

COVER-UP

Criminal medical mistreatment hidden

Tom Pearson

An inquiry exposing criminal mistreatment of patients in two Sydney hospitals has traced a culture of systemic cover-up right by the state's Health Care Complaints Commission (HCCC). Horrendous cases of patients dying after being discharged, failure to make accurate diagnoses and a litany of neglect and incompetence, have been revealed.

Included in the 70 cases from Camden and Campbelltown hospitals singled out by the inquiry are: a mastectomy in which the wrong breast was removed; a patient dying of abdominal poisoning after gall bladder surgery; two patients who died after they were discharged, one on the way home and the other inside 24 hours; a patient who required resuscitation instead being sent to another hospital and dying 12 hours later.

The interim report from the inquiry by a Senior Council, Bret Walker, finds that the HCCC "failed to respond to complaints" against individual doctors and "also appeared to have actively avoided its statutory functions" upon receiving complaints.

Shocking as these revelations are, they are only the tip of the iceberg. There are now calls for 9000 cases that passed through the HCCC mill to be reopened.

The supervisory and regulatory system failure is clear. In early 2003, for example, the HCCC issued a report that served as a cover-up of the allegations which have now come out of Camden and Campbelltown. This forced the Government to sack the HCCC Commissioner.

Whistle-blower nursing staff were threatened by the then Minister to try and silence them, with some losing their jobs as a result. The attempt to gag the nurses was a desperate act by a Government that has been negligent in its failure in duty of care to the community.

As the Walker report states: "The very notion that a public regulator such as the HCCC could prepare a report which substantiates allegations of inadequate care on the part of identifiable doctors, without regarding those allegations as a complaint against that doctor, is offensive to a sense of fairness."

Pattern of secrecy

The watchdog that was supposed to prevent the ongoing behaviours and practices that resulted in the deaths of patients, and life-long damage to others, operates through a pattern of secrecy.

The publicly unaccountable HCCC was in fact set up more than ten years ago as a means to bury complaints about community health services.

In 1993 the then Liberal Government introduced the Health Care Complaints Bill, which provided for a one-person Commission (the HCCC) to oversee complaints about health services. The legislation removed basic rights of the public regarding investigation and exposure of malpractice, corruption and negligence in the health system.

The Bills contained appeals mechanisms which in fact stymied complaints, including \$1000 fines and six month jail sentences for anyone who goes to the media about their HCCC complaint. There are also clauses to allow for the exclusion of the Ombudsman as an avenue of complaint.

Another barrier to victims of negligence was introduced by the Carr Labor Government in 2001 when it rushed through its *Health Care Liability Act* which introduced statutory limitations on claims for medical negligence.

This effectively meant the end of access to the courts for many thousands of people seeking justice each year, while at the same time protecting and boosting the profits of insurance companies. ✪



New terror laws violate more civil rights

The Howard Government is proposing new laws to allow federal police to detain terror suspects for up to 24 hours before being charged. No case has been made out for altering the existing law which permits suspects to be held without charges for a maximum of four hours, plus a further eight hours if judicial authorisation is obtained.

The laws will also allow the government to prosecute members of an organisation that it deems to be terrorist, even if that organisation has not yet been officially banned under existing laws.

The existing draconian laws include provisions for ASIO to act as a secret police force. ASIO

may now hold persons incommunicado, effectively with no time limit. Persons refusing to answer questions put by ASIO – even individuals not considered terrorist suspects – may be jailed for up to five years, and anyone revealing details of these or other ASIO activities may be jailed for up to two years.

Why does it want to hold people indefinitely, without access to the outside world (not even family or a lawyer) and then to make it an offence to report on what took place? No one has provided any need for such laws. The definition of "terrorism" and the scope of the laws are so broad that they could be used against communists, trade unionists, peace

activists, environmentalists and other progressives.

The government is also drafting legislation to restrict access to evidence by lawyers acting in defence of persons accused under the terror laws, and to require security checks on these lawyers.

It is also considering legislation to make it an offence to "consort" with someone accused of being a terrorist, and another law to permit internment without charge of foreign nationals. Appalling though this proposal is, it is just one step away from applying the same law to Australia's own citizens.

continued page 2

Guardian Dates
 Because of the Easter break
 there will be no Guardian on April 14.
 The next issue will be on Wednesday April 21.

Uranium in drinking water
 - p3

Hardie ducks asbestos claims
 - p4

Four days that shook Spain
 - p6

Coke is not it
 - p7

Terrorist in Human Rights Commission
 - p9

The Guardian

No 1178

April 7, 2004

Defending murder

A US publicist and lawyer who defends Israel's political assassinations, torture, the building of Israel's apartheid wall and accuses those who criticise Israel of being hypocrites, bigots and anti-Semites, is currently visiting Australia. He is Harvard Law Professor Alan Dershowitz and he is here to gear-up Jewish people in Australia to come to Israel's defence.

Speaking at Mount Scopus College, Dershowitz urged high school students: "Do not fall into the trap of being on the wrong side of history, the wrong side of morality and the wrong side of legality, that so many in the world are today."

Alan Dershowitz is a Harvard Law Professor but claims that the assassination a few weeks ago of Sheikh Yassin, who had lived most of his life in a wheelchair, was legal under international law because Yassin was a "combatant". "The law of war is clear: you kill combatants", says the Professor.

This argument is similar to the one used by the US leaders to imprison alleged "combatants" – including two citizens of Australia – in Guantanamo, without trial or legal representation. If they were designated as regular soldiers they would be entitled to certain humane treatment and rights, but as "combatants" they have no rights and could be summarily executed by a US military court.

Although the goodwill of the rest of the world will ensure the continuation of the State of Israel, its present leadership and those who defend the atrocities being committed by them will be rejected by history. As the Jewish people awaken to what is being done in their name they, too, will reject the policies pursued by Ariel Sharon and defended by Alan Dershowitz.

In a display of arrogance, Professor Dershowitz asserts that "The greatest moral challenge the world faces is whether Israel's legitimate attempt to defend [itself] against terrorism will become another excuse for bigotry and anti-Semitism."

During the five decades since the end of WW2, the Zionist leaders of the State of Israel have invariably accused their critics of anti-Semitism. By this means they hope to silence the critics. It is a ploy that has influenced many minds and silenced the voices of many during that period.

Since the formation of the State of Israel in 1948, its Zionist leaders have focused on the creation of a pure Jewish state. The Palestinians who occupied most of the land that constitutes the State of Israel have been systematically forced off their land to make way for Israeli settlers, many of whom come from other countries and whose ancestors have never lived in the Middle East. Palestinians who live within the State of Israel are now also being forced off their land, even though they are citizens of Israel.

The creation of an apartheid state took a huge step forward with the wall being built to keep Jews and Palestinians divided. This, more than anything else, reveals the bankruptcy of the leaders of Israel who fear that Jews and Arabs might otherwise live peaceably side by side as they did for many centuries before the Zionists introduced their hateful racist policies. The Zionists are carrying out a deliberately organised crime of ethnic cleansing.

In an interview on the SBS program *Dateline*, Professor Dershowitz, while voicing some objections, came down on the side of torture. He told the interviewer: "What I talked about in my book was a sterilised needle underneath the nail causing excruciating pain but no permanent damage..."

In answer to another question the Professor said: "I'm against all of these methods... [but] if a country were to use any methods of this kind, then it should be subjected to democratic control." So, democratic torture is OK.

Asked whether torture is being used in the US now he answered: "Excruciating pain is being caused in America, fingernails and teeth are being drilled in Jordan and in Egypt and in the Philippines and who knows what's going on in many other parts of the world?"

The Professor merely wants to bring torture out "from under the table" and "have a public debate and have legislative or judicial action".

PRESS FUND

Defeating the Howard Government's appalling policies will require enormous efforts by left-wing and progressive forces in Australia. *The Guardian* is determined to make a major contribution to that struggle, but we need the help of our party members and supporters by way of contributions to the Press Fund. In order to meet the Fund's annual target of \$14,000 we'll need an average \$339 per week. Yet our average over the last five weeks has been only about \$100! So come on everyone, please give the struggle a boost and make a contribution for the next issue. Our thanks go to the following for their generous contributions this week, as follows:

Bert Appleton \$20, Stephen Bullock \$52, Jim Innes \$15, "Round Figure" \$8.

This week's total: \$95. Progressive total: \$2755.

US soldier faces jail for refusal to return to Iraq Call for support

Staff Sergeant Camilo Mejia is a young US soldier with the Florida National Guard who is refusing to return to military service in Iraq. He has served in the Army and National Guard for over eight years and in Iraq from March to October, 2003. He returned to the US for two weeks' R&R in October, and decided he could not in good conscience return to the illegal and immoral war in Iraq.

On March 15, Camilo Mejia reported back to the military at Hanscom Air Force Base in Massachusetts, and submitted to them a 40-page application for Conscientious Objector status. He has been at Ft Stewart in Georgia since March 17. On March 25 he was charged by the Army with desertion. He is currently confined to base at Ft Stewart.

Several Members of Congress have written to the Army asking them to give serious consideration to Camilo's application for Conscientious Objector status. Camilo's lawyers plan to put the WAR on trial at Camilo's trial later this spring or summer.

His mother Maritza Catillo is a member of Military Families Speak Out, one of a growing number of groups in the US dedicated to supporting military personnel who can no longer carry out their "duty" and live with their conscience. They also call on opponents of US military aggression to speak out and give their support.

The organisation has circulated a letter from Maritza Castillo, regarding her son, seeking support. The letter reads:

My name is Maritza Castillo and I'm an active member of Military Family Speak Out (MFSO). I'm also the mother of Staff Sergeant Camilo Mejia.

On March 24, 2004, Louis Font, my son's lawyer informed me about the charges that my son is being accused of. This is what he told me:

"Staff Sgt. Camilo Mejia, 28, of Miami, Florida was charged by his commanders at Ft. Stewart, Georgia with desertion on Wednesday, March 24, 2004. He will be tried by a Special Court Martial, which means that the maximum sentence he can receive is one year imprisonment and a Bad Conduct Discharge."

"I've also learned that army officials have restricted Camilo to Ft Stewart and have barred him from conducting face to face interviews on the base with the media. Louis Font, his civilian attorney, plans to challenge this "gag" order, arguing that my son's rights to free speech are being abridged.

President Bush does not give any explanation about the weapons of mass destruction that have not been found and for which he invaded and bombarded the people of Iraq and sent our young soldiers to die in this illegal and immoral war. Instead he makes a mockery about the reasons he's had to spend the money of the American people in this bellicose adventure. When he is asked about the weapons of mass destruction and the chemical weapons, he responds with vulgar gestures.

It is in this context that the army ignores the conscientious objection

application that my son Camilo submitted to this institution. Instead they accuse him of desertion.

I'm addressing the people of the United States of America, the Hispanic Community and the world to express my deepest sorrow and indignation about the injustice that is being made against my son. I want to ask you to continue giving him your support.

Please write letters to Camilo expressing your support towards his cause. Send letters to the Army Officials and to the Congress of the United States demanding that his conscientious objection application be accepted.

Peace and Solidarity to the world.

Maritza Castillo

Camilo's Address:

Ssg. Mejia Camilo
A Company USAG MED-HOLD 865
Hase Road,
Ft. Stewart, GA 31315

His Commander:

Major General William G. Webster, Jr.
Commanding General, Fort Stewart,
42 Wayne Place,
Ft Stewart GA 31314

Veterans Call to Conscience to Active Duty Troops and Reservists
4742 42nd Ave. SW #142
Seattle, WA 98116-4553

CallToConscience@yahoo.com
www.calltoconscience.net

For more information:

www.mfso.org
www.bringthemhomenow.org

New terror laws

continued from page 1

Terror laws to muzzle criticism

In addition to the new laws, amendments to existing legislation will allow the government to confiscate money made from the publication of books or memoirs by anyone who has trained with an organisation the government deems to be terrorist.

The government argues that it prevents people from "profiting" from their experiences. In fact, it is intended to muzzle criticism of the Howard Government's slavish obedience to US foreign policy by people such as David Hicks and Mandouh Habib, who have direct and bitter personal experience of the results of that policy.

The Howard Government has even taken the stick to leading government officials who put a position that in any way invites criticism of the government.

Not content with its "achievements" to date, the Howard Government is considering leg-

islation to amend the current defamation laws so that the defendants (such as the ABC and SBS) would have to prove "public interest" was served in their statements, publications and broadcasts. Truth alone will not do.

Labor's position

The ALP federal opposition has backed the government's legislative process, albeit with some minor concessions to civil rights. Labor's foreign affairs spokesman Kevin Rudd did not rule out support for the latest government proposals, saying only that: "We will be looking carefully at the draft proposals put to us by the Prime Minister."

State Labor Governments have emulated the Howard Government by introducing their own legislation that would effectively crush civil liberties in the name of "fighting terrorism". This includes the consideration of a proposal by Queensland Premier Peter Beattie to allow police and the Crime and Misconduct Commission to conduct house searches without a warrant.

The terror coalition

Overseas, US President George W Bush has been forced to allow White House special security adviser Condoleezza Rice to testify before a special US Senate committee investigating the World Trade Centre bombing.

There are huge unanswered questions arising from this event – questions as to what happened to the US Airforce on September 11, what financial interests Bush and members of his administration have in common with Osama Bin Laden, what happened to the black box flight recorders, etc.

It is clear that the governments of the US, Britain and Australia are all terrified of revelations arising from this and other enquiries; hence the crackdown via "terror" laws on those who might reveal information about the WTC bombing and its aftermath.

The Howard Government's latest "terror" proposal, and other aspects of the existing and proposed legislation, has already been the subject of intense criticism from the Law Council of Australia, as well as from the Greens and Democrats in state and federal parliament. The Communist Party of Australia strongly opposes the legislation.

In combination with the existing laws the new batch of legislation poses an extreme danger for the civil liberties of Australian citizens.

These laws give the government of the day arbitrary power to ban organisations. The power is based on vague, extremely broad criteria, and is able to be exercised on the basis of secret and untested evidence. This makes it liable to lead both to mistakes and to abuse, allowing the government to ban organisations, and to criminalise the conduct of innocent people, whose business or politics sit doesn't like.

Drinking uranium

Workers who recently drank water containing uranium while on a break at the Ranger uranium mine in Kakadu have spoken out about the behaviour of mine owners Energy Resources of Australia (ERA) – a subsidiary of British mining giant Rio Tinto. The men were in the mine's powerhouse at the time and had previously noticed the poor quality of the shower water. Still, they had no reason to believe that they had just drunk water containing 400 times the legal limit of uranium!

A few of the 11 workers affected have taken their story to *The Sydney Morning Herald* and exposed the shabby way that ERA dealt with the dangerous incident. When company representatives told workers that the mine would be closing down because of a water leak, no mention was made of the contaminated drinking water. The first mine worker Paul McDonald heard of the threat to his health was a report in the press the following day.

ERA initially refused to pay for flights for the men to get medical treatment. However, the most damning aspect of the disaster in the eyes of the workers is that it appears that ERA knew of the contamination BEFORE they took the regrettable drink:

"There's no doubt they knew about the contamination when we drank the water. We know that because ice machines had been emptied because we had been told they had been contaminated. But nobody told us the water had been contaminated before we drank from a fountain inside the powerhouse", Mr McDonald told the *Herald*.

It has been estimated that some 150,000 litres of contaminated water was released after this latest glitch that ERA now acknowledges occurred at 10.30 pm on March 23. The contaminated water flowed from the mine site to a header tank near the township of Jabiru. From there it found its way to Majella Creek, whose water is used for drinking by the local Mirrar Aboriginal people, the traditional owners of Kakadu.

Although they denied any serious consequences from the latest accident, ERA flew their top medical officer, an expert in toxicology, from London to the mine site.

Mine management has sought to reassure its workers and the Mirrar people that their normal sources of drinking water are now safe. However, the Mirrar people are wary of such assurances, having borne the brunt of past accidents at Ranger and its associated site at

Jabiluka, whose establishment and operation they consistently opposed.

Last week, the chief Executive of the Northern Land Council, Norman Fry, angrily denounced ERA's failure to adopt adequate risk management practices at the Ranger site.

He commented: "What will it take before this company realises that mining uranium is not something that can be done on a whim and a prayer? I find it deeply disappointing that, despite numerous mine site incidents over the years, numerous inquiries and numerous pledges to reform the way business is conducted at Ranger, these problems still keep recurring."

The former mine at Jabiluka, which was located within the Kakadu National Park, has now been closed, after a long struggle by the Mirrar people, conservationists and concerned citizens.

Government officials responsible for monitoring the safe operation of the Ranger mine have claimed that no damage has been caused to the park by mining operations. However, the mine has a long record of accidental discharges over its 20-year history.

The Australian Democrats Nuclear spokesperson Senator Lyn Allison stated "Last year a Senate committee ... found that serious complaints by a whistleblower regarding environmental management were not properly investigated, and the Committee



recommended an independent investigation.

"It beggars belief that out of 180 incidents there has been no environmental damage caused, as claimed by ERA. This latest incident vindicates the Senate Committee's findings and raises questions about why the [Howard] Government has refused to take action to address these issues."

ERA recently entered into an environmental accreditation agreement. The recent incidents do not bode well for the agreement. The next accreditation inspection is due in June.

Meanwhile, the mine has re-

opened after a short break. The processing mill remains closed. The workers who drank the uranium water are left to worry about their health. Their initial symptoms were severe: diarrhoea, headaches, lethargy, sore throats and vomiting. Doctors are unable to reassure patients who have drunk such quantities of toxic water. Paul McDonald put it this way:

"I have put aside any thought of compensation. My main concern is my health ... one doctor told me that obviously my kidneys would be effected. We are not cowboys. We have a brain and we know this is serious." ☹

Students' Day of Action

In a Day of Action on March 31, thousands of university students across Australia protested against the fee hikes that are part of the Federal Government's program for user-pays tertiary education. In Melbourne students occupied the chancellery at RMIT. In Sydney, at the University of Technology, police attacked protestors with pepper spray.

Students took to the streets in all capital cities and in regional university centres. The National Union of Students (NUS), which co-ordinated the actions, warned that student anger would soon be "crashing at the Government's door". "We will not back down until each university commits to rejecting the fee increase", said NUS National Education Officer Paul Coates.

Under legislation the Government introduced last year, universities can – and have – increased fees by up to 25 percent. NUS National President Jodie Jansen said students had come together to show their disgust at the Government's policy.

"We are also expressing anger at those university administrations who have chosen to chuck equality out the window and jump on the

fees bandwagon", said Ms Jansen. "Australian students at public universities are already paying higher fees than many of their fellow students in the USA. Enough is enough."

Paul Coates praised the commitment and determination of the students in the protests. "It's inspiring that students are prepared to put their bodies on the line when necessary to make their protest heard."

Following the police capsicum spray attack on 20 of the students in Sydney, NSW Greens MP Lee Rhiannon demanded a review of the use of the spray by police. "People have a right to protest in our society and the use of capsicum spray by police on students should be condemned", she said.

The Greens have called on the Police Minister to direct the police to cease the use of capsicum spray while a review is undertaken. They point out that the pretext originally used for the introduction of capsicum spray was for it to be a "non-lethal alternative to firearms".

Ms Rhiannon said that clearly the police were not going to use firearms in this instance and that they have apparently become "spray happy". ☹

Privatising our water

Brushing aside overwhelming evidence of disastrous environmental, economic and social consequences, NSW Planning Minister Craig Knowles last week gave the state's major irrigators lifetime perpetual rights to our water. This will further reduce the future downstream flow of the dying Murray-Darling river system.

This latest move by the Carr Government is part of an overall water management plan, in which river water is converted into a commodity, with some water allocated for environmental and other purposes, but with water licence holders able to sell off what they don't need to government authorities through a tender system.

The vast amounts of water siphoned off for years by the agribusiness monopolies has become a matter of bitter contention between them, other farmers, scientists and affected communities. The Government's plan, which is in fact a form of privatisation, will deepen the hostilities.

Irrigators in south-west Queens-

land regularly divert Culgoa River floodwater onto their properties, preventing the major part of the flow from reaching areas downstream in NSW and Victoria via the Murray-Darling system. Reservoirs constructed on these properties have a combined capacity twice that of Sydney Harbour. The biggest of these, cotton giant Cubbie Station in Queensland, holds three quarters of this volume.

Because the new system allows water licence holders to sell to others, including to governments themselves, it means in reality that the "water barons" and the market are increasingly determining how our most critical natural resource is managed.

This form of privatisation has been compared to the sell-off of Telstra or the Commonwealth Bank. The NSW scheme is a foretaste of a plan designed to operate on a nation-wide basis, formulated by scientist Professor Peter Cullen.

This how Cullen puts the spin on it: "The taxpayer has got an interest here in getting the water in the cheapest possible way, which is why I'm advocating the tender-based buyback, because that way we'll get the most water for the least price."

Those promoting it – including the Federal Government – claim the system will convince the irrigation agribusinesses to reduce their consumption of water. (The CSIRO has calculated that the use of water for irrigation purposes doesn't make much economic sense. In order to generate \$1 of product output, cultivation of rice and cotton require 7000 and 1600 litres of water respectively.)

In fact, given the desperate shortage of river water in general, the agribusinesses may find the trade in water more profitable than the production of crops. If so, the gov-

ernment will simply have burdened the nation with a layer of totally unproductive middle men with a stranglehold on our most precious natural resource – a resource which should rightfully belong to the people and be managed by government.

The value of water rights to some NSW farms is already greater than the value of the land itself.

Up till now water users in NSW were granted their licences on a 15-year basis (the so-called "permanent" licences). However, under the new scheme water users would be granted licences on a perpetual basis, and their operation would be conditional on 10-year government reviews of rainfall patterns and other factors.

The state governments are arguing that if the terms of the licences need to be reviewed at the expiry of a 10-year period, the licenceholder would not be entitled to compensation.

But the Federal Government wants to give irrigators the right to sue for damages if their access to water is restricted by government to, for example, protect the environment or for the benefit of town and city water.

Rather than tackling the problem by restricting the water available to the agribusinesses, and simply charging them for the amount they actually use, the government has preserved in perpetuity the rights they currently enjoy to squander this priceless resource.

The NSW scheme and Cullen's national plan both fail to deal with the harsh reality that Australia is the most arid continent on earth, and that our rainfall is certain to fall if global warming continues.

That governments are allowing this resource to be turned into a commodity in order to fatten the profits of a handful of corporations is nothing less than criminal. ☹



Rain kept numbers down at the Palm Sunday peace rally and march in Sydney last weekend. About 2000 people attended the ecumenical gathering and rally in Belmore Park where representatives of the Christian, Buddhist, Muslim and Jewish faiths passed on their greetings and offered prayers for peace. Participants then marched to Hyde Park for a further rally. Strong protests at Australia's involvement in the US aggression against Iraq featured on placards and in speeches at the gatherings at both ends of the procession.

Hardie ducks asbestos claims

Bob Briton

Between 1920 and 1986, James Hardie Industries (JHIL) grew to become Australia's biggest manufacturer of asbestos products. Asbestos found its way into brake linings, pipe lagging, wall linings, widely used fibro sheeting, science classrooms (asbestos mats over Bunsen burners) and in many other products. About one third of all homes built before 1985 contain asbestos.

Hardies used to boast that if you went down any street in Australia, you could not help but come into contact with some of its asbestos products.

How times change! In 1981 the use of blue asbestos was banned and in 1986 the use of asbestos in most products was also outlawed. Authorities had known of the dangers of asbestos since the 1930s – its inhalation can cause a range of respiratory diseases including cancers such as mesothelioma.

compensating workers and their families for asbestos-related illnesses.

Incredibly, and even though many workers have contracted respiratory ailments from handling products with the distinctive green and white "JH" logo, Hardies claims never to have manufactured asbestos products! This is where the story gets complicated.

Hardies' representatives say that, for tax and other reasons of "financial efficiency", the company decided to move its headquarters to the Netherlands in 1996. JHIL – the Aussie icon of once-upon-a-time – is now known as JHINV to reflect its new allegiances.

At the same time, Hardies set up two companies, Amaba and Amaca, and handed over its asbestos products interests to the two new entities. Since then, Hardies CEO Peter MacDonald has been able to make public statements about asbestos products as the following with a completely straight face:

"The products were the products

new Foundation \$293 million to distribute to claimants. Former Queensland Treasurer Sir Llew Edwards was put in charge of the fund and that, so it seemed, was that.

"There's been a contrived arrangement, a bit of corporate chicanery, to sanitise the name of James Hardie from asbestos products, while at the same time quarantining their liability." That is how Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union (AMWU) NSW State Secretary Paul Bastion summed up the slick manoeuvre.

The share price for James Hardies jumped 17c to \$3.80 when the "restructuring" was completed and kept on climbing to peak at \$7.64 just before the start of the bothersome inquiry. Analysts are predicting an operating profit of between US\$118 and US\$131 for 2003-04. Hardies now has 14 per cent of the market for house cladding in the huge US market.

The problem arising from the clever scheme is that the MRCF is running out of money. After only a few years of operation, only \$200 million remains in the kitty. The actuary working for Hardies at the time of the setting up of the trust denies being asked about the idea of a "cut and run" fund or the adequacy of its funding.

While Hardies says that it believed that the funding of the MRCF would be sufficient and that there is still enough in it to settle all current claims, it is hard to find anyone who agrees with them. Sir Llew asked JHINV for more money but, reportedly, was knocked back.

The NSW inquiry last week considered an issues paper that showed that, as far back as 2001, financial advisors PricewaterhouseCoopers and Access Economics had warned of flaws in the way the funding model treated investment risks and returns.

So, while CSR – fellow former asbestos heavyweight and operator of the disused Wittenoon mine – has

of Amaca and Amaba. They weren't the products of James Hardies Industries Ltd which was the holding company...it's never itself produced these products. So the liability lies with those companies."

In February 2001, the Medical Research and Compensation Foundation (MRCF) was established. The charitable fund was supposed to dispense compensation to thousands of Australians for asbestos-related illness attributable to the company's products.

Amaca and Amaba were stripped of their assets to give the



opted to stand and take its compensation cases on the chin, Hardies has been dragged kicking and screaming before a government inquiry.

"There is a straight out humanitarian issue of the possibility that large numbers of victims of dust disease could be left without compensation", NSW Attorney-General Bob Debus said recently.

The AMWU anticipates that at least 53,000 people will be affected by their contact with asbestos products between now and 2020. Most authorities predict that claims will total \$1 billion – a figure that leaves an unfunded liability for MRCF of \$800 million. The NSW government is also worried that the taxpayer will be left holding the bill.

Hardies is now trying to take a low profile. It says it could be held liable for "only" 15 per cent of asbestos related disease in Australia. It cancelled meetings of its people

when it learnt that demonstration of unionists and asbestos victims were to be held outside the particular office building.

If management had been genuinely concerned, they could have met people like Bernie Banton, a 57-year-old who has vowed to attend every sitting of the inquiry with his oxygen bottle by his side. He has received compensation but wants to see to it that others get some justice.

One of Bernie's brothers died of an asbestos-related disease and another is very ill. They all worked making lagging for use in power stations. Before he got his compensation, Bernie and his wife existed on a payment of \$560 a fortnight from the Dust Diseases Board.

The Inquiry is set to resume this week. Many other victims and their unions will be following the proceedings very closely. ☘

Esso lockout threatens Vic gas

Bob Briton

From next Tuesday, Esso subcontractors controlling critical construction work on Bass Strait oilrigs will lock out over 300 workers as a result of a dispute over rosters. The lockout will be imposed over the Easter break and is not expected to be fully lifted until May 6, 2004.

For 25 years oilrig workers and their families have ordered their lives around a 7-days-on, 7-days-off roster. Esso and their subcontractors now want to introduce a punishing 14-days-on, 14 days-off arrangement. The change is reputed to be able to save around \$1 million a year for the transnational that, by the way, made a profit of \$722 million from its Bass Strait operations alone in 2002.

Workers have resisted the roster changes for the past eight months and suggested a number of other ways to make the savings sought by the bosses. Esso rejected the ideas and insisted on the roster changes. Naturally, workers are worried about the stability of their family life.

The lockout follows on an application from Esso's subcontractors to the Australian Industrial Relations Commission to void the agreement containing the employees' condition of employment.

If their application is successful, workers will suffer a 50 percent (!) pay cut and be put under pressure to accept an employment agreement that includes the family unfriendly 14 day rosters.

This week the Australian Workers' Union (AWU), the Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union and Electrical Trade Union will be seeking an injunction from the Federal Court to prevent the lockout being planned by subcontractors Kellog, Brown and Root, Corp Instrument Engineering and Worley ABB.

The AWU is also concerned that the actions of ESSO and the subcontractors could put Melbourne's winter supply of gas in jeopardy. The bosses appear prepared to run this risk even though the workers were not carrying out any industrial action.

The AWU put it this way: "We don't want to be pushing panic buttons but it appears that once again Esso's blind drive to save a few cents here and there will leave ordinary Victorians without gas. The workers and the unions have been fully prepared to negotiate in good faith over this issue for over eight months, but every time we try to talk to Esso we come up against a brick wall. A cynical person could even think that Esso may want to have the dispute."

Victorians still remember the tragedy of the explosion at Esso's Longford gas processing plant where penny-pinching safety standards cost two workers their lives and injured eight others on September 25, 1998. They also recall the three weeks of disruption to gas supplies that followed the incident. ☘

To raise awareness of the roster dispute in the community, film makers Melinda Jamison and Nerida Lawton have produced a short film for the AWU. The film can be viewed online at – www.awu.net.au

MAY DAY

International Day of Workers' Rights & Peace

Melbourne

Sunday May 2
May Day March

Assemble 2pm corner Victoria & Russell Sts
opposite VTHC

May Day Tea & Concert
After March at Trades Hall

Friday April 23 7pm
Multi Cultural Celebration

Trades Hall
Corner Lygon & Victoria Sts
Donation \$5

Saturday April 17 5.30pm
Film & Food

CEPU 71 Cromwell St, Collingwood

Thursday April 29
Wreath Laying 5.30pm

8 Hour Monument
May Day Lecture 6pm

Old Council Chamber THC

Sydney

Saturday May 1
May Day March

Assemble 11am Hyde Park North
March 12 noon to Town Hall Square

Speakers:

Andrew Ferguson, State Secretary CFMEU
Julia Gillard, Federal Labor
Lee Rhiannon, Australian Greens
Anna Pha, Editor Guardian
Inquiries 02 9265 8438

Powerful accounts of Bougainville women's struggles

Bob Briton

Last week, in the Jubilee Room in NSW's Parliament House, Greens MLC Lee Rhiannon introduced a group of remarkable representatives of the people of Bougainville to an enthralled audience.

A diverse group had gathered for the launch of a book that gives the world a glimpse of the role of the women of Bougainville in the struggle for peace, reconciliation,

difficult circumstances for the two editors.

Also present were Chief Moses Havini, the overseas representative of the Bougainville Peoples Congress and Sam Kauona Sirivi, former general of the Bougainville Revolutionary Army. Their contributions were full of respect for the work of the women of Bougainville.

Vikki John, long-time activist in support of the independence struggles of the people of Bougainville,

finally ended in 1997, was obvious in all the speakers' voices. Throughout the evening, singer/songwriter and former member of the Regional Peace Monitoring Group, Fred Smith, sang for the gathering. The songs were full of the suffering caused by the war waged on Bougainville.

Following one of the songs, Chief Moses Havini stood at the front to address the meeting. He took a few moments to regain his composure. The words of one of Fred's songs had clearly moved him:

**"When they came to take me in we were hiding on the hilltops
From my village down below
smell the burning hear the gunshots
My house I can rebuild when it's time to start a new life
But what they did to my wife,
cause it seems to me now that
When she cries oceans
She finds ways to hide
When she bleeds roses
She bleeds all inside"**

...as Mothers of the Land
Pandanus Books, Research School of Pacific & Asian Studies, ANU, 2004 RRP \$55

The pain of the war, which finally ended in 1997, was obvious in all the speakers' voices.

independence and freedom for their homeland.

The book, ... as Mothers of the Land, is a collection of eye-witness accounts of the war waged by Papua New Guinea on the rebel forces on Bougainville, and the still-unfolding peace process, from the point of view of the women. The stories were brought together by Josephine Tankunani Sirivi and Marilyn Taleo Havini, who both spoke at the launch. The beautifully presented book represents years of work in

also addressed the gathering.

In all their contributions it was clear that the part played by women in the recent history of the land is not just "supportive" or even "important" - it was and is central.

Through the years of protest against rapacious copper mining, war, of life on the run, astoundingly successful self-reliance and the current delicate peace process, it has been the women that have kept this matrilineal society together.

The pain of the war, which



Lee Rhiannon, Josephine Tankunani Sirivi and Marilyn Taleo Havini

Photo: Anna Pha

Speak your mind on FTA

Next month John Howard will board a plane bound for the US. While stateside, the PM will meet with George Bush for the signing of the anti-people Australia US Free Trade Agreement (FTA), which the Australian Government hopes to have up and running by next year.

The FTA is not just a trade agreement. It affects every area of our lives from health, education, water, electricity, media and entertainment, banking, insurance, investment, the PBS, health and safety, trade union rights, wages and working conditions, the environment, jobs, government spending, customs, quarantine regulations and much, much more.

Time is short to defeat the agreement. There are two Federal Parliamentary Inquiries underway.

One is by the Senate Select Committee on the USFTA which is dominated by the ALP and minor parties. This Committee will examine impacts of the agreement on Australia's economic, trade, investment and social and environment policies, including, but not limited to, agriculture, health, education and the media.

The other is by the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties. It is dominated by the government and aims to have its report ready by June 23, 2004 - after the government has signed off on the FTA!

It is extremely important that as many people and organisations as possible make submissions to these committees. Submissions can be as short as you want. They can

be broad or deal with an issue of particular concern to you.

The following are some points you might want to include in your submission. (Guardians published on February 11 & 18 contain more details.) The proposed FTA with the US:

- outlaws industrial action that in any way restricts the operation of US corporations or hinders their profit-making - cabotage would go;
- despite assurances to the contrary, the cost of medicines would rise under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme as US corporations play a greater role in the decision making process and patent extensions come into force;
- limits the regulation of Australian content in new forms of media;
- quarantine and food labelling laws can be challenged by the US government and their implementation by US corporations;
- prohibits cross-subsidisation in public enterprises - will lead to higher postal and telephone charges for rural and regional Australia;
- adopts US copyright laws which will cost consumers more;
- affects ALL of Australia's laws and policies on investment and services at all levels of government;
- contains a "side-letter" outlining the government's commitment to sell the rest of Telstra;
- in agriculture, Australia opens its doors wide to US imports while the US retains its heavy subsidies to its own sector and will (if ever) take up to 18 years to open up fully to some of Australia's key exports;

• it could lead to the loss of many jobs, especially in the manufacturing sector;

• threatens environmental safeguards that could be deemed a "disguised restriction on trade in services";

• undermines our sovereignty through such means as competition policy, deregulation, lifting of most restrictions on US investment in Australia and putting US and Australian corporations on an equal footing, even when it comes to government purchases and subsidies;

• the dispute settlement process enables the US Government to claim that an Australian law or policy is in breach of the agreement;

• it makes the Australian Government accountable to US corporations giving them rights to information and to be consulted that the Australian people do not have;

• economic integration consolidates Australia's subservient relationship to the US, tying Australia in tightly to the US agenda of global domination - already well advanced in the military and political spheres.

Senate Select Committee on the USFTA - Closing date for submissions is April 30, 2004

Submissions should be sent by email to: FTA@aph.gov.au or by mail to:

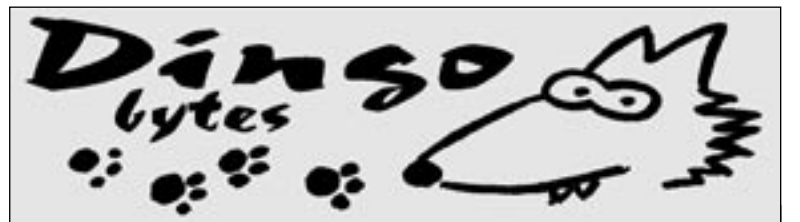
the Senate Select Committee on the USFTA
Suite S1.30.1, Parliament House, Canberra ACT 2600

Phone: Mr Brenton Holmes (61+2) 6277 3527 or Ms Tanya Stacpoole (61+2) 6277 3163
Joint Standing Committee on Treaties - Closing Date for Submissions is April 13, 2004.

Emailed submissions to: jsct@aph.gov.au or sent by post to:

The Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Treaties
R1-109, Parliament House, Canberra ACT 2600

The secretariat can be contacted by telephone: (02) 6277 4002 or fax on (02) 6277 2219.



In January the owners of the Ranger uranium mine in the Northern Territory were trumpeting a certification awarded under the international-recognised ISO environmental management standard. That in itself is a breath-taking development, considering the mine's long history of polluting the site and surrounding area and its location in the heritage-listed Kakadu National Park. Last week reality hit home when it was revealed that on March 23 there was (yet another) leak of uranium contaminated process water. The Northern Land Council said that the leak has affected at least six Ranger workers and directly threatens the national park. "From where I stand key staff appear to be asleep at the wheel", said Land Council Chief Executive Norman Fry. "It is obvious appropriate controls are not in place and there has been no improvement in risk management."

As the mass media's leading war propagandists, the News Ltd newspapers are almost past masters at beating up fear and loathing. They resort to all kinds of devices, including a style by some of their script writers (journalists?) you're more likely to find in a pot-boiler detective novel. One such article in *The Australian* last week began: "It's late at night and Abdul Zoud has a problem. The leader of Sydney's Islamic fundamentalists needs prompt answers to some serious and specific questions." You get the idea. But the placement of the piece on the centre pages of the paper was a tad unfortunate, being as it was adjacent to another article with a photo of John Howard and Howard's erstwhile choice for governor-general. That's right folks, Peter Hollingworth, the zealot Anglican archbishop who was forced to resign as G-G in disgrace for covering up the activities of paedophile priests. They could have written it like this: "It's late at night and the leader of Sydney's Christian fundamentalists needs prompt ..."

CAPITALIST HOG OF THE WEEK: is the Westco clothing stores. Sexual harassment in the workplace can be insidious or brutally open. Especially in non-union workplaces, a woman may suffer in silence for a long time in fear of losing her job. It can come from management as pressure in the form of discrimination when allocating jobs, rostering hours and holidays, doling out overtime etc. But companies sometimes get kicked back like last week after a staff member refused to bow to Westco's demand that its female staff wear sexist promotional shirts with "Stop Pretending You Don't Want Me" across the chest. The orders from management said, "This week you will receive ... a Westco Jeans T-shirt that must be worn each and every shift until further notice. THERE WILL BE NO EXCEPTIONS. NO T-shirt equals NO work." The hullabaloo that followed forced Westco to recall the T-shirts.

Workers Co-operative Arauco Building Services

Do you need any work done?
Get it done by your comrades!

- Interior/exterior painting
- Gyprock fixing: walls & ceilings
- Bricklaying, tiling, roofing
- Laying timber floors, floor sanding
- Plumbing and more

For an obligation-free quote,
phone Manuel on 04 1222 8401 or 02 9821 2626

Four days that shook Spain

The background: National elections were due to be held throughout Spain on Sunday, March 14. The government of the Popular Party (PP), with Aznar as Prime Minister, is a neo-fascist government. It is not only a repressive government against the workers and the peoples of Spain, it is Bush's direct spokesperson in Europe. Aznar is one of the "faithful allies" in the war against Iraq.

During the election campaign the Popular Party uses the "war on terrorism" as its main policy point, accusing all other parties, especially the PSOE [the Socialist Party], of joking about terrorism. On the eve of the bomb attack on March 11, unofficial polls consider the Popular Party to be the front-runner, though without an absolute majority.

Does this explain something about Aznar's attitude in the hours following the attacks in Madrid?

Day One:

On Thursday, March 11 between 7 am and 7.45 am, 10 of 13 bombs explode on trains and stations in a number of working class suburbs of Madrid resulting in 201 deaths and about 1500 injured.

Immediately, the Secretary of the Interior of the right-wing government declares that ETA, the military wing of the Basque separatist movement, is responsible.

At 10.30 am the spokesman for the Basque organisation Batasuna (a pro-independence party outlawed by

In the evening, at 7 pm, over 11 million workers and young people take over all the parks and avenues of Spain's cities.

At 7 pm there are more than two million in the streets. Suddenly Jose Aznar arrives accompanied by Prince Felipe of Spain. The masses shout: "Who did it?" The demonstrators refuse to be taken in by those who triggered the war in Iraq.

Mixed in with the demonstrators are organised fascist groups. They attempt to attack the procession of trade unions shouting: "Re-establish the death penalty! Death to Carod and Ibarretxe!" [Carod is Secretary of the Republican Left of Catalonia, which calls for political negotiation with ETA. Ibarretxe is the President of the Basque regional government and head of the Basque Nationalist Party.]

The demonstrators repel the fascist groups.

The doubts increase: If it wasn't ETA, why do Aznar and the government make these accusations?

There are more cries: "No to war!" More and more groups shout at Aznar: "Liar! We want to know the truth!" Some demonstrators wonder: "Is this demonstration against the ETA or against the Popular Party?"

Barcelona

One million three hundred thousand citizens of Barcelona gather in the centre of the Catalan capital. They shout: "No to terrorism, No to



"We want peace" – a student protester on March 12

of "management". It is the politics of "state lies" – the Big Lie. Like Blair and Bush with their famous weapons of mass destruction. Most people now understand that there were no such weapons.

In Spain the newspaper *El Pais* is seriously worried: "The government is on the ETA track – it is to be hoped that there wasn't an attempt to hide or manipulate information."

At 11 am on Saturday morning

In Washington, several hours before Aznar's electoral defeat, Colin Powell congratulates the Spanish PM, the "faithful friend". Why?

The *International Herald Tribune* replies: "To defend the decision to invade Iraq, the first anniversary of which will take place this Saturday". Powell declares: "The Prime Minister of Spain didn't shirk his responsibilities and I hope other leaders will not back out of theirs."

Day Four – the day of the elections

On election day, Sunday March 14, the Paris *Le Journal* still believes in Aznar's victory: "The drama of March 11 probably won't deprive the Spanish right of its victory."

In Madrid, Aznar votes in a charged atmosphere. The Spanish Prime Minister is booed by demonstrators accusing him of the massacre. As he left the polling station Aznar attempts to make a statement, which was inaudible due to the demonstrators' shouts, "Manipulators!"

A journalist comments: "For once, Basques and Spaniards are in agreement."

At midday, the rate of voter participation is five percent higher than at the election of 2000. "I've never seen this!" said a young electrician leaving the voting booth in Madrid. "This mobilisation favours the Socialist Party because this attack is

At 11 pm comes the announcement: "The Popular Party is beaten!"

Over the next few days:

"Sudden turn of events!" – "Shock wave" – these are the headlines that appear in the newspapers. For them the voters are never more than numbers at the polls.

The immense crowds that gathered in their millions on Thursday and Friday on the streets of Madrid, Barcelona, Pamplona and Bilbao have seized the Socialist Party vote to put down not only lies, but the war, the politics of privatisation, the destruction of jobs and the social regression implemented over eight years by Aznar under the baton of the European Union.

The *Guardian* (London) editorial sees it as "more than a Spanish event."

The *International Herald Tribune*: "Many voters expressed their anger at a government accused of support for the war in Iraq."

"The Bush Government is going to fight against the perception, true or false, that attacks on US allies can make countries wonder if it is wise to maintain such close ties with Mr. Bush," notes *The New York Times* of March 15.

The *Washington Post* states: "By voting against the party of Prime Minister José María Aznar, Spaniards apparently judged that the unconditional support of the Iraq war driven by the Americans

"We want the truth before we vote."

Spanish Government) declares that the bombs had not been placed by ETA.

At 1 pm Prime Minister Aznar calls all newspaper editors to tell them it is the work of ETA.

At 5.25 pm Spain's Minister of Foreign Affairs tables the subject again. The Europa Press agency reports that the Minister "sent a circular to all of Spain's ambassadors asking them to support the theory of ETA's responsibility". The Minister says that ETA is guilty and she requires all ambassadors to stick to this point of view. "Her Excellency uses every occasion to confirm the responsibility of ETA in these attacks and remove all doubts on the subject."

The UN Security Council votes on a resolution presented by Spain, condemning the bomb attack.

Second Day

Doubts set in: "Was it the work of ETA?"

A Madrid correspondent writes: "The [trade] unions are calling for 15-minute strike at noon on Friday. Gatherings are to be held in front of factories and business federations to insist that the government discloses all the information."

One of the trade union federations issues a declaration condemning terrorism but without reference to ETA. On Friday morning, the Madrid Government convenes a meeting of all parties and organisations. It wants to dictate to all that the banners for the demonstrations that evening should read: "Defence of the constitution!"

But the trade union federations decide, despite all the threats, to organise a procession with their own banners.

war!" "Aznar is responsible!"

The banners read: "Madrid, Baghdad victims of the same war!" and "New York, September 11, Madrid March 11, London 11?" The leaders of the Popular Party withdraw from the head of the demonstration under police protection, as the demonstrators boo and oust them from the gathering.

The crowd screams accusations: "Assassins! Assassins!" Of all the demonstrations, the one in Barcelona is probably the one that most clearly expresses the rejection of the government, the war and the manipulation of the attack.

Seven hundred thousand demonstrators in Valencia cry. "No to violence, no to terrorism, No to war!"

and at a cemetery in Madrid, two activists from the service industry (banks, insurance) who died in the attack are buried. Crowds accompany their coffins. The heads of the UGT trade union federation are there: "We must insist the government discloses all the information it is withholding. It is obvious that they won't say anything until after the elections. They must be accountable. They put us in this war. They made the war that has arrived in Madrid."

On Saturday evening at around 8.15 pm there is a sudden turn of events. The Secretary of the Interior appears on television screens to announce five arrests in regard to the investigation into the most horrific terrorist act Spain has ever

seen. The declaration is being issued, says one newspaper, in a climate of general doubt and suspicion of the information given out by the Spanish Government a few hours before the elections.

In Madrid, hundreds of people gather late on Saturday opposite the headquarters of the Popular Party to demand the whole truth. Even at midnight, several thousands remain. "We want the truth before we vote", demand the demonstrators.

There, too, they cry out: "The Popular Party-Aznar are guilty!" and "Aznar lies!"

Day Three

An interview with political expert Francois Heisburg questions: "Has the government tried to deceive, to distort?"

The answer: "I don't think the lies were intended to deceive public opinion – but in terms of political management, it is disastrous."

However, it is not just a question

The defeat of the Popular Party deprives the Bush administration of one of its strongest allies in Europe.

caused the 200 deaths in Madrid on Thursday... The defeat of the Popular Party deprives the Bush administration of one of its strongest allies in Europe."

On Monday, the future head of the Spanish Government, José Zapatero, declares: "The Spanish people voted for a government of change". He announces the recall of the 1300 Spanish soldiers stationed in Iraq: "The war in Iraq was a disaster. The occupation is a disaster." ☺

Coke is not it

Coca-Cola's products are hard to miss. Whether it is product placement in films, a supermarket, a corner shop or TV commercial, the brand name and image are always before us.

As a huge transnational company it spends millions of dollars not only on advertising its products but also on creating an image of a responsible corporate citizen, generous to good causes.

Behind this sales pitch and image is a classic transnational corporation, spreading its tentacles around the world in the never-ending drive for markets and profits – by what ever means possible.

The following are three examples:

The first one deals with workers in Colombia. Thirty members of the Colombian Food and Drinks Workers Union (SINALTRAINAL) employed by Coca Cola started a hunger strike last week in protest against increasing repression from the US transnational and far-right paramilitaries.

The hunger strikers are stationed outside eight bottling plants in Colombia.

In September last year, the company closed production lines at 11 of its 16 bottling plants. Since then, it has pressured more than 500 workers into "voluntarily resigning" in exchange for a lump-sum payment.

Most of the union leaders refused to quit their jobs. Then in February this year, the Ministry of Social Protection authorised the company's plans to dismiss 91 workers – 70 per cent of whom are union leaders.



This is Coca-Cola's latest attempt to eliminate the union from its 10,000 strong Colombian workforce.

There have been two murder attempts against union leaders, union offices have been raided and ransacked and workers have been subjected to almost constant surveillance.

In addition, relatives of union activists have been attacked, kidnapped and tortured and, in one case, murdered.

The second Coca-Cola story comes from India. In February, the government of the Indian state of Kerala told Coca-Cola that villages in the area were facing an acute drought and that the company should not use groundwater for its plant until June 15 when

There have been two murder attempts against union leaders, union offices have been raided and ransacked and workers have been subjected to almost constant surveillance.

monsoon rains started. The company suspended its production blaming the government for lack of protection.

The local council, which covers several villages, alleged that the Coca-Cola plant was drawing 400,000 gallons of water daily through thousands of wells, leaving local farmers with parched land.



Coca-Cola described the Kerala government's decision as extreme and discriminatory. The matter is pending in court.

The third Coca-Cola story comes from Britain. Coca-Cola decided to produce a sparkling mineral water. Its product was an absolute capitalist dream.

It is not quite the same as the

mineral water that comes from a mountain spring or some other natural source rich in minerals. Coca Cola apparently took its water straight from the mains supply at its factory in Sideup, Kent.

There was only one problem – how to pass off tap water as sparkling mineral water. So Coca-Cola chemists added a bit of this and a bit of that to improve the "taste profile" of the tap water. The end result saw a harmless bromide turned into bromate – a carcinogenic substance. Coke has withdrawn it from the market.

The mark-up on the tap water was over 3000 per cent. Not a bad profit for a company which suppresses trade unions, deprives poor farmers of water and cheats consumers. ☹

Best health insurance deal in the United States

As the Howard Government dismantles Medicare and tries to take Australia down the US path of privatised health services and ever-shrinking safety nets, it is worth taking a look at one of the best private health insurance deals in the US and what it offers. David Lawrence reports in the US communist weekly, *People's Weekly World*.

I want to tell you about the best health insurance deal in the United States, bar none. Here it is: The purchaser pays US\$35 per month. In return he or she gets:

- unlimited doctor's office visits
- accident care
- unlimited physical therapy
- routine exams
- unlimited specialty care
- durable medical equipment
- unlimited on-premises lab and x-ray
- unlimited EEG/EKG (expensive, sophisticated medical tests)
- unlimited hospital visits
- unlimited prescriptions
- pap smears
- unlimited medical consultations

"But wait, there's more", as they say on TV. There are no deductibles. In other words, patients don't have to pay, say, the first US\$500 in medical bills before the insurance kicks in. Moreover, there are never any co-payments.

Patients with this health insurance get 100 percent coverage for all medical benefits listed above from the first time they see the physician. These patients are never stuck paying 50 percent, 30 percent, or even 20 percent of any charges for any covered visit or medical procedure.

By now you are probably thinking, "Wow! That's fantastic! Where do I sign up?" I would love to be able to tell you that you can rush right out to your local health insurance sales office and sign on the

dotted line, but unfortunately, it is not that easy.

This is a very exclusive deal. In fact, it is only offered to 535 people in the entire United States. You would think that these would be low-income individuals, maybe, to get such affordable health insurance, but they are not.

No, in fact all these people earn US\$158,000 a year or more, and quite a few of them are millionaires. Have you guessed yet who these lucky, well-insured folks are? They are your elected officials, the 535 members of Congress!

And how was the cost of this health insurance determined? According to the Congressional Committee on House Administration: "Based on an analysis of several databases on health care statistics, an independent consulting actuary estimated that the relative value of the services provided by the Attending Physician amounts to less than 45 percent of a federal employee's average annual share for prepaid health care plans available to federal employees in the Washington, DC, area."

In other words, they claim that this is based on what other federal employees pay for comparable health insurance coverage. I suspect that the other "federal employees" would not agree.

So remember, while President Bush and his cronies in Congress spend hundreds of billions of dollars making war around the world,

and while they cut hundreds of billions of dollars from health care and social services for children, the elderly, and low-income families, these elected officials have the best health insurance deal in the nation.

Finally, here's a fun thing to do with large numbers. First, multiply \$35 times 12 months. That comes out to \$420 per year for a great primary care health insurance package. (In other words, it includes all the benefits listed above, but does not include long hospital stays or certain long-term physical or mental health treatments.)

Next, let's divide \$420 into, say, all the money President Bush has spent invading and occupying Iraq – that's now about \$106 billion. The answer is ... \$252 million. In other words, all the money wasted by Bush and the other armchair corporate warriors invading Iraq and killing tens of thousands of people could have provided primary care for four of every five Americans for an entire year.

War around the world, or health access across the nation? Only our political struggle can determine the answer.

If this is the best deal on offer in the US, then it is a sharp reminder to Australians how important it is to fight for Medicare with universal bulk billing and adequate funding our public hospital system so that everyone can have the quality treatment they need, when they need it and without a fee. ☹



Cost of war

Give me the money that has been spent in war and I will clothe every man, woman, and child in an attire of which kings and queens will be proud. I will build a schoolhouse in every valley over the whole earth. I will crown every hillside with a place of worship consecrated to peace.

Charles Sumner

It'll be a great day when education gets all the money it wants and the Air Force has to hold cake stalls to buy bombers.

Author unknown

Nations have recently been led to borrow billions for war; no nation has ever borrowed largely for education. Probably, no nation is rich enough to pay for both war and civilization. We must make our choice; we cannot have both.

Abraham Flexner

Intimidation, fraud mar El Salvador vote

Tim Pelzer

SAN SALVADOR: Far from being a victory for democracy, El Salvador's March 21 presidential election made a mockery of free and democratic elections.

Antonio Saca, the US-backed candidate of the National Republican Alliance (ARENA), won the election, easily beating Schafik Handal, the candidate of the left-wing Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN). Saca received 57.5 percent of the vote tally, and Handal received 35.6 percent.

While pre-election polls pointed to a closer race here, a campaign of fear, intimidation and blackmail carried out by the US and ARENA paved the way for Saca's victory.

The US Government sought to frighten voters into voting against the FMLN. Otto Reich, the Bush administration's special envoy for the Western Hemisphere, sent a subtle threat to the population when he told Salvadoran journalists on March 13, "We are worried about the impact that a FMLN victory would have on US commercial, economic and migratory relations with El Salvador. We would not have the same confidence with an El Salvador led by a person who is an admirer of Fidel Castro and Hugo Chavez."

Reich suggested that "all Salvadorans ... reflect and think about under what flag or ideology could the country prosper or regress, and not to surrender power to a person with an autocratic vision [i.e., Schafik Handal]."

President Bush claimed without

evidence that the FMLN was linked to terrorism.

Republican Congressmen Tom Tancredo, Dana Rohrabacher and Dan Burton visited on March 17 and threatened to revise the Temporary Protected Status that benefits 400,000 Salvadorans living in the US. They also threatened to stop sending money to their families in El Salvador.

"The citizens of El Salvador that live in the US also send close to \$2 billion to homes in your country each year", Rohrabacher said. "A hostile communist FMLN regime could make the US reconsider our policies of sending remittances toward El Salvador."

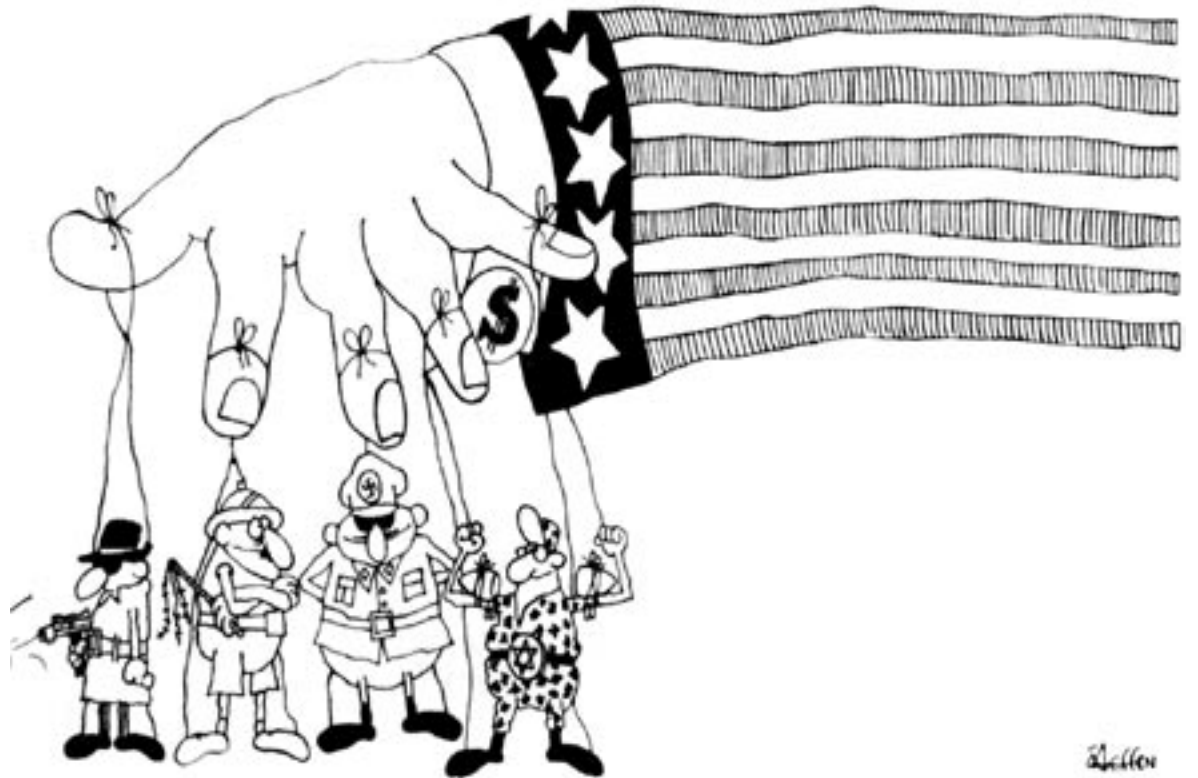
Eduardo Ortiz, a glass worker living in San Salvador who resided in the US for 10 years and still has family living there, says that such threats frightened many Salvadorans into voting for ARENA.

"Many Salvadorans in the US, including my own father, were telling people here not to vote for the FMLN because they feared the money that they were sending would be cut off", he said.

Numerous employers warned their employees that they would close their businesses if Handal won the presidency.

ARENA and its allies also ran a well-funded, dirty advertising campaign in the mass media, portraying the FMLN as a violent terrorist group clinging to "failed communism".

There is also evidence that ARENA committed electoral fraud. Prior to the election, Salvadoran religious leaders announced that



they had received information from churches in Nicaragua, Guatemala and Honduras that ex-members of the military were organising to bring thousands of people to vote in El Salvador, offering them money and voting cards to do so. Many busloads from these countries were in fact sighted on election day.

Efrain Tojada, an international election observer from Maryland, visited the Alameda Hotel in San Salvador on March 21 to investigate reports that two busloads of Nicaraguans had arrived to vote. Some claimed to be election

observers, but none could produce appropriate credentials. Tojada then talked to the two bus drivers, who told him that ARENA had paid them US\$300 to drive the buses to El Salvador, and that each of the Nicaraguan passengers had received US\$200 to travel here.

Mary Parker, an election observer from Washington, DC, was at a voting station in San Miguel. She said that her group had seen and received reports of ARENA members buying votes from the poor.

"We repeatedly saw voters - who had been paid - flash their

ballots after they had marked them to show ARENA people that they had voted for Tony Saca", she said. Similar irregularities were reported elsewhere.

While the initially flawed computerised voting system appears to have been fixed, there was wide latitude for fraud, especially with regard to the voting cards. For instance, two cameras used to take photos for voter IDs were stolen from the Supreme Electoral Tribunal, and the manufacture of the IDs was in private hands.

Despite the campaign of fear, blackmail and fraud by ARENA and the US, the FMLN nonetheless doubled its vote from five years ago.

Tim Pelzer was an international election observer in El Salvador. He can be reached at tpelzer@sprint.ca. *People's Weekly World* ☪

Who decides: women or the government?

Carolyn Rummel

Who decides? Women or the government? That's the question. Who gets to make the choice for a woman whether she has a child or not? Should we allow politicians to decide these most private matters and, in the process, to slowly but surely strip us of our freedoms?

These are the questions at issue in three courtrooms across the US where reproductive rights activists and physicians are arguing against the first federal ban on a safe abortion procedure since a woman's right to terminate her pregnancy was protected by *Roe v Wade* more than three decades ago.

So-called partial-birth abortion, used infrequently, is actually the safest procedure available for women in the second trimester. The ban is just one aspect of the Bush administration's efforts to turn back the clock on women's reproductive rights. It lacks any exception for a woman's health, which in and of itself makes it unconstitutional.

In the 1973 *Roe v Wade* ruling, US Supreme Court Justice Harry Blackmun said, "We therefore conclude that the right of personal privacy includes the abortion decision." George W Bush and his cronies have created what NARAL Pro-Choice America calls "the most hostile political environment to women's reproductive liberty since Justice Blackmun wrote these words." And they're just getting started.

Add to the partial birth law the Unborn Victims of Violence Act (UVVA), the Child Custody Protection Act, the Abortion Non-Discrimination Act, (what spin doctors came up with those names?), and two separate measures aimed at the FDA-approved drug, RU 486.

Then there's Attorney General John Ashcroft's declaration that "individuals no longer possess a reasonable expectation that their

old Melissa Ann Rowland with the murder of one of her twins, who was stillborn. Rowland, who has a history of mental illness, was advised by doctors to have a Caesarean section, but she refused, having experienced the invasive procedure in two prior deliveries.

She did eventually have the C-section, but is being prosecuted because she didn't have it early enough - on the theory that the stillborn twin might have survived

the American Civil Liberties Union Washington Legislative Office, said, "Supporters argue that this would deter violence against pregnant women, but we know that they are not serious because the Senate rejected an amendment that would have bolstered programs to do just that."

Anti-choice lawmakers even admit the deception. Republican Senator Orrin Hatch has stated, "They say it undermines abortion rights. It does. But that's irrelevant." To whom?

President Bush has already used his power to chip away at women's right to choose and right to privacy. If he is re-elected, he will almost certainly get to nominate one or more anti-choice justices to the Supreme Court, enough to overturn *Roe v. Wade*.

As NARAL Pro-Choice America warns, "Every woman will feel the consequences of Election 2004." If every woman feels it, every family will feel it.

"Don't let the right wing send us back to the days when countless women died from illegal abortions," NARAL declares. That's good advice.

The March for Women's Lives, on April 25 in Washington, DC, will be one of the most important events in the history of women's rights. You can't afford not to be there.

Carolyn Rummel can be reached at crummel@pww.org *People's Weekly World*, Communist Party USA ☪

"Giving a foetus at any stage of development the same legal rights as the pregnant woman will undermine the right to abortion..."

histories will remain completely confidential." Was that a chill that just went up your spine?

On March 25, the Senate passed the UVVA, the first federal legislation giving legal rights to a foetus or embryo.

"This legislation is another underhanded attempt to roll back women's rights", National Organization for Women President Kim Gandy said in a statement. "Giving a foetus at any stage of development the same legal rights as the pregnant woman will undermine the right to abortion as guaranteed under *Roe v Wade*."

Under UVVA, authorities in Salt Lake City, Utah, charged 28-year-

old Melissa Ann Rowland with the murder of one of her twins, who was stillborn. Rowland, who has a history of mental illness, was advised by doctors to have a Caesarean section, but she refused, having experienced the invasive procedure in two prior deliveries.

She did eventually have the C-section, but is being prosecuted because she didn't have it early enough - on the theory that the stillborn twin might have survived if she had delivered earlier. One day after the operation, she was jailed on endangerment charges because drugs were reported to be in the system of the surviving twin.

Laura W Murphy, director of

Archbishop Oscar Romero honoured

DALLAS: On March 21, sixty people turned out for a candlelight vigil in front of the Guadalupe Cathedral to remember April 24, 1980 - the day that Archbishop Oscar Romero was gunned down by right-wing assassins in El Salvador.

Archbishop Romero delivered his homilies on radio, participants said, and everyone in El Salvador stopped to listen. He had just issued a plea, and then a demand, that the mass killing of innocent civilians by right-wing death squads and the Salvadoran military be stopped. As he delivered his next homily in the national cathedral, a sniper shot him through the open doors.

Three days later, despite warnings, people gathered for his funeral. Many were murdered in the National Plaza. Others, especially young people, were trucked away, never to be seen again.

The Committee for Economic Justice and United Voices for Immigrants sponsored the vigil. Acknowledgement: *People's Weekly World* ☪

US delegation to Human Rights Commission is convicted terrorist

When the United Nations Human Rights Commission resumed on Wednesday last week, Orlando Requeijo Gual, Cuba's Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the HRC presented a letter to UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, reporting that an official US delegate to the HRC has participated in and been convicted for acts of terrorism. The following is the letter from the Cuban Ambassador:

I have the honour of directing myself to Your Excellency to denounce before the United Nations the presence of a well-known terrorist of Cuban origin, Luis Zuñiga Rey, on the official US delegation to the 60th session of the Human Rights Commission presently convened in Geneva.

The attitude adopted by the US Government is paradoxical when the images of the terrorist attacks perpetrated in Madrid last March 11, costing the lives of more than 200 people, are still fresh.

He was directly or indirectly involved in planting explosive devices in Havana hotels and Cuban hospitals.

For those who combatting terrorism in an honourable way, it is a real affront and a complete lack of respect to have – under the disguise of a diplomat and delegation member to such a forum – an individual with a long and well-known criminal history, as confirmed in a report by Mr Enrique Bernales Ballesteros, UN Special Rapporteur on mercenary activities, which was presented precisely before the HRC in 1999.

In that report, the UN Special Rapporteur points to Luis Zuñiga Rey, of Cuban origin and based in Miami, as a member of the underground security of the so-called Cuban-American National Foundation (CANF), a paramilitary structure.

According to Bernales Ballesteros' 1999 report, Zuñiga Rey recruited Guatemalan citizen Percy Francisco Alvarado Godoy to study points in Cuba that were vulnerable and susceptible to terrorist attacks, such as hotels, thermoelectric plants and oil refineries, among others.

It was possible to frustrate the actions promoted by Zuñiga

Rey due to the fact that Alvarado Godoy was a Cuban State Security agent. The current occupant of a seat within the US delegation left Cuba illegally in 1973, by entering the Guantánamo naval base and, on his arrival in Miami, enrolled in a Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) operation that consisted of a plan to infiltrate Cuban territory in order to commit sabotage and assassinate the country's main leaders.

That plan was neutralised by the Cuban authorities in August 1974. Zuñiga Rey was arrested with explo-

sives and weapons. After standing trial by the due legal authorities, he was sentenced to 25 years' imprisonment, of which he completed only 14, being released in 1988. Upon his return to the United States he linked up with the CANF and was directly or indirectly involved in planting explosive devices in Havana hotels and Cuban hospitals.

The decision by the US Government to include Luis Zuñiga Rey as a member of its official delegation to the Human Rights Commission currently convened in Geneva is not only disrespectful to the United Nations; at the same time, the presence of an individual with such a record places the security of this venue at risk, as well as that of all of the delegates now participating in the labours of the 60th session of the Human Rights Commission.

Of what value is the report presented in 1999 by Mr Enrique Bernales Ballesteros, the UN Special Rapporteur on mercenary activities to the Human Rights Commission? Is it possible that five years after its presentation to this forum the report has become a

dead letter and an object of mockery on the part of a member state that proclaims to be a standard-bearer in the international struggle against international terrorism?

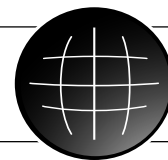
Is it possible to remain silent in face of an individual with such a criminal and terrorist history in a body whose fundamental objective to date has been for the full application of human rights?

Cuba hopes that the HRC's current president will adopt the appropriate measures for dealing with an unsuitable delegate and act accordingly. If the presence of Zuñiga Rey is accepted as a normal event, terrorism is being blessed instead of combatted, and an erroneous message of complicity and impunity is being sent to the convicted perpetrators of terrorist acts.

Cuba's delegation is willing to offer more detailed information on this notorious terrorist and his prior activities. Based on the need to adequately report this repugnant fact and alert member states to this felony, I have the honour of asking Your Excellency to see fit to circulate this letter as a General Assembly document under issue 119: "Questions related to human rights" and issue 156: "Measures for the elimination of international terrorism."

Orlando Requeijo Gual
Ambassador
Permanent Representative
March 27, 2004
Granma International:
www.granma.cu/

Footnote: The Nicaraguan Human Rights Center has also protested against the inclusion of Zuñiga Rey as a member of a delegation representing Nicaragua before the United Nations. The Center's President, Vilma Nunez de Escorcía, said Zuñiga's membership of the Cuban American National Foundation disqualified him because Cuba says group members funded and planned terrorist bombings in Havana. ☺



Global briefs

SOUTH KOREA: South Korea has cancelled plans to send its troops to the volatile Iraqi city of Kirkuk. Instead it promised to send 3600 troops after a safer location was found for them. The government cited security concerns in Kirkuk and pressure from Washington to participate in "offensive" operations. The mission, originally scheduled for April, would make South Korea the largest occupier behind the USA and Britain. Deployment will be delayed, possibly until June. Kirkuk has seen rising ethnic tensions as Kurds, Arabs and Turkomen compete for the control of the city. South Korea also has a disagreement with the US's plans to keep a contingent of US troops in the Kirkuk area after the Koreans took over. Washington planned to post some US soldiers there to help "conduct stabilisation operations" under South Korean command. That would go against the parliamentary mandate limiting South Korean forces to peace-keeping and reconstruction.

ANGOLA: The Angolan Government has banned a shipment of US corn, which is part of a food aid package. The corn is not milled and could contain genetically modified corn.

HAITI: At a press conference on March 25, spokespersons for President Jean-Bertrand Aristide's party, Fanmi Lavalas (FL), cited the killing or kidnapping of many FL supporters. "Since President Aristide was overthrown, there have been planned persecutions against the population and FL supporters", said an FL member. The party sharply criticized interim Prime Minister Gerard Latortue for suspending Haiti's relations with CAROCIM, the Caribbean community of nations, and supporting criminals such as the armed gangs that took over Gonaives. Amnesty International expressed deep concern about confirmed criminals and former leaders of military and paramilitary organisations now operating freely, including in positions of power.

ITALY: Workers belonging to the country's three major labour federations virtually shut the country down for four hours on March 26 in a general strike to protest the far-right Berlusconi Government's economic policies, including plans to restrict pensions, reform education and cut public spending. Most workers went out for four hours, but in the Rome area and in Sicily it was for eight hours. Schools, banks and post offices were shut down all day. It was the fourth general strike in two years over government economic plans. The government seeks to replace the current options of full retirement benefits at age 57 with 35 years of service, by requiring 40 years of service for a full pension.

HONDURAS: On March 13, Cesar Virgilio Pinot of the activist co-operative Martires de Guayamas was killed by security forces of Agro Oriental, a palm oil producer. A fellow activist was wounded and captured. The Campaign for Labour Rights said Agro Oriental's security forces had been menacing community leaders since palm growers organised their own marketing association, eating into Agro Oriental's profits.

National strike in Greece

Hundreds of thousands of Greek workers and employees participated in a general strike on March 31. The decision for the strike had been taken before the general elections of March 7, and concerned the signing of the national collective labour bargaining agreement and a wide range of demands connected with it. The demonstrations were organised by the All Workers' Militant Front (PAME) and took place in cities and towns around Greece, including in Athens and Thessaloniki.

It was the first strike since the new government took office, and just a few days after the report presented by the director of the Bank of Greece calling for more austerity and more "reforms" of the social security system.

The strike was successful. Several industrial sectors were "frozen" and thousands of work-

ers participated in the rallies and other actions of PAME demanding monthly basic salary of 1.100 euros and minimum pension of 880 euros (one euro is approx A\$1.65).

The social democrat-conservative majority of the GSEE (General Confederation of Greek Workers), which pursues the line of class collaboration and social consensus, has their limited the demands to 560 euros per month basic salary. Needless to say these forces were practically absent from the rallies and demonstrations around the country.

The General Secretary of the Communist Party of Greece, Aleka Paparigha, speaking to the press stated that "Today, the struggle for substantial increases, for real free and public social security system, is not only a struggle of the workers against the employers.

It has to be a comprehensive

struggle, also aiming against the government, against the logic of Euro-submission and the "EU-one-ways". The struggle brings results when it is systematic, stubborn and politicised."

Acknowledgements to
Communist Party of Greece ☺

**Needed urgently!
Solidarity with
the revolution in
Venezuela.**

Contact the
Bolivarian Circle
and help support the
progressive achievements of
the government and people
of Venezuela.

Contact Manuel on 0412 228 401

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



email: guardian@cpa.org.au

A bit rich

I found Alan Miller's criticism, (*Guardian* 31/3/04) of Sitaram Yechury's speech to the World Social Forum, a bit rich.

Alan's "this is wrong" response to Yechury's description of socialism as the rule of "the exploited classes" is pedantic. Yechury's not a novice. Is Alan implying Yechury is ignorant of, or doesn't support, the leading role of the working class?

Alan misquotes Yechury, who observed that the "extreme centralisation of power" was a defect of former socialist societies. Alan omitted the word "extreme" when quoting Yechury and then claimed Yechury was against all centralisation of power.

Alan's assertion that "socialism cannot afford to have more than one centre of power" and his implication that the "dictatorship of the party" is a legitimate socialist concept as the party is the political leadership of the proletariat, reveals some confusion.

Who holds power (or should hold power) in a socialist society? "Power" is a class concept and it is the working class, (supported by its allies), not the party, which exercises the dictatorship of the proletariat. The party is the ideological leadership of the working class and many leading party members hold leading positions in a socialist state, but the party does not (should not) replace the class in the exercise of power.

Where the party does in effect replace the class in exercising power over a period of time, the working class can indeed become depoliticised. In organisational terms, the party organisations become the real decision-making bodies and the organs of people's power (in the USSR, the Soviets) become mere administrators, carrying out those decisions.

Contrary to Alan Miller's assertion, Yechury does not say depoliticisation is a defect of socialism as such, but of the socialist societies which actually existed.

In the Soviet Union, the "leading role of the party" was enshrined in legislation. The CPSU didn't have to win and re-win its leading role among the working class. In contrast, the Communist Party of Cuba (CPC) does have to.

The CPC doesn't have the right, for example, to nominate its own members as candidates in governmental elections. Nominations are made by workplaces, neighbourhoods, places of study. The CPC has to win and re-win its leading role on a daily basis.

Alan Miller again misquotes Yechury when he chides him for supposedly suggesting there is no fully "coherent and comprehensive theory for socialist revolution", yet Alan left off Yechury's qualification "at this juncture" and then accuses him of "rejecting Lenin's ideas", of opening the way for revisionism.

Lenin's works contain a wealth of analysis of the socialist revolution in the imperialist era, but Yechury's observation is correct. There are many new features of imperialism today ("at this juncture") which were not around in Lenin's time.

As reality develops it must be investigated, using Marxist-Leninist analysis. Read the wealth of

analysis of contemporary reality by communist parties the world over, contained for example in the recent issues of the *Information Bulletins* produced by the Communist Party of Greece.

Is Alan Miller suggesting this search for a "coherent and contemporary theory for socialist revolution", analysing globalisation, examining the nature of the emerging broad anti-corporate and anti-war coalitions, looking at the contemporary forms of inter-imperialist rivalry and co-operation, all fuel revisionism? Has everything we need to know today really all been said yesterday? I don't think so. Such a position is a recipe for stagnation.

Eddie Clynes
Woodford, NSW

Another factor behind the collapse of the Soviet Union

In an article in *The Guardian* (March 17), Peter Symon discusses a lecture (recently in *The Guardian*) by Sitaram Yechury, in which he also deals with some very important aspects of Marxist theory. He also mentions (as Yechury did in his article) the question of how it was that the Soviet Union collapsed when it did.

To quote Peter Symon, "In the analysis of these same events in 1990 the Socialist Party of Australia (now Communist Party) also listed a number of causes leading to the break-up of the Soviet Union and the socialist states of Eastern Europe. They included a failure to adequately develop socialist democracy, a rigid over centralised and bureaucratic economic planning mechanism, the distortion of the role of a communist party and its relation to state institutions and a failure

to apply Marxist theory to the ever-changing situation and tasks."

There seems to be something missing from the summary of the factors which destroyed the Soviet Union. It is nothing less than the Second World War!

The German attack on the USSR did terrible damage. Some 22 million people lost their lives and millions more were injured or incapacitated.

The Soviet Union survived and stopped the German advance on the approaches to Moscow and Leningrad, but there was still the long and bitter struggle to drive the invaders back to Berlin. Some 1.7 million square kilometres were overrun by the invaders.

But there is another feature of the German invasion, which needs to be emphasised. Proportionally the damage to the Party was very much greater than the average over the whole population. The Party members in the armed forces had the task of maintaining morale in an initial period of retreat and disaster, and were summarily executed by the Germans if captured and identified.

The communists had to set an example as well in the factories and among the partisans. They carried out their tasks in an almost superhuman fashion, but they paid a terrible price.

The Party that celebrated victory was not the same party that won it.

In the post-war period, mainly after 1980, it seemed clear enough that something was wrong. It was as if the Soviet people were still exhausted and this could well have been so.

There were three organisations, apart from the state machinery which might have called a halt to the "reforms". There were first and foremost the Party, the KGB, and the Armed Forces.

No one acted – the action would have had to have been swift and decisive.

There is one other factor which, while it is a common factor in the histories of many countries, is often neglected in speculation on the fall of the Soviet Union – namely treachery.

The blow struck at the Soviet Union did terrible damage, but in spite of this the Soviet Union destroyed, for the time being, European fascism. That the USSR won a great victory is undeniable, but we cannot say that after that they could have won a similar victory over the USA, which did not suffer the ravages of invasion and who, to put it bluntly, finished Hitler's work!

Tom Gill
Carlingford, NSW

Culture & Life

by Rob Gowland

America under siege?

The barbarity associated with the killing of American coalition "contractors" in Fallujah speaks volumes about the hatred that is engendered by the US policy of aggression, conquest and economic looting.

It also speaks volumes about the evil effect of religious fanaticism, which renders people who are not of that religion as less than human, and therefore undeserving of humane treatment.

The US, itself currently run by Christian fundamentalists in the White House, is unashamedly fostering and arming Islamic extremists for its own sinister purposes.

While resistance to imperialist aggression is inevitable and natural, atrocities are not necessarily either inevitable or natural.

Such acts certainly *can* be the logical outcome of sustained violence, aggression and oppression (such as the Palestinian people have suffered for decades at the hands of the Israelis).

It is an undeniable fact that most atrocities over the years have been the work of the right wing. Progressive people do not resort to inhumanity.

Atrocities can also be deliberately encouraged and even organised by imperialism's own intelligence

services. In this instance their aim is to provide evidence that Iraq is not yet a country capable of truly governing itself and that "Coalition forces" will have to remain there for some time in order to "prevent further bloodshed".

It is of course perfectly possible for religious fanaticism, hatred of the oppressors of one's people, and covert intelligence operations to all coalesce into *seemingly* spontaneous and unconnected acts.

Complicating, or at least confusing, the picture in Iraq is the fact that the four American "civilians" killed in Fallujah were in fact mercenaries, ex-US military personnel now employed by "security" firms like Blackwater Security Consulting. These private security personnel actually make up the third largest army in Iraq.

As a private army, they are even less constrained than the soldiers of a national army. Will stories of human rights abuses embarrass their employer, or merely win the company more corporate customers?

Are all these US "ex-military" personnel really no longer in the military? There have been instances in the past of military personnel being temporarily released from the US or British armed forces so that they might join a mercenary force as "civilians".

When their task with the mercenaries was over they could resume their military careers where they had left off. This lark allows a government to intervene in another country without officially appearing to do so or meeting constitutional requirements such as gaining the agreement of parliament.

For imperialism, what private companies do is, after all, their own affair. Mind you, private corporations attempting to get their share



of the bonanza that is Occupied Iraq probably feel the need for some heavy security.

Last week, just after the Fallujah killings, Robert Fisk reported in the *British Independent*: "In the past few weeks, attacks on foreigners have happened almost daily.

"Two Finns have been killed, along with a British and Canadian contractor, two American aid workers – one a woman – and two US missionaries, including another woman. The Americans have not suffered their current scale of casualties for more than two months."

In fact, on the same day as the Fallujah killings, a roadside bomb blew up five US marines within 20 miles of Fallujah. And in the city of Baquba, 15 Iraqis were wounded by a car bomb that had been intended for an Iraqi police convoy.

The ultra-left, of course, credit all these attacks to "the Iraqi resistance". But that is simplistic, for a

significant part of the genuine Iraqi resistance do not support armed struggle under the present circumstances.

Nor do they support the withdrawal of all foreign forces at this time, for that would deliver the country to either Saddam's lot again or to the religious fundamentalists, or to a civil war.

For the US occupation authorities, of course, the spate of attacks provides a splendid opportunity to divert world attention away from the non-armed opposition to US occupation. Instead they are blaming them on a smorgasbord of groups or forces: "insurgents", "terrorists", Saddam Hussein's former troops, foreign fighters recruited by al-Qaida, and more.

For the US media, the matter is straightforward. Rupert Murdoch's Fox News, a service so right wing it makes CNN look positively benign, ran their report of the Fallujah kill-

ings under the banner: "America Under Siege".

Now think about that: attacks on US occupation troops on the other side of the world are examples of "America under siege"? If you believe that then the Vietnam War must also have been a case of "America under siege".

The proponents of the "American Empire" of course, do see the Vietnam war in exactly those terms. And that is exactly how they view Iraq, too.

For these people, or, more properly, for these corporations, our planet must be made safe for US citizens to go about their business (and business is the operative word here) unhindered by the actions of local "hotheads".

The British, at the height of their Empire, had the plan "to make the whole world England". The US has a more modern variant: "make the whole world US property". ☘



Sun April 11 ~
~ Sat April 17

Programs about music can be good, or brilliant or frightfully tedious. The two-part series *The Art Of Violin* (ABC 2.00pm Sundays) is probably in the second category. Certainly it is fascinating and (for the non-musician) informative.

All sorts of famous performers are to be seen – and heard – from Jascha Heifetz to Hilary Hahn. In the first episode, *The Devil's Instrument*, as well as marvelous old television performances preserved on film, there are some from actual Hollywood films (with infinitely superior lighting).

Watch Heifetz' fingering on the Tchaikovsky *Concerto in D Major* as filmed by Hollywood: his left hand seems to have a life of its own, somehow miraculously independent from the rest of him.

Intercut with the actual performances are fascinating comments (including first hand accounts) on the techniques and methods of a wide range of performers by Itzhak Perlman, Ida Haendel and Ivry Gitlis.

I found 22-year-old Hilary Hahn's comments very interesting – brilliant in her own right, her observations are basic, down to earth, the comments of an unassuming, working professional.

I do not possess an encyclopaedia of music, and clearly this is a deficiency that will have to be remedied, for none of my other reference works list the Chevalier de Saint-George.

And yet, according to *Le Mozart Noir: Reviving A Legend* (ABC 3.00pm Sunday), he was

an extraordinary 18th century violinist and composer whose work enraptured the French and inspired Mozart, Haydn and Beethoven.

He was also Black, the son of a slave mother. A luminary in 18th century France, he was renowned as an athlete, revolutionary and virtuoso musician, and went on to lead an army of 1000 black soldiers into battle.

Yet today he is virtually unknown. Intriguing.

In the Middle Ages, credulity, religious fervour and poverty combined to produce a brisk trade in religious relics. Enterprising folk who were fed up with being poor found they could obtain food and lodging in return for an old nail, providing they said they had acquired the nail in the Holy Land and that it was one of the nails used to crucify Jesus.

There were enough bits of Noah's ark allegedly bobbing around in the Middle Ages to make up a small navy. The reverence afforded the more substantial of these Medieval fakes has been a great boon to the church over the years and the Vatican is understandably loath to expose them to scientific examination.

If you are a biblical scholar, proving that some old piece of wood or cloth is *not* part of "the true cross" or of Noah's ark or Christ's burial shroud will only get you a small mention in the papers.

On the other hand, asserting that after careful study you are satisfied that it is *genuine* will get you a TV documentary aired wherever there are Christians, your name in the papers, probably a book and certainly assure you a very valuable place on the lecture circuit.

Which brings us to the piece of wood preserved in the Roman Church of Santa Croce as the Titulus Crucis, or the headboard of the cross on which Jesus was crucified.

Most scientists are satisfied the "relic" is a Medieval fake, but Professor Carston Thiede, an "expert in biblical texts", claims it is genuine. And so we have the obligatory television documentary, *Quest For The True Cross*, screening on *Lost Worlds* (SBS 8.30pm Sunday).

No doubt, for Professor Thiede, a welcome stint on the lecture circuit follows.



More razzle dazzle (Astroboy)

This week's success guru on *Reality Bites: Selling Success!* (ABC 8.00pm Tuesdays) is Brendan Nichols, who seems to have hit on a brilliant formula: he combines the usual seminars on "how to be a success and make lots of money" with the ever-popular Eastern religions gig.

The combination of real estate marketing and Indian philosophy has obviously worked for Brendan and still is, apparently. As the ABC says in its notes about this program, "We follow a couple of students, Kelly O'Connor and Ylia Linnet, who end up spending many thousands of dollars with Brendan in their quest for personal peace and greater profits".

Couldn't have put it more succinctly myself.

The 1960s' Japanese animated series *Astroboy* is one of the most fondly remembered of that band of naïve robot-versus-monsters cartoons. All the characters had determinedly European faces, the music was trite but it stuck in the

memory, and the animation was shall we say basic.

But Astroboy's adventure's were rather fun, and the robot-boy was a surprisingly complex character.

I suppose it was inevitable, given the way other old shows have reappeared in new guises, that a new series of *Astroboy* would also appear (ABC 5.25pm Thursdays).

The new series has more razzle dazzle in the artwork (the animation work is done in Beijing, I notice) but the characters and plots deliberately echo the style of the '60s series. What seems to be missing is the naïveté. And with it the charm.

Not all religious relics are made of wood, or cloth or rusty iron. In the four-part thriller *The Hunt For The Hidden Relic* (SBS 8.30pm Fridays) the relic is a video camera, property of a long-dead time traveller, that may have filmed Jesus Christ.

Bit contrived, but what can you expect from a German-made rip off of the Indiana Jones films?

The series is based on Andreas

Eschbach's "international best seller" *Jesus Video*. Budgeted at four and a half million Euros, it has a wonderfully ersatz "authenticity": it was partly shot on the sets from *The Bible* series.

At last, the ABC has a new series of *Taggart*, British TV's longest running detective drama (ABC 8.30pm Fridays). Blythe Duff, who has played Glasgow police detective Jackie Reid since the series began all those years ago, now gets top billing. And frankly she deserves it.

An actress with a face that is interesting rather than beautiful, she has been the mainstay of many an episode in the past. She is ably assisted by Alex Norton as the gruff DCI Matt Burke, and John Mackie as DI Robbie Ross and Colin McCredie as DC Stuart Fraser.

Written by Rob Fraser and directed by Patrick Harkins, this first episode of the new series is an above-average "police procedural", with unfamiliar scenery and, of course, colourful accents. ☺

Sydney

Take the message directly to Howard Refugee Rights Campaign

Two days of action – Easter protests at Kirribilli House – Focus on refugees

Saturday April 10 3.30pm Meet at Bradfield Park (under Harbour Bride north side) march on Kirribilli House followed by all-night vigil for those detained (bring a sleeping bag if you can stay)

Sunday April 11 1pm March from Bradfield Park to Kirribilli House
"End the Politics of Fear – Sack Howard" day
Refugee supporters will join anti-war, indigenous, civil liberties, education and health supporters and anyone else who would like to see and end to the Howard Government.

For more info contact: Mark 0422 078 376 or Max 0414 338 526 or kirribilli2004-subscribe@yahoo.com

Sydney

Politics in the Pub

Every Friday night 6pm – 7.45pm
Gaelic Club, 64 Devonshire St, Surry Hills
(across from the Chalmers St exit and Devonshire St tunnel at Central Station)
Dinner afterwards in the Royal Exhibition Hotel across the road

April 9
Good Friday

April 16
The Australian Health System – The hot issues
Con Costa: National President, Doctors' Reform Society
Ged Cowin: Assistant Federal Secretary, Aust. Nurses Federation

April 23
**Development Plans for Sydney's Ports – Views for the rich few:
Failing infrastructure for the many**
Gary Blaschke - Chair of the Botany Bay & Catchment Alliance
Noel Child, environmental scientist & engineer

April 30
Playing the Fear Card – The Politics of Insecurity
Stuart Rees: Director of Peace and Conflict Studies Sydney Uni
Cameron Murphy: President Council of Civil Liberties
Winton Higgins: Co-director of Australian Institute of Holocaust & Genocide Studies, author of *Journey Into Darkness*
Michael Dudley: Senior Lecturer Psychiatry UNSW, Alliance of Professionals for Health of Asylum Seekers, Chair Suicide Prevention Aust.

Inq: Pat Toms 02 9358 4834 pbtoms@bigpond.com; Janet Fischer 02 9398 8891;
PO Box 325 Rozelle NSW 2039; Win Childs Fax 02 9660 6554
www.politicsinthepub.org

Subscribe to **The Guardian**

12 MONTHS: \$88 (\$80 conc.) 6 months: \$45 (\$40) 3 months: \$23 (\$20)

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

POSTCODE: _____

Pay by Cheque Money order
to: Guardian Subscriptions
65 Campbell St, Surry Hills, NSW 2010, Australia

or by credit card: Bankcard Mastercard Visa

Card #

Amount: _____ Expiry Date: ____/____/____ Date: _____

Signature: _____

The Guardian

65 Campbell Street
Surry Hills NSW 2010
Phone: (02) 9212 6855
Fax: (02) 9281 5795
Email: guardian@cpa.org.au
Editor: Anna Pha
Published by T Pearson
65 Campbell St
Surry Hills NSW 2010
Printed by Spotpress
105-107 Victoria Rd
Marrickville 2204
Responsibility for electoral comment
is taken by T Pearson,
65 Campbell St, Surry Hills, 2010

The "Disappeared" in South America

Memory of the horror

Boris Leonardo Caro

"The bodies are stored away, they are not hidden in the river, in palaces of bloodstained memories."

The Disappeared House,

Fito Páez

The end came with a kick on the door. The peaceful night became an inferno of desperate screams and blows. Electricity in the neighbourhood had been cut. They were blindfolded. They didn't see light again.

Then, the torture. One confusing, interminable day. The electric prod to the mouth, the ears, the stomach, the testicles. Passing out. The knife that comes away with pieces of bloody skin. And passing out. The rape with some electrified object. And passing out. The stretching, the methodical burning. And passing out again. And wanting to die.

"Nobody remembers you anymore...You don't exist...We are justice...We are god." But death

Perhaps death was a better consolation than finding yourself face-to-face in the street with the smile of the torturer, now an "honest" citizen. Or finding your kidnapped son 25 years later, and discovering that he's no longer your son, but a stranger.

didn't always arrive. Or maybe it did, because perhaps it would have been preferable to be thrown into the sea, or to die by firing squad and be lost in a mountain of ashes.

Preferable to the agony, to disappearing from yourself, to not

being able to escape the memory of the horror.

Perhaps death was a better consolation than finding yourself face-to-face in the street with the smile of the torturer, now an "honest" citizen. Or finding your kidnapped son 25 years later, and discovering that he's no longer your son, but a stranger.

Perhaps death was, at the end, less painful than being forced to forget, or the pardon by decree; less painful, too, than the uncertainty of the families, the majority of them condemned to not knowing, to holding on to a shadowy hope.

Uruguay

The numbers of the disappeared are certainly much lower than in neighbouring Argentina and Chile. There, the terror reached just over 200 people, the majority of whom were detained and murdered in other countries as part of Operation Condor.

What the numbers don't say, however, is that the victims' relatives have had to live for more than 15 years with the murderers and torturers of their children and grandchildren. Neither do they speak to the successive civilian governments'

inability to bring down the wall of impunity and silence.

The first civilian President, Julio María Sanguinetti, introduced the *Law of Expiry of the State's Punitive Intention*, which was approved by Parliament in 1986 and ratified by a referendum three years later, guaranteeing impunity for the military.

In its first article, this law stipulates that the State may not judge "crimes committed up until March 1, 1985 by military and police officials, on the level of and assimilated by political motives, or in the execution of their duties and on the occasion of actions ordered by the commands acting during the de facto period."

This legislation is also in violation of international commitments made by Uruguay to investigate each one of the forced disappearances and punish the perpetrators.

Not even the findings of the Peace Commission, created in August 2000 to clarify the accusations made by the families of the disappeared, constitute an end to the Uruguayan drama. Without the legal authority essential to force all those implicated to testify, the commission cannot clear up all the cases.

Current President Jorge Batlle decided to consider the commission's report as the ultimate authority on what had occurred during the dictatorship. Batlle promised economic compensation for the victims' families, but never once uttered the word "justice".

Meanwhile, the military officials have regularly celebrated their exploits. They have never admitted the torture or the humiliations or the abuse; they never have acknowledged the "practice of horror"



carried out by officers and soldiers of the famous Uruguayan Republic's Armed Forces.

Chile

On the other side of the Andes, in Chile, Ricardo Lagos has also wanted to resolve, in a certain way, the human rights problem inherited from the Pinochet regime.

His project, known as "Without yesterday, there is no tomorrow", has generated protests from the victims' relatives, given that it virtually guarantees impunity for the murderers that subjugated the Chilean people for 17 years.

Argentina

Only in Argentina does Nestor Kirchner's government appear decided on bringing justice to the victims of the genocide carried out by the military during the period 1976-1982. During that time, some

30,000 people disappeared, most of them young.

President Kirchner has annulled the laws known as "Due Obedience" and "Final Point", and has promised to fully investigate every report of a disappearance or torture. He has said that every person who was disappeared represents a moral and institutional obligation that must be settled.

Those who are still suffering from the consequences of the military dictatorships, those individuals who lost a relative or friend, will continue to demand justice. They will never understand why some governments prefer to hold the truth prisoner.

Horror no longer stalks the streets of Montevideo, Santiago de Chile or Buenos Aires. But it lives on, entrenched in memory, fed by uncertainty and pain.

Granma International ☪

The costs of perpetual war

David Eisenhower

The War Resister's League estimates that in fiscal year 2005 the Bush administration's imperial war budget will top US\$935 billion.

Their maths is as follows:

US\$536 billion for current military expenditures;
US\$50 billion for the conduct of the Iraq/Afghan wars; and
US\$349 billion for the interest payments on past military expenditures.

This represents 49 percent of all outlays from federal funds. (Federal fund expenditures are distinct from payments drawn from trust funds like Social Security. However, since the 1960s, surpluses from trust funds have been commingled with federal funds in order to give the impression that the US budget is something other than a war budget.)

Basing his analysis on a recent Congressional Budget Office report on "The Long-Term Implications

of Current Defense Plans", Steven Kosiak of the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments (CSBA) warns that the Bush administration's defence budget projections understate the true costs of their 2005-14 defence plan by some US\$765 billion.

CSBA also warns that "if these additional outlays were not offset by a tax increase, or cuts in entitlement or domestic spending", the interest payments on a larger federal deficit would increase by US\$185 billion.

When the additional costs of the administration's 10-year defence plan are added in, total military spending for FYs 2005-14 increases to US\$5.8 trillion. This would deepen federal deficits by some US\$3.635 trillion over the coming decade, hardly a fiscally responsible way to prepare for the retirement of the baby boom generation.

In calculating the cost of war, Greg Speeter, executive director

of the National Priorities Project, warns that the budgets needed to carry out the Bush administration's pre-emptive war strategy "are so enormous and the weaponry so expensive that the Pentagon will have to take money from already under-funded social programs and renege on long-standing federal commitments to address such domestic concerns as child poverty, deteriorating schools and access to adequate health care."

Other programs such as affordable housing, environmental clean ups, education and public works projects to address the deteriorating infrastructure would be shortchanged. In addition, revenue sharing to help cash-starved states and cities to deal with their fiscal crises would be off the table. The costs of empire are so enormous that if they are not radically reduced the domestic "body count" will rise dramatically.

Helen and Harry Highwater keep track of the casualties of the Iraq and Afghan wars on their web site, "Unknown News". Their work focuses on the human costs of war. The following is their accounting of the dead and wounded:

- The number of US troops killed in Afghanistan is 100; the number seriously wounded, 564 (as of January 2004).

- The number of Afghan troops killed is 8000; the number severely wounded, 2400 (May 2003).

- The number of Afghan civilians killed is 24,000; Afghan civilians seriously injured, 5924 (December 2003).

- The number of US troops in Iraq killed is 539; seriously injured, 3040 (February 2004).

- The number of Iraqi civilians killed is 8245; seriously injured, 14,841 (February 2004).

- Casualties in Iraq and Afghanistan: estimated killed

27,880; seriously wounded 71,761 (as of Feb. 14).

There are additional costs of perpetual war. These include:

- the truth, as a permanent state of fear is maintained by neo-conservative practitioners of "noble lies";

- the environment, as wars for oil are fought to preserve an oil-based economy;

- liberty, as the so-called *Patriot Acts* unfold; and

- freedom, as the military draft is reinstated.

While the Machiavellian disciples of the late neo-conservative guru Leo Strauss currently occupying the Pentagon embrace the crazy theory of perpetual war, there is no reason why the rest of us should allow our children to be sent off to war by a cabal of chicken hawks.

The author can be reached at pww@pww.org.
People's Weekly World ☪



Communist Party of Australia

Website: www.cpa.org.au
Email: cpa@cpa.org.au

Central Committee:
General Secretary: Peter Symon
President: Hannah Middleton
65 Campbell St, Surry Hills, 2010
Ph: 02 9212 6855 Fax: 02 92815795
Sydney District Committee:
Rob Gowland
65 Campbell St, Surry Hills 2010
Ph: 02 9212 6855 Fax: 02 92815795

Newcastle Branch:
303 Hunter St
Ph: ah 02 4926 1752
Wollongong Branch: Leanne Lindsay
PO Box 276 Corrimal 2518
North Illawara Branch: Janice Hamilton
16/26-30 Hutton Ave
Bulli NSW 2516
Ph: 02 4283 6130

Riverina:
Geoff Lawler
PO Box 1016 Wagga 2650
Ph: 02 6921 4316 Fax: 02 6921 6873
Melbourne Branch:
Andrew Irving
PO Box 3 Room 0 Trades Hall
Lygon St Carlton Sth 3053
Ph: 03 9639 1550 Fax: 03 9639 4199

Website: www.cpa.org.au/guardian/guardian.html
Email: guardian@cpa.org.au

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

The Guardian