a name no doubt intended to enable it to retain the initials DSP.

At the same time, the DSP is proposing that the Socialist Alliance be transformed "into a single, multi-tendency socialist party". This is part of a process that, we believe, the DSP had in mind when it initiated the Socialist Alliance, that is, to eventually transform the Alliance into a party.

So the DSP will no longer present itself as a party – just a "perspective" – while attempting to transform the Alliance into a party.

Of course, an alliance is a grouping of otherwise independent organisations while a party has a single constitution and a single membership. They are two different organisational structures.

When the Socialist Alliance was first established it was formed by eight independent organisations, the two principle ones being the DSP and the ISO (International Socialist Organisation). When it became clear last year that the DSP wanted to turn the Socialist Alliance into a political party some members of the ISO protested against being gobbled up and left the ISO. Others remained and went along with the plans of the DSP.

Trial

We are told in the *Green Left* article of January 14 that the Socialist Alliance has decided to "participate in the *Green Left Weekly* project on a trial basis".

At present *Green Left Weekly* is published by the Green Left Association and its editorial has always been located at the same address as that for the DSP in Sydney.

The DSP does not seem to be certain whether it has liquidated itself or whether the Socialist Alliance has transformed itself into a party. We are told that the "DSP will continue as an affiliate of the Socialist Alliance. It will seek to integrate into the alliance, while organising as a revolutionary socialist political tendency in it".

Here, indeed, is a muddle! The DSP has held its "final congress" yet will "integrate itself into the alliance" and will remain as an organised tendency in this new multi-tendency party. So has it, (or will it), terminate its separate existence or not? It seems not.

Another clue to what is really

in mind is that Resistance – the youth wing of the DSP – adopted a resolution that "it should remain a revolutionary socialist youth organisation" and not an organisation of the "broader left". So, there is no talk here of Resistance becoming a tendency within the Socialist Alliance (Party).

It seems to be a case of having your cake and eating it too! Perhaps this is just part of an insurance policy to ensure that part of the DSP becomes integrated into the Socialist Alliance (Party) while another part remains at a certain distance.

The *Green Left Weekly* report says that all affiliated groups are urged "to pool their resources and experience and build the Socialist Alliance as a new multi-tendency party ... The DSP resolved to lead this integration by example". One can only assume that the resources of Resistance are not going to be offered up to this new cause.

As readers of *The Guardian* will know, the Communist Party of Australia declined to become part of the Socialist Alliance not only because its early formation was gazumped by the DSP and the ISO but because of its obvious Trotskyist orientation. From the outset it appeared that the ultimate objective was to turn the Alliance into a political party and this seems to be what is now happening.

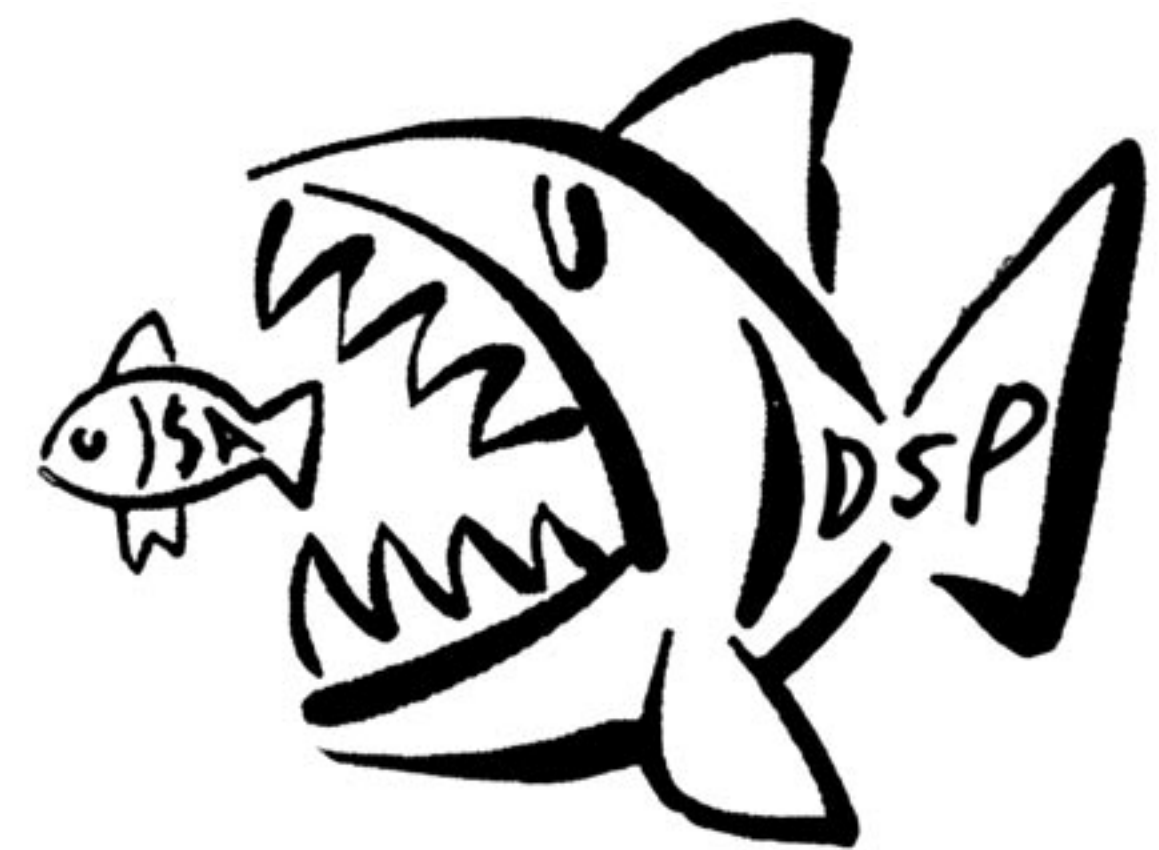
Similar process

The process that has been put in train by the DSP recalls a somewhat similar process that was followed by the former Communist Party of Australia when it was controlled by those who had lost faith in the communist movement and had abandoned their belief in the revolutionary Marxist-Leninist course.

In a step by step process at the end of the 1980s, the former CPA leaders formed a New Left Party which it was supposed would build a "broad" party and would bring into its ranks the many left social democrats in the Labor Party who it was (falsely) supposed would abandon the ALP. However, the dissatisfied members of the ALP stayed where they were and the New Left Party, despite being able to draw on the substantial resources of the former CPA, had a short life of about two years.

Some remaining stalwarts of this venture continued in an organisation known as "Left Connection" but this also did not survive for long. The long standing and respected newspaper of the CPA – *The Tribune* – ceased publication in favour of a new newspaper called *Broadside*. Again, despite considerable money being poured into this venture, it soon folded.

Although comparisons can be



taken too far, the reality is that the liquidation of the former CPA and its newspaper *The Tribune* was a heavy blow to the genuine communist movement in Australia. Many who wanted to contribute to the revolutionary movement in Australia became confused by the rapid changes and by the fact that the New Left Party, Left Connection and *Broadside* did not survive for long.

The present initiative of the DSP (and it is the DSP which is the dominant player in the new political spin) is intended to create a divisive and opposition pole to the communist movement throughout the world. Somewhat similar "multi-tendency" parties are being formed in a number of other countries.

There are several references in the report in *Green Left Weekly* to "united campaigning" but this is contradicted by the references made in the article to the role of Resistance during the demonstrations against the war in Iraq which have been seen by many as divisive.

Those who are familiar with the anti-Iraq war protests will know that a very broadly based coalition, the Walk Against War Coalition, already existed and helped to put 400,000 to 500,000 people on the streets on February 16 (in Sydney), many of whom were young people.

A separate demonstration by students could have been organised by all the organisations that made up the Walk Against the War Coalition.

It appeared to many that

Resistance did not want to share "control" with others despite them being partners in the big demonstrations opposed to the war against Iraq.

The DSP's "final congress" also heard reports on the international situation and international work, work in trade unions and in the peace movement, the Australian economy, etc.

In a report on the international situation, Doug Lorimer is reported as saying in connection with the defeat of the US in Vietnam "it

where possible, without creating an external centre to direct others' work or distorting newer parties and groups".

There is no recognition in this statement to the existence of a number of socialist states, others which are led by communist parties such as Laos and Cambodia, the left front governments in India, or the emerging left progressive governments, particularly in Latin America. It is the responsibility of genuine socialists and communists to support such governments against

*So the DSP will
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was the eventual refusal of these [US] soldiers to fight which ultimately ended the US occupation of Vietnam. The mass anti-war protests back home, which demonstrated the deep unpopularity of the war gave them the confidence to do this".

What about the military defeats inflicted on the US armed forces by the Vietnamese army, government and people? This was the fundamental factor that resulted in the US defeat in Vietnam – which is not to underestimate the anti-Vietnam war movements in the US and elsewhere. But why omit such an important factor?

There is another rather interesting statement of "principles" guiding the DSP in its international work.

The statement speaks of "Being implacably opposed to the ruling class of your country, and fighting to overthrow it, and building a strong united socialist party in your own country as the means to reach that goal". The DSP seems to be not only talking of Australia but other countries as well.

This conclusion is strengthened by reference to "class struggles in other countries" ... and, "helping

the constant imperialist threats of intervention and war. The above unqualified statement could be read as a call to "overthrow" these governments too.

The view that the omission of any such reference to the DSP resolution is not accidental is strengthened by the DSP's support for Gorbachev who was responsible for the breakup of the Soviet Union, support for the separatist forces that resulted in the breakup of Yugoslavia, their support for the fascist Kosovo Liberation Front (KLF), and for Tibetan separatism. The DSP also supports a break-up of the alliance between the ANC, COSATU and the South African Communist Party which plays into the hands of reaction at this point in time.

The call to be "implacably opposed to the ruling class of your country and fighting to overthrow it" could be seen to have a much more far-reaching implication than being just a reference to Australia or capitalist governments.

Perhaps one can describe their position by paraphrasing a monarchist call: "The DSP is dead. Long live the DSP". ☘



Many of those who marched against the war were young people

Party members killed in Baghdad attack

In a dirty attack on one of the Baghdad offices of the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP) last Thursday two Party members were killed and the offices almost totally destroyed.

An urgent statement from the ICP reporting the attack says that "in a spontaneous reaction to this vicious crime, party members and supporters gathered at the place, re-affirming their determination to challenge the forces of terror and reaction and to continue their fight alongside our people and all the forces of good-will to build a secure and stable Iraq, where there is no place for murderers who spill the blood of the innocent".

The Party has called on the authorities to reveal the identity of the killers and hand them over to justice so that they receive proper punishment for their treachery and crime.

UN role

An editorial in the ICP's newspaper *Tareeq al Shaab* supports the call for a bigger role for the United Nations.

It writes that "the meeting held on January 19 between representatives of the Governing Council, the occupation authority and the UN, acquires special significance. It responds to the demands of the majority of Iraqi political forces and the international community, for a more active role by the UN in supervising the ongoing political process in Iraq.

"There is no doubt that giving a bigger role to the UN will be in the interest of our people in the present delicate and difficult phase.

"It is well known that the occupation forces did not want, from the start, to give the UN a central role. Among the most important reasons was the desire to control the progress of the political process and its outcome in accordance with their interests and the objectives they had drawn up for their presence in Iraq.

"There is no doubt that giving a bigger role to the UN will be in the interest of our people in the present delicate and difficult phase. This role would allow the UN to act as a neutral broker that has been missed by the political process since the death of Mr Sergio de Mello, the late special representative of the UN Secretary General. He was killed in an atrocious terrorist act that was carried out by forces hostile to our people and their legitimate desire to end the occupation and build a new regime based on democratic principles.

"To achieve this aim, elections must be conducted under neutral international supervision. This is the role which is assigned mainly to the UN, taking into account its international legitimacy, as well as the accumulated experience and expertise that it has acquired, making it qualified to undertake an active and constructive role in providing the prerequisites for the emergence of an independent national government and ending the occupation of our country", the ICP said.

The editorial says that the demand by Iraqi people and organisations for an active role by the UN



The ICP has always made it clear it wants the US out

has recently increased. Such a commitment will help to lay a firm basis for a state based on law that would ensure the rights of all the Iraqi people and guarantee human rights in accordance with the UN Charter.

US Out!

The Iraqi Communist Party has always made it clear that they want the US troops out and the establishment of an independent and sovereign Iraq.

The ICP is Iraq's largest left party which battled Saddam Hussein's dictatorship and now holds a seat on the US-picked Governing Council. The Party blames Washington for the upsurge in armed resistance and wants UN peacekeepers to replace American troops in the near future.

"If the Americans had listened to us back in May and allowed a national conference to pick a legitimate government, there would never have been this level of instability", said a Party spokesperson recently.

He said that despite the ideological differences between the communists – who still stress their Marxist roots – and the coalition, the two sides have co-operated surprisingly well over the past several months.

Much of this is due to the fact that the communists and other secular parties serve as a political counterbalance to the dominant, but fractious, Sunni and Shiite Muslim groups and the ethnic-based Kurdish parties.

An official of the coalition making up the Governing Council

said "The Communist Party probably has the broadest geographical representation in the country, it's the most national of the parties. We get along fine with them and they've behaved responsibly in terms of the redevelopment of Iraq."

"We are encouraging the masses to get involved in this political process and in the creation of new democratic institutions," said the Party spokesperson.

With a core of committed activists and a growing network of party cells, the Party is re-establishing its influence among workers, farmers and educated professionals. ✪

Messages of solidarity and protest can be sent to the Iraqi Communist Party – fax 0011 44 87 01344121 or email iraq@iraqcp.org

"Separation wall" protests mount Israel extends 30-foot high wall into streets of Jerusalem

Mark Almborg

As cranes lowered segments of a 30-foot-high (over 9 metres) concrete barrier in the streets of Jerusalem on January 12, walling the city off from the adjoining Arab village of Abu Dis, the outcry against Israel's so-called "separation wall" continued to mount.

The wall, which so far runs about 90 miles (145km) along the Israeli border with the West Bank, has been the scene of numerous demonstrations by both Palestinian and Israeli Jewish peace activists over the past several months. Comparing the wall to the racist system of South African apartheid, protestors have sought to halt its construction.

The Israeli government has become increasingly belligerent toward the demonstrators. On December 27, Israeli troops shot and seriously wounded Gil Na'amati as he and others were demonstrating near a segment of the wall near the village of Maskha. A US citizen was slightly injured in the same incident. The shooting of Na'amati, a Jewish activist, caused an uproar in Israel.

The Israeli government says the wall is needed to keep out suicide bombers. The Palestinians, however, say the wall's real purpose is to facilitate a well-planned land grab.

Hanna Amireh, a leader of the Palestinian People's Party, says that the wall amounts to "besieging around 3 million Palestinians" in a tiny area – about six percent – of the West Bank and Gaza Strip where the Arab population is most concentrated.

Speaking at a conference sponsored by the European Left Forum in Cyprus in early December, Amireh said the wall is slated to run for 370 miles, much longer than the 225-mile border between the Palestinian territories and Israel. The discrepancy, he said, is attributable to the wall's "running zigzag deep into the Palestinian territories."

Amireh cited a report by the UN Office for Humanitarian Affairs ("not a Palestinian report", he pointedly remarked), which says the wall will ultimately swallow up about 48 percent of the West Bank, affecting 500,000 Palestinians who live in 136 residential areas.

The current plan calls for a 45-foot-wide strip bounded by a cement wall and metal fences with 757 checkpoints, including 73 military outposts, 58 trenches, 67 road gates, and 464 mounds of rocks to block vehicles. The wall's economic impact on Palestinians will be devastating, Amireh said.

It will prevent many Palestinians

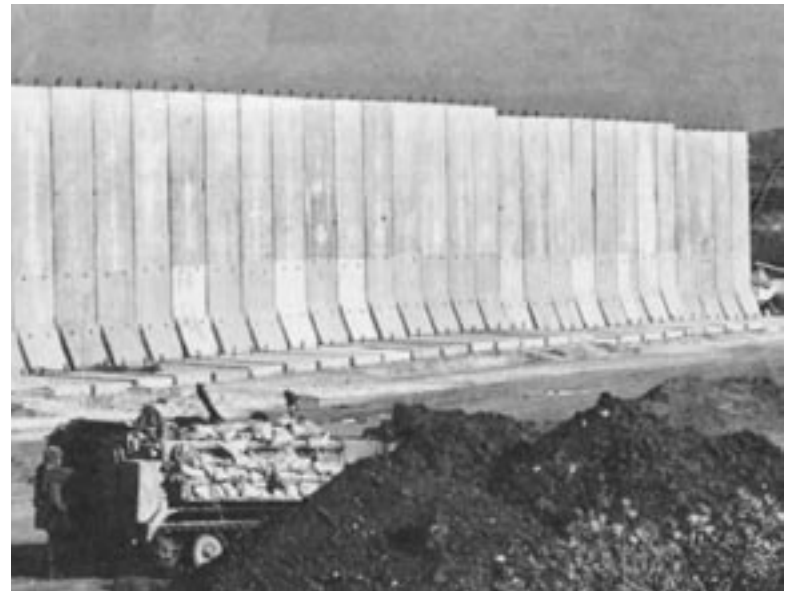
from travelling to their jobs; block access to their fields, water sources, and vital social services; and divide families. Citing another report, this one by Amnesty International, Amireh said the wall will devastate the lives of at least 60 percent of Palestinians who are currently living on less than US\$2 per day.

The Palestinian People's Party has been emphatic in its condemnation of suicide bombings and terrorism against innocent civilians. Amireh said, however, that the separation wall is not intended to stop terrorism. Its main aim is to further Israel's expansionism.

"The government of Ariel Sharon has decided unilaterally, through the use of the wall, to draw up greatly-reduced borders of what could be called a divided and fragmented Palestinian state without sovereignty", he said.

"New facts on the ground will reinforce the expansion of the Israeli settlements and will pave the way for the silent transfer of large numbers of Palestinian citizens" to what Amireh calls a "huge prison" on territory with virtually no resources.

Despite the grimness of such a prospect, Amireh said it is nonetheless possible to defeat the wall. Stopping the building of this wall is possible for several reasons, he said, citing the October vote of



The wall runs deep into Palestinian territories

144 countries in the United Nations condemning the wall, the mounting local and international campaign against it, and the difficulties the Bush administration has in openly defending it before the court of world opinion.

At this point in time, he said, "We believe that confronting the separation wall is the central cause in expressing solidarity with the Palestinian people."

The Palestinian leader also appealed for international help in getting Israeli troops to return to their positions before the most recent Intifada, so that democratic general elections can be held in Palestine in June; to support the Palestinian call for a mutual ceasefire; and to increase solidarity with peace forces in Israel.

People's Weekly World Newspaper, www.pww.org ✪

DPRK calls for new revolutionary offensive

A new year editorial published on January 1 by the three newspapers in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) calls for a "revolutionary offensive on all fronts and the building of a great prosperous and powerful nation".

During last year, says the editorial, "the single-hearted unity with the headquarters of the revolution and our own style state political system were consolidated, our self-supporting national economic potential grew stronger while the socialist cultural life was brought into fuller bloom."

"Our army and people demonstrated heroic stamina by waging a life and death struggle for independence and justice."

The editorial outlines tasks for 2004 to build a great, prosperous and powerful nation on the three fronts of politics and ideology; anti-imperialism and military affairs; and in the economy and science.

Speaking of socialism the editorial says the present situation dictates the necessity to intensify

education in socialism. If all Party members and other working people defend socialism they will win and if they abandon it they will fail. They should put the interests of society and the collective above their own and work to establish the traits of collectivism, of helping one another forward in the whole of society.

The editorial calls for a vigorous struggle to "make rapid progress in the economy and science and technology and thus increase national power in every way!"

Main efforts are to be given to the power, coal and metal industries. Railway transportation is to be revitalised. In light industry, technological upgrading is to be stepped up to increase the output of consumer goods and improve their quality. The reorganisation of farm lands will continue.

We must quickly raise the country's science and technology to world levels, says the editorial.

In a strong rejection of US threats and interference, the editorial calls for top priority to be given

to increasing the country's military muscle. The enemies will suffer inescapable blows if they impose a war of any form upon the DPRK anytime, it warns.

"Last year world peace was severely infringed in the international arena due to the imperialists' high-handedness and aggressive moves. This tragic development has shown that unless the American 'logic of power' is countered with power and national sovereignty, world peace cannot be protected.

"Today, the situation on the Korean peninsula has reached a grave stage due to the Bush administration's hostile policy towards the DPRK. Our principled stand to solve the nuclear issue between the DPRK and the US through negotiations in a peaceful way remains unchanged. But we will meet the tough stance of the US negating and threatening the dignified idea and system of our own fashion with a tougher stance.

"This is a just option of self-defence to defend the country's own sovereignty and right to existence and to ensure peace and stability on the Korean peninsula and in the region."

Last year witnessed tremendous progress in the movement for national reunification says the editorial. "The whole nation should work together to frustrate the anti-peace and anti-reunification moves of the US and the flunkeys and traitors in South Korea who side with the US."

Last August a National Rally for Peace and Reunification was held in Pyongyang and the railways and roads on the east and west coasts were relinked (between the north and south). "This is a noteworthy event in the history of the reunification movement", says the editorial.

"Inter-Korean co-operation and exchange went on without let-up in the face of the interference of outside forces and the vicious obstructive moves of the anti-reunification elements.

"No outside forces can split our nation and anti-Americanism, independence and national co-operation and exchange are the irreversible trends of the times", says the editorial.

"In the future, too, we will develop relations with foreign countries with the ideal of independence, peace and friendship and make vigorous efforts to build a new peaceful and independent world."



Road links have been established between the North and the South

268 days: still no WMDs found in Iraq

Bush, Blair and Howard went to war on the grounds that Iraq possessed stockpiles of weapons of mass destruction and was a threat to world peace. Bush insisted that former Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein had actively pursued dangerous weapons programs right up to the start of the US attack in March.

US President George W Bush: "Had we failed to act, the dictator's weapons of mass destruction programs would continue to this day." (State of the Union Address, January 20, 2004)

Dr David Kay: "I don't think they [WMD] existed."

"What everyone was talking about is stockpiles produced after the end of the last [1991] Gulf War, and I don't think there was a large-scale production program in the '90s."

(David Kay resigned as head of US weapons-search team in Iraq on January 24, 2004)

Spokesperson for British Prime Minister Tony Blair: "It is important people are patient and we let the Iraq Survey Group do its work."

"There is still more work to be done and we await the findings of that but our position is unchanged."

US Secretary of State Colin Powell: It is an "open question" as to whether Iraq had weapons of mass destruction.

"... we don't know yet."

"We had questions that needed to be answered."

"What was it?" he asked. "One hundred tons, 500 tons or zero tons? Was it so many liters of anthrax, 10 times that amount or nothing?"

(January 25, 2004)

Australian Foreign Affairs Minister Alexander Downer: "Whether we'll find any stockpiles or not just remains to be seen."

(January 26, 2004)

"Yes, we are destabilisers"

On his return from the Extraordinary Americas Summit, which ended on January 14 in the Mexican city of Monterrey, Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez asked for Cuba to be included in the inter-American system of nations.

"Why isn't Cuba part of it? Who was consulted to exclude it? It is right that we should ask the countries of the region why Cuba isn't there and not keep quiet when it is attacked in those forums", affirmed the President.

Chávez alluded to the Cuban issue during his report to Parliament on his administration in 2003, transmitted on radio and television.

Responding to recent claims that Cuba and Venezuela are promoting political destabilisation in the region, Hugo Chávez stated that he and Cuban President Fidel Castro are destabilisers, but of hunger and death.

"Yes, we are destabilisers, Cuba and Venezuela, Fidel and Chávez. Fortunately we are not the only ones, each day the destabilisers of death are more", he announced in his message to Congress.

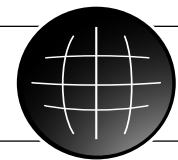
The Venezuelan President added that the integration model between Venezuela and Cuba is being presented as an alternative to the neoliberal model promoted

by the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA).

Chávez reiterated that the neoliberalism coming from the International Monetary Fund is the real political destabilising force in the region, and added that his government is aligned with the struggles of the anti-globalisation movement in search of "equity and justice".



Hugo Chávez



Global briefs

GERMANY: Over 25,000 people rallied in eastern Berlin on January 11 to commemorate the 85th anniversary of the deaths of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht. About 7000 marched through rainy streets to the Friedrichsfelde cemetery, where they joined thousands of others to lay flowers in honour of the co-founders of the German Communist Party. Luxemburg and Liebknecht were killed by far-right militiamen during a failed uprising in Berlin. Their deaths are commemorated on the second Sunday of every January. Some 600 police officers were on hand. They reported eight arrests, with four people charged with minor offences. Marchers carried a wide range of signs, including one advocating a shorter working week, which read: "Longer sleep for the same money".

GEORGIA: Georgia and the US have drafted a five-year plan of military co-operation. The US military has been actively involved in Georgia for years on one-year programs. The US will retain a permanent base there and train and equip troops. Georgia's newly elected President Mikhail Saakashvili welcomed the US troops and demanded that Russia withdraw its forces – a demand backed by the USA, which had offered to pay for part of the operation.

IRAQ: On December 6, US occupation forces attacked the temporary headquarters of the Iraqi Federation of Workers' Trade Unions (IFTU). The IFTU headquarters remain closed. Without giving any reasons, the US troops ransacked and destroyed the IFTU's possessions, took documents and briefly detained and then released members. The IFTU has since met with a member of the Iraqi Governing Council and demanded an apology from the local US military commander responsible for the attack. "Unfortunately, nothing has so far happened", the IFTU said. The IFTU expressed its appreciation to organisations in the international labour movement who sent messages of solidarity.

TURKEY: Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan said that in the event of Iraq's disintegration, Turkey would intervene. Erdogan stated that Iraqi Kurds are trying to take the oil regions under their control and "this should not be allowed. Kurds should be prevented from playing with the fire", Erdogan stated.

USA: Saying 18,000 people die every year because they lack health insurance, federal advisers said the US Government must come up with universal health coverage by 2010.

BRAZIL: Brazil has begun fingerprinting and photographing US visitors on orders of a judge who compared planned US security controls on travellers from Brazil and other nations to Nazi horrors. Federal Judge Julier Sebastiao da Silva was furious at US plans to fingerprint and photograph millions of visitors entering the United States. The US measure does not apply to citizens of 27, mainly European, nations who do not need a visa to enter the United States. "I consider the act absolutely brutal, threatening human rights, violating human dignity, xenophobic and worthy of the worst horrors committed by the Nazis", said the judge.

Letters to the Editor
The Guardian
65 Campbell Street
Surry Hills NSW 2010



email: guardian@cpa.org.au

National Heritage Place Program

\$52 million has been allocated to this program in the 2003 Federal Budget for sites of "natural, historic and indigenous heritage". Until recently no guidelines were available but the PM has now announced that further expenditure on Gallipoli will be part of this program.

There will be many groups and individuals in Australia who question the need to spend more money on Gallipoli which, for some reason, is seen by politicians as "the defining moment of Australian nationhood".

I have been in Gallipoli and found it an excellent, dignified site of definite importance to the Anglo-Australian part of this nation's history. However, let us remember that the whole exercise was a total disaster, bungled by incompetent British Commanders, where thousands fought gallantly, as colonial canon fodder, but to no avail.

To me, as a post-WW2 migrant from Holland, the decision by PM Curtin to withdraw Australian troops from the Middle East to

assist with the defence of Australia, in 1942, was a far greater defining moment for independent Australian nationhood.

Why spend still more money on WW1 monuments, especially outside Australia, while there is so much in Australia itself that has contributed much more to the birth of this multicultural nation than the fiasco at the Dardanelles?

**Klaas Woldring,
Pearl Beach, NSW**

Without values

It was interesting and very disturbing to note Downer's reaction when interviewed about the arrest in Bali of William Brown.

Downer stated that Brown had the presumption of innocence until proven guilty. Yet Downer is unwilling to accord the same presumption of innocence to the prisoners David Hicks and Mamdouh Habib, held in US custody in Cuba.

What utter hypocrisy!

**Steven Katsineris
Hurstbridge, Vic**

What are the ingredients?

I am genuinely interested to know what, precisely, the CPA can learn from El Salvador's FMLN, Venezuela's Bolivarian movement, the Iraqi Communist Party and the Cuban revolution. I am sure there is a veritable mountain of lessons and good examples to emulate but what,

specifically are you referring to?

In your letter that appeared in *The Guardian* of November 26 you say "they successfully utilise an anti-imperialist and socialist/Marxist spirit as a vehicle for challenging the liberal democratic capitalist ideal that the West would like the world to see as the unquestioned model."

You say that they "also confront traditional ideas for socialist revolutionary change that are considered doctrinaire in the West". Further on you point out "they forge links with other progressive forces which have political power (both nationally and internationally)."

Without ever having been to El Salvador, Venezuela, Iraq or Cuba it does seem to me, too, that the movements you refer to are indeed having more success in putting anti-imperialist alternatives. But is what they are putting to their people very different from what the CPA has been advocating for some time with its proposal for a people's government in Australia?

Is the fact that the CPA hasn't strong links with powerful players in the Australian political scene at the moment entirely its own fault? Do you think it is not trying to forge those links? Could any other objective factors be at work in Australia and comparable countries that make it difficult to popularise anti-imperialist ideas?

I think there are such factors but I would be thrilled to find out from you what changes, entirely within the control of the CPA, could be

made to transform it into a truly mass organisation of the type that you mention.

I'm not so sure that adopting a contemptuous attitude towards existing or defunct socialist societies is the magic bullet. In fact I'm not so sure that it is a common thread in the movements you mention. I think you would have profound disagreements with no less a figure than Fidel Castro on the historical importance of Lenin and even the more controversial contribution of Stalin.

So Richard, could you tell me what are the ingredients for this new and improved CPA? Could some optimism and energy on the part of activists be part of the mix?

**John McGarry
Gold Coast, Qld**

Appropriate name

So George Bush wants America to lead man (sic) into the cosmos. Bush, Howard and Blair should blast off together for Mars, the god of war.

A more appropriate destination cannot be imagined!

**Gareth Smith
Byron Bay, NSW**

Reality TV

In Australia we love to see private details of a person's life, little titillations. We love to see some humiliation; some people put under stress and watch them squirm. When will a network bid to run one of our detention centres?

Let's watch the good guard, the bad guard. How long do we have to imprison kids before they go really weird?

Let's watch the guards do those intimate body searches, put a microphone on a "Management Unit", no that won't be necessary, these solitary confinement rooms are already set up with camera surveillance.

How long will it take that young mother to become a pale lifeless doll, curled in the corner of her room?

How long 'til that handsome young man goes blank in the eyes and begins to shake?

We won't have to worry about any Hogan's Heroes funny accents. The guards talk straight Ocker. The whole world will begin to identify this accent!

Anyone who would like to take part needs to first flee from a repressive regime, take a boat journey.

It also helps to have already had some experience of torture and violence. Kids especially welcome, smaller the better.

**Elaine Smith
West Haven, NSW**

Preaching values

Senator McGauran fears the "jettising" of "values" in education. Senator McGauran meant to say "jettisoning". Senator McGauran ought to have remedial lessons in English, before he puts his big foot in his mouth again.

**Denis Kevans
Wentworth Falls, NSW**

Culture & Life

by
Rob Gowland

What price a man on Mars?

So George Bush is taking America to Mars. Not literally of course, more's the pity. But with the help of the rest of the world's scientists, the USA – "the greatest and most powerful country on Earth" – will send a manned expedition to the Red Planet.

Whether they ever get there is hardly important. As Bush's advisers have no doubt told him, just having such a project will enhance his re-election prospects.

It "extends the frontier", opens "new vistas for the human race", and takes voters off this planet, with its regrettable problems, and lifts them into the realm of science fiction. What could possibly be more escapist?

Look what the project to put a man on the moon did for Kennedy? (And compared to a journey to Mars, going to the Moon is just a doddle across the street.)

And look at the other benefits: lots and lots of companies (especially big ones) will gleefully receive huge handouts of government money for all manner of projects (some of them actually relevant to the Mars mission).

Corporate America will indulge in all sorts of skulduggery to secure a Mars Mission research and development contract, for such a contract is – in the words Kerry Packer once used so tellingly to describe a television broadcast licence – a "licence to print money".

Companies in the US aerospace industry, the digital technology industry, the petro-chemical industry and a host of others will leach

off the public purse on behalf of the Mars mission for years.

And since it is all "cutting edge" research and development, no one can say that a company's contribution is too expensive. So they can in effect charge the Mars program whatever they like.

If previous space program development costs are anything to go by, that is exactly what the lucky corporations will do. Bush and Co will bask in the grateful glow from all the companies they will have helped to enrich with Mars Mission handouts.

But with the US already irredeemably in debt and corporate taxation reduced to a joke, the only place money for such lavish handouts can be found is in the few remaining public programs: education, social services, support for cultural and scientific (as opposed to technological) activities.

Already, millions of US people have no health care. Additionally, Bush has cut social services severely and will cut them further.

There is virtually no public housing, public transport is a disgrace, a stay in a public hospital can leave you destitute.

If a Mars Mission will help the Republican cause and enrich the corporate sector, George W Bush will be an enthusiastic mouthpiece for it.

And just think of the possibilities: here is a whole planet, just waiting to be drilled and mined and otherwise exploited. And there is no indigenous population to get in the way, no one to get upset about sacred sites or land rights.

There are no settlers or other locals to complain about pollution, no wildlife freaks worrying about loss of habitat. There aren't even any tourists bleating about "disfiguring mullock heaps" or "despoiled landscapes".

Just lots of lovely minerals there for the taking.

And what if a manned Mars expedition is so expensive that poverty will inevitably spread as a result? That's never stopped the US



corporate sector before, and it won't stop it now!

A "Mission to Mars" will allow the US to walk as tall as if they had just clobbered the hell out of some poorly defended Third World country, but without the tiresomeness of anti-war demonstrations and UN criticisms.

Ha! Just let those left-wing bleeding hearts try to protest against going to Mars. Why, the Mars Mission is in the national interest.

But there will be protests, for poverty is growing apace in the USA. So is homelessness, drug abuse and social breakdown.

Pouring squillions into a trip to Mars will inevitably arouse complaint, no matter how much the spin doctors try to wrap it in the flag.

After all, putting a man on the moon did.

In 1972, black American singer/songwriter Gil-Scott Heron, penned and performed *Whitey on the Moon*,

a bitter, heartfelt complaint from the ghetto against the extravagance of the manned Moon program.

The white Establishment's "mission" for the US to put a man on the moon before the Russians, when millions of Americans still did not even have running water or electricity and lived in rat-infested slums, was rightly seen as obscene.

Dubbed "the father of rap" and an entertainer of the stature of Michael Jackson, Heron is known as the writer of the famous piece *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised*.

In *Whitey on the Moon* he is writing for poor Black Americans, but his song is equally valid for poor whites, Native Americans, Asian Americans or Latinos:

A rat done bit my sister Nell with Whitey on the moon. Her face and arms began to swell and Whitey's on the moon. I can't pay no doctor bills but Whitey's on the moon. Ten years from now I'll be payin' still while

Whitey's on the moon.

The man just upped my rent last night cuz Whitey's on the moon.

No hot water, no toilets, no lights but Whitey's on the moon.

I wonder why he's upp'in me. Cuz Whitey's on the moon? I was already givin' him fifty a week but now Whitey's on the moon.

Taxes takin' my whole damn check, The junkies makin' me a nervous wreck, The price of food is goin' up, And as if all that shit wasn't enough:

A rat done bit my sister Nell with Whitey on the moon. Her face and arms began to swell but Whitey's on the moon. Was all that money I made last year for Whitey on the moon? How come there ain't no money here? Hmm! Whitey's on the moon.

Ya know, I just about had my fill of Whitey on the moon. I think I'll send these doctor bills airmail special... to Whitey on the moon. ☘



Rob Gowland
previews
ABC & SBS
Public Television

Sun February 1 ~
~ Sat February 7

One of my passions is fine photography: I have numerous books of the work of some of the great photographers – Eisenstaedt, Steichen, Karsh, Ylla, Schulthess, Cazneaux, Dupain, and many more.

So I am particularly pleased that the various documentaries (mainly American) which the ABC has grouped together over the next five weeks under the heading *Season of Photography* are of such high quality.

First up is the three-part *American Photography: A Century Of Images* (ABC 2.00pm Sundays). The first episode deals with the development of photography from Kodak's Box Brownie in 1900 to Dorothea Lange's photographic record of the Depression in 1934.

It is followed by a documentary by Ric Burns on the curious life and exquisite work of *Ansel Adams* (ABC 3.00pm Sunday), wizard of the darkroom and wilderness photographer without peer.

There is perhaps too little of Adams' own photos and too much modern movie footage of his beloved Yosemite national park, but it does give you some idea of the awesome beauty of the place and how it affected him so powerfully.

Adams and his contemporary Weston were criticised for photographing trees and mountains when the country was suffering through the Great Depression; other photographers (like Lange) put their talents at the service of the struggle for a New Deal, but Adams would have

been an inferior photographer of poverty and actuality.

His forte was revealing the beauty of the natural world through the play of light and shadow, and his work led to the conservation of vast tracts of wilderness as national parks.

Fifty million years ago evolution produced a very effective design: the rhino. Strong, fast, capable of rapid acceleration, with extraordinarily sensitive hearing and an acute sense of smell, it has few natural predators.

But, as *Rhinos: Built To Last?* (ABC 7.30pm Sunday) shows, human greed and the willingness of profit-makers to exploit and perpetuate human ignorance means that in less than a quarter of a century 97 percent of all rhinos have been lost.

While rhino horn continues to be marketed as an aphrodisiac the animal is in danger of extinction. Nevertheless the program shows the efforts being made to try to save this prehistoric giant for the future.

The documentary series *Seven Up* followed a group of seven year old children, interviewing them every seven years thereafter. It proved popular and spawned a few imitations, including here in Australia.

Now the director Michael Apter (*Gorillas in the Mist*, *Coal Miner's Daughter*) has taken the idea and applied it to the institution of marriage in the USA, in *Married in America* (SBS 8.30pm Sunday).

Beginning with nine soon-to-be-wed couples representing a variety of cultures, ethnicities, religions and economic backgrounds, Apter will return to them every two years for a decade to see how their relationships and views on marriage change.

With half of all US marriages ending in divorce, a lot of Apter's follow-ups are expected to explore what it means to be an "ex".

Nevertheless, if you can last the distance, it should be interesting.

Animated cartoons are not merely comic strips that move. Disney understood this, maintaining completely separate production units to write and design his cartoons and his comic books.

Lee Mendelson and Bill



A documentary that makes you angry *Land Of The Morning Star*

Melendez, who make the *Charley Brown Specials*, based on the *Peanuts* comic strips by Charles M Schulz, including this week's *Lucy Must Be Traded* (ABC 4.35pm Monday), have never understood it. They meticulously animate the strips, using the words in the former speech balloons as dialogue, and the result is, well, dull.

The possibilities inherent in the animated film are not pursued while the surreal logic of the four-panel comic strip is dissipated on TV. Neither fish nor fowl, they are a great disappointment considering the delight of the original strips.

In the 1960's, helping the anti-colonialist Sukarno Government of Indonesia to wrest West Papua, at that time the colony of Netherlands New Guinea, from the Dutch seemed the progressive thing to do. But, as the excellent Film Australia production *Land Of The Morning Star* (ABC 8.30pm Monday) shows, it actually scuttled West Papua's progress towards independence.

Determined to prevent Indonesia, now the world's fourth most populous country, from "falling to Communism", US imperialism

co-operated with Indonesian capitalism's own imperialist ambitions to ensure their permanent control over West Papua.

The Dutch had a timetable for Papuan independence within a decade. Indonesia made Flying the West Papuan Morning Star flag or advocating independence into crimes, harshly suppressed by the Indonesian military.

Today, if transmigration (a more subtle form of ethnic cleansing) continues, the indigenous people of West Papua will soon be a minority in their own country.

Meanwhile, inevitable inter-imperialist rivalry means that, as armed resistance continues and Indonesia jails student activists for 20-year stretches, Indonesia and the USA now struggle with each other for control of the giant Freeport gold and copper mine and the undoubted mineral wealth of the rest of the country.

Written and directed by PNG-born Mark Worth, *Land Of The Morning Star* is that rare thing: a documentary that can make you angry at the injustice it shows. It exposes the Australian Government's less than noble involvement in the sorry story, but lack of a class perspective means that the program over emphasises nationalism while economic reasons are too often ignored.

But its eyewitness accounts and extraordinary archival footage are very interesting, and the program provides a first rate introduction to a colonialist crime and incipient – and largely neglected – national liberation struggle that is taking place on our very doorstep.

Consider this: every five minutes, somewhere in the world, a woman dies as the result of an illegal and unsafe abortion.

Abortion Ship, on *Cutting Edge* (SBS 8.30pm Tuesday), recounts the battle between a shipload of Dutch feminists trying to provide Polish women with access to an abortion clinic, and fundamentalist Polish Catholics supported by skin-heads and young fascists determined to stop them.

In the end, a few Polish women get to the seagoing clinic, but the quixotic expedition is largely a bust, in the face of the reactionary, clerical-dominated regime that rules Poland today.

If you despair of the bed-hopping by drug-addicted police in *The Bill* and hanker for a straightforward "police procedural", you should catch this week's episode of the Scottish cop show *Taggart* (ABC 8.30pm Friday).

The ABC is advertising this episode, *A Fistful Of Chips*, as a "new episode" but it was made in 1999, and is new only to the ABC, having previously been seen on Channel Seven.

Running them out of sequence has the unfortunate result that the head of the team, who was killed several episodes ago, is back alive and well and heading the investigation, which takes a little getting used to.

Nevertheless, this is a good cop show, tightly shot and energetically edited with a good script. And the seriously compromising situation one of the detectives carelessly gets himself into wouldn't even raise an eyebrow at Sun Hill. ☺

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Fax: (02) 9281 5795
Email: guardian@cpa.org.au

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Parmalat black hole

Scandal on a global scale with consequences for Australia

Bob Briton

The spin doctors of capitalism would love to pass the Parmalat scandal off as a crisis that could only happen in Italy. After all, Italy gave the world Machiavelli, the mafia and institutions like the P2 Lodge – names now synonymous with scheming, secretiveness and shady dealing. The Parmalat debacle would conveniently fit this heritage.

However, Parmalat Finanziaria SpA is only one of the most recent collapses of corporate giants previously fêted as success stories of the globalised economy. It follows a pattern laid down by the likes of US heavyweights Enron and World.Com and, closer to home, HIH. Furthermore, it appears that other big outfits are set to join it at the brink of oblivion.

Swiss-based Adecco, the largest player in the world labour hire industry this month delayed the publication of its annual results for 2003 due to "material weaknesses in internal controls in the company's North American operations". Adecco has worldwide sales of about A\$25 billion. Its failure would be the equivalent of an IBM or Microsoft going under.

In this climate the OECD published proposals to tighten up the way companies are run. If adhered to, the OECD's non-binding proposals would improve the quality of market information provided by companies, protect whistleblowers and increase the power of shareholders over boards.

Parmalat's difficulties became world famous when the company filed with Italian authorities for bankruptcy protection on December 24 last year. The company had defaulted on a US\$185 million bond payment in mid-November, prompting auditors to look more closely at company accounts.

It turns out that some 38 per cent of Parmalat's assets were supposedly held in the name of a subsidiary in an account with the Bank of America on the Cayman Islands. However, a note on Bank of America letterhead claiming the existence of a US\$4.9 billion nest-egg proved to be a forgery. The whole truth behind Parmalat's

fall is still to be unearthed from the company's labyrinthine records.

Information gathered from raids on company and bank offices and during interviews with company heavyweights has helped authorities to piece together at least part of the lurid story. It seems that there is a US\$10 billion hole in the company's accounts and it will be up to government-appointed administrator Enrico Bondi to find it and, if possible, recommend a way out of the current predicament.

Company founder Calisto Tanzi has fallen from grace. He is one of 10 company representatives being held by authorities. Once praised for his generosity to projects like the restoration of Parma's 11th century basilica, various Christian charities in Central and South America and his hometown's soccer team and respected for his connections among government and Vatican elites, he is now a pariah.

Tanzi faces charges of fraud, false accounting and conspiracy. His application to be released from Milan's San Vittore prison and kept under house arrest was turned down. Administrator Enrico Bondi saw to it that his son Stefano was removed from the boards of Parmalat and AC Parma.

According to the prosecutors, Tanzi has admitted to diverting up to US\$640 million from Parmalat to his family's tourism business to cover losses. His wife, Donatella Alinovi, has been arrested and two money orders worth about a million Euros in her possession were confiscated.

Parmalat's former finance director and author of a textbook on business finance, Fausto Tonna, claims that he only ever followed Tanzi's orders. "Stainless Fausto" told a gathering of curious journalists, "I wish you and your families a slow and painful death" when asked about his role in Parmalat's demise.

Tanzi claims he is the victim of bad advice. He told prosecutors that the head of Capitalia (formerly Banca di Roma) had pressured him into buying the dairy company Eurolat from the Cirio group five years ago and a Sicilian mineral water and soft drink company two years ago – investments that later went bad.

Signor Tanzi conveniently leaves out the masses of "creative" accounting done for him by the agencies of finance capital. For years the Bank of Italy, the stock market's watchdog Consob, co-operating banks like the Bank of America, Citicorp and the Deutsche Bank, other corporations and auditing firms like Grant Thornton and Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu apparently sat quietly by while Parmalat carried on its doubtful business.

Banks turn blind eye

Parmalat used derivatives (a form of gambling in which it is possible to lose more than you bet) and other complex financial transactions to disguise its financial situation. It did this through investment banks like Citicorp and Merrill Lynch. In 1999 Citicorp made an "investment" of US\$146 million in the Italian food giant through a subsidiary called Buconero LLC ["Buconero" is Italian for "black hole"].

This perfectly legal transaction helped hide the company's indebtedness by showing loans as investments. Company managers have revealed that Parmalat used a web of "shell" or empty companies in tax havens and forged documents to cover up losses and support bond issues.

The shockwaves from the collapse of Parmalat have been felt all over the world. Brazil's largest flour milling concern, Moinho Pacifico, has not seen any payment for its supplies to Parmalat since December 15.

In Australia, Parmalat had bought the Pauls concern for \$A460 million. Its products account for 19 per cent of the milk sold in the country and 37 per cent of sales in Victoria. If the Australian subsidiary were sold to market rival National Foods, the buyer would control over 80 per cent of Victorian milk sales.

Should the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission prevent the takeover, Coca Cola Amatil, Wesfarmers, Frontera and Murray Goulburn Cooperative are reported to be interested.

Meanwhile, corporate big-wigs all over the world are bracing themselves for the embarrassment that will flow from the Parmalat investigations. Sacrificial lambs will be prepared according to the time-honoured tradition. One senior aide has already apparently committed suicide.

Calisto Tanzi, himself, might live to fight another day. His billionaire Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi last year succeeded in having false accounting reduced from a felony to a misdemeanour. ✪



A protest by dairy farmers at Parmalat's offices in Italy

Corporations blamed for mad cow disease

Todd Tollefson

SEATTLE: By now, pretty much everyone in the United States has heard of the Holstein from Mabton, Washington State, found to be infected with bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE), better known as "mad cow disease". What people may not know is how this disease that devastated the British beef industry in the '90s has been allowed to spread to Washington State.

After all, don't we have governmental agencies set up to protect our food, such as the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA)? Yes, we do have these agencies, but anyone who has wondered what ill-effects the push for "less government" has gotten us need look no further.

Along with the defunding of these government departments, corporate greed in the US\$180 billion US beef industry has helped create a mad cow crisis in our country. The practice of feeding a species its own dead – forced "cow cannibalism" if you will – has been shown to be one of the root causes of BSE.

The government has no basis for claiming that the 1997 FDA ban on feeding cow slaughterhouse remains to other cows, the most common transmission path, will prevent spread of the disease. The agency's own survey found 25 percent of feed plants out of compliance. In fact, the Mabton Holstein was born after the ban.

The Bush administration should bear much of the responsibility for this outbreak. As of yet, it has not acted with any significant corrective measures. "The Bush administration had an opportunity to avoid this situation, and to save millions and millions of dollars for the beef industry in this country", said presidential candidate Howard Dean.

Presidential contender, Democrat Rep Dennis Kucinich, who, incidentally, is a vegetarian, has devoted a web page to mad cow disease which states, "Last year, the USDA tested only 19,990 cattle believed to be at risk for mad cow

disease, out of a population of about 96 million or one out of every 5000 cattle. By contrast, in Europe every single animal above a given age gets tested for this fatal brain-wasting disease (one out of every four cattle)."

Kucinich proposes seven new steps to help make meat safer. All of these measures would enhance public health but would also cut into the meatpacking industry's fat corporate profits. Hence the resistance.

Back in 1998, John Stauber and Sheldon Rampton wrote a book titled, *Mad Cow USA: Could the Nightmare Happen Here?* In an interview shortly thereafter, Stauber said, "While the USDA and FDA are supposed to be protecting US consumers from the sorts of dangers we've been discussing, a central function of theirs is to promote sales for the meat and dairy industries."

The Senate approved language last November that would have banned the slaughtering of downed animals for human food, but House Republican leaders dropped it from a final spending bill. On the last day of 2003, the USDA put a ban on specified risk materials in the human food supply, but this applies to animals 30 months or older, despite the fact that several cattle found to harbor the disease were younger than 24 months of age.

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Communist Party of Australia

Central Committee:
General Secretary: Peter Symon
President: Hannah Middleton
Australian Marxist Review:
Executive Editor: Hannah Middleton
65 Campbell St, Surry Hills, 2010
Ph: (02) 9212 6855 Fax: (02) 92815795
Sydney District Committee:
Rob Gowland, 65 Campbell St,
Surry Hills 2010 Phone (02) 9212 6855
Newcastle Branch: 303 Hunter St
Phone: ah (02) 4926 1752

Wollongong Branch:
Leanne Lindsay
PO Box 276 Corrimal 2518
Riverina: Geoff Lawler
PO Box 1016 Wagga 2650
Phone: (02) 6921 4316
Fax: (02) 6921 6873
Victorian State Committee:
Andrew Irving
PO Box 3 Room 0
Trades Hall Lygon St Carlton South 3053
Ph: (03) 9639 1550 Fax: (03) 9639 4199

Brisbane Branch:
David Matters
PO Box 2148 Salisbury East 4107
Phone: (07) 3398 9623
South Australian State Committee:
Marie Lean
Room 5, 1st floor, 149 Flinders St,
Adelaide 5000 Ph: (08) 8232 8200
West Australian Branch:
Vic Williams
5B Jemerson St Willagee Perth 6156
Phone: (08) 9337 1074



Website: <http://www.cpa.org.au> Email: cpa@cpa.org.au