

Stop Star wars! No Free Trade Agreement! March on May Day

The Australian Government has already committed Australia to being involved in the United States' aggressive "missile defence", or to use a more accurate name, Star Wars program. It did not hesitate to follow the US into illegal wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and is spending on average a staggering \$55 million a day on its military budget.

Nor did the government hesitate in sending Australian forces to Iraq on the basis of lies, or on signing up for an "endless war on terror". Nor will it be shy in coming forward in relation to the US's plans for war in our region – in particular in a war against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea) or the People's Republic of China.

It is spending billions of dollars on specialised warships, long range anti-missile capabilities and upgrading of radar facilities to assist the US in its offensive military program which aims to put weapons in to space and control the earth from the heavens.

Do we need such weapons? Do we need US bases in Australia? Will they make us safer?

The answer is NO, NO and NO.

The US's plans are provocative and destabilising. They will only lead to more wars.

At the same time as throwing billions of dollars to military suppliers and going to war for the US, the Howard Government cries poor, saying there is not enough money to adequately fund public schools, universities, child care, and universal bulk billing for Medicare.

"We need more for hospitals and schools instead of \$6 billion for three air-warfare destroyers, \$1 billion for 12 pilotless surveillance aircraft, \$20 billion for new surveillance and combat aircraft, \$1 billion for 12 transport helicopters and \$600 million for tanks", Communist Party of Australia President, Hannah Middleton, told *The Guardian*.

"The diversion of only two weeks' military spending – about \$600 million – to public hospitals would overcome most of the critical hospital shortages", Dr Middleton said.

Dr Middleton spoke strongly against US plans for a new base or bases in Australia. "US bases undermine Australia's security and add even more to the already out of control Australian military budget."

As well as tying Australia to the political and military ambitions of the US, the Howard Government is about to hand over the Australian economy and resources to US transnational corporations, and with it Australia's sovereignty. This is through the recently negotiated Australia-US Free Trade Agreement.

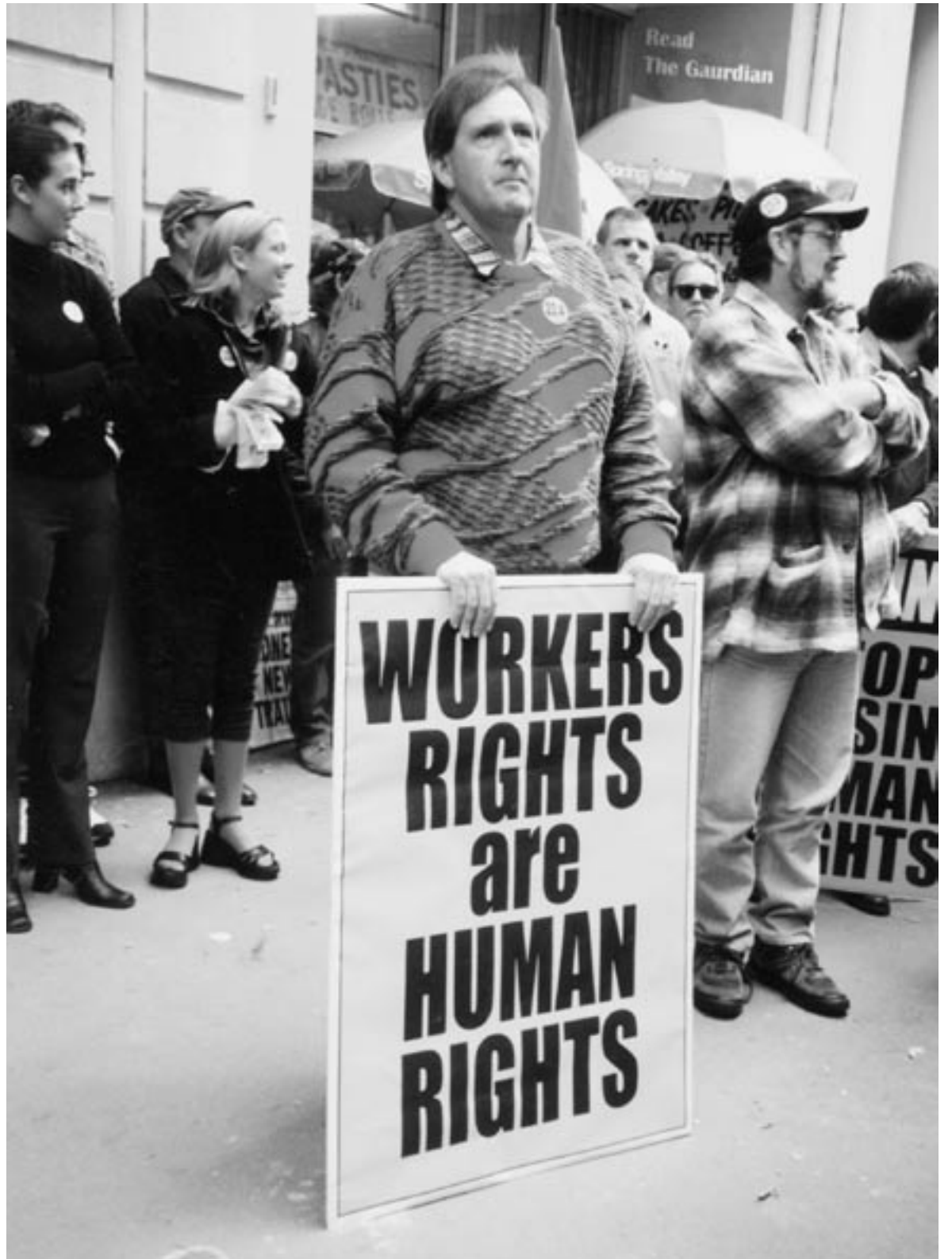
Free trade agreements are one of the means by which the US is attempting to gain global domination in the economic sphere. It has also used such agencies as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and World Trade Organisation (WTO) to open up economies for its transnational corporations to move in and takeover.

Growing resistance by the people of the world to these economic rationalist policies and their devastating effect on economies, people and the environment has made it more and more difficult for the US to get its way. Their plans have suffered serious setbacks at the WTO in its attempts to extend the organisation's charter well beyond that of trade into such areas as foreign investment, competition policy and government regulations over health and safety matters.

As these institutions fail, or appear in danger of failing, to deliver, the US administration is turning to free trade agreements and the use of brute force to pursue its aims and to strengthen its strategic military position for future operations.

Over the past 10 years the US has signed number of "free trade agreements" with other countries such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA – with Canada & Mexico); the Central America FTA (just reached with Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras & Dominican Republic); others with Jordan, Chile, and Singapore.

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The Guardian

No 1180

April 28, 2004

May Day 2004

May Day was first celebrated in Australia at Barcaldine (Queensland) in 1891. Why Barcaldine? Because the young trade union movement was made up largely of itinerant workers – shearers, timber-workers, casual waterside workers, stonemasons and builders. This was also before Federation when the Commonwealth was formed in 1901. The separate Australian states were still colonies of England.

By 1912 the first iron and steel mills came into existence and with them the beginnings of an industrial working class. During the next 60 years May Day celebrations came to the cities and reached a high point during World War II which was a period of great upswing in the progressive and revolutionary movements.

The Soviet Union became a hero nation in the war against fascism and the communist movement and progressive trade unions brought thousands of workers onto the streets in wartime May Day celebrations.

By the 1970s the composition of the working class began to change again with the decline in manufacturing and industrial unions and the substantial increase in white-collar and service industry unions. The number of teachers and professionally trained workers increased dramatically.

Irrespective of the designation of blue collar or white collar, all remain members of the working class and are exploited by capital. Many do not yet see themselves as such and are not so familiar with working class traditions and the significance of May Day as an international day of the working people.

Furthermore, there has been a decline in the influence and strength of the socialist and communist organisations and militant, class conscious trade unionism.

But change is on the way. The possibilities were shown in the large May Day marches in 1998 when the MUA struggle was at its height. May Day is a day of working class struggle and an occasion to spell out the many economic and political issues that confront working people.

In the forefront are the many issues that are going to drastically affect all working people if the Free Trade Agreement with the United States is implemented. No-one is going to remain untouched by this agreement which is all about implementing the interests of the giant corporations while imposing their selfish interests on both Australian and US workers. (See article on page 12)

Then there are the issues that were raised by the invasion and occupation of Iraq, the steady militarisation of the economy and the tearing up of many of the democratic rights that have been fought for and won in Australia and other countries.

The militarisation of the economy is going on apace and every extra dollar spent on armaments means less for hospitals and education and other essential services for the people. Furthermore, the new warplanes, naval craft and other weapons are intended for new wars that are always a tragedy for the people of all the countries involved.

Sometimes these issues seem to be a long way away from the issues of wages, health and safety and working conditions in a particular workplace or the problems confronting a particular trade union. But that is an illusion. It is these bigger issues that have their origins in capitalist globalisation, that underlie the fact that hardship in Australia is steadily increasing. Many families are living in poverty.

May Day is also the occasion to build a strong unity among all those who are involved in these struggles irrespective of their political outlook. This has been reflected in Sydney's list of May Day speakers. The list includes Andrew Ferguson from the CFMEU, Julia Gillard from Federal Labor, Lee Rhiannon, Australian Greens and Anna Pha, the editor of the Communist newspaper, *The Guardian*.

This is the way forward, yet it is amazing that some who might repeat the slogan "Unity is strength" object to this or that speaker or would deny participating organisations the opportunity to raise issues of concern to them. Unity does not rule out differences of opinion and building strength calls for all participants to join in the common cause of strengthening the working class and people's movements and organisations.

PRESS FUND

The recent Latham/Howard plagiarism dispute focused on quotation sources, not content. Don't the Australian people have a lifelong right of access to education? Weren't horror stories of the Hussein regime cynically used, together with fabricated "evidence" of WMDs, to justify Australia's involvement in the dirty Iraq war? *The Guardian* believes these issues were primary, and that of acknowledgement of sources secondary, albeit an ethical obligation. If you agree, why not send us a contribution for the next issue of the *Guardian*. For our part, we acknowledge with sincere gratitude this week's contributors, as follows:

Bert Appleton \$40, R Kiek \$12, C J and P J (South Australia) \$12, J M (South Australia) \$13, "Round Figure" \$13, Hendry & McLaren families \$200.

This week's total: \$290. Progressive total: \$3515.

Call to oppose the scrapping of ATSI^C*

Statement by ATSI^C NSW West Commissioner Steve Gordon

The Federal Government's move to revive mission management practices and gag the voice of Indigenous Australia is an outrage and should be opposed by all right-thinking Australians.

The Government's plans to hand over successfully-run ATSI^C programs to mainstream failures, ranks with a range of other discredited government policies of the past such as separating children from their families, the breast plates Indigenous people had to wear as identification and the assimilation policy.

As ATSI^C's longest serving Commissioner, however, I believe the Prime Minister, John Howard's scheme is even more sinister than transferring ownership of Indigenous service delivery programs to mainstream agencies.

At the same time as Mr Howard is prosecuting a war in Iraq in the name of introducing democracy to the Middle East, at home he is moving to strip Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of their right to vote for their own elected representatives and advisers to government.

The last ATSI^C elections during 2002 saw a record number of voters, more than 50,000, vote for their Aboriginal representatives. The election was conducted under the national campaign theme of "Your Right to be Heard". Mr Howard is moving to take away that right.

His proposal for a hand-picked Indigenous advisory panel

is nothing more than an attempt to gag and shutdown Indigenous Australia. When Mr Howard appointed the previous ATSI^C Chairman, Gatjil Djerrkura, he would not talk to him for half of his three-year term because the Chairman was telling him what he didn't want to hear – the voice of Aboriginal Australia.

I urge all Indigenous people to refuse any offer from the government to join their advisory panel because it is attempting to remove the democratically-elected Indigenous leadership of Australia. Mr Howard's scheme will also almost certainly prevent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders from travelling internationally to report to the United Nations about the true state of Indigenous Affairs in this country.

This would stop ATSI^C and other organisations from informing the UN about issues such as racially discriminatory laws introduced by Mr Howard's government to wind back High Court rulings which have recognised the legitimacy of Indigenous Land Rights claims.

Mr Howard is also hoping that by winding back the cause of Indigenous Australians by at least 50 years that he will kill off ATSI^C's

continuing campaign for a Treaty or similar agreements to achieve a just and fair settlement of the unfinished business of 216 years of colonial settlement.

For too long it has been too easy for Indigenous issues to be put on the back burner by departments which have little experience or expertise in dealing with the real issues that affect our people.

Governments failed to deliver meaningful services for over a century prior to the establishment of ATSI^C. If they know any better now, it is only because they have learned from ATSI^C what effective program delivery means. Mainstreaming has failed in the past and will fail in the future.

Thirty years ago we were forced to take to the streets to voice Aboriginal issues. Without ATSI^C, we will have no option but to take to the streets again. There will be no other way for our voices to be heard. No longer will Aboriginal people democratically elect representatives from their communities to speak on our behalf. I urge all Australians to support such protests in NSW and elsewhere in the coming months.

*ATSI^C is the Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Commission. ✪

March on May Day

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There are also a number of other agreements under negotiation. The most important of these is the proposed Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) which would take in all 35 countries on the American continent with the exception of Cuba. This agreement is running into considerable problems due to fierce opposition from the people of those countries and also, not unrelated, the election of more progressive governments in some of them.

These agreements are much more than their name suggests; they go way beyond trade issues. The FTAA just agreed to by the Howard Government would affect everyone in Australia, in virtually every aspect of their lives. It would have profound economic, social, cultural, environmental, labour and political consequences, and not for the better.

US Secretary of State, Colin Powell, was quite open about the aims of free trade agreements. "Our objective with the FTAA is to assure for American corporations control of a territory that runs from the North Pole to the Antarctica, free access without any hindrance or difficulty for our products, services, technology and capital through the hemisphere."

The FTAA with Australia is no different: here the aim is for US corporations to control Australia and have free access without any hindrance or difficulty for their products, services, technology and capital throughout Australia.

An examination of its content

confirms that the US corporations got most of what they wanted. Australian Trade Minister Mark Vaile describes the agreement as "integrating" Australia's economy with the US's. "Wholesale take over" is a more accurate description.

Ten years ago when Bill Clinton was US President, David Rockefeller, CEO of Chase Manhattan Bank, responded to a question about what had changed since the days of the Kennedy presidency: "Back then we were sitting on the sidelines observing what was going on, now we're in the driver's seat writing the documents."

When the FTAA was negotiated, the big corporations and government officials did the negotiating and drafting – in secrecy. The public and even Parliament were kept in the dark as to the outcomes of these top secret negotiations until well after agreement had been initiated.

Trade in agriculture and other commodities is only a small part of the agreement.

It is an agreement on investment, putting US corporations on the same or even stronger footing as Australian one. It covers the financial sector, giving banks, insurance companies and stockbrokers equivalent or superior rights than Australian ones in some areas, with virtually no controls on their operations in and out of Australia or within the country.

It is set to weaken Australia's important quarantine regulations. It is about competition policy and deregulation; it encourages privati-

sation. The cost of medicines will rise astronomically. The FTAA places in jeopardy the future control and management of essential services such as water and electricity, almost beyond the reach of government.

US corporations will have the power to challenge Australian government decisions and have imposed huge monetary fines on local, state and federal governments that might be doing no more than trying to protect health, educational standards or the environment. See page 12 for more details.

And it will cost jobs!

May Day is an opportunity for workers and other peace-loving and democratic people to express their opposition to the militarisation of Australia and the FTAA as well as many other destructive government policies.

The FTAA is a direct attack on Australia's sovereignty. It must be stopped. The Prime Minister plans to sign off on it in Washington in May – before two parliamentary committees on the FTAA report back on their findings!

Australia must pull out from the Star Wars program, close the US base at Pine Gap and end its military alliance with the US.

The Howard Government must be thrown out in the coming federal election. The people of Australia need a government which represents the people and their interests, one that is prepared to stand up to US corporations and pursue a path of peace and friendship with other peoples. ✪

Victorian nurses on warpath

Peter Mac

The Bracks Labor Government is hardly carving a name for itself as a friend of the Victorian working people. Hard on the heels of their offer to big business of \$400 million in tax breaks and infrastructure funding, the government has introduced new legislation to forbid strike action on projects deemed to be an essential service or industry, or a vital state construction project.

One group that is not about to take this sort of treatment meekly is the state's nurses, who last week took strike action over their claim for a 24 percent increase in pay and the maintenance of the nurse/patient ratio.

Victoria's nurses are among the lowest paid in any state. Graduate nurses are the lowest-paid in the nation, and are also the lowest-paid health professionals.

They have also been for many years among the hardest worked nurses in Australia. However, three years ago they achieved a world-first in their working conditions – the establishment of a minimum 5:20 nurse/patient ratio.

Ms Lisa Fitzpartick, the secretary of the Victorian branch of the Australian Nurses Federation (ANF), commented: "... Victoria is the only state with ratios and the only state that doesn't have a severe nurse shortage."

The ANF has pointed out that:

- Before ratios were introduced, about 400 public hospital beds were closed on any given day.
- Since ratios were introduced

Victoria's nurses are among the lowest paid in any state.

an additional 3300 nurses have returned to the public health system.

- Ratios mandate a safe minimum number of nurses per ward.
- Patient dependency systems that tell management more nurses were needed for the previous shift or that there were not enough nurses are useless.

• Ratios ensure that there are adequate numbers of nurses on roster six weeks in advance.

• Ratios help management break its reliance on expensive nursing agencies to fill permanent vacancies rather than unplanned vacancies.

• Victoria has proven that ratios mean safe patient care and the ability to recruit and retain nurses during a global nursing shortage.

However, the government has now taken action to remove this crucial working condition. They have also taken action to replace qualified nursing staff with untrained personnel in the care of elderly and vulnerable residents of public aged care beds, and to abolish the

requirement for directors of nursing at regional hospitals and hospital campuses.

As a result, last week the nurses began their industrial action, which will affect public hospitals, operating theatres and blood banks.

The government had previously responded to their demands with a contemptuous offer of a three percent pay rise – and the "promise" of a new computer system that would direct nurses to wards where the patient demand was highest!

The computer system has been widely criticised by nurses as consistently underestimating the nursing time each patient needs, and therefore compromising patient care and safety. Use of the system to determine the level of care means in effect that the level of care received by the patient is determined by a computer, whose parameters are in turn predetermined by a programmer who is not present, and can have no idea of the time actually needed for individual patient care.

The system also allows for



unlimited short shifts of varying duration during which nurses would be required to work frantic shifts of between two and six hours at a time.

Not surprisingly, nurses rejected the government's "offer".

Representing a government that is fast gaining a reputation as an industrial bully, State Health Minister Bronwyn Pike declared petulantly: "It's clear the union has gone in much too early and much

too hard." This was pretty rich, considering that negotiations have been dragging on for five months, with the government stonewalling every inch of the way.

The matter is now before the Industrial Relations Commission. The nurses have indicated that they are willing to negotiate on the wages issue, but that the issue of retention of the nurse/patient ratio is absolutely non-negotiable. ☘

TAKING ISSUE with Marcus Browning

Cricket and the Zimbabwe reality

So, cricketer Stuart MacGill won't be going on the Australian team's tour of Zimbabwe, making himself unavailable on the grounds of "maintaining a clear conscience". PM John Howard, who has led the West's economic and political offensive against Zimbabwe, was quick to spew kudos over MacGill, using his usual, pathetic appropriation of the battlers' idiom ("He's not only a wonderful player, but he's a good bloke" etc.)

Interestingly, a microcosm of the situation in Zimbabwe can be found in its national cricket team. Watching a Zimbabwe match on television a couple of years ago my then 12-year-old daughter asked me why an African nation had only white players in its team.

I told her that Zimbabwe is a cricketing nation because it was a colony of Britain and that inequalities are everywhere to be found as a legacy of colonialism: they can take a long time to overcome. Now, Zimbabwe's leading white cricketers have spat the dummy over what is being called race-based selection criteria i.e. quotas of black players in representative teams.

Those white farmers in Zimbabwe, who grabbed their valuables and skipped out of the country (some to the sheltering arms of white Australian pastoralists) because black Zimbabweans are reclaiming what is rightfully theirs, faced a similar dilemma.

They could have stayed and become farm workers employed by those they had dispossessed – just as the cricketers could stay and help

develop a national team that reflects Zimbabwe's reality.

Of course, the white farmers were never going to take the step down from the position of overlord with absolute power that the racist regime had conferred upon them, to become common labourer working for blacks!

A brief look at history gives a context to the reality of Zimbabwe, a nation which gained its independence from Britain in 1970 following centuries of occupation by various colonial powers. One of the leaders of the independence struggle, Robert Mugabe, became president.

His government began redistributing farmland that had been seized by the British colonialists, and to take control of the country's rich mineral resources out of the hands of foreign mining corporations.

At the time of independence, 5200 white settler farmers owned most of the productive land while 4.5 million black farmers were confined to poor peasant status on infertile "tribal lands" where they had been forced to scratch out an existence. Many supplied cheap labour to the white farmers.

Zimbabwe has developed and maintained an independent foreign policy, including providing support to its neighbours threatened by outside interference. (For example, Zimbabwe dispatched troops to the Democratic Republic of Congo in the late 1990s to support that nation's government against a US-backed invasion by Rwanda and Uganda.)

These developments are the real reasons why those serving the powerful corporate interests in the West have imposed sanctions against Zimbabwe and why an orchestrated media blitz has portrayed Mugabe and his government as dictatorial and despotic.*

It is also why the forces within Zimbabwe seeking to overthrow the government have Western backing, including funding from the right-wing US Heritage Foundation. The most high-profile group, the Movement for Democratic Change, has even been exposed organising the assassination of President Mugabe.

Most people don't take the trouble to look into the background to world events, and I wouldn't expect Mr MacGill to, either. People are swayed by objective and subjective factors in a tidal wave of information, and misinformation.

But it is not stretching things too far to suggest we turn our eyes to home, to our government, which in our name has, using lies and deceit, invaded and occupied another nation, Iraq, at the ongoing cost of tens of thousands of innocent lives.

Zimbabwe is reclaiming its sovereignty and the very land that defines it as a nation: the Howard Government has given up our sovereignty and the very land that defines us as a nation. We have a long way to go. See – *Zimbabwe: The Struggle for Land, the Struggle for Independence* by Rob Gowland. Available from SPA Books. ☘

The 12th Battalion Marches Through Hobart

Such a chunk of island life hacked out.

Twelve thousand two hundred Tasmanians in 1914, a sea of slouch-hat finery conscripted to the aid of robber barons. Two thousand five hundred never again to greet the jewelled rivers of the Apple Isle.

What street, farm, community did not slip into the void of loss?

Some came home with inflamed scars, hell clawing at their sleep.

Given unyielding earth to till as a soldier's reward, they planted their tangled mass of love and devotion with a bitter determination, and a kind of grief.

Tom Pearson



"Slave labour" in WA revolt

Twenty-five South African tradesmen walked off jobs across West Australia last week after the Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union (AMWU) blew the whistle on a massive immigration rort. The boilermakers, pipe-fitters and welders – earning as little as \$11.45 an hour at Pt Hedland, Perth and Kalgoorlie – rallied in the state capital Perth, demanding Australian rates and relief from oppressive conditions tagged to their four-year immigration visas.

One Pt Hedland boilermaker was earning \$13.40 an hour, after deductions, alongside workmates on \$44 an hour union agreements.

The undercutting of Australian rates and conditions reignites last year's furore in which Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock threatened a South African diplomat after she accused employers of using "slave labour" from her homeland.

AMWU State Secretary, Jock Ferguson, said the 25 imported workers who joined his union are the tip of a "bloody big iceberg".

Labour hire cum immigration agency, Freespirit, told the WA Trades and Labor Council that it

had 1000 South Africans employed across Australia.

Freespirit and the powerful WA Chamber of Commerce and Industry have been accused by unions of ruthlessly exploiting the immigrants.

One worker, a boilermaker who left his wife and children in Johannesburg under the impression he had a family visa, went public about his predicament. The next day he was sacked from Perth engineering shop, RCR.

Members of the 25-strong group said they had answered advertisements in Johannesburg newspapers placed by a company called Australian Business Associates. They said the ads spruiked "hundreds" of skilled positions available in Australia.

They went to a meeting with a woman who claimed to represent both Freespirit and the WA Chamber of Commerce and Industry. She told them four-year visas would be arranged and that they would earn around \$25 an hour.

When they arrived in Australia they were farmed out to a range of sites where all-in rates were quickly



eaten away by a \$1 an hour health care levy; nine percent super deductions; and 12.5 percent kickbacks to the labour hire company.

On top of that, they face a \$5000 slug to cover airfares and administration costs on visas arranged through Australia's Immigration Department.

The majority said they signed agreements to pay 144 percent interest on loans for that figure but were told that, on arrival, they could transfer it to more manageable rates on visa or bank cards. Without credit ratings, they didn't qualify for Australian cards and remain saddled with the initial rate.

They said they had been told,

in South Africa and on arrival in Australia, that they must not join a trade union.

Workers said that they were simply supplied with visas and told to find jobs. If employment finished they had to find alternative work and report back to the labour hire companies so that it could deduct its cut from whatever rate they had negotiated.

Mr Ferguson labelled the arrangement "pyramid labour hire".

"We have nothing against these people. They are workers looking to better themselves and their families", he said. "But they are being used to undermine every agreement and every worker in Australia."

Union organiser Steven McCartney said the South Africans had been so harshly treated they had risked dismissal by contacting the union despite the warnings from labour hire companies.

"In South Africa, they were told all these figures in rand and they sounded like a million bucks", he said, "but when they got here and saw the price of a steak they knew they were being stitched-up."

"They've stood up to be counted and stuck together on this. They don't know anyone in this country but they do know they are being shafted by Freespirit, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Federal Government." ☺

LABOUR NOTES

Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) Queensland Secretary Andrew Dettmer, will visit sugar mills in North Queensland as part of the AMWU's campaign to save Queensland's sugar industry. The AMWU, which represents fabrication and maintenance workers in the industry, will be distributing literature highlighting the importance of the sugar industry to north Queensland communities. The union will release a paper listing the various suppliers to Queensland sugar mills and how they have benefited from the sugar industry. "It also highlights why any decline in the sugar industry has a ripple effect through local economies. And this is not something that should not be ignored, because there are not many alternative industrial options on the horizon for many of those sugar communities. That is why the AMWU wants a sensible, balanced debate about the industry's future. Not one based on panic and certainly not one based on strict adherence to free market ideology that ignores the welfare of the wider community," Mr Dettmer said.

A meeting of combined unions on the South Coast of NSW have voted unanimously to consider a district-wide stoppage if the NSW Government does not progress demands for a local medical retrieval unit within 14 days. The South Coast Labour Council decided to co-ordinate the campaign after a spate of recent workplace deaths; road and other accidents in the region raised serious concerns about response times and exposed the fact that there was no retrieval unit based in the region. "We have thousands of workers in heavy industry risking their lives every time they go to work. The least the government can do is provide adequate local emergency services should they be need," South Coast Labour Council Secretary Arthur Rorris said. "It is a disgrace that our local health service does not currently have one specialist retrieval doctor able to attend a serious injury in the workplace."

Miners in Western Australia are fighting attempts to "slash and burn" wages across the coalfields. According to unions, Wesfarmers Premier Coal has taken to sending out letters to workers' families stating its intention to attack wages and conditions. The coal company plans to extend working hours to beyond 12 hours per shift, bring in contractors without consultation, and reduce holiday entitlements. More than 300 members of the CFMEU and the AMWU voted unanimously to shut down the industry for 36 hours. State Secretary of the CFMEU Gary Wood said that the attempt by the company to force the changes on workers was unacceptable. "The dispute will have an effect on customers, but we do not expect any disruptions to power supplies unless there is an escalation of the dispute. Any such escalation will only result if Wesfarmer Premier Coal continues to refuse to bargain in good faith."

Mitsubishi jobs hang in the balance

Bob Briton

"I would say to Mitsubishi that this is a strong economy with a good business environment and they ought to consider that very cheerfully." – Federal Treasurer Peter Costello, March 4, 2004.

Cheerfulness was in short supply last week at Mitsubishi's Tonsley and Lonsdale plants in Adelaide's southern suburbs. Workers had just learnt over the internet [!] that Daimler Chrysler had decided not to sink any further funds into the ailing Mitsubishi Motor Corporation (MMC) or increase its share-holding from 37 percent to 50 per cent. Mitsubishi will now have to rally other investors to get relief from estimated debts of \$10 billion globally with projected losses for this year of nearly another billion.

As a result, the future of Mitsubishi's operations in Australia is uncertain. For months SA Mike Rann and Mitsubishi Australia Limited President Tom Philips had been angrily denying reports that the future of the plants was in doubt.

Reports in the Japanese newspaper *Asahi Shimbun* last month that the corporation was looking to shed 4500 jobs internationally were shrugged off. The idea that Mitsubishi would cut and run after having committed \$200 million to upgrades in readiness for the new Magna model next year was derided as preposterous.

Last week, however, all the corporate and political heavyweights were singing a much more feeble tune. "We hope they can stay and I want to give that assurance to the workers and to the management of

Mitsubishi in South Australia", said John Howard in a statement giving the most lightweight "assurance" imaginable. "This issue is way above politics, it's about people's lives", claimed Federal Industry Minister Ian Macfarlane, which is a bit rich coming from a government that has expressed no concern about the many jobs shed by banks, Telstra and other corporations.

The 3500 workers at the Adelaide Mitsubishi plants will have to wait for reviews to be completed in Tokyo next month to know what the future holds for them. Another 22,000 workers employed by component parts suppliers could also be affected.

SA Treasurer Kevin Foley says that Australian governments, both state and federal, have virtually no power in these sorts of circumstances.

This powerlessness of governments illustrates the point that private corporations will do as they please irrespective of the consequences for workers and their families.

In 2002, Mr Foley was talking tough. His government and the Commonwealth had just given Mitsubishi \$85 million of taxpayers' money as a sweetener to keep its operations in Australia. There was a lot of bluster that assistance would only be given in future if companies made a commitment to the community on issues like jobs.

The icy response from Daimler Chrysler to Mitsubishi's problems has deflated all the hype. Mitsubishi could well decide to speed up the consolidation of its manufacturing facilities in Thailand. The Thai Government is spending up big and

offering "investment privileges" to carmakers as part of a drive to turn the country into the "Detroit of Asia" by 2010. The number four carmaker in Japan has already closed a plant that used to employ 1100 autoworkers in the Gifu prefecture in Japan.

Workers worldwide are set to suffer for a series of management errors. Mitsubishi has few new models. Quality control is less effective than with major competitors – 148 problems per 100 vehicles compared to the competitors' average of 133. The US branch of the corporation burned a lot of money selling cars with loans involving no interest and no payments for 12 months. A lot of customers ultimately could not afford the vehicles and had to hand them back.

In Adelaide, unions are due to meet with management this week to talk about the threat to local jobs. There have been suggestions that the current EBA could be simply "rolled over" into the new one without any claims being made.

Experience shows, however, that this course does not guarantee jobs either. Until corporations are brought under control, and that means control by a worker friendly government, they will continue to throw workers on the scrap heap whenever their profits and the interests of shareholders are threatened. The auto industry should come under public control.

Another major lesson from these developments is that the union movement must speed up efforts to organise on the same global basis as the manufacturing companies that employ the workers. ☺

Students promise "Month of Mayhem"

Students across Australia have promised a "month of mayhem" in protest against the Howard Government's higher education reforms. Students at university campuses are currently deciding on the actions they will take which could include a mock toll booth that would charge students fake money to enter the library.

National Union of Students (NUS) President Jodie Jansen said in announcing the month of protest, "Universities should have taken a stronger public stand for more government funds rather than increase the burden on students."

Students took to the streets in Sydney on April 20 blocking traffic on Broadway to protest against the University of Technology decision to increase fees by 25 per cent. The University of Sydney and the University of Newcastle have also recently followed suit.

Ms Jansen said the NUS did not support violent protest action but she could not rule out the possibility of students blocking roads as a form of protest.

Meanwhile a new report into the Federal Government's higher education package has found that the fee charges could price poor students out of paying their way into university.

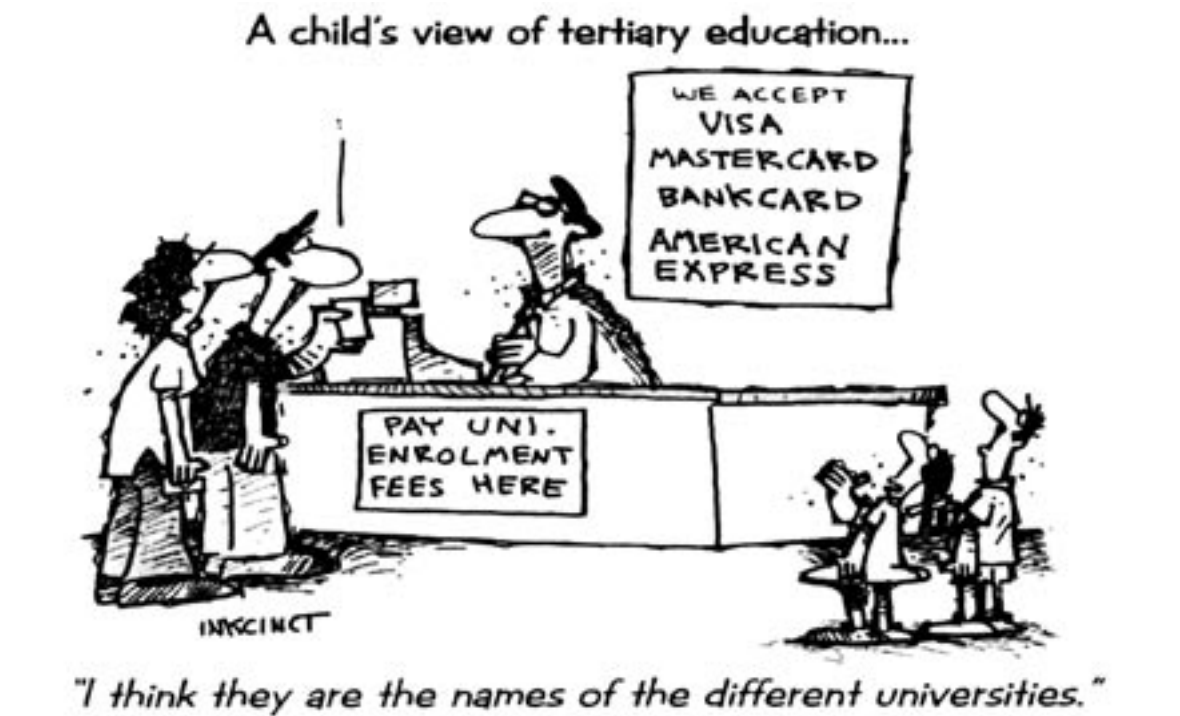
Australian National University professor of economics, Bruce Chapman labelled the new loans scheme introduced by the reforms as "regressive".

The report, to be released later this month, states that many courses will cost more than the \$50,000 cap placed by the Federal Government through the Higher Education Scheme (HECS). This will no doubt force students into paying the difference between the cap and the total fee for the course.

The National Union of Students has come out in opposition to full fee-paying places saying that it is fundamentally unfair. "It is quite obvious the Government has got it the wrong way around. They've capped the loan when they should have capped the fees", Ms Jansen said.

The Chapman Report argues that some universities will gain greater benefits than others in having the discretion to set the price of full fee-paying courses.

It also seems that the students are not the only ones to be taking action this month. Academic staff at three Victorian universities are considering rolling industrial action over an impasse concerning enterprise bargaining agreements. Action could include strikes and



Students took to the streets in Sydney on April 20 blocking traffic on Broadway to protest against the University of Technology decision to increase fees by 25 per cent.

work bans to run throughout the month of May.

The National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) Victorian Branch Secretary Matthew McGowan said Victorian Universities were playing a "wait and see" game with the union to assess what their counterparts in NSW and Queensland were agreeing to before signing agreements.

"We are completely fed up with this tactic and now we are letting them know that we are fed up", Mr McGowan said.

Mr McGowan said the main sticking point at each university was the regulation of academic workloads, followed by salary increases and Indigenous work placements. ☺



When Labor came to office in Victoria they were hailed as the saviours of the working people. Of course almost anything would have looked good after years of the slash-and-burn Kennett Government. Promises to fix the mess – in health, education, emergency services etc – brought public acclamations, but it didn't take long for Steve Bracks and his crew to show their true allegiance was to big business. So it was that in the state budget last week Treasurer John Brumby announced changes to emergency service laws to give employers more power to attack striking workers. And "emergency services" will now include "vital state construction projects". Brumby also outlined \$400 million of annual tax cuts for business. At the same time the Government is attacking nurses for daring to take action for a wage rise. Now, transfer this state scenario to the federal sphere and the new Labor saviour, Mark Latham.

Conflict of interest department. A director of the biotechnology company Biotron is on two federally-funded committees which have awarded Biotron \$2 million in federal science funding grants. Though Biotron has yet to release a product of any kind, it claims to have developed the means to block HIV, hep C, SARS and dengue fever. Give me a break!

The Australia East Timor Friendship Association last week organised protests against Australia's oil and gas grab in the Timor Sea. The Howard Government refuses to recognise the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea which provides that sea boundaries, such as that in the Timor Gap, run along the midline between two countries. If the Convention was applied most of the revenues being generated from the oil currently being drilled in the Timor Sea would go to East Timor. The Howard Government has so far stolen \$1.7 billion of revenue from what is the poorest country in south-east Asia.

In the face of rising unemployment and increasing poverty the Government and business keep lauding the economy. "Float boom a \$2.2 billion bonanza" and "Strong growth fuels budget's big spend" cry the headlines. Meanwhile, major corporations come crashing down one after the other. And last week accounting group Certified Practising Accountants reported that in the first three months of this year there were 5222 personal bankruptcies in Australia, and increase of 7.1 percent.

CAPITALIST HOG OF THE WEEK: is supermarket giant Woolworths. The two supermarket chains that monopolise food retail in Australia, Woolworths and Coles, are pushing to take over the trade in pharmacy medicines that are currently covered by chemists. As usual they say it's all about delivering lower prices to consumers, but consumers know that's a load of rubbish. (Remember how deregulation of the dairy industry was going to reduce the price of supermarket milk?) It turns out that the pharmacy items Woolworths does sell are already priced at 56 percent more than at discount chemists!

Some questions for Mark Latham

During the short time in which he has been federal leader of the Australian Labor Party, Mark Latham, has outlined his support for a number of progressive policies, in particular the return of Australian troops from Iraq, the preservation and development of Medicare, and acceptance of the right of all citizens to education, from infancy to old age.

These and a great many other issues that are of major importance to the Australian people

require explanation by the party that presents itself as the "alternative" government. *The Guardian* therefore invites the leader of the ALP reply to a number of questions regarding these issues:

- Would you seek to end the US/Australia war alliance?
- Would you support scrapping the US/Australia Free Trade Agreement?
- Would you move to repeal the anti-democratic "terror" laws introduced by the Howard Government?

• Would you act to remove the draconian powers that ASIO has been given which turn it into a secret police force?

• Would you support scrapping the Goods and Services Tax?

• Will you act to create real job – full-time, proper wages etc and not merely introduce cheap labour schemes?

• Would you fully fund and expand Medicare, to enable universal access to bulk billing?

• Would you support the extension of Medicare benefits to cover dental care?

• Would you act to protect and broaden the scope of the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme?

• Would you fully fund public education?

• Would you phase out the use of public funds to support private education?

• Would you scrap university fees?

• Would you support the abolition of the anti-union Workplace Relations Act?

• Do you acknowledge the right of Aboriginal people to self-determination?

• Would you act to reinstate the sacked Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission or create a similar body and what form would this take?

• Do you favour the development of peaceful and fair relations with Australia's Asian and Pacific neighbours?

The Guardian looks forward to Mr Latham's comments on these and any other issues. ☺

Howard's anti-union building Taskforce takes a hammering

The farcical and anti-union nature of the Howard Government's building industry Taskforce was well and truly exposed in the Sydney District Court recently when a Judge dismissed 48 of 49 charges brought by the Taskforce against the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU) and an organiser. The anti-union exercise is estimated to have cost the taxpayer around \$100,000.

The case began with dozens of charges against the CFMEU and its youngest organiser Joe Brcic and dwindled to one charge of unlawful industrial action at the finish.

This had come about as the organiser mistakenly believed that protected industrial action notices were in place, where in fact there had been an administrative error.

This point had already been conceded by the CFMEU in an Australian Industrial Relations Commission hearing earlier.

In fining the CFMEU \$2,000 for the technical offence, Judge Hughes was critical of the way that the Federal Government's Taskforce had handled the case.

He used the word "provocation" in reference to the manner in which the Taskforce Inspector had handled the matter.

The CFMEU has called on the Federal Government to stop attacking the union and its delegates and to focus instead on industry issues such as the poor safety record of the industry with one worker being killed every week.

Common Cause, April/May 2004 ☺

Colombian crisis drags on – A plea for Australians to speak out

Nilson Dávila recently visited Australia on behalf of the Central Unitaria de Trabajadores or CUT (the major trade union peak council in Colombia). In Sydney he spoke with Bob Briton from *The Guardian* about the extreme challenges facing workers and their unions in Colombia and added an appeal for solidarity from the Australian labour movement.

Bob Briton: On the internet we continue to see reports about attacks on trade unionists in Colombia. There are assassinations, leaders of unions like Hernando Hernandez are put in detention and so on. Is the situation improving or deteriorating?

Nilson Dávila: The situation facing trade unionists in Colombia remains very worrying. The statistics can help you to understand the situation better. In 2002, 684 trade unionists were killed, the majority of those were in leading positions. In 2003, 92 leaders were killed. Over the past two years, over 2000 unionists have been killed in total. Because of the struggle they have waged to obtain very basic rights, the system has pursued a strategy of classifying trade unionists and their

union, an offer came from Coca Cola to reincorporate the dismissed employees into different areas of the workforce.

BB: We have seen in the press that President Uribe of Colombia travelled to Washington to negotiate an extension of Plan Colombia unit 2009. [Plan Colombia is an agreement between the US and Colombia to provide military assistance with the stated aim of combating the drug trade in Colombia but in fact to help defeat leftist guerrillas in various parts of the country and to contain the political movement against rule by pro-US elites in general]. Are the trade unions and the rest of the progressive movement anticipating that the current crisis will drag on?

DN: The visit was part of a

ness to vote for parties other than the traditional ones in Colombia. They are seeking a more progressive response to the militarist policies of President Uribe.

This follows on the success of the campaign to deny the Government additional powers at the referendum held last year. The vote was a form of punishment for the government of Uribe for those policies enforcing the militarisation of Colombia. It was a clear “no” from the people and showed support for the alternatives represented by leaders like “Lucho” and initiatives at a local level.

However, these local leaders will also suffer difficulties and repression at the hands of the traditional parties, paramilitaries and the government and, more indirectly, from US intervention. The US is not happy with these political developments.

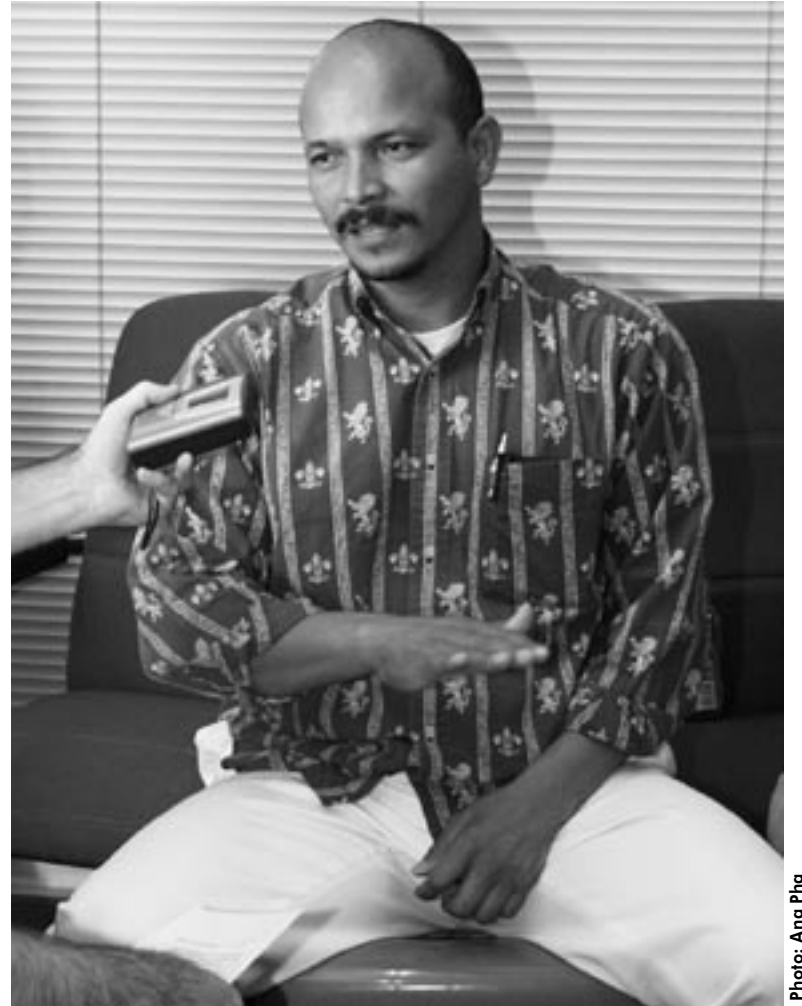
BB: What is the attitude of the CUT to the proposed free trade agreement between the US, Canada and the countries of Latin America, the so-called Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA)? Have the unions been able to mobilise opposition from the workers?

ND: A protest movement in various countries of Latin America has developed over the proposal for an FTAA. Committees of opposition have been established in Colombia and in other Latin American countries. The FTAA is more than an agreement for “free trade”. It is an attempt to further impose US interests and to more tightly control the economy of the region. They hope to have the arrangements in place by 2005.

The proposal for an FTAA has turned out to be problematic for the US Administration because of the reaction of a number of Latin American countries, particularly Venezuela, which has shown strong opposition to the main objectives of the proposal. There have been many other expressions of opposition throughout the region.

In Colombia, we are very concerned about the effects of an FTAA because of precedents set by other “free trade” agreements between the US and Latin American countries, such as the one between Mexico and North America [NAFTA – US, Canada & Mexico].

In that case, the real situation is that the US controls the Mexican



Nilson Dávila speaking with Bob Briton

Photo: Ana Pha

We would like the Australian people to know what sort of ally the country has with the Bush Administration.

leaders as “terrorists”.

The person you have mentioned (Hernando Hernandez or “HH” – the ex-president of the union of workers in the oil industry), his only “crime” was to propose an alternative policy for the nationalisation of the energy resources of the country. These resources are currently the property of giant transnational corporations.

BB: Do you have any news of the workers struggling for justice against Coca Cola in Colombia?

ND: The situation of the workers at Coca Cola has been very difficult for quite some time. It has claimed a number of victims from among the workers and their union, Sinaltrainal. Workers and their families have been threatened by the company, government authorities and paramilitary groups and some have gone into exile owing to the risks.

The union representing the workers used to have about 7000 members in the industry. Now, there are only about 1400 owing to the fear being generated by the Coca Cola multinational itself.

What happened was that Coca Cola was authorised in January by the Ministry of Social Protection (the old Labour Ministry) to dismiss 92 workers. This eventually resulted in 30 of the workers starting a hunger strike. The strike and various protests spread to several cities throughout Colombia: Bucaramanga, Cúcuta, Barrancabermeja, Cartagena, Valledupar, Cali, Medellín and Bogotá. After 12 days on hunger strike, during negotiations with the

drive by Uribe at the international level to obtain support. The tour wasn’t that successful in Europe. He did not get a warm reception in the European Community and did not get support for his plans for “security”, including Plan Colombia.

The following week, however, he travelled to Washington to get the reassurance he was seeking. It must be pointed out that the Bush Administration has been an unconditional supporter of President Uribe and his terrorist strategy in Colombia. It has been announced in the press that Bush will redouble the military and political support for repression inside Colombia.

In has previously been acknowledged that there were 400 US soldiers in Colombia, presumably training their Colombian counterparts. This is the figure given publicly but it is suspected that there were closer to 500. However, the latest announcement from Washington means that there will be 800 soldiers on Colombian territory. These troops will be adding weight to efforts to achieve a military solution to the social and political crisis in Colombia and the establishment of a military system there.

BB: Has the election of progressive candidates like “Lucho” Garzon to important posts in last year’s municipal elections opened up more possibilities for popular forces in Colombia?

ND: The election of “Lucho” as Mayor of Bogotá and the election of several other progressive candidates as mayors and governors of different regions show the people’s willing-

economy. With the production of corn, for example, the current arrangement allows the US to sell subsidised corn in Mexico for less than the cost of production in Mexico. This is strictly illegal but recently the US passed a law that allows for an increase in the subsidies going to agriculture. This is

very worrying and affects not only trade unionists but other sectors of the popular movement, as well.

US companies continue to receive high levels of subsidy at every stage of production while producers in Latin America are expected to compete with no assistance at all. The trade unions in Colombia are very concerned and have been gathering solidarity around the issue. The poor peasants are also very concerned – given the level of poverty that already exists among them – that the subsidised US products will wipe out any opportunity to export their products to North America.

All sectors of Colombian society affected have been demonstrating their concern at international forums like the Social Forum at Porto Alegre [in Brazil] and at the WTO meeting at Cancún. These forces have also taken part in anti-globalisation protests, for example in Italy

of the Australian people. What can we do from here to assist the people of Colombia?

ND: Solidarity with the people of Colombia is especially important in the area of human rights. Every year there are over 28,000 people killed in Colombia by dark forces, the paramilitaries, in their efforts to impose a repressive regime on the people. There are about three million forcibly displaced persons in the country and another 125,000 who have fled the country for their own safety to neighbouring countries.

These displaced persons do not receive any assistance from any organisation of the Colombian Government, which persists with its policy of repression. That’s why we are asking the international community to become active around these questions of human rights. This is one of the reasons for my visit to Australia.

Because of the struggle they have waged to obtain very basic rights, the system has pursued a strategy of classifying trade unionists and their leaders as “terrorists”.

and in Quito, the capital of Ecuador, where there was a summit of leaders discussing the FTAA in 2002. The move towards such an agreement has prompted a firm response from the people of Colombia and the region against the proposed FTAA.

BB: Is there anything else you would like to bring to the attention

We hope that people Australia will be able to show solidarity by confronting the policies of the US. In Colombia we know that Australia is an ally of the US and that Australia and the US have signed a number of accords regarding human rights. However, we would like the Australian people to know what sort of ally the country has with the Bush Administration.

Interview conducted in Spanish. Thanks to Juan for assistance with translation. ☺

Over the past two years, over 2000 unionists have been killed

We need support, not a lecture

Salam Ali, a member of the Central Committee of the Iraq Communist Party (ICP), was interviewed by Richard Bagley for the British socialist newspaper *Morning Star*.

Salam Ali has a simple message to the anti-war movement in the face of continued violence in Iraq – “We don’t need to be lectured”, and called on left critics to “understand the complexities and forge alliances with the forces that matter”.

The ICP has been criticised by some on the left for taking part in the 25-member US-appointed Governing Council. But the party has also pursued a strategy outside the Governing Council, said Salam Ali. After the collapse of Saddam Hussein’s regime, the ICP, which celebrates its 70th anniversary this year, was well placed to re-establish itself openly across Iraq, having operated underground during the dictatorship.

Ali says: “It is effectively the best organised democratic force in Iraq. The party has expanded very fast.”

But, he adds, “We are trying to expand but not at the expense of quality – it’s a race against time to build a party and a strong democratic movement to face up to the challenges ahead.”

In answer to some of the criticisms levelled at the Communists, Ali points out that the ICP was the only major force opposed to the invasion.

He adds: “We have no illusions whatsoever that the power that will be handed over on June 30 will be total or complete.”

“The Americans will exercise influence on military, security and economic matters, but we hope that it will bring about a new correlation of forces.”

Dealing with reality

Ali describes the Governing Council as a compromise. “What we took into account was, first and foremost, where the interests of the people lay”, he says.

“We took into account the fact that people had come out of a war and were under occupation. “There was a collapse of not only the regime but the whole state. There were immense difficulties affecting the lives of people. Another path was possible, but it would mean more hardship for the people.”

In the light of this, says Ali, the Governing Council was seen as a step forward in the direction of regaining national sovereignty and independence.

“We were also confident that not everything that the Americans and the occupying forces had planned would work as they wanted”, he explains. “They have been forced to modify their plans – of course without changing their strategic objectives, we have no illusions about that.”

He clarifies the current situation on permanent US bases in Iraq and privatisation, noting the refusal of the Governing Council to sign an agreement on the former.

On sell-offs, Ali says that there is consensus on the Governing Council on retaining the oil industry as an Iraqi state asset.

He also reveals that “even Bremer and the CPA [Coalition Provisional Authority – US, British, Australians, etc] have decided to shelve any large-scale privatisations for the simple reason that they know it would aggravate not only the economic situation but the social and political situation.

“One major shortcoming in



“Nobody wants the occupation – everybody wants a speedy end to the occupation”

the situation up to now is the failure to form a broad patriotic and democratic alliance – a very serious shortcoming”, he admits.

“It has meant that on many issues we have had to work very hard to achieve a common stand.”

Striving for Unity

To the ICP, a strategy of united political confrontation is the best current method to advance, rather than inflicting more violence on a battered people.

The most recent crisis in Iraq has centred around the militia of Shi’ite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr, who the US occupying forces want to extract from the holy city of Najaf.

Ali points out that the political and religious situation in Iraq is not as simple as that portrayed in the media and by the occupying forces.

He explains some of the issues behind the continuing confrontation with Sadr.

“In Iraq, one has to respect the reality of religion and Islam and the Shi’ite sect in particular”, he says.

But, adds Ali, “the centre of authority in Najaf has always tried to distance itself from being directly involved in politics, political life and the affairs of state.”

The highest Shi’ite authority in Iraq, Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, has refused to endorse calls for an armed uprising and, while refusing to negotiate with the Coalition Provisional Authority, has entered into discussions with UN representatives.

“Until this recent escalation, al Sadr was isolated and weakened in the Islamic Shi’ite camp”, says Ali.

“Many Islamic parties and groups and even the main religious centre in Najaf led by Sistani would like very much to have Sadr defeated.

Ali says that Sadr should “disband his group and work as a political group like others, rather than resort to intimidation and violence which was directed mainly against his political opposition.”

He sees the US stance towards Sadr’s militia and other forces in Fallujah as inflammatory. “Really, they don’t command much support, but the way that the Americans have

been dealing with them has been giving them more weight than they deserve.”

To Ali, the last few weeks serve as ample evidence of the folly of an armed strategy in the current situation.

“The biggest losers are the Iraqi people who are caught up in between, like the hundreds who were killed in the fighting in Fallujah.

“The problem with the Americans is that they have no other language – they simply react with excessive force.”

Political process

According to Ali, “the majority of political forces are for pursuing the political process to bring about elections supervised by the UN and a legitimate elected government to end the occupation fully.

“The alternative would be to drag the country in chaos and play into the hands of the neoconservatives in the US who want to turn Iraq into a battlefield for Bush’s war on terror.”

He addresses the nature of violent forces in Iraq other than Sadr’s militia: “Yes, there is a patriotic element, we fully understand that. But, on the other hand, there are forces carrying out sabotage simply to destabilise the situation and to maintain the privileged position that they had before.

“There are remnants of the old regime. The dictatorship at the time had a sophisticated system of repression. They didn’t just vanish”, says Ali.

“They carry out operations in return for money paid by leading figures of the old regime, as well as tribal elements. Certain strata thrived under the sanctions through the smuggling of oil.

“Of course, there are other forces which jumped into the situation to settle scores against the Americans. The Americans actually allowed the borders to be open without taking any action. Whether deliberately or not we don’t know.”

One thing of which Ali is certain is that the US has been dragging its feet on the training and equipping Iraqi security forces.

“This escalation of violence – whether by design or default – could play into the hands of those in the American establishment who want to sabotage or delay the transfer of power to the Iraqi people.”

He compares the potential situation in Iraq with that which now exists between Israel and the Palestinians, such as the US use of collective punishment.

“The US is trying to copy tactics used in the West Bank and Gaza. This is dangerous because you end up with a cycle of violence and counter-violence with the overwhelming majority of people and political forces marginalised.

“Now, you have only extremist elements that are used by Sharon to justify his plans and divert attention from the legitimate aspirations of the people to end occupation.”

Ali has strong words for those on the left here who have hailed the current upsurge in violence as a sign of a “national resistance”.

“What is the agenda of these political groups?” he asks. “What alternative are they putting forward for Iraq and the region as a whole apart from violence and destabilisation and turning Iraq into a battlefield to fight their own wars against America?”

“Anybody can go to Baghdad and they can detect straight away that the people simply are not part of it. They’ve had enough wars and killing. These people who are advocating support for ‘national resistance’ have to convince us – how will this in any way advance the causes of peace, democracy and social progress?”

He says that it is important to understand that there’s “a very strong Iraqi national sentiment. Nobody wants the occupation – everybody wants a speedy end to the occupation.”

United Nations

Ali sees the UN as having a vital role, but argues that there is no way that elections can be held until the security situation improves – under adequate well-trained Iraqi forces.

“It’s very irresponsible to say, on one hand, let the Iraqi people decide their fate without giving any

alternative apart from supporting people like Sadr or extremist reactionary forces.

“Immediate elections are simply impossible. That is the conclusion that the UN came to after consulting all Iraq’s political forces – including the clergy and Sistani and others. They agreed to prepare for elections at the end of the year.”

Rather than criticising the democratic forces in Iraq for entering into discussions with the occupying powers, Ali believes that the left needs to engage with them and help ordinary Iraqi people take centre stage in the political process.

“One aspect which has not been given sufficient attention by the peace movement, not only in Britain but internationally, is solidarity with the democratic forces inside Iraq.

“They need to develop links with democratic forces. I’m not only talking about political parties – I’m talking about democratic organisations and social movements.

“We see it as unthinkable to imagine any advance, any social progress without political and social democracy.”

It is important, he says, “not to think of Iraq and the Iraqi people simply as a means to achieve an end but as equal allies in the fight to gain an end to the policy of pre-emptive war.

“The Iraqi people don’t need lectures in how to conduct their affairs. The people, from bitter experience, know their enemies very well.

“Some of the analysis on the left – I don’t think it has been intentional – gives the impression that there are some who want to dictate and to lecture. We don’t need to be lectured.

“Only democratic regimes representing the will of the people can stand up to imperialism. Saddam ended up being a paper tiger. He collapsed after two days.

“Unless people understand the complexities and forge an alliance with the forces that matter – with your allies in the struggle – it will always be a one-sided struggle, to the detriment of both us in Iraq and you in Britain.”

www.morningstaronline.co.uk/

Landslide ANC election victory

Winning about 70 percent of the vote, the African National Congress (ANC) has chalked up an overwhelming election victory giving it and its alliance partners a massive mandate to press ahead with their objective of transforming South African society.

In a comment on the election result, the SA Communist Party (SACP) says, "The working people and the poor of South Africa have spoken."

"The victory of the ANC in the KwaZulu Natal and Western Cape

class unity and setting both these provinces on a course of progressive transformation."

The SACP says, "But let no-one doubt that this renewed and increased mandate has been built fundamentally on the energies, aspirations, commitment and organisation of millions of workers and poor, those who live in dusty townships, in sprawling semi-urban settlements, in rural villages and homesteads. This is the bed-rock of support for the ANC and its alliance. The ANC electoral success has been

crossed our country, door-to-door. We have explained the achievements of the last 10 years, we have discussed our ANC manifesto plans, and, perhaps most importantly, we have listened to the hopes and frustrations of the working people and the poor.

"The SACP agrees with leading ANC colleagues who have said that this victory is not a cause for arrogance. It increases our responsibilities to deliver on the commitments we have made in our election manifesto, especially in regard to creating work and fighting poverty. The trust placed in our movement is not something to be taken for granted. Moving forward, it cannot be a matter of 'business as usual'."

The SACP in its statement called upon the working class to take responsibility for its vote by ensuring that, through its organised muscle and mass base, it is in the forefront of the implementation of the ANC Manifesto.

The Party statement concluded: "As the SACP we commit ourselves to work towards sustained and ongoing contact with the mass of our



people, through people's forums, community development forums and workers' forums. We will do this in order to ensure that the workers and the poor are mobilised as

the leading social force in driving further the transformation program and to ensure that this electoral victory should primarily be for their benefit." ✪

"It increases our responsibilities to deliver on the commitments we have made in our election manifesto."

provinces is an affirmation that the ANC is now the leading political force among rural African voters in KwaZulu Natal and among Coloured and Indian voters in both provinces. This is important for the consolidation of intra-working

based on a dynamic and revitalised contact over many months, between our alliance organisations and these communities.

"Beginning with our president, right through to every grass-roots cadre of our alliance, we have criss-

Progressives win Sri Lankan elections

Vernon Abeysekera

At the general elections held on April 2, Chandrika Kumaratunga's Sri Lanka Freedom Party (the SLFP) in collaboration with the Communist Party, the Trotskyite LSSP and the recently registered JVP (People's Liberation Front) triumphed.

These parties won a total of 105 seats in a 225-seat parliament which means that they do not hold a majority and will have to win the support of other smaller parties and groups (such as Buddhist monks) to govern and maintain stability.

Their closest rival, the United National Party (UNP), which made up the previous government, won 82 seats.

For some time the President and the Prime Minister had been at loggerheads and this conflict could only be resolved by resort to a general election.

Mrs Kumaratunga's Freedom Party had consistently followed left of centre policies.

The UNP on the other hand, led by the PM Ranil Wickremasinghe, had been equally consistently conservative.

This apparent contradiction was contributed to by the fact that elections to the post of President and to Parliament had taken place at different times.

A former UNP leader had drafted the present Constitution when his party came to power in 1977. His major concern at that

time was to consolidate his own power.

In the numerous clashes that had taken place between the President and the PM, the most serious disagreement was on the conduct of the peace negotiations with the rebel Tamil Tiger group.

The PM and the Cabinet had secured a "cease-fire", which has now lasted over two years. This was naturally welcomed by all sections of the people, but the President had argued that the "cease-fire" was obtained at too heavy a price.

She pointed specifically to the measures taken by the Tigers to strengthen their position in the territories annexed by them – the setting up of police stations and magistrates' courts and the imposition of a rough and ready system of taxation.

The SLFP went to the polls with the collaboration of two old allies, the Communist Party and the Trotskyite LSSP, and was joined by the JVP.

The CP and LSSP shared power with the SLFP in the '60s, '70s and within the last ten years, and at various times held some important portfolios – Finance, Transport, Housing, Public Works and Constitutional Affairs.

There was some speculation that if the UNP won the elections it might attempt to reach an agreement with the Tamil National Alliance, which had been sup-



Tamils queue to vote

ported by the Tigers. However, the electors rejected the UNP and Mrs Kumaratunga was quick to announce her victory.

She has already appointed a stalwart of the Freedom Party, Mahinda Rajapakse, as her Prime Minister.

The new Government has a heavy work load ahead. Foreign affairs should present few problems as Mrs Kumaratunga is bound to continue the policy of non-alignment, a course taken by Sri Lankan governments for many years.

She is unlikely to bend over backwards to appease the USA, as so many other leaders in the world have done recently.

Her more serious problems will be at home – promoting commerce, trade and tourism, and maintaining peace and harmony in a multi-racial, multi-religious society.

Her toughest problem, however, will be to find a solution to what is generally referred to as the "ethnic issue".

She will first have to reach a lasting agreement with the Tigers and then, most important of all, satisfy the legitimate demands of the Tamils, the largest minority in the country.

She will have the goodwill of all progressive people in the world. ✪

"Wiranto must stand trial, not stand for office"

The New York based East Timor Action Network (ETAN) said it was "dismayed" at the Golkar Party's nomination of General Wiranto for President of Indonesia.

Wiranto was Armed Forces Commander and Defence Minister in 1999. Prior to and after East Timor's overwhelming vote for independence, his troops and their militia proxies conducted a campaign of terror resulting in more than 1400 deaths, displacement of three-quarters of the population and destruction of more than 75 percent of East Timor's infrastructure.

On February 24, 2003, Wiranto was indicted in East Timor for crimes against humanity before the Dili Special Panel, a joint UN-East Timorese court.

ETAN pointed out that "Wiranto is responsible through acts of omission and commission for the gravest violations of human right in East Timor and Indonesia. He must stand trial not stand for office."

"Wiranto's rise in Indonesian politics speaks volumes about the failure of the United Nations, the

US and other countries to act quickly and forcefully for justice. The cycle of impunity continues. Those responsible for the devastation in East Timor are now directing similar campaigns in Aceh and Papua.

"Wiranto should be arrested and transferred to East Timor, where he has been indicted for crimes against humanity. Regardless of the outcome of the coming Indonesian election, his indictment will remain in force until he is arrested and brought to trial.

"We urge the United Nations to revisit the recommendation to establish an international tribunal for East Timor made by the UN's Commission of Inquiry in January 2000".

The prosecution of Wiranto and others responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity from 1975 through to 1999 in East Timor is necessary to end the state-sanctioned terror by Indonesia's security forces throughout the Indonesian archipelago.

To contact ETAN go to www.etan.org ✪

Jail begins for SOA protestors

Nell Ranta

"I still believe, even after being degraded, yelled at, groped and shackled in chains, that each American can make a difference. We can close this school for terrorists", said Leisa Faulkner one of 27 human rights activists standing trial for demonstrating against the School of the Americas (SOA), a school for terrorists run by the United States army.

She is to serve a three-month sentence for "crossing the line" during protests at the military base.

As a result of increasing public knowledge and outrage at the SOA, Congress closed the school in 2000 but reopened it in 2001 under a new name – Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation.

At least 12,000 people have taken part in demonstrations against the school. Amnesty International has charged – and the Pentagon finally admitted in 1996 – that training manuals used at the SOA advocated torture, execution and blackmail. Hundreds of graduates of the SOA have been implicated in many of the worst atrocities in the

western hemisphere – the murder of bishops, priests and nuns, of labour leaders, women and children and community workers.

The School of the Americas Watch, a national faith- and conscience-based group founded in 1990 that is committed to closing the base is urging supporters to lobby their Congress representatives to sponsor a bill that would permanently close the school.

For more information, visit www.soaw.org People's Weekly World (abridged) <http://pww.org/> ✪

Cuba asks the UN to investigate USA in Guantánamo

Ivan Terrero

A few hours after the UN vote against Cuba in the Human Rights Commission (HRC), the island's government called on the same agency to investigate the situation of the prisoners detained by the United States on the Guantánamo naval base.

"The international community has a right to know what is happening there", stated Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque during a press conference at the Havana Ministry.

Around 600 persons suspected of belonging to the al-Qaida network or the Taliban have been detained on the Guantánamo base without formal charges or access to legal representation.

The resolution presented by Cuba is aimed at an investigation and report on the prison conditions of the detainees and the cessation of all violations of their rights. Moreover, Cuba has asked for a special rapporteur on issues of torture to pronounce on the situation at the US base, and a follow-up discussion on the issue at the next HRC session in 2005.

against Cuba yesterday to co-sponsor the resolution. "We likewise hope for sponsorship from the European nations whose parliament has mandated them to give priority attention to prisoners on the base."

The HRC passed the anti-Cuban resolution presented by Honduras with the minimal difference of one vote: 22 in favour, 21 against and 10 abstentions.

The Minister qualified the result of the vote as ridiculous and affirmed that the document could never be presented as a condemnation of Cuba. "This confirms once again the decline and discredit into which the anti-Cuban manoeuvre organised by the United States at the HRC has fallen", he stated.

The anti-Cuba resolution

The loud applause given Juan Antonio Fernández, head of the Cuban delegation; and the solid position of China, Russia and the overwhelming majority of the African nations that are members of the HCR, swayed votes.

This was the vote on the anti-

cisms of Havana. Far less so was the case of the United States which, in passing, congratulated its new pawn, Honduras, for presenting the text.

Other nations explaining their vote included Chile, unsurprisingly, as subsequently was clear in the voting; Guatemala, Mexico, Peru, the Dominican Republic and Costa Rica, members of the choir following Washington's tune.

In the case of Mexico, its decision was relayed by a White House spokesperson after a brief telephone conversation between Mexican President Vicente Fox and George Bush.

The US President took it upon himself to contact various Latin American Presidents to pressure them into backing the anti-Cuban resolution. However, not all of them bowed to the White House will. Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay (finally) decided to abstain.

On the other hand, China gave a solid defence of Cuba, by affirming, "In 45 years of Revolution its valiant people have achieved exceptional advances in all spheres, despite the blockade and pressure from the United States."

The Chinese delegate noted that it was very sad to see the HRC allowing itself to be manipulated by the hegemony that the White House is attempting to impose on the world and condemned outright the fact that a little island should be the preferred target of US governments.

Russia, Zimbabwe, Togo, Congo and Sudan stayed firm to their stand of not supporting a document condemning Cuba, and attested during the session to the island's solidarity with the peoples of the world, its successes in education, health care and culture, and its adherence to human rights.

Granma (abridged) ☪



A resolution calls for a report on prison conditions in Guantánamo

Cuba has asked for a special rapporteur on issues of torture to pronounce on the situation at the US base

The Cuban Foreign Minister explained that the text only asks for the creation of control and investigation mechanisms and presented all the participating journalists with a copy of the document.

Pérez Roque announced that he is to ask the 22 nations who voted

Cuba resolution presented by Honduras, at Washington's behest, as Fernández eloquently explained, to condemn the island on human rights issues.

On behalf of the European Union, Ireland did not surprise the auditorium by reiterating its criti-

We salute your great courage

An international delegation of 80 individuals from a dozen countries and from Israel welcomed Mordechai Vanunu when he was released from an Israeli prison last week. He had been imprisoned following his exposure of Israel's nuclear weapons program in a British newspaper. Vanunu revealed that Israel had more than 200 thermonuclear weapons.

He was jailed for 18 years, 11 of which were spent in solitary confinement. It is a remarkable tribute to his strength that after such treatment his spirit was unbroken and that upon his release he again denounced the nuclear weapons program being undertaken secretly by Israel

The number of weapons will have increased during his period of detention. The International Atomic Energy Agency which has campaigned against Iran, Libya, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and some other countries, has done absolutely nothing to investigate or insist that Israel should abide by the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and dismantle its nuclear weapons.

Ken Livingstone, the Mayor of London sent a message of greeting on Mordechai Vanunu's release. He wrote: "I salute your courage and

determination, sacrificing your freedom for the sake of a nuclear free Middle East and nuclear free world. I hope at some point you may want to come to London to meet the many supporters who have campaigned tirelessly on your behalf."

Keith Locke MP, Foreign Affairs spokesperson for the Green Party of Aotearoa/New Zealand

"We salute your great courage and welcome your freedom."

wrote: "We salute your great courage and welcome your freedom. We are deeply saddened by the huge sacrifice you have been forced to make for telling the truth about Israel's bomb. However, by standing true to your principles, you have made a considerable contribution to the struggle to free our planet of nuclear weapons."

Other messages to Vanunu were sent by Melvyn Bragg, broadcaster, writer and critic; Michael Mansfield, QC and International human rights lawyer; Daniel Ellsberg, US whistleblower who revealed the Pentagon Papers; Julie Christie, film actor; Harold Pinter, playwright and actor and many others.

Despite having served the penalty for his alleged crime Mordechai

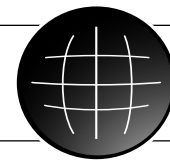
Vanunu faces severe restrictions on his movements following his release.

"It is absolutely disgraceful that these restrictions are being imposed on a man who has finished his 18-year sentence, has no charges to face and has suffered so much already", said Rayna Moss of the Israeli Free Vanunu Campaign.

Vanunu will:

1. have to register to live in an Israeli city of his choice.
2. have to give notice to the authorities if he wishes to travel to another city.
3. not be allowed to leave Israel for six months – a restriction that will be reviewed at the end of six months and could be renewed.
4. not be allowed to contact foreigners either by phone or in person.
5. not be allowed to go within 100 metres of any embassy, visit any port of entry, come within 300 metres of any international boundary and may not be allowed to worship in a church of his choice.

For more information go to www.vanunu.co.uk or www.vanunu.com ☪



Global briefs

BRITAIN: British foreign Secretary Jack Straw told BBC radio that British forces would be in Iraq "at least for a couple of years" or maybe even longer. Britain has about 8700 troops in Iraq. Spain, Honduras and the Dominican Republic are pulling out their troops. Poland is reviewing its engagement in Iraq but stated that it would withdraw early next year. US General Myers revealed that the cost of the war had increased to US\$4.7 billion (A\$6.44 billion) a month.

USA: President Bush named John Negroponte, the United States' top diplomat at the United Nations, as the US ambassador to Iraq. If confirmed by the Senate, Negroponte would head a US embassy in Baghdad which would be the largest in the world. Negroponte assisted the Contras in Nicaragua when he was the US ambassador in Honduras and to this day denies the human rights abuses committed by Honduran death squads, funded and partly trained by the CIA.

SERBIA: UN police in Kosovo are investigating a shootout between Jordanian and US police units in the province, which left two US officers and a Jordanian dead, amid fears that it was motivated by anti-US feeling.

ITALY: Silvio Berlusconi's right-wing government is to change the law to allow people to kill intruders without fear of imprisonment.

JAPAN: Peace organisations in Kanagawa Prefecture, south of Tokyo, are strongly opposed to Pentagon plans to deploy a nuclear-powered aircraft carrier in the Yokosuka Port. Yokosuka Port has been the only homeport outside the US for US aircraft carriers since 1973. Up to now strong opposition by the Japanese people has prevented nuclear-powered aircraft from being deployed there.

GREECE: The head of the Greek construction workers' union said that construction workers were risking their lives as they tried to complete preparations for this summer's Olympic Games. Georgios Filiouis said 13 workers involved in Olympic projects have already died, and he fears more will die as the deadline draws closer. He compared this to one death prior to the Sydney games, and blamed it on companies cutting costs. The union said average working hours on the projects ranged from seven to 12 hours – up from the usual five to seven – and builders were working around the clock on key sites.

HAITI: As death-squad gangs linked to the former fascist Duval regime ravaged the country after President Aristide's forced removal, 34 workers at the Grupo M garment factory in the Codevi "free trade zone" on the Haitian-Dominican border, were sacked on March 1 for joining the union. The next day, as co-workers prepared to act in support of the union, they were attacked by gang members, who said Grupo M management had called them in. After several workers were handcuffed and others beaten, the workers were forced to return to work.

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

email: guardian@cpa.org.au



I didn't know I could be sold!

I am one of 150 employees of the Home Care Network of Chicago's Rush Hospital who were literally sold March 23 to Patient Care, a giant for-profit home-care company with 6000 employees nationwide.

Workers in the homecare network include registered nurses,

physical and occupational therapists and home health care aides. We provide the medically necessary follow-up care after someone is hospitalised. The skilled services we provide include physical therapy, chemotherapy or cardiac assessments. The goal of this Medicare certified service is to prevent re-hospitalisation.

After the sale of the not-for-profit Rush Hospital's home care network to the for-profit company was announced, we were shocked to learn that the deal included a provision barring us from transferring to other positions in the hospital's medical centre. The hospital had agreed not to rehire any of us, its soon-to-be-former employees, for two years, and even then only as a new hire.

We had been "sold" to Patient Care!

Rush Hospital nurses have never been unionised, but we are not taking this lying down. Talks are underway with local union representatives and community organisations.

Elizabeth Peace, R.N
People's Weekly World
Communist Party USA

A recently mandated withdrawal

Who does the Australian Prime Minister, John Howard, think he is? It is not up to him to condemn the freshly elected Prime Minister of Spain, Sr Jose Zapatero, for honouring a pre-election pledge

to withdraw his country's troops from an illegal occupation of Iraq. He's got a valid mandate. Quite obviously, the Spanish people did not like being lied to and ignored by his predecessor.

Nor is it Mr Howard's business, or sensible politics, to publicly applaud the air-strike murders of two leaders of the Palestinian group Hamas, in rapid succession, either.

Perhaps, at a date to be determined, the Australian people, as representatives of a successful multi-cultural society, will show Mr Howard that they're no more fond of being lied to and ignored than the Spaniards were, and that he shouldn't blatantly favour the interests of one section of the Semitic peoples over another.

Dave Diss
Glengowrie, South Australia

"No, to a meaningless and aimless war"

As Australians we must be alarmed by our Prime Minister's response to any one who disagrees with him on any aspect of the Iraq war. Spain's troop withdrawal will, he says, result in "more bloodshed in the troubled nation" (*The Age* 19/4/2004).

The people of Spain may have seen the vanity of war and they have voiced their concerns, their opinions and the government has respected that. Perhaps the Spanish nation can see what our Prime Minister does not want to see: that continued engagement by arms and meddling in another sovereign country's affairs will lead to more anti-American and "coalition of the willing" hatred and bloodshed not only inside Iraq but outside also.

What have we achieved in Iraq up to this point in time? Nothing but destruction, displacement, chaos and bloodshed.

Has our Prime Minister found the WMD that he and Mr Bush were hoping to find? No. Have we contributed to any reconciliation or/and the unification of the Iraqi people? No. To the contrary, our presence has increased the resolve of the insurgents to resist. Are the Iraqi people safer now than they were under Saddam Hussein. Of course not.

Are Australian military and other personnel inside Iraq at risk? Yes.

Australia should not wait for casualties to occur. It will be too late.

As Australians, let's begin condemning the immoral actions of our government that have contributed to destruction and bloodshed."

John Karamanos
Balwyn North, Vic

Howard's values

"Immigration Department figures revealed that nearly 97 children had tried to harm themselves while in immigration detention over the past three years with 88 successful." (*The Age*, Feb 12/04).

Now what did Mr Howard say about not teaching children "values" in public schools? What are his and his government's values? Is treating innocent, traumatised children as criminals a value to be aspired to?

It may be Mr Howard's attitude to children but it is certainly not many other people's.

"Disgusted"
Fairfield, NSW



Landmine Action Week is a joint project by the International Campaign to Ban Landmines - Australian Network and AUSTCARE. Uniting Church NSW Synod is a major partner in Landmine Action Week.

Culture & Life

by Rob Gowland

Australia's national day?

I turned the television on at lunch time last Friday and found myself looking at a huddled mass of shipwreck survivors. But no, what I had at first glance taken to be blankets around their shoulders were actually Australian flags.

Their faces were tear-stained, not with shock but with the same "emotion of the moment" that grips people at pop concerts. This crowd, literally "wrapped in the flag", were apparently awaiting dawn on Gallipoli peninsula.

It was a surreal spectacle, like some bizarre One Nation election rally. Many of the crowd, apparently feeling that wearing an Australian flag like a cloak was not enough, had added smaller Aussie flags in their hats or even their hair.

As far as I could tell, there was not a New Zealand flag in sight. So much for the meaning of ANZAC.

And while these tourists in Gallipoli were wallowing in sentimental patriotism, ABC News (for that's what the program turned out to be) was interviewing some academic in front of the Anzac Memorial in Sydney's Hyde Park. He informed us that "Anzac Day has become Australia's national day".

Certainly Australia Day (January 26) has not caught on. Celebrating the anniversary of the invasion of the country, the theft of the land of the Indigenous people and the subsequent genocide by British

colonialism is hardly an appropriate anniversary.

But Anzac Day? Celebrate the slaughter of thousands of young Australians and New Zealanders in a harebrained scheme to sever Turkey from Germany and Austria-Hungary and put Turkey's imperial possessions in the Middle East under British control?

The young Anzacs had been suckered into volunteering on a wave of jingoistic patriotism that also wrapped the whole undertaking in the flag, and appealed on behalf of God and King for good measure.

They went full of romantic notions of freeing the Middle East from the swarthy hordes of "the Turk" and replacing Turkish rule with the enlightened benevolence of the white race.

British imperialism saw them as so much useful cannon fodder. Colonial troops were generally taller and better nourished than their English counterparts.

English conscripts, as opposed to their upper class officer corps, were the undernourished product of smog-ridden industrial towns, impoverished mining valleys or the teeming alleyways of London.

This contrast was obvious (it was observed, for example, that English Tommies tended to address Australian soldiers as "Sir" because they physically had to look up to them just as they did with the toffee nosed sons of the ruling class). But it did not make the British ruling class decide that working class kids needed more and better food, clean air and opportunities for exercise.

No. The conclusion the British authorities drew was that if they had a tough enemy position to attack then the colonials would be of more use than their own men.

So they sent the Anzacs to Gallipoli and subsequently to the mud and blood of the Western Front. I had an uncle who was one



For workers the Eureka Stockade would be an appropriate Australia day commemoration

of the lucky ones who survived the fighting in France and Flanders.

The British authorities had another reason for sending the Anzacs on to the war in France: their own troops were turning mutinous. As idiotic order followed idiotic order, and men went over the top in senseless and futile assaults on heavily defended positions time and again, the British Tommy dug his heels in.

They had had enough. A year or so ago I saw a 106-year old veteran on TV recalling how his Australian unit in France was unable to move up the road towards the front line because it was full of British troops coming away from the front. They had left their positions and jacked it in.

Such WW1 mutinies are rarely reported even now, but their growing prevalence as the War continued into its third and fourth year, com-

bined with the influence of the Russian Revolution (and the determination of the Russian soldiers to quit the war), was a major factor in convincing the ruling class of Britain, France and Germany to end the War with an armistice.

The senseless slaughter of trench warfare on the Western Front was duplicated in the Gallipoli campaign. Botched even before the British Navy sent the Anzacs ashore in a heavy current that carried their lifeboats to the wrong beach, the campaign achieved none of its objectives.

After months of futile bloodshed, the troops had to be ignominiously withdrawn under cover of dark and "the Turk" was left in possession of the peninsula, which was after all part of his country.

The anniversary of this disastrous fiasco should be our national

day? Give us a break.

For working class Australians this country's national day must - in my opinion - commemorate the Eureka Stockade, when workers from Australia, England, Ireland, Italy (and elsewhere in Europe) and the USA, diggers on the Ballarat goldfields, declared their independence from the rule of the British Crown.

Indeed, the only question is whether it should be celebrated on November 30, when the diggers raised the blue flag with the stars of the Southern Cross and erected their stockade, or on December 3, the anniversary of the courageous but unsuccessful defence of the stockade against a sneak attack by a much superior force of soldiers.

Which ever date we choose, let's fly a rebel flag (as Henry Lawson says) and get rid of Johnny Howard's demeaning jingoism. ☘



Sun May 2 ~
~ Sat May 8

The two-part documentary series *A Species Odyssey*, screening on *Lost Worlds* (SBS 8.30pm Sundays), is a French/Belgian co-production that sets forth the latest scientific hypotheses on the origins and development of the human race.

Not being from the USA, it is mercifully free of the compromises and equivocations that most US documentaries on this subject are obliged to include in order to placate the religious lobby.

The first episode, *From the Rift to the Discovery of Fire*, begins about eight million years ago with the formation of the Rift Valley in Africa and the draining of East Africa, creating the conditions for the development of primates that walked upright.

From the seven species of the pre-human Australopithecus evolved, in time, the first species of the Homo genus, Homo habilis, author of a crucial invention: tools.

Tools helped to increase food supply, leading to a vital physical mutation: the development of the brain. These first conquerors left the cradle of Africa to discover the ancient world.

More than one and a half million years ago, they became Homo ergaster and Homo erectus, the first hominids to tame fire.

Next week's episode follows the evolutionary trail from these early hominids to the appearance of Homo Sapiens, who began a new period of expansion, into the Americas and even reaching Australia.

Budgeted at a remarkable three

million Euros, making it one of the most expensive documentaries ever, *A Species Odyssey* uses the most sophisticated and advanced Computer Graphic creation techniques to simulate the world of pre-history.

Those of you who watched last week's episode of *Foyle's War* (ABC 8.30pm Sundays) will know that the new series is well up to the standard set by the first.

But it is more than a period *policier*. Anthony Horowitz and his co-writers might present each episode as a detective story, but they are really studies of people and intricate interpersonal relationships in a time of national and social crisis.

This week's episode, *Among The Few*, is set in September 1940 and deals with blackmarketeering in stolen fuel, as well as murder, sexual indiscretion, illegitimate pregnancy and homosexuality.

Sam gets to do some undercover detective work and Foyle's son gets himself in hot water again, but although we can be confident that, in the best detective story tradition, Foyle will have unravelled the mystery by the end of the episode, this does not always mean that he gets his man (or woman). *Vide* last week's episode.

SBS has a new drama series, *Oz* (SBS 10.00pm Mondays). The title does not refer to our fair homeland but to the land where Dorothy met the Scarecrow.

Actually, it's a prison drama – in fact, a post-modernist *Prisoner*. The prison is the Oswald Maximum Security Prison with a modern, experimental unit called Emerald City. Here the emphasis is on rehabilitation over retribution.

However, survival remains top priority and fear is a constant companion.

With so many US citizens, especially black and Hispanic, being incarcerated under conditions Amnesty labelled "a form of torture", there must be considerable scope for a realist drama series on the place of prison in US life. This is not it.

Despite some contemporary trimmings (Eamonn Walker, for example, plays prisoner Kareem

Said, a charismatic author and militant Muslim who considers himself a political prisoner) this is basically a rather gritty soap opera.

The new kids' series *Noah & Saskia*, at least on the strength of the opening double episode, is a bottler. I found it excellent in all departments: storyline, acting, use of animation and graphics, even the interesting way computers are integrated into the plot.

The first episode is a double (ABC 5.55pm Tuesday), but future episodes will be half hour and run at 5.25pm on Tuesdays.

The series is produced by the Australian Children's Television Foundation and I must say is a credit to them. The concept is not exactly original but it has been given a new spin.

Two teenagers who don't exactly fit in in their own environment, one in England and one in Australia, meet in a computer chat room where they adopt larger than life personalities. Each is smitten by the other's make believe alter ego.

They join forces to produce an on-line comic book set in a prison camp that reflects (at some remove) incidents in the life of the English boy.

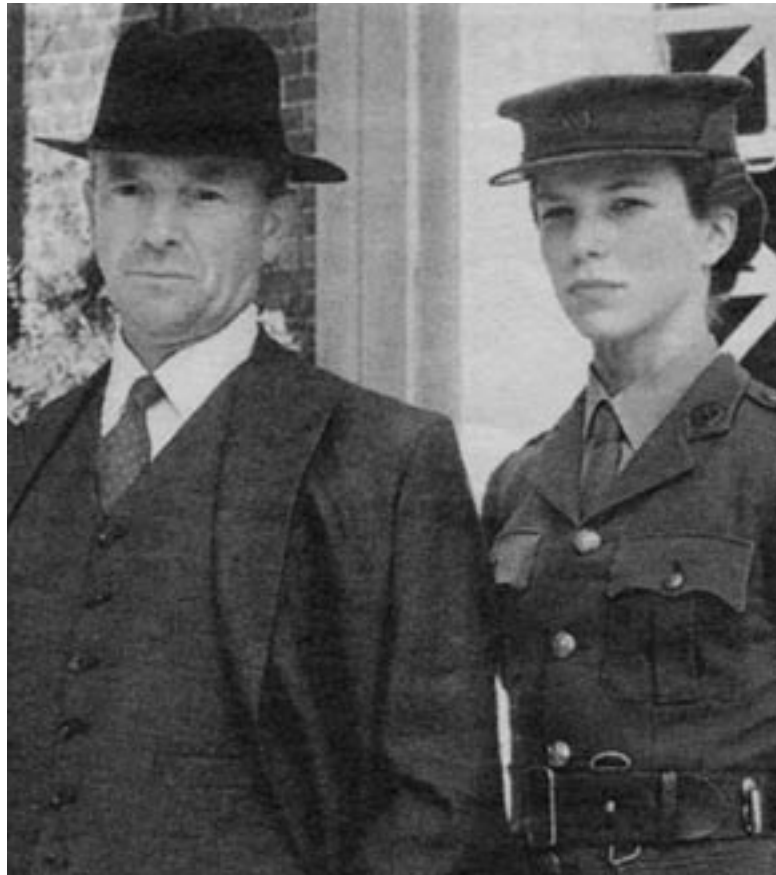
If the standard of the opening is maintained this will be a very popular series. I don't know how kids will go for it, but I will certainly watch it! (Well, if I am home on a Tuesday afternoon, that is.)

Fifteen out of the 19 terrorists who flew hijacked airliners into New York's Twin Towers and the Pentagon were Saudi nationals. Workers in Saudi Arabia who join trade unions have their hands cut off and hung up at the factory gates as a warning to others.

Women are crushed to death under a truckload of rocks for the "crime" of adultery. Thieves are mutilated, consumers of alcohol flogged. Slaves are bought and sold.

The members of the ruling clique – sorry, the "royal family" – squander colossal oil revenues and the bulk of the populace live in poverty. Who runs this medieval blot on the 21st century?

The question is answered in *The House of Saud*, screening in the *Cutting Edge* timeslot (SBS 8.30pm Tuesday). It is made by Jihan El-



Relationships in a time of national crisis (*Foyle's War*)

Tahri, Beirut-born Arab filmmaker of dual French and Egyptian citizenship whose previous films include *Israel and the Arabs* and *Islam and the Kalashnikov*.

The program includes archival footage and photographs and interviews with members of the ruling family, as well as former US government officials and executives from the oil company, Aramco. Clearly Jihan El-Tahri knows who really runs the country.

Finally, two programs that should certainly be of interest to *Guardian* readers. The first is *Dhakiyarr Vs The King*, screening on *Untold Stories* (ABC 9.35pm Wednesday), the story of a racist murder trial followed pretty obviously by a racist murder.

In 1933, on Woodah Island in remote northeast Arnhem Land, the Yolngu leader Dhakiyarr Wirrpanda speared to death a policeman, Constable Albert McColl, who had chained up Dhakiyarr's wife. To Dhakiyarr, the action was lawful on his land. On the advice of missionaries, he went to Darwin to explain his actions and his people's ways to the Northern Territory Supreme Court.

He was found guilty of murder in a trial where conditions and justice were grossly stacked against him and was sentenced to hang. However, the sentence was overturned by the High Court and Dhakiyarr was freed. But he disappeared the day he was released and his family have never discovered what happened to him.

I am sure they can make a pretty shrewd guess.

The other program is *Molly & Mobarak*, screening in the *Storyline Australia* timeslot (SBS 8.30pm Thursday). It is the moving story of an Australian girl and an Afghan refugee working at the abattoir in the NSW town of Young.

It is made by talented, committed filmmaker Tom Zubrycki. "This is a timely and revealing documentary which clearly illustrates the human cost of the government's unjust and hostile policies on asylum seekers", says Zubrycki.

And Sacha Molitorisz, in *The Sydney Morning Herald* said: "Tom Zubrycki's doco is one of the best Aussie films of recent times. It's a revealing exploration of multiculturalism in Australia, but – above all, it's just a great film." ★



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Surry Hills NSW 2010
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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

Sydney

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Every Friday night 6pm – 7.45pm

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(across from the Chalmers St exit and Devonshire St tunnel at Central Station)
Dinner afterwards in the Royal Exhibition Hotel across the road

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

May 7

What's Happening With
Progressive Politics In The Usa
Roger Bell: School of History at UNSW;
Stephen Loosely: (former ALP Senator) Consultant,
Price Waterhouse Coopers

May 14

Corruption of Public Culture –
Lessons of Interwar Germany For Present Day Australia
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

Say NO FTA!

The Howard Government's Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with the US is a manifesto for the takeover of Australia's economic, cultural and political life by American transnational corporations. These corporations will have unprecedented access to invest in Australia, to move capital and goods in and out of Australia, manipulate the Australian dollar, and incredible powers to intervene in the process of government and the making of laws and regulations. Jobs and workers' rights will under the hammer.

Trade union rights threatened

- Strikes and other industrial action affecting US investments or trade with Australia considered a barrier to trade with US will be banned.
- Actions against corporations on basis of their activities in other countries (e.g. against Nike, Rio Tinto) will be banned.
- Cabotage (requirement for Australian ships on coastal routes) will be outlawed.
- Government will face fines of up to \$15 million if it fails to enforce labour laws (state or federal) that protect the operations of US corporations.

Medicine prices will rise

- Prices will move towards US levels making many medicines unaffordable.
- US pharmaceutical corporations will have greater influence on functioning of Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme, weakening the capacity of PBS to control prices.
- Exclusive patent rights extended to 20 years, delaying introduction of cheaper generic products and pushing prices up.
- Beginning of direct advertising by pharmaceutical companies to the public – on the net.

Open slather on uranium

- Australia would lose the right to restrict exports of products to US such as uranium.

Health care standards threatened

- Patient care could be undermined with easing of requirements for qualifications, licensing and standards so they become "not more burdensome than necessary to ensure the quality of the service".

Hands environment over to markets

- Promotes "flexible, voluntary and market-based mechanisms" as means of protecting the environment.

- Locks Australia in with US at international forums.
- Makes no commitment to international law regarding the environment.
- But does allow Australia an US to "retain the right to establish their own domestic environmental ... standards".
- US given the right to question laws governing water supply and quality, greenhouse gas emissions, air pollution, fisheries, release of GM organisms, etc.

Media

- The deal gives Australia a guarantee of only four percent of domestic product on pay TV – opening the gates even further to US content.
- It removes restrictions on US takeover of new and emerging technology.
- Locks in current inadequate rules for local content on free-to-air TV.
- More jobs will be lost in the industry.

Affects almost all public services

- US corporations will have same rights as Australian companies and governments to provide public services such as water, electricity, gas, education, health, post, telecommunications and any other activity of government carried out on a commercial basis (corporatised) or in competition with other service providers.
- The government included the sale of Telstra in a binding side letter at the same time as Parliament was debating policy.

Australian farmers get raw end of deal

- Australia drops remaining tariffs immediately on agricultural products from US.
- The US will phase out tariffs and quotas over a period of up to 18 years.
- The US's massive government subsidies remain, giving it an unfair advantage over Australian farmers who are not subsidised.

Immediate job losses

- Tariffs on US motor vehicle parts (15%) will be removed immediately.
- Provisions favouring local products or US links with local firms will be illegal.
- Migrant workers in particular will suffer from resulting job losses.

US investors protected

- The emphasis is on protecting US investors' interests.
- "All US investment in new businesses is exempted from screening ..."



- Investments under \$800 million in existing businesses (eg takeovers or parcels of shares) are exempt from scrutiny, with the exception of several key areas such as banking, airlines and media.

Acceptance of US regulations

- Australia and the US are required to give "positive consideration" to accepting each other's technical regulations as equivalent to their own, and to give reasons if they do not.
- There is no requirement to label genetically modified food products in the US. Such labelling is deemed to be a "barrier to trade".
- Australia is required to give US representatives the same rights as Australians to participate in the development of Australia's standards and technical regulations.

Government cannot give preference to Australian companies

- US companies to receive treatment no less favourable than that given to Australian corporations.
- US corporations to have same rights to government funding as Australian ones.

- No requirement to treat Australian companies as well as US corporations.

Massive financial penalties

- Actions by federal, state or local governments such as making grants conditional on employment of local labour, use of local products could result in fines of up to \$15 million.
- In addition government could be fined millions of dollars more according to the amount of damages caused by its actions.

Government hands powers to US corporations

- Undermines scope for democratic decision-making.
- US corporations can through their government challenge changes to Australian law and regulations.
- Many of the rights of Australian governments (at all levels) to regulate and decide what is in interests of the people and economy are handed over to US corporations.
- So-called "independent panels", not internationally or nationally recognised courts of law will resolve disputes and hand out penalties.

The MAI was stopped, the WTO has been blocked on several occasions. We can stop the FTA. ☺



Adelaide

UTLC Music Festival
30 April to 2 May
Governor Hindmarsh, Port Rd, Hindmarsh
Opens 30 April 6.30pm
1 May 12 noon onwards
Speeches, BBQ
For full program contact
UTLC 08 8212 3155 or visit

www.utlc.org.au
May Day March
Saturday 1 May
Assemble 10am
Victoria Square
March to Parliament House

Brisbane

May Day March
Monday 3 May
Assemble 9.30am
Mary St
March 10
to parklands
Stalls, BBQ, rides for kids,
speakers

Melbourne

May Day March
Sunday 2 May
Assemble 2pm corner
Victoria & Russell Sts
opposite VTHC
Tea & Concert After March

at Trades Hall
Multi Cultural Celebration
Friday 23 April 7pm
Trades Hall
Crn Lygon & Victoria Sts
Donation \$5
Film & Food
Sat 17 April 5.30pm
CEPU 71 Cromwell St,
Collingwood

Wreath Laying

Thurs 29 April 5.30pm
8 Hour Monument
May Day Lecture 6pm
Old Council Chamber THC
& Tea

Perth/Fremantle

May Day Toast
Friday 30 April 5.30pm
Solidarity Park
MUA catering!
May Day Parade
Sunday 2 May

Assemble Fremantle
Esplanade 11.30am
March 12 noon
Rally & Concert with
speeches, a jazzy African
band, kids' activities, free
grub & drinks, community
stalls etc

Sydney

May Day Toast
Thurs 29 April 6.45pm
Sth Sydney Leagues Club
256 Chalmers St, Redfern
\$20 Food, Drink and DJ
**May Day with the Iranian
Communist Party**
Friday 30 April 6.30pm
Parramatta Town Hall
Music, cultural
performances, speeches
May Day March
Saturday 1 May
Assemble 11am

Hyde Park North
March 12 noon to
Town Hall Square
Speakers: Andrew
Ferguson, State Secretary
CFMEU; Julia Gillard,
Federal Labor; Lee
Rhiannon, Aust Greens;
Anna Pha, Editor Guardian
Inquiries 02 9265 8438

After the march come
to the joint function of the
Maritime Branch of the
CPA, MUSAA and the
Sydney Branch of the MUA
at Scruffy Murphy's pub,
upstairs.

**Celebrate May Day
with the Lebanese
Communist Party**
Saturday 1 May 7.00pm
Yagoona Senior
Citizens' Centre

Ron Whitehead Park
Yagoona
Just bring your snacks and
drink, join us for an evening
of music and entertainment.

Wollongong

May Day Toast
Friday 30 April
6.30pm (for 7pm)
Hellenic Club
Princes Hwy, Figtree
\$25/\$15 concession
Special guest Paddy
Crumlin MUA Secretary
May Day March
Saturday 1 May
Assemble 10am
Fred Moore House Lowden
Sq Wollongong
March 10.30am
For more info ph: Leanne
0425 201 828 or Elizabeth
02 4229 2888



Communist Party of Australia

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President: Hannah Middleton
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Rob Gowland
65 Campbell St, Surry Hills 2010
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The Guardian