

Tied to US war plans

In a speech last week to the Lowy Institute (see footnote) Alexander Downer, Australia's Foreign Minister, once again made clear the Howard Government's total commitment to follow the war-mongering policies of the US Bush administration. Downer used the occasion to justify the Howard Government's support for the United States' so-called "missile defence system" and to assure the audience of his Government's commitment to keeping Australia tied to the global aspirations of the USA.

He took up the issue of the alleged proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), completely ignoring the fact that it is the US and Britain that have by far the largest stockpiles of WMD and have used them in the bombing of Yugoslavia and the invasion and occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq. The possession of nuclear weapons by Israel is once again completely ignored.

Those nations labelled by the US as "rogue states" – Libya, Syria, Iran and North Korea – were Downer's immediate targets but he widened the field to include any country that might be using nuclear energy for power generation purposes.

Downer also used the speech as part of his Government's attempt to justify claims by Bush, Blair and Howard about Iraq's WMD stockpiles, claims that have now been exposed as lies. Downer repeated the assertion that "Saddam Hussein continued to pursue weapons of mass destruction and that he was actively concealing these efforts from UN inspectors."

UN inspectors found nothing prior to the war; nor have the hand-picked American team come up with any evidence. It is almost 300 days since the official end of the conflict and no weapons of mass destruction have been found.

Downer said that "the status-quo of non-proliferation measures is unacceptable" and that "action is needed".

He called for "new thinking" and illustrated what he meant by declaring that "the challenge is to

go beyond the constraints imposed by consensus decision making to lift the standards of compliance and enforcement in these regimes.

"We want a stronger Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty ... to uncover the nuclear cheats...", Downer declared, in the face of the Bush administration's abandonment of all treaties aimed at reducing the world's nuclear weapons.

The Howard Government, in doing the bidding of the US, is demanding that even the development of the use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes is an "unacceptable risk" – unless, of course, it is by the US or a close ally.

"We need to be assured that the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty's peaceful nuclear energy provisions are not abused to acquire the technical basis for a nuclear weapons program."

The Australian Government is to "intensify efforts" to "ensure that exports of the most sensitive nuclear technologies cannot contribute to weapons programs". This would "require states to criminalise proliferation". This is not out of concern for health and safety or for the environment, but rather to ensure the US's global domination as a single super power.

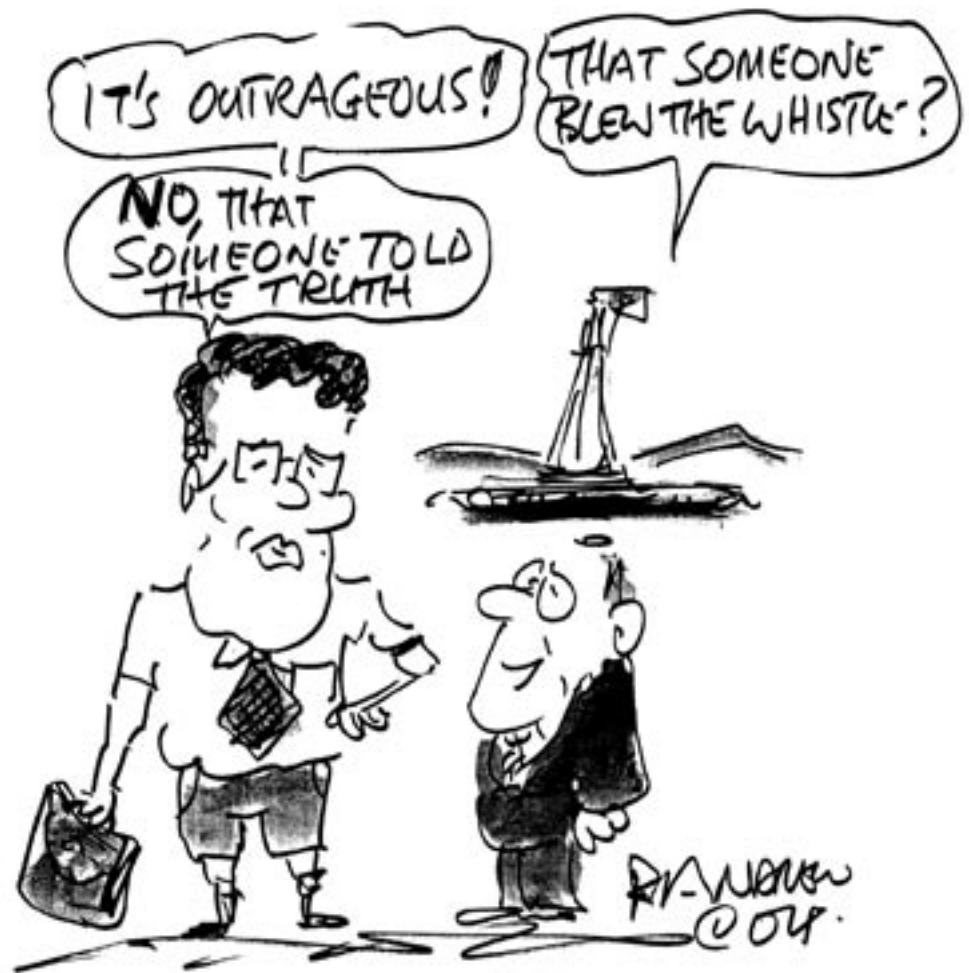
Obviously this is to include technologies that are intended to be used for the production of nuclear power. Many countries, particularly third world countries that do not have coal or oil resources, have turned to nuclear energy for their industrial development.

Arms race

Downer claims the missile defence system would protect people and defence personnel from missile attack and said it was "unreasonable to deny the United States – and its allies – the right to defend its cities against ballistic missile attack".

Downer obscures the real reason for the "missile defence system" which is intended to provide an umbrella under which the US can rain nuclear missiles of its own on the cities and towns of other countries.

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US coup in Haiti

As *The Guardian* goes to press a number of sources have corroborated claims that Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide did not step down voluntarily but was kidnapped and taken by force to the Central African Republic. The kidnapping was part of a US-orchestrated coup said a member of the US Congress, Maxine Waters.

In a call Waters received from Aristide in the early hours of the morning – from what Aristide believed was the Central African Republic – he said that he had been kidnapped and was surrounded by military personnel. She said he had been threatened by US diplomats that if he did not leave Haiti, paramilitary leader Guy Philippe would storm the Presidential Palace and Aristide would be killed.

A close Aristide family friend in the US, Randall Robinson, also received a call from the Haitian President in the early hours of the morning. Robinson said that during the call, made from a cell phone that had been smuggled to him, Aristide "emphatically denied" that he had resigned, "He did not resign. He was abducted by the United States in the commission of a coup."

In an interview with the organisation Democracy Now, Waters said Aristide was anxious to get the message out so that people would understand what was happening. The US diplomats had warned him, "You must leave NOW!" They said that the right-wing paramilitaries were coming to Port Au Prince with the US marines and that he and many Haitians would be killed.

"He did not resign", stressed Waters. "He said he was forced out, that the coup was completed."

See page 9 for background information on Haiti.

It is a palpable lie to claim that it is a "defence system" when it is part of the total first-strike war strategy of the United States.

The Guardian

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March 3, 2004

Caught again

Both Tony Blair and Alexander Downer became very petulant when Clare Short, a former cabinet minister in the Blair Government, spilt the beans over the spying by British and American "security" forces of the office of the UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan in New York. That they spied on the UN offices of the representatives of other countries has not been mentioned by the media in Australia. (See article page 8)

The former leader of a UN weapons inspector team, the Australian Richard Butler, has also declared that his office was being bugged and that he went to the UN canteen if he wanted to have a confidential discussion.

Tony Blair declared that Clare Short's action was "deeply irresponsible" while Downer went even further declaring angrily that she had made a "complete fool of herself". He refused to confirm that international law had been breached claiming it was an "operational matter".

These foremost leaders of the capitalist world repeatedly declare that they stand for the "rule of law", yet in this matter and in the invasion of Iraq they violated the international rule of law. The offices of the United Nations are inviolable and this has been accepted by all countries that are members of the UN. Yet with complete contempt for their obligations and commitments they have invaded the privacy of UN offices when it suited them.

The feeble and dishonest defence of both Blair and Downer was to declare that they never comment on "security" operations, disregarding the fact that in the lead-up to the invasion of Iraq and on many occasions since then, Bush, Blair, Howard, Downer and a number of others made full use of what they claimed to be the assertions of their security organisations about Iraq's alleged weapons of mass destruction. They have in fact hidden behind the claims of their security organisations to justify their monstrous and illegal invasion of Iraq.

It is now almost one year since the invasion of Iraq and no weapons of mass destruction have been found. The US-appointed weapons inspector David Kay has declared that "we all got it wrong", but none of the leaders of the invading nations are prepared to come clean.

Downer still refuses to accept what is patently obvious to any observer, that Iraq did not have any weapons of mass destruction at the time of the invasion and that what the Iraqi authorities said at the time was the truth.

But this is not all. Claims that the Bush administration had been warned about or actually knew about the impending attack on the World Trade Centre in New York on September 11, 2001 continue to surface.

Some of the families of the victims of those who lost their lives in the WTC are now suing the US Government and are raising serious questions about the involvement of the Government which failed to act at the critical moment of the attack. (see article page 9)

It was following the 9/11 event that the "war on terrorism" was launched. It is a diabolically clever device by which the United States and its allies find justification for attacking militarily or intervening in the affairs of any country deemed to be a "rogue state", a "failed state" or one that is alleged to be harbouring "terrorists" or is run by "bad guys".

The actions of the US, Britain, Australia and some of the other countries that have signed up for the campaign against terrorism, have resulted not in less such attacks but more. The simple reason is that their campaign has nothing to do with overcoming terrorism and its causes in poverty and oppression. It is aimed at interfering in the affairs of other countries and imposing their military, economic and political control on these countries.

The leaders of the capitalist and imperialist countries are more and more resorting to gangster tactics. They are personally devoid of any honesty, integrity or morality. Let us say it loud and clear. This applies specifically to Howard, Downer, Blair, Bush, Powell and their hangers-on. If there is ever to be a peaceful world they must be thrown out, and the sooner the better.

PRESS FUND

So the British Government spied on the United Nations prior to Iraq War! It just goes to show you shouldn't reject conspiracy theories out of hand. At *The Guardian* we like to play our part in revealing information about such matters, and to present it from the point of view of the world's working people. If you agree with this aim, and enjoy what we bring you, you can help us by making a contribution to the Press Fund for the next issue. Our sincere thanks go to the following for their generous contributions this week:

June Ayres \$10, J Hale \$27, "Round Figure" \$13, Betty Stewart \$70.

This week's total: \$120. Progressive total: \$2280.

International Women's Day The Rate for the Job

Phyllis Johnson

The Communist newspaper *The Guardian* has kept the spirit of International Women's Day (IWD) alive in articles, photographs, greeting cards and meetings to advance the causes of women's struggle for equality and status.

At the first Australian celebration of IWD in the Sydney's Domain in 1928, a member of the Central Committee of the CPA, Edna Nelson dealt with equal pay. Justice Higgins had decided that women would only receive 54 per cent of the male wage.

I was then 10 years old.

I grew up in a community well aware of the ills and breakdown of capitalist society – the 1930 Depression, dole queues, hungry and unemployed men waited for a bowl of soup, food handouts, without clothing or warm blankets.

Children wanting one penny or one halfpenny would be told, in a singsong voice, "Wait until daddy comes home, daddy's got money and mummy's got none".

My father was on the dole.

He had no money either and in the grandmother's life it was even worse.

She had no power at all. She could not own property, have money in her own name, she was not recognised as the guardian of her own children, their father was, she couldn't vote, sue or be sued, she could be beaten by him with a switch or rod no thicker than his index finger and could not divorce.

A wife was a slave, the husband's property.

There always have been, however, groups of dedicated women to fight these undignified inequalities.

In 1908, a Conference of socialist women met in Copenhagen,

Denmark, and dedicated March 8 every year as International Women's Day for legal, social and economic equality.

It took just about 80 years for equal pay to be accepted (but only in principle), let alone full rights and status.

In 1984 the Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Commission accepted the principle of equal pay.

However, principle or not, many women still work for peanuts.

In the last two decades women have fought and won their place in the three tiers of government, play a greater part in Australian culture, science, literary and art bodies and have established women's refuges as a means of escape from domestic violence.

Abortion, rape and health centres and units to screen breast cancer are quite well known and widely used.

This year IWD calls upon all women, the peace movement, trade unions and those active in the labour cause to join hands to fight for the rights of Aboriginal women and migrant citizens who have come to live with us from the four corners of the earth.

IWD is an occasion to call on all progressive people to join hands to build homes, schools, hospitals and libraries.

The people can stop for all time the horror and misery of war in Iraq or anywhere else.

Let us fight for the rights of all people, men, women and children in the name of bread, liberty and peace.

Phyllis Johnson is a truly dedicated communist who has never let up in the struggle for women's and other rights over many decades. ✪



Phyllis Johnson (centre) at 1960 equal pay meeting

International Women's Day

Sydney

International Women's Day 2004

Women create a better World

**March to Hyde Park
Saturday 13 March**

**Assemble at
Sydney Town Hall 11.00am**

Speakers, Stalls & Entertainment

**For more information
Go to www.women.nsw.gov.au**

Adelaide

International Women's Week

March 7 - 13 inclusive

March

Saturday 13 March 10.30am
from Victoria Square to Adelaide Uni

FESTIVAL

12 - 2pm on the Maths Lawns
via Gate 6 [off Frome Road]

After the march, relax with women friends, bring your lunch or buy some, visit stalls for information or products, all women are welcome to participate; book your turn at the microphone in speakers' corner!

Want more info? Want your group to be more involved?
Ring Fliss 08 8379 5104 or 0411 655 104

For details on conferences, fun run and other exciting events during the week contact Women's Information Service, Adelaide on 08 8303 0590 or 1800 188 158



THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF AUSTRALIA (WA)
invites you to join them for morning tea in celebration of

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 2004

Guest Speaker: Giz Watson MLC (fierce advocate for Women's Rights, Human Rights, Environmental Rights, Indigenous Rights, Refugee Rights, Workers' Rights, Animal Rights)

When? Sunday 7 March 10 am

Where? Sheila's : 1 Salar Place, Dianella

How much? Entrance by donation and/or a plate or juice

RSVP 08 9276 9144

Habib and Hicks: left to rot by Australian Govt

Peter Mac

The Australian Government still refuses to exert any pressure on the US Government for the return of Australian prisoners Mandouh Habib and David Hicks. This leaves the two men at the mercy of totally unaccountable US military, incarcerated indefinitely in Guantanamo Bay, possibly until they die.

The two men were arrested after the September 11 "Twin Towers" bombings and the subsequent invasion of Afghanistan by the United States. Attorney-General Phillip Ruddock has already admitted that they could not be tried here because they have committed no crime under Australian law. They can not be tried under the new anti-terrorism laws, because their supposed crime occurred prior to those laws coming into effect.

Moreover, under which country's law should they be tried, and under what charge? Neither man was in the US when the September 11 bombings occurred, and no evidence has been produced that would link them to that or other crimes carried out in America, so the US is surely not entitled to try them under US law.

Should Hicks be tried under the law prevailing in Afghanistan at the time of his arrest there? Should Habib be charged under the laws of Pakistan, where he was arrested on behalf of the American Government? In neither case would the US have jurisdiction.

Charges of crimes against humanity should be dealt with by an international court, but the US strongly opposes this – such a move would leave the US exposed

to charges for war crimes, such as invading and making war on Afghanistan and Iraq.

The US base on Guantanamo Bay, where the two men are held, has been described as a "legal black hole". According to US President Bush, the base is not actually on US soil, so the detainees are not subject to US law.

(He coyly avoids pointing out that the base, which is illegally occupied, is actually in Cuba. This would invite the conclusion that the base should only exist with the agreement of the Cuban Government, and that conduct on the base should be subject to Cuban law!)

As information leaks out on the appalling conditions and barbaric treatment of the Guantanamo Bay prisoners the situation is becoming an embarrassment, even for the Bush administration.

Moreover, Hicks' military representative, US Major Michael Mori, has stated with astonishing frankness and detail that Hicks would not receive fair treatment under US military regulations for the conduct of trials of the Guantanamo Bay detainees.

Any public trial of Hicks would inevitably highlight the embarrassing fact that during the war in Bosnia he fought for the Taliban in the so-called "Kosovo Liberation Army" as an ally of the United States, which at that stage regarded him as a hero.

He then returned to Afghanistan, where he was turned over to invading US forces after the events of September 11, 2001. His own position hadn't changed, but in the eyes of the US he was no longer a hero but a war criminal.



The Government is content to leave Habib and Hicks locked away

Pressure from within his own Labor Government has forced British Prime Minister Tony Blair to request the return of the British detainees. The US Government agreed, in large part because the return of these prisoners would save them facing the thorny legal implications of their imprisonment.

Ruddock admitted that both Habib and Hicks would almost certainly be released into the community if returned to Australia, and used this as an excuse for not seeking their release.

The government is quite content to see Habib and Hicks simply rot in Guantanamo Bay for the rest of their lives.

Attorney-General Phillip Ruddock has already admitted that they could not be tried here because they have committed no crime under Australian law.

The most recent chapter in this long and terrible saga concerns ALP leader Mark Latham's stupid and extremely dangerous suggestion that new retrospective laws should be passed to allow Habib and Hicks to be tried in Australia.

This idea was rejected by the Howard Government, not on any principle of human rights, but because previous legal advice indi-

cated that any such legislation was likely to be deemed unconstitutional by the High Court.

The Howard Government stands condemned for its callous and cynical treatment of the two Australians detained at Guantanamo Bay. Latham should be careful that his own reputation doesn't also begin to stink, for similar reasons. ✪

Australian quarantine in peril

Australia's wonderful status as a quarantine-protected producer of disease-free fruit, vegetables and meat is about to be dumped. The Howard Government intends to scrap our historical reliance on quarantine entry restrictions in favour of a system of simple assurances from other countries that their produce does not come from disease-affected areas.

The \$400 million banana industry, the pear and apple industries are at stake, as well as the pig meat and other primary industries.

Moves to scrap the quarantine system were signalled in the proposed Free Trade Agreement with the US, with regard to which the Howard Government reassured the nation that: "Australia's quarantine and food safety regimes, which ensure our health and our environment are protected, are not affected by the Agreement".

If Moko gets into Australia, it will be devastating for our \$400 million banana industry, and will harm our clean export reputation

However, an official US Trade Department memo states that Australia is committed to "working with the US in the ongoing WTO negotiations on agriculture to develop export competition disciplines that eliminate restrictions on the right of entities to export".

But the Howard Government isn't even waiting for the Australian

or US parliaments to ratify the Free Trade Agreement. Biosecurity Australia, the agency overseeing quarantine matters for the Australian Government, commissioned a report that recommended that the present system of quarantine inspections at entry points be scrapped for fruit, vegetables and meat. In its place was to be a system of assurances from other countries that the produce they propose to introduce into Australia does not emanate from areas where diseases affecting the produce are prevalent.

The proposal has been condemned by the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO), as being clearly inadequate to protect Australia from the introduction of disease and pests.

Interviewed on ABC TV, a representative of Biosecurity Australia dismissed the CSIRO criticisms

with the comment that the standard of protection advocated by the CSIRO would block the course of trade in fruit and pig meat between countries.

She ignored the obvious implication that although the standards advocated by CSIRO would actually block the import of certain items, it would not prevent their export from

Australia to other countries. In short, the CSIRO is warning that we risk irreparably damaging certain industries if we abandon the traditional quarantine regulations.

The relaxation of quarantine laws as advocated by Biosecurity Australia has already been tried and thoroughly discredited. As Democrat Senator John Cherry noted recently, with regard to the fruit disease Moko:

"Eighteen months ago Biosecurity Australia concluded that Moko disease is very likely to be present on fruit harvested for export from the Philippines and that imports should not be allowed. Yet today, despite no new scientific evidence the government will accept Filipino assurances that bananas will only be sourced from 'disease free' plantations.

"Anyone who believes that such a weak protocol ... will keep Moko out of Australia needs their head read. If Moko gets into Australia, it will be devastating for our \$400 million banana industry, and will harm our clean export reputation.

"On apples and pears, the Senate exposed the flawed processes used by Biosecurity Australia in assessing the risk of Fire Blight from New Zealand apple imports in 2001."

On learning of the government's move to scrap the quarantine procedures, Federal Independent MP Bob Katter commented: "To do this on top of the decision to leave sugar out of the (FTA) deal seems to me to be a determination to commit political harikiri".

Let's hope he's right. ✪

Universities and students under a cruel regime

Many students at Australian universities are already paying up to \$100,000 for their degrees, and in some cases even more than that, under the Howard Government's vicious student fee regime.

Before the last federal elections Howard promised that no student would be asked to pay that much for a degree. However, the federal Department of Education, Science and Training has revealed that by this time two years ago some universities were already charging this amount for as many as 16 courses.

One particularly cruel aspect of the fee arrangements is the limited availability of the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) under which the government partially funds the place and the student the remainder through a deferred payment. HECS was originally available to all Australian university students, students could defer payment until after graduation and gaining employment.

Step by step poorer students are being discouraged and squeezed out of the system – first by the introduction of HECS and more recently by an increasing quota of upfront full-fee paying places. Working class women in particular are being excluded through this process.

HECS is now limited to a given proportion of the top performing students, with the rest having to pay full up-front fees. Students

whose HSC results would have been sufficient to gain entry under the old system, but who are not in the top bracket, now have to pay full up-front fee. Relatively poorly-performing students from wealthy families can buy their way into university, even if there results are below many of those being denied HECS places.

The government's current proposals for higher education would tighten the screws on students even more, for example by allowing universities to increase their fees by as much as 30 per cent. Just last week around 7000 new students at the Queensland University of Technology were told that next year they face a 25 percent fee increase.

They responded by holding a demonstration outside the main administration building and began an occupation inside.

The government has made a number of relatively minor changes to its "package" of proposals, in order to get them accepted by independent members in the Senate, who are currently threatening to block the proposals' enabling legislation.

The government has dropped demands that university administrations introduce anti-union workplace practices, or else lose some \$404 million in extra funding, but is still insisting that universities "offer" staff (i.e. pressure them to accept) individual work contracts. ✪

Vic teachers strike

As *The Guardian* went to press Victoria's public school teachers were preparing to take strike action on March 3 in response to the State Government's failure to advance negotiations on a log of claims the teachers' union had presented more than 13 months ago. The Victorian Branch of the Australian Education Union (AEU) says the 2.25 percent Bracks Government offer is "unsustainable".

"People just can't believe it", said AEU Branch Council member Val Steane. "They just laughed when I told them about the offer."

"A lot of us got behind the Bracks Government when it was elected and they have done some good things in the primary sector, but the secondary sector has missed out. There is a feeling that in a lot of ways the Labor Government is no better than the Kennett Liberal Government."

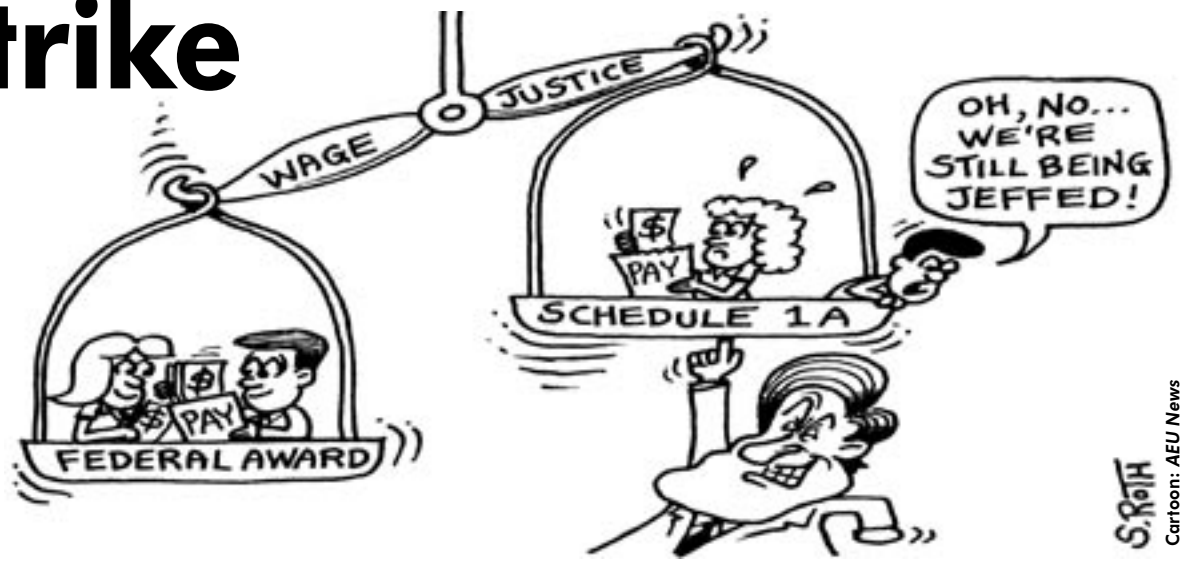
The AEU's claim includes a 10 percent increase each year over three years, actions on class sizes

and firm limits on the use of contract teachers. Bans and limitations are already in place in a number of areas, including on visits of state Labor MPs to schools and workplaces.

AEU regional and sub branches throughout the state held planning meetings in the lead-up to the strike. This stoppage follows on from last year's September 17 Day of Action.

AEU State President, Mary Bluett, said the dispute is about the future and quality of public education. "We have a national teacher shortage and Victoria is going to feel the brunt of it." In 2005 the shortage is estimated to be 5000, rising to 25,000 by 2010. Shortages continue to hit the system in specialist teachers and in regional areas of the state.

The latest AEU survey, in 469 schools, found shortages in maths, science, languages, information technology, media and legal studies. When the AEU put its pay claim to the Government in December 2002



S. Roth
Cartoon: AEU News

the union expected to start negotiations quickly to allow schools to plan for 2004.

In an unprecedented development Victoria's Catholic school teachers are joining their public school colleagues in walking off the job.

"We gave them 13 months before this agreement expired, but the first negotiations didn't start

until seven months after the claim was lodged", said Mary Bluett. She said the delays and paltry offer indicates a government out of touch with reality. "You cannot say you value education and value teachers and then make such an insulting offer."

The AEU believes the Government can afford to fund improved pay and conditions as the

State's surplus is almost three times the \$245 million budgeted for last May. "[Treasurer] John Brumby gets up at every state budget and says we have the most vibrant economy in the country", said Ms Bluett, "then he says they can't afford to pay improved wages and conditions for teachers. If WA and NSW can afford it, why can't we?"

Ackmnt: AEU News

LABOUR NOTES

The Brack's Labor Government threatened power unions with fines of up to \$1 million if they further disrupt Victoria's electricity supplies. The Electrical Trades Union (ETU) and the Australian Services Union (ASU) had placed work bans on the electricity grid during negotiations with five of six energy companies over an enterprise bargaining dispute. The unions are seeking a 36-hour week, a 15 percent pay increase over three years, more apprentices and a reduced emphasis on the outsourcing of company work to contractors. The provisions of the Electricity Act carry fines of up to \$10,000 for individuals and \$1 million against corporations or unions who fail to abide by the government's direction. The ETU said that it would not tolerate any threat of the Electricity Act when his union members were acting lawfully under the Workplace Relations Act. Under the Act, the work bans are "protected action".

Twenty five Information Technology workers have walked off the job in Sydney and voted for 24 hours of action in response to news that their jobs will be exported to Cairo, Egypt. The decision by Equant Sydney a subsidiary firm of French Telecom comes only months after an announcement that Telstra or its contractors would shift more than 600 IT jobs offshore to India.

Sydney's Wonderland theme park is set to close on April 26, and its predominately young workforce sacked. Their boss, Steven Galbraith whose car boasts the personalised number plate of "CEO 1" is refusing to pay the majority of the workforce any form of severance pay. According to the Liquor Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers Union a vast majority of the staff are listed as casual but in fact were not. "They are using casualisation to deny 200 western Sydney workers any redundancy or severance payments. But these people work regular shifts, with a regular expectation of work, and set rosters. Many of them have been with Wonderland for years", said LHMU Assistant Secretary Mark Boyd. The company wants cap payouts to a maximum of eight weeks' wages for the 40 or so workers who it describes as "permanent". While Wonderland cries poor and callously throws its workers on the scrap heap, that company that owns it is pocketing a cool \$52.5 million from the sale of the land to developers. One can only wonder what Steve's payout will be.

The workforce at the North West Shelf construction project in Western Australia have just completed a five-day stoppage over management's use of scab labour on site. Australian Manufacturing Workers Union Organiser, Tony Lovett said North West Shelf workers had given the companies "fair warning" that any use of "scab labour" would result in a five-day shut down after supervisors had been used to clean toilets during a cleaner's dispute last year. "We were faced with a situation where electricians had a dispute and management used scabs to do their work. It's not on", Mr Lovett said. The North West Shelf construction project is building infrastructure for the industry.

BHP-Billiton's gift to women



In the past it was not uncommon for a female worker to be told: "Sorry, you'd be great for the job but there are no female toilets". But after years of struggle, women have gained employment as bus and train drivers, mechanics, seafarers, mine-workers, and other "men's work". It has not been easy and it is still not easy as the female mine produc-

tion workers at BHP-Billiton's Mt Arthur mine in NSW can vouch. The women have been using the portable toilet pictured above for the past eight months or so.

One of the male mineworkers told *The Guardian*: "Although the temperature was in the low 40s (C) last week I imagine a visit to the ladies' on-site toilets would be

rather a quick "sitting" as there are no fans and little ventilation, nothing to read also I'm told".

But it should be noted that the on-site toilets are cleaned daily and pumped out regularly – but surely one of the largest resource companies in the world that recently boasted a \$1.7 billion profit could do a little better? *

Tied to US war plans

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It is a palpable lie to claim that it is a "defence system" when it is part of the total first-strike war strategy of the United States.

Australia's Foreign Minister makes the claim that the US build-up of missiles and missile defence systems "will not spark an arms race", and that it will instead "dissuade countries and others from acquiring and developing ballistic missiles".

The fact is possession of superior weapons by a country has never resulted in the abandonment of armaments, as each country works to overcome the threat.

Indeed, the technology to build nuclear weapons is now a part of the world's vast accumulation of scientific knowledge available to all, not a national secret possessed by the US.

In this context it is now reported that the Russian Federation has developed and tested a missile that can be manoeuvred in space that would render the US missile defence system useless – even before it has been built.

If confirmed this will undermine

the whole premise being used by the US for the development of this project and the huge, as yet unspecified, expenditure by the US and Australian Governments.

Downer told the Lowy Institute that the Government expects to sign a memorandum of understanding with the US this year. This will lock Australia into a program that threatens the whole world as the United States and its allies attempt to force all countries to bend the knee to their domination and occupation.

"The time we lose to further talking around the issues is time gained by those rogue states – and possibly terrorists – seeking to dodge the system and acquire weapons", he declared.

Thus, behind Downer's tough talk are the policy of the preemptive strike and the abandonment of negotiations to solve international problems in favour of the use of military force.

Under the Howard Government, Australia has become a pirate country, a feared and increasingly despised agent for the US in the Asia-Pacific region which, along with the world's biggest military

power, is sweeping aside all the normally accepted means of resolving international disputes.

This is why, in the eyes of the US and its tiny group of supporters, the United Nations and its Security Council are only "relevant" to the extent that they comply with the policies dictated by the US.

Note: The Lowy Institute was set up last year by Frank Lowy, one of Australia's richest men, chairman of the Westfield shopping centre empire. The Lowy Institute is yet another of the right-wing "think-tanks" that formulate and promote conservative views. Other Institute members include: Rob Ferguson, formerly of Banker's Trust; Ross Garnaut, a foreign policy analyst at the Australian National University; Ian McFarlane, Chairman of the Reserve Bank of Australia; Professor Bob O'Neill, formerly of Oxford University. World Bank President James Wolfensohn is also associated with the Lowy Institute. Lowy is a prominent supporter of the fascist Sharon Government in Israel. *

Film Review by Andrew Jackson

The Passion of The Christ

Directed and Produced by Mel Gibson

"It is as it was", allegedly declared the Pope, stating that Mel Gibson's *The Passion of The Christ* is an accurate account of events leading up to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Yes, the Pope is very, very old but frankly, he wasn't there. And this is where *The Passion* falls down.

The Passion of The Christ has divided and polarised critics and audiences – both religious and secular – in a way perhaps not seen since *The Exorcist* in 1973.

On the one hand there are those who say the unrelenting and excruciatingly graphic scenes of torture, violence and murder are so over-worked it kills off any enjoyment that otherwise might have been gained from the film.

Yet those who promote *The Passion* claim the visual horror is an accurate portrayal of Jesus' crucifixion – as recounted by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John in the New Testament.

And therein lies the problem.

While professing the film's truth on television Mel Gibson admitted to the interviewer: "I cannot remove myself from the equation".

Mel is affiliated to Opus Dei, a cult-like fundamentalist and supremacist faction within the Catholic Church whose teachings and practices are of concern to many Catholics, including many clergy. (There is evidence to suggest that the present Pope is a keen supporter of Opus Dei. For example, he gave Opus Dei the privilege of having its own Bishop and he is proceeding towards the canonisation of the founder of Opus Dei.)

Therefore from the outset we are watching "*Mel Gibson's Inspired Version of the Four Gospels*".

It is also an established fact that up until the King James Version the Four Gospels themselves had been rewritten and retranslated numerous times to suit the Church of the day. Numerous other Gospels giving account of Jesus' life – including one by Mary Magdalene – have been discarded completely.

Even Matthew, Mark, Luke and John themselves were writing of events as observed through human eyes and only as remembered some years after the crucifixion took place.

A true recreation based on scientifically-proven historical facts this is not.

Examining just one simple

scene of the film shows the extent to which history and science are set aside so as not to spoil a great story.

As Jesus struggles under the weight of the cross a young woman rushes forward to wipe his face. An imprint of Jesus' bloodied visage is visible – a nod to the Shroud of Turin, which has for centuries been touted by the Catholic Church as a holy icon.

Even Matthew, Mark, Luke and John themselves were writing of events as observed through human eyes and only as remembered some years after the crucifixion took place.

The Turin shroud first surfaced in 1355 in Lirey, France, and was immediately claimed to be the authentic burial shroud of Jesus.

But as early as 1389, Bishop Pierre d'Arcis of Lirey wrote to Pope Clement VII and explained how a predecessor, Bishop Henri de Poitiers, had "discovered the fraud and how the said cloth had been cunningly painted, the truth being attested by the artist who had painted it..."

Modern scientific analysis has confirmed the Bishop's statement – that the Shroud is a product of the 14th century.

Yet the myth continues to be perpetuated, with revisionist "scientists" and "historians" continuing to attest to the Shroud's authenticity, and declaring those scientists who have denounced the Shroud as having an "agenda".

Likewise there have been numerous historians and theologians come forward to denounce *The Passion of the Christ*. Mel Gibson has openly declared that those who oppose his film are "agents" of "dark forces" who are "conspiring to prevent the truth being told".

Setting aside the "True Story" element of *The Passion* for a moment, what is left for the film-goer? Lashings of blood and gore – literally.

And apart from Christians who are seeking to rekindle their faith via a blood-drenched horror-induced catharsis, this film has limited appeal to a wider audience

To enhance *The Passion's* authenticity Mel Gibson had the

film scripted in the "original" Latin and Aramaic languages. While this is an added torture for most viewers of those languages – a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to hear them spoken in conversation outside of a university class.

If you have a penchant for History Channel high-budget docu-dramas, or *Spartacus*-type

Hollywood recreations of ancient legends this would certainly provide an afternoon's entertainment – if you have the iron stomach to match the iron nails which are pounded through Jesus' wrists.

And if you do enjoy the film and want to take home a little memento of the occasion be sure to drop by *The Passion's* website for an array of movie merchandise that would put *Lord of the Rings* to shame.

Mugs, framed stills, and a stunning array of Jewellery – lapel pins, necklaces, bracelets, pendants and crosses featuring Aramaic inscriptions and Biblical verses – are all available for purchase.

Or for as little as A\$17 you can have a replica pewter crucifixion nail complete with leather cord.

Along with these are a wealth of specially designed "witness tools" to help you capture the hearts and minds of expectantly stunned audience members as they exit the cinema. (A pack of 25 Aramaic Witness Cards will set you back only \$8.)

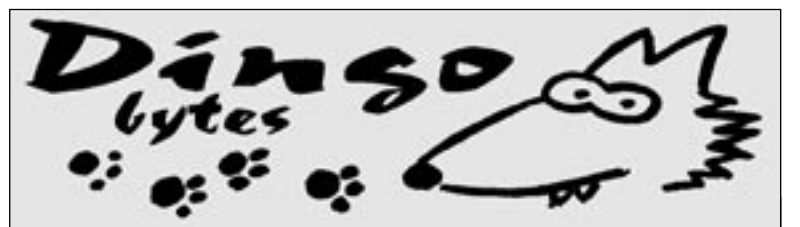
Wise old Bishop d'Arcis warned the Pope back in 1389 that a church official was "falsely and deceitfully, being consumed with the passion of avarice, and not from any motive of devotion but only of gain, ... falsely declaring and pretending that this was the actual shroud in which our Saviour Jesus Christ was enfolded in the tomb".

Mel Gibson should hear those words and hang his head in shame.

***The Passion of The Christ* is now showing at cinemas everywhere, and is rated MA for strong violence.** ☘



A pack of 25 Aramaic Witness Cards will set you back only \$8.



The following is a synopsis of the saga, The Collapse of the King Dynasty, being the story of the owners of the King Bros bus company, twins Peter and Tony. Giving evidence in the Supreme Court, Tony King's ex-wife Patrice told how, in the lead up to the collapse of the company last year with debts of \$226 million, the brothers and their wives spent up big time on property, cars, jewellery and holiday jaunts. In 2000 they splurged \$5 million even though the company's total income was only \$6.6 million, with more than 90 percent of that coming from NSW Transport Department subsidies for the 22,000 children who travelled on King Bros buses each day. The Court has also heard that only half of the King Bros fleet of 600 Mercedes buses actually existed.

Dingo assumed that the Queen's representative in Australia, Governor-General Michael Jeffery, was PM Howard's choice because he's a former army Major-General who took a leading part in the invasion and slaughter in Vietnam. It was yet another move in the militarisation of Australian society and a shift in emphasis from his first choice, Archbishop Peter Hollingworth, who was forced to resign for covering up the activities of paedophile priests. But it turns out the Major-General is also a religious zealot just like Howard and Hollingworth. Last week he actually gave a speech to a bunch of corporate heads in Perth telling them where to look for leadership guidance. Who has been our greatest leader, asked Jeffery? The answer - "That person is ... Jesus Christ."

If there was ever any doubt about the opportunistic nature of Labor leader Mark Latham's politics, his proposal last week about the two Australians being held by the US military at Guantanamo Bay should put them to rest. Latham called for the introduction of retrospective laws so that Mamdouh Habib and David Hicks could be put on trial in Australia. The Greens pointed out that the problem is political rather than legal and the way to resolve it is for Australia to demand that the US return both men. And as for Latham's suggestion, it is against constitutional law to introduce laws to charge prisoners who at the time of their arrest had broken no laws. Latham actually gave Howard ammunition to score an easy point. Howard dismissed the idea of retrospective laws saying he was against laws being enacted retrospectively.

CAPITALIST HOG OF THE WEEK: is James Hardie Industries, beginning in the 1920s the biggest producer of asbestos products in Australia. Hardie has for decades tried every trick in the book to avoid paying compensation to asbestos victims. In 2001 it actually moved its headquarters to The Netherlands, leaving behind a Medical Research and Compensation Foundation – a separate entity run by trustees with \$293 million in the kitty. That is nowhere near enough to pay the claims of the victims it knowingly allowed to be exposed to the deadly asbestos fibres, and so taxpayers will pick up the bill.

Carr backflips on GM crops

Last year the NSW Premier Bob Carr promised a moratorium on the commercial release of genetically modified crops, a calculated move to calm down fears of the unknown consequences of using GM food. Now there is to be the planting of canola as early as April this year that involves thousands of hectares of genetically modified plants.

Monsanto and Bayer are the corporations that will run what are being called "joint tests" of genetically modified canola. They also want the participating farmers to sell their crops. The NSW Agricultural Advisory Council on Gene Technology has stated bluntly that the proposal is a done deal.

The way was opened for wider cultivation of GM crops by the Federal Office of the Gene Technology Regulator – where Monsanto and Bayer have had

licence applications for more than a year to grow GM canola – when it announced that GM crops "pose no risks to humans or the environment".

In March 2003, Carr vowed to impose a three-year ban if his Government was re-elected later that same month. "It is an emotive issue requiring further analysis before commercial crops are released in NSW", said Carr at the time. He promised his Labor Government would pass laws to suspend the production of GM food crops until at least 2006.

"They [NSW Agricultural Advisory Council] have already made up their minds that genetically engineered canola is inevitable", said Jo Immig of the Nature Conservation Council of NSW. This was despite widespread and significant concerns expressed by farmers and the community.

"The majority of [Advisory

Council] members would approve anything Monsanto and Bayer placed before them."

Concerns

Field trials and general releases of GM crops are a concern because of the contamination risk to non-GM crops.

Contamination of non-GM canola has already occurred in GM canola trials.

There have been no independent investigations of GM food and its production to determine its safety. Food safety testing so far in Australia has been based on assessment of data supplied by the biotechnology corporations.

There is also the question of control of Australian agriculture: just four transnational biotechnology corporations have been responsible for the development of GM technology and products – Syngenta, Monsanto, Aventis and Dupont. ☘

Tales from working life

Stolen Wages, Stolen Generations, St

The following is the third in a series of articles describing the eventful early years and working life of Des Donley. He is now retired and has kindly made his written recollections available to *The Guardian* and has been interviewed by our staff on several occasions.

Part I of Des's story appeared in *The Guardian* on November 5, 2003 and Part II on November 12, 2003. This week we take up the story when, at age eighteen, Des finally shakes free of the "care" of the Queensland State Department.

Just after his eighteenth birthday and for the first time in his life, Des was about to hit a lucky streak. This was already the era of the swagman – Des had seen them on the dusty tracks and noticed their telltale stones left on the gateposts of farms. A stone meant that the owners were generous and that it might be worthwhile asking for some bread or vegetables. The young farm hand could also have ended up on the road.

Fortunately for Des, even though he had told dairy farmer Thomas Bell what he could do with his farm-labouring job, he volunteered to drive him to his brother's pineapple farm on the other side of Ipswich. Here, Des was shown to his quarters – a shed he would share with another hand. They each had a metal bed, a fibre-filled mattress, a dark blanket and a hurricane lamp atop a kerosene box.

He was finally receiving wages of 15 shillings (\$1.50) a week plus keep. He no longer had to milk cows at 3.30 in the morning. On weekdays, the farmer's son would call Des and his mate to work in the fields at 7.30 in the morning. Knock off time was 5 in the afternoon. They also worked a half-day on Saturday. Typical tasks were cutting out and burning great mounds of lantana and planting suckers to get new crops of bananas and pineapples to grow on the cleared land. All the while, Des' knowledge of farm work was expanding:

"There were two types of pineapple and the juiciest one had a smooth leaf which had no prickles on it and the rough leaf was a small pineapple with prickles on it. The prickles would stick into your skin, like rose thorns, and tear hell out of your hands and make them bleed."

Des started going to the local dances, meeting girls and gaining confidence.

"I felt freedom was coming my way – to be able to handle my own

wages and do as I liked with them. After feeling like a caged bird for over 18 years, someone opened the cage and set me free."

Temptations

"There were many temptations put in my way like all teenagers, drinking and smoking and I ended up in a brawl or two, where I had to defend myself.

"I had a lot of problems to overcome. Being a country lad, I didn't know a bar of music and I'd never heard a wireless or read a newspaper. However, I liked music and I went to dances.

"I was shy and not being able to dance I was afraid to approach the opposite sex for a dance. Night after night I would sit and listen to the music and watch people dance.

"There was a big woman who must have been watching me sitting down while the others were enjoying themselves. She came over, grabbed me by the arms and pulled me up on the dance floor. It was slippery and I was like a duck out of water. I was slipping and sliding; I felt ashamed of myself.

"I persevered with this lady, learnt to dance and had many a good night and enjoyed myself. Though I was still unable to communicate with women – when I saw them coming towards me in town I would cross the road to avoid them."

On Sunday afternoons Des played cricket. He thought he would test the limits of his newfound freedom by asking the cocky for a pay rise. "...He said 'I will give you an increase alright, right out the gate'".

From then, until the outbreak of World War II, Des worked at a series of backbreaking, outdoor jobs – felling trees with the driver of a team of bullocks, digging loam to be put on the side of the road for the main roads department and various building jobs.

Of course, Des got his taste of bitter dole bread. At this stage he



Des Donley

lived with his dog Pete in a rudimentary timber shack he built for himself.

"...Being a single fellow, I only got a day's work a week and the amount of money the Government paid was shocking. We had to work on the road, with a ganger in charge, cleaning out the water tables and wheeling it out and filling the potholes in the road..."

"And for me to collect the dole, I had to walk ten miles into town. They used to dish it out at the police station and wouldn't start until about eleven in the morning. You had to be early to get in the queue to get paid early because there was a hell of a queue. You would receive six shillings in cash and your ration card. On the card it would tell you what

you could purchase – no butter or cheese – you could get the cheapest cut of lamb and that was the flaps (from the side of a lamb), a couple of loaves of bread and the cheapest jam (which was plum jam)."

One of Des' building jobs involved the construction of a bush dance hall. The days spent on the hall job were getting longer and longer. One afternoon, on one of the days when the boss went off to the races, somebody approached Des and asked him about his hours of work and pay. He was the secretary of the Carpenters and Joiners Union and his subsequent intervention brought about a dramatic improvement in Des' conditions. He was also a Communist.

"...He was the only person in my life who was prepared to look after my interests, so I finished up joining the Communist Party and became active in it and what the Party stood for..."

I learnt a lot

"I learnt a lot from that job and having a union ticket meant a lot to me. I had to be accepted on any job

because the union was strong. We finished the job, weather-board outside and painted with a brown stain of linseed oil. I was proud to be on the job and when it was finished I was ready for dances."

Des eventually got work on the building of a dam on the Brisbane River about 160 kilometres from the Queensland capital. It was a Works Board project where the workers had good pay, accommodation and facilities by the standards of the time.

Once, on one of his round-trips to Ipswich to go to a dance he met the girl he was to marry. They moved into a cottage at the workers' settlement near the dam and were counting on a secure, comfortable life together when global events intervened.

Following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour, Des was signed up to the Civil Construction Corps (the CCC) or "Curtin's Cunning C...s", so named after the wartime Australian Prime Minister John Curtin. He was set to work alongside other conscripts on a dry dock on the Brisbane River to replace



"I felt freedom was coming my way - to be able to handle my own wages and do as I liked with them".

Stolen Lives (Part III)

the one lost when the British lost Singapore.

"I wanted to join the armed forces and go away with my mates, many of whom never returned. When they found out I was a tradesman, I was put into the Essential Services (which was the Allied Works Council).

"My grey matter was starting work and I began mixing with members of the Communist Party. I gained a lot of knowledge.

Des joined men from all over Australia who were packed aboard rattly trains and covered trucks for the long trek to Darwin. The bombed-out town was the site of massive warehouses storing the mountains of tinned and frozen food for American forces all over the Pacific. The journey was an ordeal and conditions on the job were harsh.

Unions weren't allowed

"We had a lot of trouble and being strictly military, we weren't allowed to have unions come into the area. They weren't allowed to come any further than Alice Springs, so the only way we could contact the unions was by writing to them. The Allied Works Council and the Army didn't believe in unions and some of the mail was censored.

"We wanted an award that would cover us while in the Territory. The union officials had to negotiate with a tribunal for a new award. The judge was Justice O'Mara and to represent the trade unions was Albert Monk, a typical right-winger who became president of the Australian Council of Trade Unions.

"It was one of the worst awards and it put a lot of restrictions on us.

We couldn't hold open meetings with our members..."

This was not the last of Des' unsatisfactory experiences with right-wing forces in the trade union movement or the Allied Works Council. Set up by a joint decision of the Australian and US governments, the Council oversaw many infrastructure projects needed for the war effort. It was, however, top-heavy with bosses (like media baron, the future Sir Frank Packer) and their representatives who took advantage of the opportunity to beat down unions and fill their pockets.

Friends and enemies

"What I did learn while in Darwin, was that your friends can be your enemies and your enemies can become your friends. While watching the news on a big open-air screen in Darwin, they would show Churchill and Roosevelt but not Joe Stalin. The men would sing out, 'What about Joe?'. Russia was fighting on a huge front against Hitler's troops. The men were persistent and they put Joe on and the men went wild. Russia lost 27 million lives in the war.

"Today our enemies in World War II have become our friends and fighting alongside of our soldiers, that is how silly capitalism is. Lives mean nothing, but money and territorial gains mean a lot to the rich".

"After being in Darwin and living under Army conditions I decided when I came back to civilisation to be an active unionist.

"My first experience of being a job delegate was on a big warehouse being built for the Navy. I was elected to replace a bosses' man, and so I immediately became an enemy of the boss. Who was it? None other than the Lord Mayor of Brisbane, a builder. He had a couple

of dozen men working on it where normally he would have a third of that amount working on the job..."

The taxpayer met the cost of wasted materials and even wages for absentee or non-existent workers. Soon after his election, as well as dealing with the men's many legitimate complaints, Des tried to restore some legitimacy to the job:

"I had a number of encounters with builders who were flouting the award and conditions on the jobs, especially the safety of our members. The Mayor was in the racket also".

at Warwick Farm in NSW. The workers' own camp was at the racecourse. Stewart Bros, Hutchinson Bros and Kennedy and Bird had the contract for the project. Des represented the men on the Kennedy and Bird job. It wasn't long before trouble struck.

"One of my members came to me and showed me the toilet set-up. It was a three-foot square hole dug in the ground. A pole was belted into the ground in each corner with a bit of hessian wrapped around them, with two pieces of timber sitting on a cross piece. The firm expected the

to the site to speak at a meeting of the workers about the very unsatisfactory situation with the food prepared for the men. These officials wanted to put their speakers first, get a feeble resolution passed and then report their good work to the bosses.

However, at the meeting Des beat them to the punch and put two good speakers first.

"Anderson from the Plumbers' Union took off his coat and said to me, 'you're the cause of it you bastard'.

"The men en-masse started to

"I had a number of encounters with builders who were flouting the award".

"...I was showing the labourers where to lay the flooring to make as little wastage as possible. The Lord Mayor came over to me and said, 'what role are you playing here?' I told him I was elected as the men's delegate and that if he wanted any orders given to me, they had to be given through his foreman".

Luckily, Des' union was led by Communist officials that backed up their reps on the job. They even prevailed on the Mayor to hand Des his wages personally, i.e. in the same manner that he gave them to the other workers.

The young militant's next assignment was on a naval camp

men to sit on it like a bird and crap over the side."

Down the hole

Des pulled the flimsy structure down and threw it down the hole. He then contacted the union and the threat of court action soon brought on the construction of proper toilet and washroom facilities. While that was being done, Des instructed workers to use the toilets at the naval base.

On another occasion, Des had to stand his ground against two right-wing officials from the Plumbers' Union and the Builders' Labourers' Union. They had come

move to the front and the two sell-out union officials didn't get their way. We soon had an improvement in our food".

Des' time on the job was limited. His activity in his union and his outspokenness about theft and rorting saw to that. He was discharged from service with the Allied War Council.

As the war drew to a close, so did this turbulent chapter of Des' life. He had become estranged from his wife and lost contact with his baby boy. Now peacetime was to bring new challenges for the battle-proven union and Communist Party activist. ❖



Is it possible to end the occupation of Iraq?

Daniel Rubin

It is in the interests of the peace and democratic forces of the US that we join with the Iraqi people and the people of the world to compel the Bush administration to end all forms of occupation and control of Iraq now.

On November 2, we must elect an administration that will respond to the pressure, end the occupation if Bush fails to do so, and not repeat such aggression elsewhere. Only then can we end the huge financial drain of the occupation that is

over power to a handpicked compliant group in Iraq while reducing the number of US troops until just after the elections.

While paying close attention to how the Iraqi progressive forces assess their situation, we have to judge how best to struggle here in the US [and in Australia] to end the occupation.

US Out! UN In!

Maximising pressure to turn over control of the country to the democratic forces of Iraq and to get the US out completely requires

out, there is concern about how to prevent leaving Iraq in a state of civil war as a result of the US aggression.

Given the present armed attacks by backward forces and the existence of a number of politically contending militias, including one acknowledged to have been created by the CIA, the concern is legitimate and is expressed by some Iraqi progressive forces.

Such a danger can best be met by UN commanded and controlled peacekeeping forces. By including such a just demand, it will be much easier to build maximum pressure and ensure major support in Congress for withdrawing the US military.

UN role

Some on the US left complain that the UN is a tool of US imperialism or of imperialism in general. That case could have been made when the UN General Assembly endorsed the US aggression against North Korea [DPRK] in 1950.

Now the UN is the scene of major struggles between the forces for peace and progress in the world and those for war and reaction, headed by the US.

Not every battle is fully won, but the UN has been resisting US dictation on Iraq. There was evi-

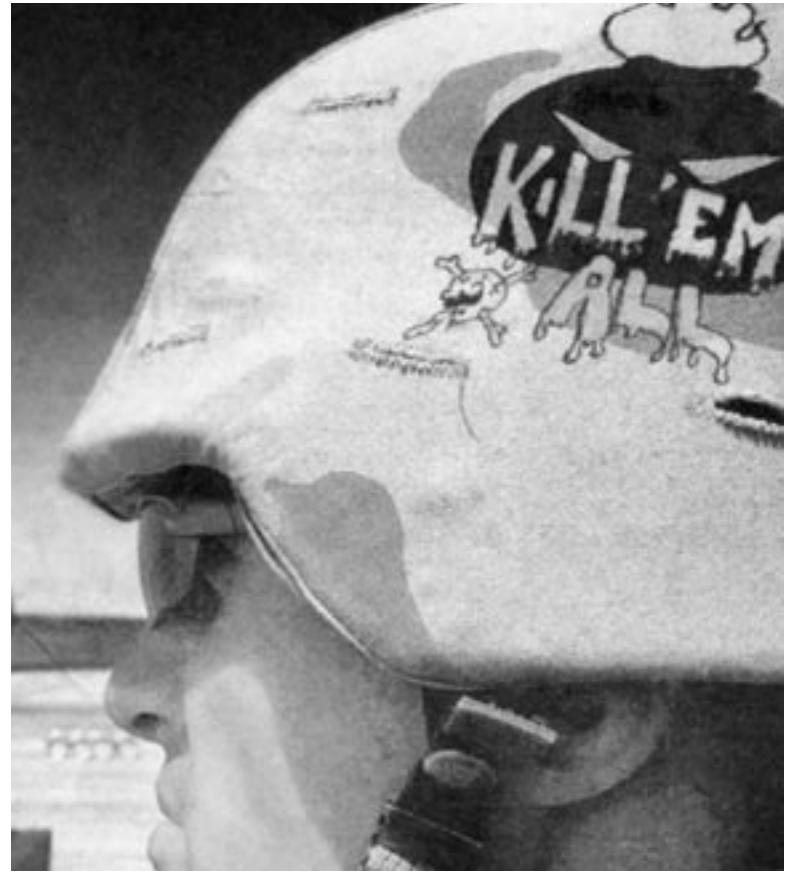
supporting not only the demand to "bring the troops home now!" We need also to support "UN peacekeepers in!"

UN peacekeepers enter a country only with the agreement of the authorities of that country. Even among those who opposed the war originally and now want the US

Bush still hopes to fool the Iraqi and US people by appearing to turn over power to a handpicked compliant group in Iraq while reducing the number of US troops until just after the elections.

contributing to starving funds for jobs and other social welfare needs at home. Only then can the lives of Iraqis and US troops be saved. Only then can we begin to restore the good name of our country in the world.

Bush still hopes to fool the Iraqi and US people by appearing to turn



US soldiers spreading freedom and democracy in Iraq

dence of the change in three recent votes of the General Assembly. These condemned the Sharon Government of Israel for threatening the life of President Arafat, for assassinating Palestinians and for building the separation wall. Only Micronesia and the Maldives joined Israel and the US in opposing those resolutions.

In most cases, if the Bush administration is for something internationally, it is safe to assume the peace, democratic and progressive forces of the US and the world should be opposed. But in a complex situation there can be moments when, for its own basically reactionary reasons, the administration supports something democratic forces support [but] for opposite reasons.

Elections

That is the case with the US opposing Ayatollah Sistani's proposal for immediate, direct elections. While opposing a federal state, the Bush administration apparently recognises that if the Kurds are

excluded by a majority Shi'ite Arab vote, the country may split apart in civil war, or, due to fundamentalist militias that control sections of Iraq, end up with a theocratic regime similar to Iran's.

That result would only produce long-term instability for US imperial interests. The US wants instead to handpick caucuses, to assure its dominance after June 30. If that proves impossible, it would like elections postponed until after the US elections, under cover of a UN recommendation, but keeping control in the meantime.

Whether the US will be compelled by the Iraqi people, world public opinion and a growing majority sentiment in the US to give up real power and get out in favour of democratic Iraqi political power and UN peacekeepers, remains to be seen. As the Bush administration sees its present policy become an ever-greater threat to its re-election, the possibilities of a compelled just solution grow.

People's Weekly World (slightly abridged) ☼

Cuba's infant mortality rate lower than in US

Emile Schepers

Under the best of circumstances, it is hard for a poor, Third World country to equal, let alone surpass, the social statistics of wealthy developed countries. For years, Cuba has been passing all other relatively poor countries in its statistics on health, health care and education. It has now officially passed the United States of America, the richest country in the world, on one key measure of national well-being, namely, the infant mortality rate.

What is the infant mortality rate? It is a public health statistic, representing the number of babies per every 1000 born in a given year who die before reaching their first birthday.

In mid-February, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta revealed that the US infant mortality rate now stands at 7 as of 2002, backsliding from 6.8 in 2001.

In early January, the Cuban Ministry of Health announced an infant mortality rate of 6.3, more than a half-point lower than the US.

Worldwide, the lowest infant mortality rates are generally found in countries which are both wealthy and have well-developed social safety networks, such as Sweden (which has an infant mortality rate of 3 – that is, out of every 1,000 babies born, 3 die before reaching their first birthday).

The countries with the worst infant mortality rates are those that are desperately poor and have a social safety net that is minimal or nonexistent, such as Afghanistan

(infant mortality rate of 165) and many countries in sub-Saharan Africa.

The worldwide tendency is for infant mortality rates to go down, due to urbanisation, improvements in sanitation, health advances, and other factors. What is remarkable about the Cuban achievement is that it has gone down so far so fast. Cuba's rate is far better than those of the vast majority of countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America, wealthy economies such as those of Japan and Singapore excepted.

People who know Cuba won't find the Cuban achievement surprising. They attribute it to the high level of education of the Cuban population, the supportive social networks that are encouraged by the Cuban socialist government, the investment of Cuba in public health and health care, and the low AIDS and drug addiction rates in Cuba. These things are made possible by Cuban socialism.

Only in a few places in the world do you find a trend toward worsening of the infant mortality rate. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, for example, infant mortality rates in the former Soviet republics in Central Asia skyrocketed, but are going down again in some places.

The AIDS crisis is causing an increase in Southern Africa. And now we see an increase in the rate in the United States.

The Center for Diseases Control attributes the worsening of the infant mortality rate in the US to the tendency of more women to have babies when they are already in their 30s and 40s, said to be a greater risk for the neonates. Even if this is accepted (which it should not

be) as an excuse for such a negative development, it raises more questions than it answers, such as:

- How come the same thing is not happening in other developed, wealthy countries, where the demographic trends on childbirth are similar? And how does this breakdown among different racial, ethnic and economic subsections of the U.S. population? Could it be the atrocious state of health care among low income and minority workers is the major factor that is causing the increase in infant mortality in the US?

- Are there economic factors behind the decision to have babies later in life, such as the inability of many families to survive economically without both parents out working full time, unable to support or care for children? Are the policies of the "pro-family values" Bush administration making the US the wealthiest child-unfriendly country in history?

But, some would argue, the infant mortality rate in the US is still relatively low, right?

Sure, when you consider the only countries besides Cuba that are doing better than we [in the US] are: Australia, Austria, Brunei, Canada, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, San Marino, Singapore, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the UK. (UNICEF and World Health Organization 2003 statistics.)

Not bad for us, the richest country in the world. We're number 30! We're number 30! Hurrah!
People's Weekly World ☼

More dirty tricks come tumbling out

The Blair Government is being rocked yet again, this time over allegations that British intelligence agents spied on UN Secretary General Kofi Annan in the run-up to the Iraq war.

Blair refused to say whether the allegation was true but attacked Clair Short, a former cabinet minister who made the allegations in an interview with BBC radio, as "deeply irresponsible".

A UN spokesman said any such espionage would be illegal. This is not the first allegation of spying on the UN. Mexico's former ambassador to the UN said it was common knowledge that the US spied on UN delegations in the lead-up to war. Chile also alleged its UN mission telephones were tapped as the Security Council considered a resolution backed by Washington, Britain and Spain authorising the war.

In a restrained comment, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan said: "We would be disappointed if this were true".

Clair Short said she had read transcripts of Annan's conversations while she was a cabinet member.

"The UK was spying on Kofi Annan's office and getting reports from him about what was going on. These things are done. And in the case of Kofi's office, it's been done for some time", she said. Asked explicitly whether British spies had been instructed to carry out operations within the United Nations on people such as Annan, she said: "Yes, absolutely".

As these allegations are surfacing, the prosecution of Katharine Gun, a former translator with the British Government's Communications Headquarters listening station, has been dropped. She is alleged to have leaked a memo from US intelligence officers asking their British counterparts to spy on members of the UN Security Council. The fact that Katharine Gun was a translator of Mandarin suggests that the British Government was also spying on China.

Was the case against Katharine Gun dropped because the continuation of this prosecution would have led to even more damaging disclosures? ☼

Haiti: "a coup d'état in the making"

Mark AlMBERG

The political crisis in Haiti reached a boiling point last week as violence by opponents of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide intensified, particularly in the northern part of the country, while right-wing elements in the capital stepped up their calls for Aristide to resign.

In Gonaives, Haiti's fourth-largest city, armed gangs with links to the former "Papa Doc" Duvalier regime and right-wing paramilitary elements roamed the streets, burning police stations and other government buildings, and intimidating supporters of the constitutionally-elected President. As of February 16, of the 30 persons killed in Gonaives, 21 were policemen.

Louis-Jodel Chamblain, the former head of Haiti's dreaded army death squads in the 1980s and later the leader of the notorious Front for the Advancement and Progress of Haiti, or FRAPH, resurfaced in Gonaives with a retinue of at least 20 commandos. FRAPH killed and maimed thousands of Haitian democrats and progressives in the early '90s.

Similarly, Guy Philippe, a former police chief who fled to the Dominican Republic after an attempted coup against President Aristide in 2002, was also spotted in the city, urging rebels to

prepare for a showdown with the government.

A motley assortment of other rightist elements, including the "Artibonite Resistance Front" (formerly known as the Cannibal Army) and "Force 86", led by Jean Tatoune, the architect of the anti-Aristide Raboteau massacre in 1994, have also emerged in Gonaives, St Marc, Trou du Nord and other northern cities and towns, vowing to bring down the government.

In parallel with these shock troops of the anti-government rebellion, other forces have stepped up pressure on Aristide to resign. In Port-au-Prince, the capital city, opposition leaders include millionaire businessman Andre Apaid, a big factory owner and head of the "Group of 184", and leaders of the centre-right "Democratic Convergence." Apaid owns 15 factories in Haiti, including several sweatshops, and allegedly carries a US passport. The mass media is also dominated by anti-Aristide elements.

Opposition forces know they cannot win power through democratic elections, and have therefore repeatedly rejected the government's call to participate in forthcoming parliamentary contests. They also know that the vast majority of the Haitian people reject their brand of rightist politics.

Hundreds of thousands of Aristide's supporters rallied in Port-au-Prince on February 7, just as they did on the 200th anniversary of Haiti's independence on January 1. They did so despite the fact that Haiti remains the poorest country in the hemisphere, and despite some of Aristide's painful concessions to the dictates of International Monetary Fund.

The other side of the coin is that under Aristide, the Haitian Government has doubled the minimum wage from 36 to 70 gourdes (about \$1.67) per day, built more schools between 1994 and 2000 than in the previous 190 years, and increased public investments in agriculture, health care and child welfare. And all this despite a continuing embargo of financial assistance from the US, the IMF and the World Bank.

The apparently concerted activities of the paramilitary shock troops and the political manoeuvres of the big business-linked opposition elements in the capital, combined with a recent statement by US State Department spokesman Richard Boucher that Haiti's future may include "changes in Aristide's position", have prompted some observers to charge a US-backed coup is under way.

Representative Barbara Lee (D-Calif), who visited Haiti recently,



A motley assortment of rightist elements have emerged

told Secretary of State Colin Powell in a February 12 letter, "There is a violent coup d'état in the making, and it appears that the United States is aiding and abetting the attempt to violently topple the Aristide Government. With all due respect, this looks like 'regime change'."

Similarly, Representative Maxine Waters (D-Calif) has said, "This is clearly an attempt at a power grab. ... It is my belief

that Andre Apaid is attempting to instigate a bloodbath in Haiti and then blame the government for the resulting disaster in the belief that the US will aid the so-called protestors against President Aristide." Waters called on the US to cease its support for Apaid and his allies, and to respect the Haitian Government's efforts to defend the rule of constitutional law.

People's Weekly World ☼

Questions about 9/11 refuse to go away

Not only is the truth of Iraq's non-existent weapons of mass destruction refusing to go away as an issue in many countries, so is the complicity of the Bush administration in the bombing of the World Trade Centre Towers on September 11, 2001 refusing to lie down.

Families of the 2976 victims are filing claims for the loss of their wives, husbands and relatives and are being required to sign away any rights for future claims against the government, the airlines, the airports or any security firms.

Most have agreed to this demand but 125 of the families are refusing to give away these rights and are asking very nasty questions and challenging the stories that have been told by leading figures in the Bush Government.

Bush's National Security Adviser, Condoleezza Rice said at the time that she did not "think anybody could have predicted that these people would take a plane and slam it into the World Trade Centre". The fact is that there were many warnings as far back as 1993 and 1994 that this was a possibility but they were ignored.

One of those challenging the Government, Kristen Breitweiser says that throughout 2001 intelligence agencies flooded the government with warnings of

possible terrorist attacks. These resulted in commercial airlines being warned in June and July of 2001, several months before the 9/11 events.

On July 5, 2001, a top counter-terrorism official, Richard Clarke, warned that "something really spectacular is going to happen here, and it's going to happen soon".

Kristen Breitweiser also asks: Why weren't the F-16s and Stealth bombers that tracked the hijacked planes on radar screens at approximately 8.05am used to prevent the tragedy?

Many other questions are being asked.

For example, why did World Trade Centre 7 collapse when no airplane hit that building and why did it and the other two World Trade Centre buildings all implode in exactly the same way? There have been other fires, but this has never happened before.

The firefighters fighting the fires at the time claimed that the fires were dying out and could be extinguished with just a couple of lines of hose. This was before they imploded.

Why would seismographs in the New York City area register two tiny quakes at Ground Zero at the commencement of the collapse of each tower?

Of the 19 alleged crew members of the hijacked planes, four have been found alive and well.

Questions without answers

Another of the widows, Ellen Mariani filed a suit last September naming George Bush, Richard Cheney, John Ashcroft, Donald Rumsfeld, Condoleezza Rice and others as defendants and is demanding a jury trial.

In an open letter to President Bush she has posed some questions:

- Why were 29 pages of the 9/11 committee report personally censored at your request?
- Where are the "black boxes" from Flight 11 and Flight 175?
- Where are the "voice recorders" from these flights?
- Why can't we gain access to the complete air traffic control records for these flights?
- Where are the airport surveillance tapes that show the passengers boarding the doomed flights?
- Why did your brother, Jeb Bush, the Governor of Florida, personally go to the offices of the Hoffman Aviation School and order that flight records and files be removed? These files were flown out of the country. Where were they taken to? she asks.

Complicit

A growing number of people in the United States believe that the US Government was complicit in the attacks. And American families are in the forefront of the efforts to find the truth. A recent German poll showed that one-third of young people also believe this. The daily media ignore these questions but they continue to bubble away and sooner or later the truth will come out, just as it is coming out about WMDs in Iraq. ☼

President Bush and Vice-President Dick Cheney have placed strict limits on the private interviews they will grant to the federal commission investigating the Sept 11, 2001 attack on the World Trade Centre while Condoleezza Rice has refused to testify publicly. One former Senator, frustrated by the restrictions placed on the commission by the Bush administration said he might quit the commission altogether.

Global briefs

The Hague: The trial of former Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic may be extensively delayed as the court seeks a new judge. Richard May, the presiding judge has announced that he is retiring because of ill-health.

BRITAIN: The number of prisoners in England and Wales reached an all-time high of 74,543 despite pleas from ministers to the courts to use imprisonment as a last resort.

IRAQ: 1.7 million signatures have been collected on a petition demanding a referendum on the future of northern Iraq's Kurdish region. For the past decade Kurds in northern Iraq have been largely autonomous under Western protection. Their status in the new Iraq has become an extremely contentious issue for negotiators as they are trying to finalise an interim constitution. Organisers are demanding a vote on whether the Kurdish zone in northern Iraq should become part of the country in a federal structure or declare independence. The petition was handed to Iraqi and American officials. Kurdish leaders have been pressing for self-government in a federal system but many in Iraq view this as the first step to the break-up of Iraq.

INDONESIA: Indonesian Vice President Hamzah Haz described the US-led invasion of Iraq as "terrorism against all mankind" at the closing of a three-day international conference of Islamic scholars. The conference held in the world's largest Muslim populated nation was attended by some 300 Islamic scholars from 49 countries. The conference opened last Monday with stinging attacks by President Megawati Sukarnoputri and Islamic leader Hasyim Muzadi on the US-led invasion. Haz ended the meeting on the same note. "When the United Nations is no longer able to restrain the yearnings of strong states' leaders to kill harmless, innocent (people) and devastate a civilisation, I'm very sure that the voice of worldwide Muslim scholars has more value still in the global endeavour to halt the violence by strong countries against the weak", Haz said. The conference's closing statement condemned terrorism and called on Muslims worldwide to practice moderation and tolerance.

ISRAEL: Israeli forces raided Arab banks on the West Bank, seizing millions of dollars. The money was removed from hundreds of institutional and personal accounts. Witnesses said soldiers covered the banks' security cameras with black plastic bags and herded employees together before ordering workers with keys to open the vaults. Amin Haddad, the head of the Palestinian Monetary Authority called the raid a robbery intended to "shake our banking system". He rejected assertions that the accounts were linked to terrorism.

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



email: guardian@cpa.org.au

Putting workers in chains

With the diversion being created by the ALP and the Government going on about such claptrap as "mentoring boys to provide father figures" it may be easy to forget the real agenda of both major parties is to put workers and their unions in chains. The ruling class hasn't for a second abandoned this goal as the economics editor of *The Australian* newspaper, Alan Wood, made clear last week.

In his column Wood took a pot shot at the Melbourne broadsheet *The Age* over its dispute with the Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union, which had a picket on the *Age's* printing plant in Melbourne.

Wandering from safe ground to take a stab at creative writing, Wood tried to use sarcasm and irony to pour derision on the *Age* staff, calling them a "union-hugging" collective now faced with union action (irony, get it?).

This playful thrust and parry at a rival paper seemed rather off the subject of the economy, but it transpired that Wood was only using it as a springboard to launch an attack on the union movement.

He whinged about the "failure" of the police to "enforce the rule of law" against unions, and cited what for him was the "most notorious example" of union action, the 1998 waterfront dispute (which

was in fact a Government/employer attempt to destroy the Maritime Union).

Outrage fairly pouring from his keyboard, Wood accused waterfront workers of using "violence, destruction of property and threats to kill". Wood wants Victoria's Labor Government to get behind the police to encourage them to attack unionists taking industrial action otherwise "corporate Australia might take the view the state is returning to the industrial dark ages ..."

Wood even claims federal Labor intends to scrap the Howard Government's anti-union legislation.

This, then, is that dried up old cliché that unions are destroying the economy. So much for creative writing, Alan. But he, as a mouthpiece for the ruling class, is nonetheless deadly serious, as are his masters.

As the economic crisis becomes more entrenched and the class contradictions become sharper they will come out more in the open with their plans for organised labour. They haven't put all those anti-union laws in place for nothing.

**Nathan Barnes
Brisbane, Qld**

Memorial concert for Andy McNaughton

It is a pleasure to pick up a Guardian on Campbell Street. There is always much in it that I personally agree with. To keep an independent publication going, in the current climate of anti-humanitarian parrotry and empty punditry, is no mean feat.

We remember Hannah Middleton's invaluable help in past protests, when East Timor was under Indonesian military occupation.

We recently lost our convenor,

Dr Andrew McNaughtan, a hero of our times, admired by many in East Timor.

For years, Timor was his life. Recently he campaigned against the "generous" stealing of East Timor's oil. He helped make an excellent 18-minute documentary last year, called DON'T STEAL OUR FUTURE on the standover tactics which means that Australia is getting 60 per cent of the revenue from East Timor's oil.

Typical of this Howard Government to divorce itself from international law to decide the seabed boundary issue that makes this theft possible.

On the April 21 we are holding a memorial concert for Andy, Sydney Town Hall 7-11pm, with proceeds going to the Alola Foundation in Timor.

Alola helps the many women traumatised in that country.

Sydney readers, please support it. Like all events organised by the indefatigable Jeff Lee, it will be a night to remember.

**Stephen Langford
(Secretary Australia East Timor Association, NSW) and
Kate Finsterer, Toni Pollard,
John Bell, Jean Lopez,
Jeff Lee, Gai Smith,
Brendan Doyle, Kathleen Riggs**

Time to end inhumanity

I am writing about the dilemma of all those genuine refugees on Australian visas that are temporary. Their life here is torment and in the national interest, the torture must end. After three years and more, living peacefully among us, we know them as good people and good workers who should be allowed to stay.

A 40-year-old Iraqi refugee in my community died last week. The death certificate may say "cardiac arrest" but all who knew him say he died of a broken heart, his physical and mental health broken by four years of intense grief and shame, and the forced separation from his beloved family in Iraq who looked to him as their provider and protector. His four years in Australia were hell on earth, his suffering unbelievable.

The current policy results in many of the nearly 9000 refugees on temporary protection visas suffering and being medicated for severe anxiety – men, women and children. As well, tens of thousands of Australians personally involved with this national tragedy are experiencing vicarious trauma, bewildered by the continuing inhumane actions of our Government. We share the pain of our refugee friends.

May mercy, kindness and compassion be restored, and quickly.

**Frederika Steen
Volunteer worker
Romero Centre, Brisbane**

Open letter to Latham re Pine Gap visit

We would like to congratulate you on your decision to visit Pine Gap. As you visit this military facility, we would like to draw some facts to your attention.

Pine Gap was established in secrecy, without the knowledge or consent of the Australian people.

It has continued to operate in secrecy, largely without the knowledge and consent of this country's parliamentarians.

The Australian Parliamentary Joint Standing Committee on Treaties has complained that MPs

are kept in the dark about Pine Gap. Although members of the US Congress have visited Pine Gap and received classified briefings about its functions, the Treaties Committee is "entrusted with less information than can be found in a public library".

When Pine Gap was established, the Australian people were told that it was for space research. Subsequently it was revealed that in fact it was a CIA-run intelligence gathering and surveillance – spy – base. Later the CIA was joined by two other United States intelligence agencies, the NSA and NRO.

In addition to its surveillance role, it has become clear over the years that Pine Gap has important war fighting functions, including target identification, missile early warning, monitoring communications and troop movements, and photographic surveillance.

Pine Gap was a vital element in United States military actions in Afghanistan and in the first and second invasions of Iraq.

An important part of your recent statements to the Australian people has been the question you ask: "Is it in the interests of Australia and Australians?"

We clearly say that Pine Gap is not in Australia's interests. But how can the Australian people take a decision on this issue when they are not allowed to know anything about Pine Gap.

We call on you to make a commitment to the Australian people that, should you become Prime Minister, a full and public enquiry will be held into the role of Pine Gap.

**Denis Doherty
National Co-ordinator
Australian Anti-Bases Campaign
Coalition**

Culture & Life

by
Rob Gowland

Who's a threat?

Michael Moore, in his excellent film *Bowling For Columbine*, remarks upon the culture of fear in the United States. It is the most discernible link to and justification for the country's equally prevalent gun culture.

Moore, you will remember, did some elementary but telling on-the-spot research on the high murder rate, multi-locked doors, suspicion and fear on the part of people in Michigan compared with the unlocked doors, openness, lack of fear and low murder rate of people living just over the border in Canada.

With more guns than people, and backed by its super-power arsenal, the US population should be the most secure and least frightened in the world. Instead they are the most fearful. They are afraid of their neighbours, strangers, foreigners, the UN, the police, the Devil and aliens from outer space.

This should not surprise anyone. After decades of assiduous promotion of a culture of acquiring wealth by fair means or foul, people can hardly be blamed for assuming that others must covet what they have.

At the same time, and with equal assiduousness, capitalism denies that society develops according to scientific laws. Instead it cultivates the view that society is subject to totally random acts,

that crime and violence are arbitrary, indiscriminate and entirely unpredictable.

In such a seemingly chaotic world, with these messages drummed into them all the time, it is understandable that US citizens, who have a startlingly high rate of superstition and an appallingly low standard of general education, should so susceptible to fear and paranoia.

It is equally understandable that the capitalist ruling class fosters that fear and paranoia for its own benefit.

US ruling circles have used various mythical "threats" to justify hiking the military budget, or the FBI's or the CIA's budgets ever since the end of the Second World War.

The overthrow of socialism in the USSR removed the most generally useful of all the "threats" – the "Soviet threat". This was paradoxically the most "visible" but also the most mythical. That it was mythical did not diminish its usefulness, however.

While ordinary Americans naïvely welcomed the removal of the "Soviet threat" and looked to a "peace dividend" wherein previous military spending would be diverted to socially useful projects, the big corporations looked around for a new "threat".

Corporations with Pentagon contracts, the most lucrative sort you can get, and corporations who found it beneficial to have their economic clout backed up by the military might of an unchallenged superpower, were united in their desire to keep the military budget at record levels.

They found "their most persuasive excuse for inflating the military budget since the Soviet threat" in

the September 11 suicide airliner bombings of the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon. The "terrorist threat" emerged.

But terrorists are, almost by definition, relatively small scale, and while they helped to generate fear they could not really be used to justify a world-dominating military. So "rogue states" were added to the mix.

But even these failed to measure up as viable "threats" according to the previous ways of assessing a threat. So the Pentagon, the State Department and other relevant US agencies changed the very definition of what constitutes a "threat".

As US writer Diana Johnstone puts it in *Fools' Crusade: Yugoslavia, NATO and Western Delusions*: "From its pinnacle of power, the United States can scarcely perceive any tangible threats.

"Instead of feeling safer, the 'defence' planners imagine potential threats everywhere. These go beyond invisible 'terrorists' or recalcitrant 'rogues'.

"From now on, the United States fears the very potential of anybody, anywhere, to have the capability to pose any sort of threat. ... Here is the bottom line to 'globalisation', and it signifies world economic domination by military means. ...

"The pretext is flexible: Harboring terrorists, building weapons of mass destruction, or 'humanitarian catastrophe' – all can be used to justify bombing as part of an unfolding strategy of global control."

But there is a flaw in this grand design: it is impossible for capitalism to control all sources of information, to mould and manipulate all opinion, to silence or sideline all dissenting views. Their own life experiences teach people



about the different class allegiances of corporations and working people.

While US corporations are making a mint out of Iraq, US soldiers are being killed by a population that clearly does not want them there. The US people may be denied information, manipulated by a host of spin doctors, and kept in a state of alarm, but they are not stupid.

Thousands of them never succumbed to the paranoia, the patriotic fervour whipped up after September 11, the Christian fundamentalist crusade of George W Bush. Tens of

thousands will take part in the mass rallies and marches on March 20 against the continuing US occupation of Iraq.

For those Americans, like thousands of others around the world who will demonstrate on the same day, the real threat comes from their own government and the corporations that back it. The "Pentagon threat" and the "CIA threat" are the ones that they find most fearsome.

And, unlike the "Soviet threat" of yore, these threats are very real indeed. ☛



Sun March 7 ~
~ Sat March 13

Several new series start this week of which the standout is definitely the thriller *State Of Play* (ABC 8.30pm Sundays). Not really a series, it's more like a one-off drama that happens to be in three parts.

A gripping thriller it concerns an up and coming politician and a team of journalists on a major broadsheet. When the politician's research assistant inexplicably falls in front of a train the tabloids smell an "affair".

The broadsheet's team, however, discover a puzzling connection between the dead woman and a young bag snatcher who was mysteriously shot dead the same morning.

The British critics have been lavishing praise on the acting and on Paul Abbott for his script, which is outstanding, but I think the director, David Yates, must take a lot of the credit. The film moves at a tremendous pace, keeping you glued to your seat, as they used to say.

Compared to something like *Murder Investigation Team*, that short-lived spin-off from *The Bill*, where everyone is always rushing madly about, smashing in doors and shouting "Go! Go! Go!" into radios, *State Of Play* is in a whole different class.

The program stars John Simm as the lead reporter, David Morrissey as the MP, and Bill Nighy (as the news editor), together with Kelly McDonald, Polly Walker, and Philip Glenister.

Paul Abbott's previous writing credits include *Cracker* and

the factory-based drama series *Clocking Off*. What marks out his script for *State Of Play* is its originality of plot and the quality of its characterisation.

At almost 300 minutes, there is certainly plenty of scope for density in the writing and it has paid off here.

The great contest in philosophy is between idealism (the belief that ideas are primary – God thought a bit and created the world) and materialism (the belief that matter is primary – the Universe, the Earth and eventually human beings all evolved, and in time humans themselves invented "God" to explain the things they didn't understand).

This contest is still being bitterly fought, especially by the proponents of religion (the epitome of idealism). But today the anti-materialist propaganda takes many forms, to suit different audiences.

For the likes of George W Bush there is old-fashioned crude fundamentalism, with its literal interpretation of the Bible and total rejection of science (especially evolution).

But for more sophisticated folk there are a variety of approaches that all try, one way or another, to incorporate science in the idealist camp! It takes considerable intellectual juggling, but clearly it allows some scientists to run with the hares and hunt with the hounds.

On the ABC, the chief outlet for this anti-materialist propaganda is *Compass* which this week has yet another go: a three-part series *Testing God* (ABC 10.15pm Sundays).

I'll let the ABC explain the theme of the series: "As this three-part series unfolds it becomes clear that science does not in any way demand atheism.

"In fact, belief in God emerges as a coherent and intellectually satisfying position, adhered to by many of the world's most distinguished scientists. For them, far from undermining God, science is the ultimate way of enriching their faith and exulting in creation."

Yeah, right.



Oscar-winner (*Harvey Krumpet*)

Here is a hypothetical question for you. You and a mate have decided to go to Antarctica to walk across a chunk of it without mechanical aids, dragging your tent, food and equipment behind you in two plastic kayaks doubling as sleds.

Do you abandon this project:
(a) the moment you think about it?

(b) when the Australian authorities warn you not to make the attempt?

(c) when you find your budget will not run to rescue insurance, even though you will be alone in one of the most inhospitable and dangerous places on the planet?

(d) when you get to the airport and realise that you did not check whether your heavily laden kayaks would be acceptable as luggage and you find that they will have to be shipped separately as freight?

(e) when you arrive in Sydney from Melbourne to catch your connecting flight to the jumping off point in South America and you find

that your mate has left his passport in Melbourne?

(f) when you get to South America but the kayaks don't and you and the yacht you have hired must sit in harbour for a week waiting for the kayaks and the precious gear to arrive?

(g) or when you realise that you cannot afford to extend the hire time for the yacht so you must now complete the crossing of the Antarctic Peninsula in the minimum time or there will be no yacht to pick you up on the other side?

All these things happened to Australian "adventurers" Pete Bland and Jay Watson, but they went anyway. When they got to Antarctica they went off course more than once, fell through the ice into freezing water, lost one of the kayaks down a mountainside to smash at the bottom.

Eventually had to be rescued (at great expense) when an avalanche carried one of them away and left him badly injured at the bottom of a crevasse.

Naturally they had a video camera with them. The film they made of their "adventure" has been turned into a three-part series called *Hell On Ice* and screens on *Reality Bites* (ABC 8.00pm Tuesdays).

Idiocy on ice would seem more appropriate.

Other programs of interest this week include's Adam Elliot's Oscar-winning claymation

"biography of an ordinary man cursed with perpetual bad luck" *Harvey Krumpet* (SBS 9.00pm Monday). Elliot's trilogy, *Uncle, Cousin and Brother*, is one of Australia's most highly awarded and successful collection of short films.

British children's glove-puppet superstar Basil Brush returns in his own sitcom, *The Basil Brush Show* (ABC 4.35pm Tuesdays), a mixture of corny jokes, zany situations and silly characters. The show is endearingly post-modern: every character in it is aware that they are in a scripted sitcom. When there is a chase they run through neighbouring shows.

The ABC has another series for our entertainment, *Posh Nosh* (ABC 10.15pm Fridays).

A faux cooking program, it is full of cod technical terms (which sound disconcertingly real) and absurd onscreen data (a whole Beluga sturgeon can be imported for 41,000 British pounds through endangered_species.com).

The presenters are frightfully rich, titled snob Simon (Richard E Grant) and Minty (Arabella Weir, who co-wrote the series) whom he married so no one would know he's gay.

I would not want to see several episodes back to back, but once a week for ten minutes, it makes a clever and diverting filler. ✪

An evening with: Andrew Wilkie



Andrew Wilkie is a former Lieutenant Colonel and Senior Intelligence Officer in the Office of National Assessments. On 11 March 2003 he resigned in protest over the looming Iraq war, the only spook in the USA, UK or Australia to do so. The dramatic move was reported globally. Since then he has become a leading critic of the Howard Government.

Wilkie will explain why the Iraq war was unjustified and illegal, and offer his assessment of the prospects for the still embattled country. Central will be his first-hand observations of the politicisation of intelligence in Canberra, London and Washington. Wrapping up, Wilkie will consider also the broader implications of the war, not least how it made the world a more dangerous place.

Sydney

Western Sydney
Peace Group
Monday 8 March 7.15pm
Rooty Hill Uniting Church
86 Rooty Hill Rd North,
Rooty Hill
Further info: 0404 273 313 or
timothy.k.vollmer@uts.edu.au
Wspg.blogspot.com

Perth

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Every Friday night 6pm – 7.45pm

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(across from the Chalmers St exit and Devonshire St tunnel at Central Station)

Dinner afterwards in the Royal Exhibition Hotel across the road

5th March

The impact of globalisation on the aspirations of Latin America

Dr Michael Humphreys School of Sociology Uni NSW;

Dr Estela Valverde, Dept of Spanish and

Latin American Studies Uni NSW

12th March

An evening with John Pilger:

Power, Danger, the Media and Conscience...

March 19

Divide and Rule – Return of the Wedge

Professor John Warhurst, Politics ANU (to be confirmed);

Phil Glendenning, Director Edmund Rice Centre

March 26

Reining in Economic Inequality

Louis Haddad, Economics, Uni of Sydney

Frank Stilwell, Prof. Economics, Sydney Uni

Inq: Pat Toms 9358 4834 pbtoms@bigpond.com; Janet Fischer 9398 8891;
PO Box 325 Rozelle NSW 2039; Win Childs Fax 9660 6554

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America's empire of bases

Chalmers Johnson

As distinct from other peoples, most Americans do not recognise – or do not want to recognise – that the United States dominates the world through its military power. A vast network of American bases on every continent except Antarctica actually constitutes a new form of empire. Our military deploys well over half a million soldiers, spies, technicians, teachers, dependants and civilian contractors in other nations.

To dominate the oceans and seas of the world, we are creating some thirteen naval task forces built around aircraft carriers.

We operate numerous secret bases outside our territory to monitor what the people of the world, including our own citizens, are saying, faxing, or e-mailing to one another.

Our installations abroad bring profits to civilian industries, which design and manufacture weapons for the armed forces or, like the now well-publicised Kellogg, Brown & Root company, a subsidiary of the Halliburton Corporation. Whole sectors of the American economy have come to rely on the military for sales.

Seven hundred and more foreign bases

It's not easy to assess the size or exact value of our empire of bases. The Pentagon currently owns or rents 702 overseas bases in about 130 countries and has another 6,000 bases in the United States and its territories. Pentagon bureaucrats calculate that it would require at least \$113.2 billion to replace just the foreign bases.

These numbers, although staggeringly large, do not begin to cover all the actual bases we occupy globally. The 2003 Base Status Report fails to mention, for instance, any garrisons in Kosovo – even though it is the site of the huge Camp Bondsteel, built in 1999. The Report similarly omits bases in Afghanistan, Iraq, Israel, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Qatar, and Uzbekistan.

The Pentagon similarly fails to note all of the US\$5-billion-worth of military and espionage installations in Britain, which have long been conveniently disguised as Royal Air Force bases.

If there were an honest count, the actual size of our military empire would probably top 1,000 different bases in other people's countries.

If there were an honest count, the actual size of our military empire would probably top 1,000 different bases in other people's countries.

For their occupants, these are not unpleasant places to live and work. Most chores like laundry, mail call, and cleaning latrines have been subcontracted to private mili-

tary companies. Fully one-third of the funds recently appropriated for the war in Iraq (about \$30 billion), are going into private American hands for exactly such services.

Where possible everything is done to make daily existence seem like a Hollywood version of life at home. According to the *Washington Post*, in Fallujah, just west of Baghdad, waiters in white shirts, black pants and black bow ties serve dinner to the officers of the 82nd Airborne Division.

Some of these bases are so gigantic they require as many as nine internal bus routes for soldiers and civilian contractors to get around inside the earthen berms and concertina wire. That's the case at Camp Anaconda just north of Baghdad. It occupies 25 square kilometers and will ultimately house as many as 20,000 troops.

The military prefers bases that resemble small fundamentalist towns in the Bible Belt rather than the big population centres of the United States. For example, even though more than 100,000 women live on our overseas bases, obtaining an abortion at a local military hospital is prohibited.

Since there are some 14,000 sexual assaults or attempted sexual assaults each year in the military, women who become pregnant overseas and want an abortion have no choice but to try the local economy, which cannot be either easy or pleasant in Baghdad or other parts of our empire these days.

Our "Footprint" on the World

Of all the insensitive, if graphic, metaphors we've allowed into our vocabulary, none quite equals "footprint" to describe the military impact of our empire. Establishing a more impressive "footprint" has now become part of the new justification for a major enlargement of our empire.

There are "rogue states", "bad guys", and "evil-doers". The Pentagon has identified something they call the "arc of instability", which is said to run from the Andean region of South America through North Africa and then sweeps across the Middle East to the Philippines and Indonesia. This is more or less identical with what used to be called the Third World. No less crucially it

covers the world's key oil reserves.

Once upon a time, you could trace the spread of imperialism by counting up colonies. America's version of the colony is the military base. Militarism and imperialism are Siamese twins joined at the hip. Each thrives off the other.

According to the right-wing American Enterprise Institute, the



idea is to create "a global cavalry" that can ride in from "frontier stockades" and shoot up the "bad guys" as soon as we get some intelligence on them.

"Lily Pads" in Australia, Romania, Mali, Algeria . . .

In order to put our forces close to every hot spot or danger area in this newly discovered arc of instability, the Pentagon is proposing at least four and perhaps as many as six permanent bases in Iraq.

Other countries mentioned as sites for what Colin Powell calls our new "family of bases" include the impoverished areas of the "new" Europe – Romania, Poland, and Bulgaria; in Asia – Pakistan (where we already have four bases), India, Australia, Singapore, Malaysia, the Philippines, and even, unbelievably, Vietnam; in North Africa – Morocco, Tunisia, and especially Algeria, and in West Africa – Senegal, Ghana, Mali and Sierra Leone.

Most of these new bases will be what the military calls "lily pads" to which our troops could jump like so many well-armed frogs from the homeland, our NATO bases in Europe, or bases in the docile satellites of Japan and Britain.

To offset the expense involved in such expansion, the Pentagon has leaked plans to close many of the huge Cold War military reservations in Germany and South Korea. The US has already withdrawn virtually all of its forces from Saudi Arabia and Turkey, partially as a way of punishing them for not supporting the war strongly enough.

It wants to do the same thing to South Korea, perhaps the most anti-American democracy on Earth today.

In Europe, these plans include giving up several bases in Germany, also in part because of Chancellor Gerhard Schröder's domestically popular defiance of Bush over Iraq.

But the degree to which we

are capable of doing so may prove limited. The Pentagon's planners do not really seem to grasp just how many buildings the 71,702 soldiers and airmen in Germany alone occupy, and how expensive it would be to build even slightly comparable bases, together with the necessary infrastructure in countries like Romania, one of Europe's poorest countries.

One reason why the Pentagon is considering moving out of rich democracies like Germany and South Korea and looks covetously at military dictatorships and poverty-stricken dependencies is to take advantage of what the Pentagon

calls their "more permissive environmental regulations".

The Pentagon always imposes on countries in which it deploys our forces so-called Status of Forces Agreements, which usually exempt the United States from cleaning up or paying for the environmental damage it causes.

For example, the 2004 defence authorisation bill of US\$401.3 billion that President Bush signed into law in November 2003, exempts the military from abiding by the Endangered Species Act and the Marine Mammal Protection Act.

Grandiose plans

There are several reasons to doubt that some of the more grandiose plans will ever be put into effect or, if they are, that they will do anything other than make the problem of terrorism worse than it is.

For one thing, Russia is opposed to the expansion of US

military power on its borders and is already moving to checkmate American basing sorties into places like Georgia, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. The first post-Soviet-era Russian airbase in Kyrgyzstan has just been completed forty miles from the US base at Bishkek.

By far the greatest defect in the "global cavalry" strategy, however, is that it accentuates Washington's impulse to apply irrelevant military remedies to terrorism. As the prominent British military historian, Correlli Barnett, has observed, the US attacks on Afghanistan and Iraq only increased the threat of al-Qaeda.

From 1993 through to the 9/11 assaults of 2001, there were five major al-Qaeda attacks world-wide. In the two years since then there have been seventeen such bombings.

From 1993 through to the 9/11 assaults of 2001, there were five major al-Qaeda attacks world-wide. In the two years since then there have been seventeen such bombings.

As Barnett puts it, "Rather than kicking down front doors and barging into ancient and complex societies with simple nostrums of 'freedom and democracy', we need tactics of cunning and subtlety, based on a profound understanding of the people and cultures we are dealing with – an understanding up till now entirely lacking in the top-level policy-makers in Washington, especially in the Pentagon".

But the real reason for constructing this new ring of American bases along the equator is to expand our empire and reinforce our military domination of the world.

Abridged from *Common Dreams News Center*. For full text go to www.commondreams.org ☆



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