

# Teachers say "Back off Carr!"

State teachers held a very successful full day strike in NSW on Thursday last week and are set to take further action on Wednesday this week. Their actions were about far more than wages and professional recognition. They were political strikes on issues that go to the heart of public education and trade unionism. They were followed the next day by Catholic school teachers who are also seeking a significant pay rise.

The NSW Teachers' Federation (NSWTF) representing teachers from government schools and the Independent Education Union (IEU) covering teachers from Catholic schools had each taken a Special Case to the NSW Industrial Relations Commission (IRC) seeking substantial pay rises. This was after years of bitter dispute during which the real value of salaries and working conditions had been reduced and the workload and pressures on teachers had risen.

A resolution adopted by the IEU at a rally last Friday said, "Both unions presented strong and compelling evidence to underpin their claim that teachers' work over the last decade had substantially improved in value and that the demands and expectations on teachers' experience, professionalism and expertise had all increased".

The Special Cases appeared to be going well when hearings had closed and the IRC handed down an interim pay rise of 5.5 percent last December. Then last month, when teachers were poised to hear the IRC's final decision and were expecting to receive considerably more than the 5.5 percent – the Carr Government intervened.

"The Government had every

opportunity prior to the final hearings last December to put its arguments and did so, notably by arguing the preposterous proposition that teachers' work had not substantially changed", the IEU resolution said.

## Provocative intervention

State Premier Bob Carr, at a press conference and later in Parliament, stated that NSW could not afford wage rises for teachers. He followed this up with an urgent message to the IRC seeking to reopen the teachers' wage case. The IRC agreed.

Such intervention is unusual in the arbitration system. It is provocative and, not surprisingly, angered teachers. It is also an attack on unions and unionism. Strikes were organised quickly by both unions.

About 10,000 public school teachers marched through Sydney streets on Thursday in a defiant and determined mood. At the rally held at the end of the march, NSWTF President Maree O'Halloran was loudly cheered when she said: "We are here for the future of our profession. We are here for the future of education."

On the next day over 1000 Catholic teachers gathered at the Masonic Hall in Sydney and then marched through the streets to Parliament House.

John Robertson, Secretary of NSW Labor Council, spoke at both strike meetings.

"We cannot allow any political person, be it the Premier or anyone else, to try and intimidate the industrial umpire in NSW, which is effectively what Carr has done", he said.



## Almighty brawl

"If the Premier wants to continue with this sort of tactic ... there will be an almighty brawl in NSW and not just with the teachers."

Reflecting on what makes Carr so antagonistic towards teachers Dick Shearman, IEU General Secretary, suggested that maybe NSW teachers do not teach enough American history, a comment that delighted his audience.

When Carr became Premier he

promised he would be remembered as the "Education Premier". These words are now a sick joke.

Carr introduced the Premier's Reading Awards for primary schools students at the same time as he was undermining the great work of teachers.

## Teacher shortage

One of the issues behind the campaign by the NSWTF is a looming teacher shortage and the impact this will have on public education.

The average age of teachers is 50 years. Around 40 per cent of teachers in NSW will most likely retire in the next five to ten years. Over two-thirds of principals in NSW will also retire in this period.

Teaching has become more stressful in recent years while teachers are expected to take responsibility for more administrative tasks than previously.

The "Work, Time, Life Survey" by the ACTU highlighted teaching as one occupation where large amounts of unpaid overtime is common.

Many other changes have taken place, including to the curriculum.

With a marked increase in social problems and increased tension and inequities in society, students bring more of these problems to the classroom. Students are more difficult to handle.

Teachers are expected to be educators, social workers, counsellors, conflict resolution mediators and role models.

These reasons and many more deter young people from choosing a career in teaching; they also very quickly drive significant numbers of younger teachers out of the profession.

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**When Carr became Premier he promised he would be remembered as the "education premier".**

**These words are now a sick joke.**

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## The Guardian

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### When sovereignty is another US fraud

The issue of sovereignty and independence has been thrust onto centre stage by the attempts of the US and the United Nations to decide, even at this point in time, the make-up of an interim Iraqi government.

Sovereignty and independence mean that the people and the state of every nation have the right to establish their own government and the forms of security that are to be established, to control every aspect of their armed forces, their judiciary, electoral processes, economic structures, etc. But this is not what the occupying powers have in mind despite the statements by Bush and Powell. The US leaders and even the United Nations are attempting to decide who should be President, Prime Minister and ministers of an Iraqi interim government.

This is happening despite the statements of President Bush that Iraq would have "full sovereignty". He went on to say that on June 30, when an interim government is to be set up, that "the occupation will end". The incoming US ambassador to Iraq, John Negroponte, said that the occupying forces will act with Iraq's "consent and approval". None of these statements are true. Once again the leaders of the occupying countries are lying. At a press conference on May 27 Colin Powell said that "The President never, never relinquishes command of American troops". Other statements have made it clear that the US leaders intend to stay in Iraq for years until "the job is done". The Australian Prime Minister fully supports this intention.

This is not a new attitude on the part of imperialist governments. British and other European colonial countries imposed governments on their former colonies and only left when the national liberation movements forced them to do so.

Today, the US, British and some other governments are pursuing a policy of "pre-emptive strike". They also claim to have the right to intervene in what they describe as "failed states". Pre-emptive strike was to describe the invasion of Iraq, alleging that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction and that the US had the right to march in and overthrow the government and impose "democracy" as Iraq posed a threat to the whole world.

It is now clear that the Iraqi people will not have the right to establish a government of their own choosing unless it is a government that is acceptable to the US leaders and the UN. This is neither democracy nor the acceptance of the right of the Iraqi people to sovereignty and independence.

It is these same policies that the Australian Government has used to occupy the Solomon Islands. It would like to do the same in PNG and East Timor.

It is very unfortunate that United Nations personnel under the authority of the UN Security Council have become a part of this fraud. Its representative, Lakhdar Brahimi, is actively involved in choosing an Iraqi President and Prime Minister instead of supporting the demand of the Iraqi people and Governing Council that their nominees for these positions should be accepted.

The first responsibility of the United Nations is to uphold its own Charter, which asserts the right of nations to independence and is against interference in the internal affairs of other countries.

It appears that none of the big powers are speaking up strongly to insist that the principle of sovereignty and independence must apply to Iraq just as these countries would insist on them applying to their country and their interests.

The only exception is the UN representative of the People's Republic of China who has spoken in favour of giving the interim Iraqi government the power to review the mandate to keep foreign troops in Iraq.

It is not likely that the Iraqi people will accept for long the occupation and the appointment by outsiders of their government. Their struggle for sovereignty is part of the long struggle of the people of many countries against the imperialist powers, which have never accepted the right of people to sovereignty and independence.

The people of the world will never be safe nor be guaranteed their right to independence while imperialism exists. Imperialism is the enemy of the people of all countries.

#### PRESS FUND

The progress of the Press Fund is a bit like that of the Murray-Darling river system, in that it's slowed right down. Mind you, the river is deliberately being deprived of water because of the insatiable greed of the major irrigation agribusinesses, whereas the Press Fund's problems stem largely from hard times being experienced by our readers. But the end result is much the same! We badly need the help of our supporters to reach our annual Press Fund target, so if you possibly can, please send us a contribution for the next issue of *The Guardian*. Our thanks go to the following, for their generous contributions this week:

E Durstan \$5, Susanne Hale \$27, J Innes \$66, "Round Figure" \$7

This week's total \$105. Progressive total: \$4230

# Music to his ears

Child care mogul Eddie Groves requires employees earning as little as \$6 an hour to supply music for his centres from their home collections, Federal Parliament has heard.

MP Michael Danby made the claim in Canberra, after congratulating Groves on his move up the *Business Review Weekly (BRW)* Rich List courtesy of a personal fortune estimated at \$175 million.

Groves' ABC Learning Centres actively oppose Work Value cases being run by the child care workers' union, the Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers' Union (LHMU) in the ACT and Victoria in a bid to raise entry rates for child carers which are as low as \$5.99 for teenagers, and \$11.90 for adults.

The ABC Learning Centres' stance is significant because it is the biggest for-profit operator in Australia with more than 300 child-care centres.

"While I would like to congratulate Mr Groves for moving up to 131 on the *BRW* Rich List, ABC Centres refuse to hire sufficient cleaners, refuse to pay staff a decent wage and require staff to bring their own music to play to the children", Danby said.

The MP for Melbourne Ports referred to a complaint he had received from an ABC Learning Centres employee who said she "couldn't afford to stay in the industry".

"At ABC we do all the cleaning in the centre and are expected to tidy the outside areas as well", she wrote.

"I believe that if a job includes several roles i.e. cleaning and child care, then maybe the award wage



should reflect this. If ABC had to pay cleaners in each of its centres, it would cost hundreds of dollars, instead the childcare workers have to perform the role of cleaners to save Eddie more money.

"Staff are also required to play music at certain times of the day, which is not supplied by ABC and only gets played if staff bring in their own music."

Leading Liberal Party figures, including Jeff Kennett and Andrew Peacock, have been associated with the management of ABC Learning Centres.

Last year, Groves donated

\$10,000 to the Queensland Liberal Party.

Danby revealed Federal Treasurer Peter Costello had recently visited an ABC Learning Centre in Queensland.

He called on Parliament to scrutinise government subsidies to Groves' operation, especially in light of his highly-publicised hand-outs to the Brisbane Bullets basketball team and the Brisbane Lions AFL side.

Groves has begun legal action against the LHMU, alleging they portrayed him as greedy and mean. ☹

## Mourning the death of a great leader

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) has expressed shock and sadness at the premature death of Mr Djerrkura on May 27.

Born at Yirrkalala near Nhulunbuy in East Arnhem Land, Mr Djerrkura was a senior elder of the Wangurri Aboriginal Clan and responsible for a number of traditional and ceremonial activities on behalf of his clan.

Mr Djerrkura will be remembered as a great champion for his people and a great ambassador for Australia. He devoted his life to righting wrongs. He never backed down from his beliefs, nor compromised them.

He spoke about unequal opportunities in regard to education, employment and training. He spoke about the legal system, policing, constitutional change, customary law and how Indigenous cultures and languages were being destroyed. It is ironic that his words still ring true today and that our great nation is still

to effectively address so many of these issues.

Mr Djerrkura committed his life and considerable energy to fighting against racism, ignorance and paternalism and had the knack of pricking Australia's conscience over many years about the way Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were being treated in the "Lucky Country".

He was a great Australian who fought to try and make Australia a fairer and better country for us all. He was heartened by the way the push for Reconciliation in Australia was developing through people power.

Widely respected throughout Australia as a leader he served as Chairman of ATSIC from December 1996 to December 1999 and has held the positions of ATSIC NT North Zone Commissioner and Chairperson of the Miwatj Provincial Governing Council.

The father of three also held a number of other current positions, including the director of

the Board of the Indigenous Land Corporation, chairman of the Batchelor College Council, a member of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation and a board member of the National Australia Day Council.

He has held key positions in Aboriginal health and education organisations, and has a long history in Aboriginal administration and business.

He was awarded the Order of Australia in 1984, for services to the Aboriginal community and his tireless and dedicated work confirms his place in the forefront of modern Australian history.

We consider it an honour and a privilege to have known and worked with Mr Djerrkura.

Our hearts are with his family at this time.

He will be sadly missed. Note: In keeping with Aboriginal custom and the express wishes of Mr Djerrkura's family, we do not publish his photograph nor use his first name. ☹

Sydney

### Juanita Nielsen Memorial Lecture The Politics of Fighting Back

Guest Speaker: Anne Summers

Wednesday 16 June  
6.15 pm for 6.30 pm start  
Main Common Room  
The Women's College,  
University of Sydney  
15 Carillion Avenue, Newtown

Organised by Greens MP Lee Rhiannon  
RSVP (02) 9230 3551  
Or linda.wilhelm@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Anne Summers AO is a journalist and author.

Introduction: Sally McManus, President Australian Services Union  
Juanita Nielsen, publisher of the independent paper *Now* and active campaigner against high-rise development in Kings Cross, disappeared in July 1975. The circumstances of her disappearance remain unresolved but it is commonly believed that she was murdered because of her stand for the environment and the rights of low income residents.

# Australia's water situation worsens

Peter Mac

**"Water, water, everywhere, and all the boards did shrink, Water, water, everywhere, nor any drop to drink..."**

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner*  
**Australia seems to be becoming more and more like the ancient mariner's ship, surrounded by water but with its inhabitants menaced by a desperate shortage of fresh water.**

Several months ago rains generated crops from seed sown by Australian farmers as a last-ditch gamble against a long drought. However, the rain was not sufficiently heavy or prolonged to penetrate far below the parched surface of the earth. Large areas of the country are slipping back into their former arid state, and the nation is now faced with the terrible predicament of "back-to-back" drought.

Nor is the dilemma confined to rural areas. Sydney's Warragamba dam is now down to about 48 percent of its total capacity, and reduced flow is exacerbating salt pollution of river water to the point where Adelaide's water supply is under a critical threat.

But unlike the ancient mariner, the nation is not dependent on divine intervention to rectify these problems, which are the result of global warming and criminally wasteful use of our desperately precious water supplies.

The phenomenon of global warming is a result of man-made activity that results in the emission of large amounts of gases, whose presence in the atmosphere prevents the sun's rays from being re-radiated back into space. This in turn results

in a gradual build-up of the atmospheric temperature (the so-called "green-house effect").

The very first and most basic step that Australia needs to take in order to deal with this world-wide problem is for the government to sign the Kyoto Protocol, the international agreement on measures needed to curb global warming.

However, the Howard Government has stubbornly refused to do so. The arguments they cite to justify this stance reflect those used by many members of the business community, who still deny that global warming is taking place.

Some organisations have elaborated plans and strategies to deal with the water crisis. The latest is the Farmhand Foundation. This group has outlined a number of steps that are well worth supporting, for example the capping of old artesian water bores, which lose large amounts of water each year.

However, it has also recommended collection of water at source and its distribution by means of a national grid. This scheme appears to exacerbate the problem of inadequate water flows in the natural river systems with consequent devastating impacts on wildlife and small farming.

In other parts of the world, global warming may result in catastrophic floods, such as those seen last week in Haiti, while in Australia it manifests itself in periods of prolonged drought. However, the resultant water shortage is being compounded here by the massive extraction of river water for flood irrigation purposes.

The worst culprits in this respect are the huge irrigator agribusinesses such as those that run Cubbie farm

and other cotton-producing properties in Southern Queensland. Their extraction of water from the local Culgoa River has resulted in the loss of massive amounts of water that would otherwise have reached farmers in Brewarinna and other parts of Northern NSW.

And once again these businesses have a critical influence on the elaboration of water policy, and even on the extent of public discussion on critical aspects of national water use.

This was highlighted last week by ABC TV's *Mediawatch* program. The presenter drew attention to the withdrawal from ABC radio's *Country Hour* of an item that

contained criticism of the Cubbie Station "water guzzler" irrigators. The program was particularly critical of the role of cotton grower Leith Bouilly in this respect.

The program noted that Ms Bouilly combines her business interests with heading two government advisory boards concerned with water use – and is also a member of the ABC Board!

It's hardly surprising, then, that the *Country Hour* segment on irrigation water use was dropped. As *Mediawatch* revealed, the segment contained an interview with Brewarinna farmer Ed Fessey. He described the huge vested interests that irrigators like Ms Bouilly have

in preserving their almost unrestricted access to river water that are of concern to the southern Queensland irrigators:

"...[they've] got pretty big investments in water up there and also the ability to extract water at very low dollar rates. And also there's no system of measuring many of the extractions of the water out of ... the rivers up there. I think there's only 20 or 25 pumps that have metres on them. The rest is reported in on an honour system! It doesn't augur well for a visible and transparent system of water sharing."

And that's an understatement! ☺



# Big tobacco fights health warnings

**Tobacco companies are remaining deadly silent about a wide range of newly-revealed diseases caused by their products – while at the same time making much noise in opposition to new packet health messages which would inform smokers about these dangers.**

A new landmark report just released by the US Surgeon-General shows for the first time that smok-

ing causes diseases in almost every part of the body – with conclusive links to leukaemia and cancers of the cervix, kidney, pancreas and stomach; as well as abdominal aortic aneurysm, pneumonia, cataracts, periodontitis and more.

"Many of these diseases are quite unknown to the vast majority of smokers", says Anne Jones, Chief Executive of ASH (Action on

Smoking and Health) Australia.

"But the tobacco companies are, as usual, silent about this latest report – while they've been very noisy and aggressive in their opposition to new improved cigarette packet health warnings that would help to better inform smokers about these dangers."

Ms Jones said that the tobacco industry has lobbied hard for these

new warnings to be weakened and delayed for as long as possible – though it is clear their consumers will be harmed as a result of ignorance about the many and varied harms caused by tobacco.

"These companies have whinged to the government long and hard, not about the health harm, but about the economic harm they face from having to telling their consumers the whole truth.

"They also protest that more should instead be done to prevent child smoking – but reaching children with these new messages is one of the strongest reasons for strengthening and fast-tracking the new warnings."

More than a quarter of a million Australian schoolchildren are regular smokers. ASH says that if the tobacco companies were genuine and sincere in their concerns about children smoking they would offer to donate to anti-smoking campaigns the almost \$19m a year they get from illegal tobacco sales to Australian children."

Health and medical groups fear tobacco companies have won major concessions from the Federal Government to further delay and water down new graphic health warnings on cigarette packets.

The warnings, originally proposed by the Government to take effect in mid-2004, have already been delayed until mid-2005 – and will possibly now be held off until the beginning of 2006 as a result of strong tobacco industry lobbying.

A revised Regulation Impact

Statement released last month by the Federal Treasury proposes manufacturers could be given until early 2006 before consumers would be alerted and warned about the link between smoking and several diseases.

The revised statement also leaves open the possibility of reducing the proposed size of the mandatory warnings from 50 percent to 30 percent on the front of the packets.

Health groups have criticised what they see as a back-down by the Government in the face of tobacco industry influence.

"Smokers and potential smokers – especially children – deserve better protection", said Anne Jones.

"If just one percent of the 19,000 lives lost prematurely to tobacco smoking in Australia could be saved by the increased quitting and reduced uptake strong effective warnings could produce, then for each month of delay more than 15 Australians are dying whose lives would otherwise be saved."

Adds Andrew Ellerman of The Cancer Council Australia: "All smokers have basic consumer rights to truth and safety. Yet both have been denied and fought by tobacco interest groups to protect their own commercial self-interests."

"We urge the government not to cave in to the interests of tobacco companies but to put public health and consumer rights first – without further delays", said Maurice Swanson of the National Heart Foundation of Australia.

www.ashaust.org.au ☺

Pete's Corner



# Hardie's asbestos pants on fire

**James Hardie, formerly Australia's biggest producer of asbestos, defended a scheme to hive-off asbestos liabilities with a press release senior advisers knew was inaccurate, an Inquiry has heard. The building materials giant has taken repeated hits during the Jackson Inquiry, established by the NSW Government after unions refused to drop criticisms of its corporate restructure.**

Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union (AMWU) NSW Secretary, Paul Bastian, has told anyone prepared to listen that the company engaged in "corporate bastardry" when it restructured in 2001, leaving massive asbestos compensation liabilities on the books of new entity, MRCF (Medical Research and Compensation Foundation), and trading its Australian identity for a new corporate home in the Netherlands.

Mr Bastian put that line to senior Government ministers, including Premier Bob Carr. Other unions who blew the whistle on the restructure included the Maritime Union of Australia and the Construction Division of the CFMEU.

James Hardie listed Paul Bastian and the AMWU as "major risks" to its strategy in an analysis prepared for executives, the inquiry learned.

Few others took much notice, however, until the *Australian Financial Review* began shedding light on the restructure.

The bottom-line of those

articles, which unions and asbestos sufferers' groups had been hammering since 2001, was that the \$293 million tipped into MRCF would go nowhere near meeting liabilities to sufferers of mesothelioma and other asbestos-related diseases and to their families.

Back in 2001, the AMWU claimed James Hardie would fall \$1 billion short of meeting its share of the national compensation bill. Hardie-created MRCF now concedes that figure has reached \$800 million – and the parent company has refused to bail it out.

It was that core issue that brought admissions James Hardie had misled the public in defending its restructure.

Company legal adviser, Wayne Attrill, told the Jackson Inquiry that senior Hardie executives knew that a press release that said MRCF would be adequately funded was dodgy.

Attrill said he had seen actuarial advice received prior to the restructure.

Under cross examination from union lawyer Jack Rush, Attrill said, he had raised his concerns with James Hardie's corporate affairs chief, James Baxter (who has since been headed-hunted by Rupert Murdoch's News Ltd).

"I think I'd seen a draft press release and this press release said in very categorical terms that there would be enough funds to meet all claims. I just didn't think that that could possibly be said in such categorical terms and I expressed those

views to corporate affairs", Attrill said.

Rush: "What did he (Baxter) say?"

"He said, 'oh no, we're comfortable with that statement'", Attrill testified.

Lawyers for unions, asbestos sufferers and the MRCF alleged James Hardie had misled the public and the NSW Government.

They claimed it had kept information from incoming directors of MRCF and the State Government, fearing the latter would stop the restructure going ahead.

The Inquiry also heard from a former James Hardie safety officer, Peter Russell, who said he had quit because the company tried to "cover its backside" by refusing to put warnings on products it knew were dangerous.

Emails, from as early as December 2000, between Attrill and David Minty, partner in actuarial firm Trowbridge, suggested James Hardie should have been aware it was under-funding MRCF.

One headed "Not good news Part IV" alerted Attrill to the fact Trowbridge had posted "gory numbers" about asbestos disease rates on its website – "You should be sitting down and probably heavily sedated before reading it", Minty's email suggested.

Attrill forwarded the warning to the company's legal chief Peter Shafron who, by return email, told him the big boss, Peter McDonald, had "hit the roof – wondering how it



was that our retained experts could publish something that implicates us so directly without prior notice".

Commissioner David Jackson QC warned that he expected allegations of "illegalities" to be put before him in final submissions.

Mr Bastian pledged, whether government or corporate watchdogs moved against James Hardie or not, that the AMWU would stay on its case.

"James Hardie needs to know

the AMWU will not allow it to walk away from its responsibilities to people dying from these diseases, nor the people they leave behind", he said. "We will pursue Peter McDonald and everyone else involved in this to the ends of the earth, if needs be.

"We have always said they performed this restructure to sanitise their name and to quarantine themselves from responsibilities to lung diseases sufferers." ☘

## Joel's law one step closer

**The NSW Carr Labor Government is under pressure to jail killer bosses in the wake of a Legislative Council committee recommendation that corporate manslaughter should be written into the Crimes Act. The cross-party committee, including three Labor members, also wants to give courts the power to make delinquent employers face up to bereaved family members.**

Welcoming the release of the report into workplace deaths and injury, Labor Council Secretary John Robertson called on the Government to extend the same support to families of dead workers it has pledged to other victims of crime.

"This Government went up and down the state promising to be

tough on crime before the last election. This is its chance to prove its credentials on workplace crime", Robertson said.

**You can go to jail in this state for seven years for spraying graffiti on the Opera House but not for gross negligence that takes the life of an employee.**

"We don't want jails overflowing with employers but we do want every employer to know that if they deliberately thumb their noses at safety requirements they can be held accountable.

"You can go to jail in this state for seven years for spraying graf-

fiti on the Opera House but not for gross negligence that takes the life of an employee. It's ridiculous."

The committee launched its

inquiry after 10,000 workers marched on State Parliament following last year's death of 16-year-old building worker Joel Exner.

His mother, Sue Baxter, was amongst a dozen people from bereaved families who joined Labor

Council, Manufacturing Workers' Union and Construction Union representatives in applauding the findings.

Key recommendations in the 246-page report include:

- "urgent" introduction of a new offence under the Crimes Act, corporate manslaughter;
- companies to have their safety performances rated and published;
- courts to consider "victim impact statements" from bereaved family members and to have the ability to direct negligent employers into face-to-face meetings;
- that Workcover reform its liaison with victims of workplace accidents and/or their families because its "current and recent practices are inadequate";

that Workcover commit additional resources to prevention, and that this include launching more prosecutions.

The report was released at state parliament by the committee's chairman and Christian Democrat MLC, Rev Fred Nile. Its findings and recommendations were endorsed by Nile, Labor representatives Peter Primrose, Kayee Griffin and Jan Burnswoods along with the Greens Lee Rhiannon.

Liberal committee members Catherine Cusack and David Clarke dissented.

Observers suggest Carr and the Minister responsible, John Della Bosca, are likely to support the Liberals on corporate manslaughter. ☘

**Pass  
it  
on!**

When you've finished this issue of *The Guardian* share it with someone else. Give it to a friend or workmate, leave it in the dentist's or doctor's waiting room, at the bus station, on the train, or give it to your local library or reading room.

**Help The Guardian  
get around.**

## "Back Off" Call To Death Inquiry

**Three horrific deaths in as many weeks have prompted the WA Government to bow to an Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union (AMWU) demand for an independent safety audit of BHP Billiton's Pilbara operations.**

Now the union's State Secretary, Jock Ferguson, is asking vested interests, including the minerals giant, to "back off" and let Pilbara people have their say.

Mr Ferguson criticised BHP Billiton for tying the future of its Boodarie hot briquette iron plant, which employs 500 people, to the outcome of the investigation.

He said a public statement, made by BHP's iron ore division of President Graeme Hunt "cast a shadow" over the inquiry and potential witnesses whose families were dependent on the plant's continued operation.

Mr Ferguson challenged BHP to commit itself to the hot briquette operation before the inquiry opened.

His criticism followed claims from Port Hedland that safety had "plummeted" since BHP tried to drive unions out of its operations and used individual work employment contracts (AWAs) to create a climate where production took precedence over safety (see *Guardian* #1184).

The call for an inquiry followed the May 2 death of 26-year-old AMWU delegate, Cory Bentley, who was crushed in an early morning incident at the company's Port Hedland iron ore facility.

A mass meeting, attended by Jock Ferguson and ACTU Pilbara organiser, Will Treacey, demanded an independent review as company reps started removing posters that exhorted employees to "aim high, move fast" and which graphically

illustrate how far they had fallen behind the million-tonne targets set by the company.

Mr Treacey said Bentley's death came after a number of "near fatalities" and a matter of hours after workers had notified the company of safety shortcomings.

Last week, a gas explosion at the nearby hot briquette plant, saw Royal Flying Doctor Service aircraft from Derby, Meekatharra and Port Hedland mobilised to transport injured workers to hospitals.

The same day, a 19-year-old apprentice had his head crushed by a "piece of equipment" at the company's Iron Ore Body 25, operated by Henry Walker Eltin, near Newman.

Ross McKinnon died over the weekend, as did one of the four burned workers rushed to Perth. Medics said AMWU member,

James Wadley, had failed to survive burns to 95 percent of his body.

Two other men injured at the hot briquette plant are still in Royal Perth Hospital with burns to 70 and 80 percent of their bodies.

On the eve of discussions with State Development Minister, Clive Brown, AMWU State Secretary Jock Ferguson indicated that he would consult the people directly affected before laying down what the union wanted in the inquiry's terms of reference.

"We are in touch with delegates, safety reps and communities in the Pilbara and will be guided by their advice", he said. "These are the people who know what's happening and the things that need to change.

"What we will be insisting on is an environment that encourages them to participate without fearing for their jobs or futures." ☘

Reviewed by Rob Gowland

# Angels In America

ABC 8.30pm Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday June 8 – 10

*Angels In America*, the television adaptation of Tony Kushner's sprawling, Pulitzer Prize-winning Broadway play is being ballyhoed not as a mere television program but as something called "Event Television".

In fact the ABC is hailing it as nothing less than "the television event of the year". I am afraid that it is nothing of the sort.

The first play in the seven-hour two-play cycle won the Tony Award for Best Drama in 1993, and the second play won the Tony for Best Drama in 1994. These awards are deceptive, however.

**The play alternated naturalistic and surreal scenes with characters as far apart as a Mormon lawyer, his pill-popping wife and the ghost of judicially murdered "atom spy" Ethel Rosenberg.**

Tony Awards are given only to plays on Broadway. But, as the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* noted at the time, "the concept of Broadway as the national American theatre was fast losing credibility even while drama itself was not".

"The best dramatic work was being done either off-Broadway or in non-commercial, institutional theatres, whether in New York City or elsewhere." On Broadway, *Angels In America* stood out because, as a drama, it had almost no competition.

Moreover, the play was both timely and, for the New York theatre world, highly topical. The *Britannica* again: "The devastation that AIDS continued to inflict on the United States generally, and in the theatre world in particular,

was reflected by the plays that dominated not only Broadway and off-Broadway but also US regional theatres in 1993".

It was especially reflected "in Broadway's most acclaimed play, *Millennium Approaches*", the first part of *Angels in America*. "The work by Tony Kushner was a drama about nothing less than a perceived crisis in American life.

"With AIDS as its central metaphor, *Angels in America*, subtitled *A Gay Fantasia on National Themes*, mixed characters as diverse as middle American conservatives, East Coast liberals, and Roy Cohn

– the power broker and lawyer who castigated homosexuals even as he lay dying of AIDS."

The play alternated naturalistic and surreal scenes with characters as far apart as a Mormon lawyer, his pill-popping wife and the ghost of judicially murdered "atom spy" Ethel Rosenberg.

However, although *Newsweek's* critic, presumably caught up in the hysteria of the moment, called it, incredibly, "the broadest, deepest, most searching play of our time", the play is in fact a rather shallow rumination on love, morality, faith and the need for mutual support.

Kushner seems to be saying "Hey, look, something's very wrong here", but he does not know exactly what it is, still less what to do about it.

The television version, running five and three quarter hours, was adapted for the screen by Kushner himself. It suffers from the same fatal flaws.

As directed by Mike Nichols, it sometimes plays like a clever comedy, sometimes like a parody of itself; occasionally genuinely moving it is too often over the top.

The cast have been copiously rewarded with Golden Globe Awards for their performances, but these cannot save it from ultimately becoming tedious. Even Meryl Streep's portrayal of Ethel Rosenberg seems to be just another of her exercises in cleverly faking a foreign accent.

Also in the cast are Emma Thompson (as the Angel she has a very peculiar sex scene), Al Pacino, Mary-Louise Parker, Jeffrey Wright and Ben Shenkman.

Made for US cable channel Home Box Office, the film is set in the early '80s, and touches on many themes that give it the appearance of depth: AIDS, homosexual love, Reaganite politics, religion, family breakdown, personal fulfillment, and the failure of the American dream. None of them, however, are handled with genuine depth.

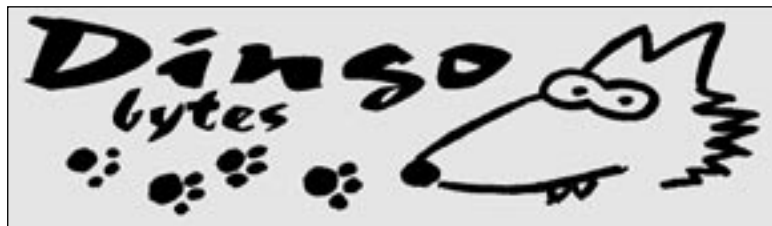
Near the end, Prior Walter, probably the central character (played by Justin Kirk), advises the Angels to sue God, because He deserted the human race in the 20th century "when we needed him the most".

And right at the end, Harper, the pill-popping unhappy young wife (Mary-Louise Parker), tells the audience: "In this world, there's a kind of painful progress – longing for what we've left behind and dreaming ahead".

Deep, eh? Don't be surprised if it wins a slew of Emmys later this year. ☹



Emma Thompson in *Angels in America*



The NSW Carr Government's pro-environment stance is being exposed more and more as a greenwash. For the second year in a row it has cut funding for the environment. Rangers in national parks, education programs on the environment and head office staff have been targeted for the chop by the NSW Department of the Environment because of a \$30 million budget cut. Staff members in the department's Sustainable Programs Division have been sent letters seeking their "expression of interest" in taking a redundancy. As well as park rangers, staff in other regional services will also go. Last year's cut was \$47 million.

In Victoria, the Bracks Government has hired a private investigation company to spy on the state's 11,000 public servants. Under the three-year, \$1 million-plus contract, the Department of Human Services is setting up a panel of private investigators to provide "discipline management services" such as looking into alleged "breaches of discipline" and whistleblower complaints. (You may recall that Departments of Human Services were previously known as personnel departments, but governments and corporations have changed the name to put a positive spin on what more appropriately should be called the Bullying and Intimidation Section.) The Government wants to gag people making complaints and exposing all manner of government incompetence and corruption. Most recently the managers of two hospital emergency departments came under intense pressure from the Health Department for speaking out about shortcomings in the health system because of lack of funding. Two years ago Bracks had Department of Natural Resources and Environment staff interrogated by a private investigator about alleged leaks to the Liberal Party.

"Universities need a mechanism beyond 'we have a commercial office'. They need to recruit talented people who have real and proven commercialisation skills." That's privatisation consultant Kris Gale. These money grubbing cowboys are now quite open about the agenda to privatise higher education. And here's Andy Sierakowski, of Knowledge Commercialisation Australia, standing up for those pushing privatisation within the universities themselves: "The amount of work required to shape the intellectual property into a form that the commercial world can understand is underestimated". Not surprisingly he thinks that "venture capitalists see this as an opportunity to get control of technology, to get control of the profit".

**CAPITALIST HOG(S) OF THE WEEK:** are BHP and PM Howard. Flakjacket Johnnie and BHP Billiton chairman Don Argus are off to the USA where they will meet with California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger to stitch up a deal for BHP to have a liquefied natural gas terminal off the US west coast. Thus we have the no-talent boofhead who has "killed" tens of thousands of people on the big screen, coming together with the head of a corporation responsible for the deaths of thousands of workers and for putting hundreds of thousands out of work, and the man jointly responsible for the deaths of tens of thousands of real people in Iraq – all in order to stuff more profits into the coffers of BHP Billiton.

## Teachers say "Back off Carr!"

continued from page 1

Higher salaries for less stress can be earned elsewhere. In fact, one third of all trained teachers work outside the profession. Higher salaries are part of the solution.

The NSW Government claims it cannot afford to increase teacher salaries, yet it has reaped a windfall of \$800 million in stamp duties. It spends \$1 billion each year on private schools and bussing students to schools outside their local area.

It maintains the grossly inequitable "25 per cent rule" whereby any increase in capital expenditure to state public schools automatically translates into an equivalent sum of 25 per cent of the given amount being handed over to private schools.

Still the Government insists it cannot afford to fund a decent pay increase for teachers.

### More strikes

Ms O'Halloran of the NSWTF described the decision by the IEU to take strike action last week as helpful to the union's arguments with the public, media and government. "However, in the wake of the IEU advertisement in the Sunday papers on May 23, the union clearly has

other motivations. Among other things, the advertisements argued that non-government schools were part of the 'provision of public education'. The IEU's strike is therefore about linking their schools to ours in the full-funding debate."

None-the-less, in the struggle for proper recognition of the work done by teachers there is a common aim.

As *The Guardian* goes to press NSWTF teachers will hold another 24-hour strike on Wednesday, June 2. Union members will attend Sky Channel meetings in clubs around the state.

The NSW Minister for Education, Andrew Refshauge, provocatively told teachers: "Get back to school!"

Maree O'Halloran replied that the strike was going ahead and would include TAFE teachers. "We're asking the Premier Bob Carr to talk to us. He hasn't responded to us", she said.

### Election issue

The present state of public education and its future are already election issues.

A demand must be placed on all political parties to make a com-

mitment to acknowledge the importance of public education for the future of our country and to provide more resources for it. The share of the economic cake for public education must be increased.

In the 2004 Federal Budget, the military received more funding than education (\$14.4 billion versus \$14.2 billion).

The Communist Party has been campaigning for a ten percent cut in military spending to provide funding for essential services such as public education.

### Support the teachers!

Teachers are to be congratulated for carrying this fight right to the heartless NSW Government.

The CPA calls for full support for the teachers, not just in their campaign for their justly deserved wage increases but in their brave defence of union rights and the public education system.

Keep the pressure on the Government! The wider trade union and community movements must reach out in support of the sterling work that teachers are doing for the future of education and the union movement. ☹

# Australia Post – the privatisation by stealth

Bob Briton

**The ongoing dispute between Australia Post and its workforce over a new Enterprise Bargaining Agreement has brought two important features of the country's postal service to the attention of the public. One is that the government-owned corporation is miserly, head-kicking, anti-union employer. Australia Post is a winner in the recent past of the *Workers Online Tony Award* for being the country's worst boss. Its performance during negotiations with the Communications, Electrical, Electronics, Plumbing and Allied Services Union (CEPU) over a number of modest claims for a pay increase and job security has certainly cemented its reputation.**

The other controversy relates to plans by Australia Post to "franchise" 150 retail outlets to private operators. The CEPU is concerned that the small business people will try to trim costs by stitching about 600 former Australia Post staff into inferior, non-union Australian Workplace Agreements. Postal workers are also protesting that the plan carries on the Federal Government agenda of privatising the service by stealth – allowing more and more functions of Australia Post to be taken over by private enterprise until only the husk of the institution remains.

While the determination of the

aware of the ideological importance of its contest with the public interest and is using its heavy guns. These include "trade" agreements being made by the government such as the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and, of course, the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with the United States.

## Some history

A lot changed from the time Australia's first post office opened in George Street, Sydney in 1809 to the days when the Post Master General's Department carried on post and telecommunications throughout the country. However, in terms of guiding principles the biggest changes have come about in much more recent times.

Australia Post was corporatised in 1989. As late as 1985 the service's first objective was "to operate Australia's postal services so as to best meet the social, industrial and commercial needs of the Australian people". In last year's annual report, anything resembling this pledge had slipped down the page. The corporation introduces itself this way nowadays:

## Our Business

"Australia Post is a Government Business Enterprise (GBE) operating under the *Australian Postal Corporation Act 1989*. The Corporation is self-funding and

Post recorded a pre-tax profit of \$462 million on total revenue of \$3.97 billion. These figures are up on the previous year and represent a return on investment of a nice fat 11.6 per cent.

In the past 10 years Australia Post has returned a whopping \$3.44 billion to government coffers and under the Act of 1989 the corporation has to pay all federal and state taxes and charges. Australia Post is estimated to be worth between \$4.2 billion and \$6.18 billion.

Australia Post does not have any bothersome obligation to be an "employer of last resort" to help soak up unemployment or give school leavers a chance. In fact, Australia Post has reduced its workforce since corporatisation from 46,490 in 1989 to 35,427 full-time and part-time staff last year. Despite achieving productivity increases of 23.3 per cent in just the past five years, the pressure is still on for further staff cuts and for the greater use of casual workers.

With figures like these you can begin to see why Australia Post is a candidate for privatisation by hook or by crook. The phenomenon is not restricted to Australia. Prime Minister Koizumi of Japan is rumoured to be toying with the idea of selling off that country's postal services. It has already happened in the US, Germany and the Netherlands. The results have been negative for workers in those

designated mail centres – for further cost reductions.

In 1997 the Federal Government's National Competition Council (NCC) was asked to wave its deregulating, privatising wand over the Australian Postal Corporation Act. In the end, the NCC's report of February 1998 argued rather disingenuously that Australia Post should stay in public ownership and that it should continue with its Universal Service Obligation (USO) to deliver a standard letter at a fixed price throughout Australia and its Community Services Obligation (CSO) to provide mail facilities to the bush.

Its private competitors would be under no such obligation to provide universal or fixed price services. Because of this its recommendations concerning these obligations would have effectively killed off Australia Post as a public institution. To be sure the message was clear, it suggested 2005 as the year that Australia Post's official postal service status as the provider of a universal service should be reviewed.

For the time being, the NCC recommended that Australia Post's USO should be restricted to household letters only. Even for this mail, competitors would only be required to charge two times the standard letter rate. Inward international mail would be open to full competition. Australia Post would no longer be able to cross-subsidise services to remote and regional areas from other income sources. The CSO would have to be funded from a separate allocation from the Federal Budget – a method that would ensure that these services would join the queue of beggars outside the Treasurer's door.

And, of course, Australia Post would have to provide access to its infrastructure (such as the processing centres, GPO and other Post Office boxes, mail holding and bulk lodgement facilities paid for by workers' taxes) to its competitors on terms approved by the pro-business Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC). There are strong similarities with the treatment of Telstra which has had to give its competitors access to its infrastructure.

All in all, the NCC report recommended everything that Australia Post's competitors could have dreamed of.

Even though subsequent attempts by the Federal Government to implement the NCC recommendations – with the *Postal Services Amendment Bill* – have been defeated in the Senate, the ideological blowtorch is still being applied to Australia Post. *The Australian Financial Review* has semi-regular pieces urging the further "opening up" of Australia Post to competition and there has been a stream of reports from think tanks, business organisations and academics calling for the full privatisation of the postal service.

One of these papers, by Terry Black and Susan Black for the Centre for Independent Studies,



even enlisted Aristotle in the debate: "What is common to many is taken least care of, for all men have greater regard for what is their own than for what they possess in common with others."

Left out or distorted in most of these lopsided treatments of the issues is the fact that Australia Post is no longer the truly public enterprise giant that the post office once was.

## A haven for private profit takers

"Eighty-five per cent of Australia Post's revenue now comes from fully contestable [meaning areas open to private competitors - Ed] services – only 15 per cent is from the regulated standard letter", shadow Communications Minister Lindsay Tanner told the press last October.

This figure only begins to tell the story of how private operators have moved in on the postal service. For example, while licensed agencies of the post office date back to colonial times most post offices were public property until historically recent times. However, the ownership and running of most of Australia's post offices has undergone a major change in recent decades.

The names in the annual reports may have changed but the fact remains that the number Australia Post (now "corporate") owned post offices has slumped from 1395 in 1984 to 872 last year. More and more, Australia Post's obligation to

## The NCC recommended that Australia Post's universal service obligation should be restricted to household letters only.

CEPU and public concern may yet derail the franchising moves, the more drawn out process of selling off of Australia Post is still undoubtedly the preferred strategy. According to neo-liberal observers, it is no longer essential to keep Australia Post in government hands. The functions it carries out could be done by private companies and pull in some nice private profits. It is largely a labour intensive enterprise – a "natural" candidate for capitalists, big and small, to go hard at their "screw the worker" brand of magic.

The problem for the privatisation advocates is that postal services are an essential service, basic to our sense of community. For years Australia Post has subsidised its operations in rural and remote areas with income generated in more populated centres. Most people see this as logical, that affordable postal services are a basic right for all Australians. Business interests, however, see this arrangement – known as cross-subsidisation – as an obstacle to maximising profits. If people are determined to subsidise services to the bush – the "Community Service Obligation" in the Australia Post Charter – let the Federal Government make a separate budget allocation for that purpose and then make Australia Post compete like every other carrier in a totally deregulated market, they argue.

This issue is now the backdrop to every struggle within Australia Post and to every discussion about the future of the service. Capital is

makes the best use of its assets and resources in order to earn profits to reinvest in the business."

Aside from a commitment to maximise returns to private investors, Australia Post talks the same language as Coca Cola Amatil, News Corporation and the rest. The people at the top of Australia Post are no strangers to the booster's mindset. Managing Director Graeme John is Australia's highest paid "public servant" (\$1.88 million last year), a former player and coach at South Melbourne and a member of the Business Council of Australia.

Chairman Linda Nichols has the standard sort of qualifications to be on the board of directors. She is Deputy Chairman of private health provider Healthscope, a director of the St George Bank and Sigma Pharmaceutical Group and an advisor to financial services outfit Goldman Sachs.

It would be interesting to ask these people to talk about the relative merits of public and private enterprise without resorting to doublespeak. In any case – and in the meantime – Australia Post is still a challenge involving the control of lots of money. Last year Australia

countries and it is important to note that it is dearer to post a letter in all those countries in spite of the smaller logistical challenges.

## 1997 – the year the debate heated up

In recent decades Australia Post has experienced a number of challenges to its position. In 1982, the Bradley Committee of Inquiry put forward a recommendation that was subsequently adopted to break up the letter carrying monopoly of Australia Post. Competitors could carry letters but would be required to charge at 10 times the standard letter rate.

In 1994, the weight of a standard letter was reduced from 500 grams to 250 grams and the minimum charge for a standard letter (then 45c and currently set at 50c) reduced to four times the Australia Post charge. Other carriers were allowed to carry outgoing international letters in 1994. Further discounts were given to customers with bulk pre-sorted mail. They were able to "interconnect" – i.e. arrange their own transport for the mail to

**The CEPU has estimated that a deregulated (and then privatised) postal service would threaten 15,000 jobs in Australia Post. Services to people in rural and remote areas would be decimated.**

# n of a vital public service



is no longer Australia's national airline but a private corporation whose largest shareholder is now (privately owned) British Airways. Australia Post also has 50 per cent joint ventures with iPrint Corporate Pty Ltd for printing services and Decipha Pty Ltd for mailroom and electronic document imaging solutions.

For some time the effect of bank closures in the bush has been mitigated by the presence in these communities of agencies offering bill paying and other financial services. These services have also been a steadily rising source of revenue for Australia Post and have helped compensate to some extent for the declining importance of the letter in the message sending market. However, Australia Post's charter obligations do not include the provision of these services and, consequently, their continued existence in the bush is far from assured.

The funds for the establishment of these centres in more remote areas comes from a \$70 million pot of federal money called the Rural Transaction Scheme, which is due for review in June. Operators pay \$122 a month rental for the equipment and 43 cents per transaction to Australia Post. So long as the number of transaction per year does not fall below 10,000, the facility is relatively secure. If not...

Australia-wide, the range of financial services available through Australia Post has expanded significantly. Finance capital calls on the network's services to collect all sorts of payments. Last year the US-based Citibank started collecting a \$2 fee every time its customers pay a credit card bill in person in cash via the only means available to them – at the post office.

## "The government has no business in business"

Over the years, a process has been taking place in which many of the services once the reserve of Australia Post have been encroached upon by privately run firms. The remaining services live in such close symbiosis with the private sector that the consumer would be hard pressed to know where the role of Australia Post stops and the private sector starts.

This development has, no doubt, warmed the hearts of recent federal governments and managements at

Australia Post. The end game for the privatisers could come if ever Australia Post were to lose its still unique role under its Community Service Obligation. If this were to be funded from a distinct Commonwealth budget allocation, rather than from cross-subsidisation, the cry would go up that the private sector could just as easily use those funds to provide services to the bush.

Australia Post management – with its corporate mindset in considering business questions and in its dealings with its workers – will have assisted the privatisers, the ones that say "the government has no business in business". The privatisation proposal is always just below the legislative surface. Last October, Australia Post's Manager for External Relations let the cat out of the bag while he was talking to Sydney's *Daily Telegraph* about the intentions of the Federal Government:

"If they can get the rest of Telstra away, and if that was successful, then maybe they would look at us again."

This must not be allowed to happen. The CEPU has estimated that a deregulated (and then privatised) postal service would threaten 15,000 jobs in Australia Post. Services to people in rural and remote areas would be decimated. While the government might say that it would guarantee the universal standard letter service, if their previous attempts at legislation are a guide, they would dodge the questions as to how far a member of the public would have to travel to post a letter or how regularly they could expect a delivery.

Rural services hanging by a thread now would be subjected to a combination of budget constraints and market forces. And government revenues needed to fund health, education and other essential public services would have to do without regular annual contributions of the order of last year's \$462 million from the postal service's profits.

It is time to insist on a change in the direction of change in Australia Post. The CEPU's current EBA 6 campaign should get the whole-hearted support of the labour movement. A call for an extension of Australia Post present Community Service Obligation to include parcel delivery to remote areas could be a good start in a campaign to claw back public control of this vital service. ☘



maintain a network of outlets has been met by privately run licensed post offices (LPOs). There are now 2981 of these throughout Australia. Australia Post has proposed buying back 100 of these but only to kick-start plans to have a network of privately run franchises!

In July 1995, Australia Post established a Property Division "... to contribute to bottom line performance of Post's property portfolio", as the annual report put it. That year it sold off \$23.2 million worth of "surplus or under-performing properties" and has continued to sell of its property to this day. Since 1995, the number of buildings owned by Australia Post in its "property portfolio" has gone down from 982 to 554 last year. The number leased has increased from 630 to 741 in the same period. The trend in all this is away from being a public asset owner.

## Private contractors

Australia Post's deliveries are more and more the preserve of private contractors. As long ago as 1997, Australia Post revealed to the NCC that it hired 4741 mail contractors within its networks. In 1985, the services of these contractors cost just under \$93 million. By 1995/96, that figure had blown out to \$208.4 million. More recent annual reports do not even bother listing this as a separate item. Neither do they show the number of vehicles – trucks, vans, sedans, bicycles, etc. – that Australia Post has in its fleet. As a general rule, the older the corporation's annual report, the more frank and open it is.

Australian Air Express – part of Australia Post's venture into logistics in November 2000 – is actually a 50/50 joint venture with Qantas. Last year it again went halves with Qantas in the \$750 million purchase of Star Track Express freight logistics group.

It is worth recalling that Qantas

Film review by Andrew Jackson

## The Day After Tomorrow

Directed by Roland Emmerich



**There are certain ingredients that are essential in any disaster film: bumbling bureaucrats who mishandle early reports of impending doom; penny-pinching government officials who put the bottom line before public safety; brainless citizens who, when offered escape from the disaster, race straight back into the thick of it to retrieve the pet/jewellery/briefcase they left behind; and a brave-but-flawed hero who saves the world – even though his against-all-common-sense heroic deeds should have had him killed five times over.**

This film has it all – bar the world being saved. And that is the twist that makes *The Day After Tomorrow* tantalising viewing.

Global warming is a fact. A more recently learned fact is that the Arctic region is warming at 10 times the rate of the rest of the planet.

It is also a fact that without the United States' commitment – in signature and deed – to the Kyoto Greenhouse Protocol the pace of warming will continue to accelerate.

The global cataclysm depicted in *The Day After Tomorrow* is a fantastical interpretation of one scientific theory on how that warming will shape the future of the planet.

The film begins with scenes not too unfamiliar to earth residents in recent years – freak weather occurrences pounding major population centres.

Two-kilo hailstones pound Tokyo, a blizzard engulfs New Delhi while tornados tear up Los Angeles.

Scientists at an ocean monitoring station in the USA notice that buoys measuring ocean currents in the North Atlantic are recording a sudden and steep drop in ocean temperature.

This seems to confirm climatologist Jack Hall's (Dennis Quaid) worst fear: Greenland is melting, and the sudden dumping of near-freezing fresh water into the ocean has disrupted the warm North Atlantic current, the inevitable result of which will be a new ice age across Europe and North America.

However, once the weather realignment has started it is already too late to act.

The film's characters do not

prevent the disaster, nor save the world. All they can do is survive the initial onslaught until they are able to escape, along with other scattered remnants of the US population, as refugees into Latin America.

The final defeat suffered by the United States in this film is a major break from past efforts by German Director Roland Emmerich.

His most notorious work, *Independence Day* (1996) is so ferociously pro-US, pro-military and xenophobic it could well have been scripted by the CIA. Earth is attacked by aliens but is saved from annihilation by no less than the US President himself, who leads the airforce into glorious battle before declaring the establishment of a New World Order.

(The only stench the audience was spared in *Independence Day* was that of the cigars which were constantly being chewed, lit and puffed on screen each time an American kicked some alien arse. So blatant was this "real men smoke" advertisement it's a wonder the grubby handprints of the tobacco CEOs weren't visible on the celluloid.)

Emmerich's ultimate motive in making this film is not in doubt – he's out to make a buck from the millions who rush out to see every high-tech special effects-laden Hollywood blockbuster.

But in the process Emmerich will also re-ignite discussion on the destruction of the environment. This process has been somewhat buried from sight at the same time as being hastened by George W's wars in the Middle East.

The *British Guardian* has gone so far as to suggest this film may go against Bush in the upcoming Presidential Election.

That article is proudly featured on *The Day After Tomorrow*'s website, along with a global warming facts slide show and links to environmental and scientific organisations.

This has the potential to be a provoking film. Get out your \$14, suspend your logic and enjoy it.

Then go out and take action before it really is too late.

*The Day After Tomorrow* is rated M and is screening in cinemas everywhere.

www.thedayaftertomorrow.com ☘

# People's army for Venezuela

**Following the capture by Venezuelan forces of 150 Colombian paramilitaries who had been hired to assassinate Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez the government has decided to form a people's army to defend the unfolding revolution in that country.**

The capture of the assassins was a reminder that US imperialism has not ceased to conspire to overthrow President Chavez through a failed recall referendum and by secret but violent means.

It is reported that the Colombian group planned to kill and decapitate the Venezuelan president and send his head to Cuban President Fidel Castro.

In a speech on May 16, Chavez announced a new phase of the Bolivarian Revolution. While formally declaring the revolution to be anti-imperialist, he made a call to the masses to be an army for the defence of the revolutionary process.

Stating that the revolution is "just beginning", Chavez encouraged the crowd to always think and reflect on the events that occur and put them in an historical perspective. Always ask: "Where are we? Why has it happened?"

Referring to the revolution's newly declared anti-imperialist

the hands of those who really need them".

Chavez said, "We cannot permit [ourselves] to be absorbed by a conservative spirit; either we are or we are not". He spelt out the different laws that have been enacted and should be enforced, like the Land Law and the Supreme

**Venezuela, along with Cuba, is a beacon to all the dispossessed masses in Latin America and the Caribbean who are rising up for the first time in considerable unison**

character, he said: "And that gives it a special content, which forces us to think and act clearly not only in Venezuela but in the rest of the world", adding that "with the Constitution in our hands, we have to take actions ... for example, the expropriation of lands to put them in

Justice Tribunal Law. This last one will allow, after careful review, the removal from the courts of counter-revolutionary elements who are still part of the justice system and are sabotaging the Bolivarian process.

## Popular army

Chavez called for the formation of a popular army to defend the revolution. He went on to say, "I call on all the Venezuelan people to incorporate themselves into the national defence, the territorial defence and the defence of the national sovereignty. I not only make a symbolic call to the people; no, as head of the state, as commander-in-chief of the armed forces I have already begun to give the orders to open the massive popular participation into an integrated national defence."

Retired military professionals are to be selected as part of the active reserve to "incorporate them into the tasks for the defence of the country in each district, in each ravine, in each island, in each



Chavez - "The revolution is just beginning"

field, in each university, in each factory, in each jungle, in each place where there is a group of patriots, there they must be organising themselves."

The government has already allocated about US\$1 billion for the armed forces and the National Guard and to weed out counter-revolutionary elements in the armed forces.

In a display of compassion and understanding of the roots of the problem in Colombia from where the assassins came, Chavez mentioned that some of the paramilitary forces were children who had been forced into the ranks of the paras by extreme poverty and lack of opportunities in their own country.

He said these children are not in a military prison like the adults arrested and that they will be returned to their parents. He added that after consultation with the National Council for the Defence of Children and Adolescents' Rights, it had been decided that these children could stay in Venezuela if they wish to and receive free education in an effort to save their futures.

The Bolivarian Revolution is

at a crossroads, with all the elements, particularly the strength of the peoples' commitment to it, in place. However, US imperialism has plans to destroy it. As Chavez said recently, the revolution is very strong but not yet irreversible, as is the Cuban Revolution.

Venezuela, along with Cuba, is a beacon to all the dispossessed masses in Latin America and the Caribbean who are rising up for the first time in considerable unison, realising that US imperialism and its "free trade" will never be the answer to their needs and their misery.

On the contrary, it is the health care, education and development of employment offered by these revolutions that gives hope to the millions of people in deep poverty, not only in the region but worldwide. This is a huge threat to the bourgeoisie who will not let it go on voluntarily.

It is an urgent task for the people everywhere to demand: Hands off Venezuela!

Acknowledgement to  
Workers' World News Service  
(Abridged) ☼

## The New York Times admits wrong on Iraq - but how wrong?

**One of the leading newspapers published in the US, *The New York Times* has at last begun to have second thoughts about its own coverage of the lead up to the Iraq war.**

It claims that "Over the last year this newspaper has shone the bright light of hindsight on decisions that led the United States into Iraq. We have examined the failings of American and allied intelligence, especially on the issue of Iraq's weapons and possible Iraqi connections to international terrorists. We have studied the allegations of official gullibility and hype. It is past time we turned the same light on ourselves".

It says, "we have found a num-

**"In most cases, what we reported was an accurate reflection of the state of our knowledge at the time..."**

ber of instances of coverage that was not as rigorous as it should have been" and refers to such matters as the claims made about Iraq having weapons programs and chemical and biological weapons, about the aluminum tubes said to have been imported for a nuclear weapons program, that Iraq was cooperating

with Al Qaeda and that Syria had sent "unconventional weapons" to Syria and was also cooperating with Al Qaeda.

It goes on to claim that "in most cases, what we reported was an accurate reflection of the state of our knowledge at the time..."

## Blaming others

*The NYT* puts most of the blame for the misinformation (deliberate lies in the opinion of many) on Iraqi defectors. After saying that these allegations came from an Iraqi scientist who claimed to be "an official of military intelligence" the newspaper says, "*The Times* never followed up on the veracity of this source or the attempts to verify his claims".

The newspaper promises to "continue aggressive reporting aimed at setting the record straight".

There is, however, no indication that this leading US newspaper intends to shine "the bright light of hindsight" on President Bush, Colin Powell and others who are responsible for assiduously pushing this same misinformation for the purposes of justifying the invasion and occupation of Iraq, a war that they had already decided on and planned for.

The simple reason is that the *NYT* continues to support the illegal war and the intention of the US leaders to keep their military forces in Iraq for "as long as it takes". The *NYT* will continue to justify this with their own misinformation about the right of nations to full independence and sovereignty which includes control over all military forces that may temporarily be in occupation of Iraq. ☼

## Better late than never

**A Chilean court has stripped former military dictator, General Augusto Pinochet, of his immunity from prosecution on human rights charges. Pinochet could be prosecuted for 108 different criminal charges lodged against him.**

"Very good news", said Lorena Pizarro, the head of an association for the relatives of victims of the repression suffered by the Chilean people during Pinochet's rule. "We are happy now, but we remain alert because the next step must be for the dictator to go to jail and pay for all the crimes for which he is responsible", she said. More than 3000 people were killed or disappeared under Pinochet's rule.

In this period among many other crimes, military officers toured the country hauling political activists from jail cells, torturing and executing them. It became known as the "Caravan of Death".

Pinochet has been able to avoid prosecution for many years claiming that he suffered from diabetes, arthritis and a mild case of dementia. For a time he was detained in Britain following a visit to London for medical treatment but the Labour Government's then home secretary, Jack Straw, ruled that he should not be extradited.

An appeal by Pinochet against the court's decision is still likely but the recent decision shows that Pinochet is neither physically nor mentally unfit to stand trial. He recently took part in a Chilean TV interview. ☼

## Looking the other way

**In an action that is reminiscent of the Nazi destruction of the Czech village of Lidice during WW 2 and the US massacre in the Vietnamese village of My Lai in the 1960s, the Israeli army has invaded the Palestinian Rafar refugee camp in the Gaza Strip and destroyed many homes and killed scores of Palestinian civilians.**

President Bush and Prime Ministers Howard and Blair were looking the other way as these atrocities were being carried out by the Israeli army. If such destruction had been carried out by the armed forces of any country other than Israel or the United States they would have screamed their condemnation using terms such as "ethnic cleansing" and "genocide".

As the Gaza Strip atrocity was taking place Bush praised Ariel Sharon and told a pro-Israeli election rally that Israel "has every right to defend itself against terror".

Even Israel's own justice minister said of the Gaza events: "We look like monsters in the eyes of the world. It makes me sick." ☼

The UN representative for refugees described what happened in the Gaza Strip as a "humanitarian catastrophe" while Turkey's Prime Minister labeled Israel as a "terrorist" state during a meeting with an Israeli minister visiting Ankara.

The overwhelming majority of the Turkish people sympathise with their Palestinian brothers and there have been angry demonstrations on the streets of Ankara and Istanbul in solidarity with the Palestinians.

Earlier in Israel itself about 120,000 people demonstrated against the policies of the Sharon government.

President Bush stubbornly supports the repressive policies of the Sharon government while claiming to support the so-called "Roadmap for peace". He wants the considerable Jewish vote for his re-election in November but Jewish support for Bush is running at only 31 percent which shows that over two-thirds of Jews in America do not support the war-mongering policies of Bush and Cheney. ☼



Sydney

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# Mechanisms to regain Iraq's national sovereignty

An editorial in the newspaper of the Iraqi Communist Party at the end of May came out strongly on the question of sovereignty for Iraq on June 30 when the occupying powers are scheduled to hand over power to an Iraqi interim government.

"We look forward to June 30 as a decisive date for transferring power to the Iraqi people and restoring full sovereignty", says the newspaper.

"What is beyond doubt is the fact that Iraqi sovereignty has been blurred, violated and usurped due to the policies of the deposed regime and also many UN resolutions.

"It is thus important to emphasise the regaining of sovereignty, ending dual authority and endeavouring to end the occupation."

Sovereignty generally means possessing full state power in governing the country, running its affairs and controlling its destiny, as well as freedom in political planning and decision-making to serve the interests of the country and its people. This would be embodied in the proper transfer of authority from the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) to the Iraqi Government.

The editorial calls for specifics powers to be implemented:

- The transfer to Iraqi ministries of full authority to run their own affairs, and draw up policies, plans and specific programs for each ministry. This is to be carried out in collaboration with various sectors at all levels to ensure the provision of basic services to all citizens, the reinvigoration of economic activity and establishing the necessary priorities.

**What is beyond doubt is the fact that Iraqi sovereignty has been blurred, violated and usurped**

- Full control by the Iraqi Government over all elements of the Armed Forces and internal security organs, as well as measures to transfer responsibility for security to the Iraqis and relevant bodies which need to be promptly and effectively formed, trained and equipped in order to carry out their tasks fully.
- Enable the Iraqi Government

to control all of Iraq's financial resources public property and land. The Iraqi Government to freely exercise this right fully in the service of the Iraqi people.

- The importance and necessity of upholding the tenets of the Transitional Administrative Law for the Iraqi State insofar as they pertain to the long-term agreements and decrees issued by the CPA.

"We think that these constitute the guidelines for the Iraqi team negotiating with the UN, before and during preparations and dialogue about a new UN resolution to replace UNSCR 1483 and 1511.

"They should also form the guidelines for discussions and negotiations with the Coalition Provisional Authority, which will hand over all its authorities to the interim national Iraqi Government on June 30."

The editorial concluded, "As efforts intensify to draw [up] Iraq's future, implement the timetable stipulated by the Administrative Law for the Iraqi State and transfer power and national sovereignty, the Iraqi people and all their patriotic forces inside and outside the Governing Council are called upon to seriously and effectively participate, through various means, in formulating the new directions and future orientation of our country, to achieve sovereignty and independence, end the occupation and build a unified democratic, federal, Iraq".

## Okinawans resist new US base

Residents of Nago City on the Japanese island of Okinawa are carrying out daily sit-ins to defend their beautiful sea with its rich life against the construction of a new US military base being imposed on them. They are opposing the drilling involved in a geological survey of the seabed as the first step in the construction of the new US on-sea base. The construction of the base is being supported by the Japanese government.

The US call for a new base followed the April 1999 announcement by the Japanese and US governments that the US Futenma Air Station on Okinawa would be completely returned to Japan.

The return, however, was on the condition that Japan offer the US forces a substitute facility. The Japanese government decided in December 1999 on the construction of a substitute facility in the sea off Okinawa's main island.

The sea has a lot of coral reefs and is known to be the feeding grounds of the endangered sea mammal dugongs.

In order to construct a new base the government is planning to bore 63 holes in the reefs within the construction site.

The drilling was to start on April 19, the day local residents began their sit-in. Their actions prevented the start of the drilling.

Officials have explained that the drilling survey they are trying to conduct is just a "preliminary", but residents, supported by an increasing number of people in and outside of Okinawa, know that the survey is

the first step in the process of constructing the base.

The "sit-in" tent is filled with excitement. The participants are holding various activities, including study meetings, yoga workshops, boat tours, and short plays.

### A national issue

On May 8, 90-year-old Nakamura Fumiko from Naha City participated in the sit-in. She is known as the leader of the "One-Foot Film Movement" to buy back and preserve US films of the Okinawa ground war.

She said, "I was born in a town adjacent to Nago City and grew up in the kindly fruits of nature there. When I was a child, my mother scolded me for taking small clams. Now her teaching "Don't kill out living things" is more important than ever. The government officials are going to destroy the nature and build a military base to train murderers. We must refuse to allow such a base to be built."

Japanese Communist Party member of the House of Representatives Akamine Seiken said, "The construction of a new base in the district will further enhance the capabilities of the US military bases in Okinawa as a major stepping-stone for US military intervention in or invasion of other countries. Having experienced the tragic Okinawa battle, Okinawans wish for peace. We'll never allow the construction of the new base. It's a fight that flows together with the world current moving towards peace." \*

## Fahrenheit 9/11 update

Michael Moore's sensational documentary *Fahrenheit 9/11* has been bought personally from the Walt Disney Co. by the founders of Miramax film studio, Harvey and Bob Weinstein.

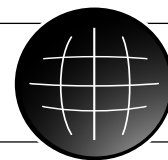
Miramax had funded the film but Disney, which owns the art-house studio, had refused to distribute the movie, saying the documentary and its criticism of President Bush's war on Iraq were too politically charged.

Miramax will arrange for theatrical and home video distribution and are thought to have paid Disney US\$6 million for the rights.

The movie might still show in US theatres well before the November presidential election with its unflattering portrait of Bush. Conservatives fear that it will influence the election outcome against Bush.

*Fahrenheit 9/11* won this month the Palme d'Or, the highest award of France's Cannes film festival, with its portrayal of families affected by the war and the Bush government's policies following the September 11, 2001 attack on the World Trade Centre.

Interest in the film around the world is so great that it is expected to meet or beat the box-office performance of *Bowling for Columbine*, which set a record for a US documentary with US\$21.6 million in ticket sales. \*



## Global briefs

**COLOMBIA:** Unionists and five MPs were beaten up by aggressive police at a demonstration in Cartagena, Colombia. On May 21 twenty thousand people marched against the Free Trade Agreement with the US. President Uribe, a US stooge, urged local authorities to stop the march by violent means, including the use of tear gas bombs fired from helicopters. The confrontation between the police and the protesters lasted for three hours. In Bogota, Bucaramanga, Cali, Popayan and other cities the workers declared a 24-hour general strike, leaving their places of work to take to the streets. More than seven million pupils in the public education system missed their classes as 300,000 teachers joined the strike.

**SYRIA:** Syrian President Bashar Assad said that the United States had provided no proof to warrant the sanctions it had imposed on Syria and stressed that he would not accept US demands to expel Palestinian militants. He disputed the case that the Bush administration had made to impose the embargo, saying that Syria does not have weapons of mass destruction and there is no evidence of foreign fighters crossing the border from Syria to Iraq. The sanctions ban all US exports to Syria except food and medicine and direct flights between Syria and the US.

**RUSSIA:** Russia's chief auditor has called for the billionaire energy tycoon and Chelsea Football Club owner, Roman Abramovich, to step down as governor of Chukotka in Siberia. The region's authorities have been accused of "misappropriating" US\$50 million and allowing the oil company he controls to evade US\$470 million in taxes. Forbes business journal estimates that the personal fortunes of Russia's 100 richest businessmen amount to a quarter of the country's entire economy.

**IRAQ:** The World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) expressed its "great sorrow, concern and indignation" at the revelations of torture and inhuman repression unleashed by US and British occupation forces at Iraqi prisons. The WFTU expressed "its indignation and surprise that these acts were committed by two Great Powers who claimed that their illegal aggression on Iraq was to defend liberty, democracy and human rights". The WFTU demanded the "immediate restoration of sovereignty to the Iraqi people to enable them to govern themselves and to build their national parliamentary and administrative institutions, to defend security and national sovereignty".

**USA:** George W Bush's 2005 Budget was withdrawn from the Senate when it became clear it would not be passed. Four Republican Senators stated their intention to vote with the Democrat bloc against making permanent Bush's \$1.5 trillion tax cut for millionaires made in 2001. One of the rebels, Senator John McCain of Arizona, said he wanted to send a message to Republican "fat cats" who wallow in Bush tax cuts but are unwilling to make any sacrifices while US soldiers are dying in Iraq. The 2005 Budget forecast a record deficit of US\$367 billion.

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



email: guardian@cpa.org.au

## Where to begin?

There is a Luddite ring in the article "Capitalism & jobs - the fundamentals" (*Guardian*, May 19). Pat Barile states that "the main battles of the working class have to be aimed, ideologically and practically, at the job-killing use of more and more technology". As an afterthought, the connection is made between unemployment and exploitation. The big task "is to explain to millions of workers how and why (ideology) they are being ripped off (exploitation) and laid off (unemployment), and to help them to organise (the practical solution)".

This practical solution, however, is mere wishful thinking. "When workers see how they are being ripped off, who is doing it and that they can do something about it, they will get rightfully angry and

demand jobs and control over the wealth they create."

The action foreseen does not follow from the premise particularly since, apart from being organised, it is not clear what the something is they can do. In any case, will they make the connection between the demand for jobs and the "control over the wealth they create"?

Australian workers know they are being ripped off and have a good idea how and why. Yet all the organised workers can see as a solution is for public money to be used to protect jobs through hand-outs to the capitalists.

That crucial "something they can do" is where the CPA is failing to carry out its vanguard role. For over a decade it has been calling for left, progressive and democratic forces to unite to form an alternative government. Even for this limited aim, what has the CPA done to gain the support of the working class, which must form its nucleus? What policies has it elaborated as its contribution? Nothing beyond social policies which people feel can be implemented by the Greens or by changing the ALP.

Where are the policies that can here and now begin the struggle for "control over the wealth" the workers create, policies that attack the

private ownership of the means of production? Are such policies possible? The CPA began several congresses ago to demand the extension of the public sector, but it has not elaborated specific proposals.

Is it only a slogan designed to rally the people, a demand that can be implemented only by a future alternative government?

A left strategy must incorporate policies that propose the immediate transfer of the ownership of the means of production to the people in a way that is acceptable to the majority. Nationalisation is out of the question at present.

We need bold approaches to help us to move forward. We could try buying strategic parcels of shares in companies from the capitalists with their own money. It's been estimated that \$80 billion a year could come from taxing the rich, increasing company tax, stopping various handouts to the rich, etc, etc. And control must be given not to government bureaucrats but to the unions and other non-government organisations.

The use of the \$80 billion to create jobs must be the Number One priority. There is the potential to activate the working class, to win the people away from the ALP which can only get the "best possible deal" for the workers within the system and leaves the basic cause of society's problems intact. Even such a demand as this which merely threatens the capitalist principle of private ownership would arouse the hostility of the ruling class. Therein lies its revolutionary potential.

The Chinese Party adopted bold programs to build socialism and is doing it successfully. The only

reason why we can't is a fear that we haven't the strength (unlike the Chinese) to carry it through. The crisis facing the working class is the system itself and not technology.

Bob Saltis  
Adelaide, SA

## Poor response reflects badly

**I am not confused. I am not bewildered. I read *The Guardian* in full. I am saddened however because of the prospect that my country will not be the vanguard of those who will embrace socialism. I am of the opinion that the Latin-Americas and the Caribbean and probably some Asian countries will be there before us.**

Why? Because I think the capitalist influence is still too strong in our land.

It appears to me that our "socialist supporters" are more so in "lip service" than in actual fact. A foot in both camps! Two bob each way so to speak.

And why do I think this way? Simply, the response to The Guardian Press Fund. Nobody is prepared to boost the appeal, but every week the editor has to appeal, beg for contributions to try and reach the annual target.

I consider this a sad reflection on the real belief and sincerity of those who purport in the realisation of socialism.

It is not going to be handed to you on a platter. And one way to take part in this life changing struggle is to support the workers' paper.

B Appleton  
Woy Woy, NSW

## Promises, promises, promises

**Jackie Kelly, the Member for Lindsay, talks about a "Renaissance Centre" for Science in Western Sydney.**

There is such a centre already. It is called the University of Western Sydney, a centre of Science and all round excellence.

This University, like all Australian Universities, famed for their research and talent, has been hard hit by Howard's horrendous HECS hike!

A massive, crippling increase in student charges by the Member for Lindsay's government, to which she agreed without the whisp of a whimper.

Now we have promises about a "board" to discuss promises about promises, while talented young Australians are despairing, and descending into ever deepening and dangerous depression.

Hyperbolic, horrendous, hypocrisy from the Howard Government!

Denis Kevans  
Wentworth Falls, NSW

## Torture approved

**Of course Rumsfeld approved torture. He brokered sales of lethal micro-organisms to Saddam Hussein knowing they would end up weaponised, so why would he have qualms about torture? (Congressional Record: September 20, 2002 (Senate) Page S8987-S8998)**

Gareth Smith  
Byron Bay, NSW

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# Culture & Life

by Rob Gowland

## A culture of lying

George W Bush lies almost every time he opens his mouth. He can't help it: he's a right-wing Christian-fundamentalist Republican. Lying is part of the culture in which he exists. And which he is trying to export to the rest of the world.

Capitalism was still very much in its formative stage at the time of Oliver Cromwell, but even then Gerrard Winstanley had astutely characterised it as "the lying art of buying and selling". Today, in the most developed capitalist country of them all, the "lying art" is also at its most developed.

Bush is but one liar amongst many at all levels of the US administration. And the US people are getting jack of it.

They know they were lied to about the weapons of mass destruction that supposedly littered the Iraqi countryside. Many of them know - many more suspect - that they were lied to about the circumstances of the September 11 plane hijackings.

In the past, US citizens were piously informed that it was not only their right to question their officials, it was their duty. But after September 11, those who question the veracity of official accounts are accused of being disloyal or "unpatriotic".

But as the lies grow in number and magnitude, so does the questioning. And curiously, it is coming not only from the Left but from

what are considered the most "patriotic" sectors of US society.

The families of US soldiers serving in Iraq are openly accusing the Pentagon of lying about the number of US soldiers killed there. European and Middle Eastern media accuse US forces of also lying about the number of Iraqi civilians they have killed.

Non-US media regularly report eyewitness accounts of US soldiers responding to any attack by indiscriminately shooting up everything - and everybody - in sight, whether young or old, male or female, armed or unarmed. Afterwards the US command defends the slaughter of civilians in the vicinity with the lying claim that they were armed or "appeared to be armed".

On May 19 US forces attacked with all guns blazing (including bombs, rockets, planes, tanks, armoured personnel carriers, the lot) a sleeping wedding party in a little desert village near the Syrian border, Makr al-Deeb.

US intelligence had apparently concluded that having wedding guests come from all around the local area including across the border in Syria, putting up a tent for the festivities, hiring a band and one of the best wedding singers in Iraq, was evidence that a "safe house" was being set up for "foreign fighters".

*Al-Arabiya* television filmed the result: some 42 men, women and children horrifically slain.

Witnesses identified the families involved in what had been a major wedding for the region, uniting two large families. Among the dead were 27 members of one of those families.

Many of their guests died as well, as did the band of musicians and Hussein al-Ali, the wedding singer.

The news footage included shots of two dead babies wrapped side by



side in a blanket, the body of a little girl of six wrapped in a white shawl, and a headless child lying next to the body of his or her mother.

Ignoring the women and children seen on the TV footage, Major-General James Mattis, commander of the US 1st Marine Division, claimed all the dead were "foreign fighters".

When reporters pressed Mattis about TV images of dead children he took the classic military out when a lie is uncovered: he did not have to justify the actions of his men, he announced.

Brigadier Mark Kimmitt, Deputy Director of Operations for the US military in Iraq, brazenly declared that the Iraqis (at the time of the US attack a sleeping wedding party) had fired first.

"We took ground fire", said this loyal mouthpiece, "and we returned fire". He then said, disingenuously but with possibly unconscious accuracy: "But we operated within our rules of engagement".

In Washington, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Richard Myers, contentedly repeated the lie, but with an odd little caveat: "We feel at this point very confident that this was a legitimate target, probably foreign fighters".

Only "probably" foreign fighters, but still a "legitimate target"?

Following usual US practice, General Myers tried to link the victims in Makr al-Deeb to terrorism. Although all the evidence says that the dead were guests at a regional wedding, he had the

gall to suggest that the (mythical) "foreign fighters" might be linked to the killers of American hostage Nick Berg.

Without a shred of evidence, he said with a straight face that they could be connected to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the Islamist militant leader and ally of Osama bin Laden whom the US claims personally beheaded Berg.

Although such a connection was "still to be determined", the worthy General said it was "not out of the question".

And pigs can fly.

Next week we'll look at some of the serious doubts that have been raised over the Berg "snuff video" that the US tried to use to divert attention from the prisoner torture photos. ☹

**Rob Gowland  
previews  
ABC & SBS  
Public Television**

Sun June 6 ~  
~ Sat June 12

The documentary genre in the cinema began as a reaction against the glamorised and essentially false picture of people's lives presented by Hollywood and the other major centres of film production.

Left-wing filmmakers in particular turned to documentary in their desire to show the reality of people's living and working conditions. In the USSR in the 1920s, then most notably in Britain from the beginning of the '30s, a small group of politically conscious filmmakers sought to not only show the real world but to interpret it.

They did not limit themselves to filming actuality footage, but where necessary, they dramatised or re-enacted scenes, the better to expose not just the appearance of some phenomenon but its essence, its reality.

In the late '30s in the US film was finally taken up as a weapon of the New Deal by another group of progressive filmmakers. And Dutch Communist filmmaker Joris Ivens travelled all over the world to wherever people were in struggle.

They sought to show the heroism and dignity of labour, to show who really built the ships and dams, the dykes and bridges, who really grew the food and turned the wheels of industry.

Australian documentaries like *Coaldust* and the films of the Waterside Workers' Federation Film Unit were also part of this tradition – films which took a stand, had a partisan viewpoint which they presented without apology.

Today, in television, the term "documentary" is used for anything that purports to be non-fiction and

deals with a topic drawn from travel, wildlife, science or history.

The wholly dramatised "documentary" *The Brooklyn Bridge* in the series *Seven Wonders Of The Industrial World* (ABC 7.30pm Sundays) forfeits its claim to be a documentary by submerging the real story of the building of this great structure in the "human drama" of the fate of its designer, his son and his daughter-in-law.

While it shows the innovative nature of the design, and the extraordinarily hard and dangerous work involved in the construction, the program skims over the graft and corruption that also featured.

Fraud by cronies of some of the Bridge company's Board members resulted in faulty wire being woven into the cables. When the faulty cables snapped and men died, we learn that the contract was taken away from that firm and awarded to another but not whether anyone was prosecuted.

How did the Bridge company expect to recoup its investment? What were the economic issues that made its construction so imperative?

One could be forgiven for thinking it was only the "vision" of the designer that was behind the building of the Brooklyn Bridge.

The program mixes actual newsreel footage with the re-enactment in a way that distinguished between the two, but it never uncovers the commercial essence of the project.

Nevertheless, it is well worth a look.

Another program that mixes real and enacted scenes even more skilfully is *Ten Days To D-Day* (ABC 8.30pm Sunday). It follows ten real-life characters through the dramatic 10-day countdown to D-Day.

Those still alive provide their recollections throughout the program. Those who did not survive the War are represented by diary entries and letters home.

All of them are portrayed in scenes at the time by actors. There is no false attempt to provide "drama". You are aware at all times that the acted scenes are merely fleshing out or illustrating the factual information in the commentary.

My comments last week about D-Day remain valid, but this excel-



Unfortunate attempt to portray the horror of violence (*A Clockwork Orange*)

lent program does convey the sheer magnitude of the undertaking. Even so, One should remember that some of the offensives launched by the Soviet army on the Eastern Front involved up to ten times as many men.

SBS begins a season of six feature films by Stanley Kubrick this week as well as beginning a three-part documentary series *Stanley Kubrick: A Life in Pictures* in the *Masterpiece* timeslot (SBS 10.00pm Tuesdays).

The documentary is directed by Kubrick's brother-in-law Jan Harlan and features "unique film footage and photographs" provided by Kubrick's wife Christiane, so it eschews any criticism of the great man.

The Kubrick season begins with his unfortunate attempt to portray the horror of violence, *A Clockwork Orange* (SBS 9.30pm Sunday). The book was a big hit with trends who seemed as thrilled with its use of Russian-derived words in the slang of its near-future gangs as with its portrayal of the near future as a police-state.

Kubrick seemed genuinely shocked when critics quizzed him as to why he made the violence in the film version so entertaining. He protested that it was shocking, not entertaining; that it was truly horrifying.

The critics were right, however. At the public screening where I first saw it, the young males in the audience came out absolutely stoked.

It was very noticeable that whenever there was a scene of violence, Kubrick distanced the audience from it: he drew his camera back, thereby lessening the impact of the violence, or he used surreal or stylised backgrounds, or extreme wide-angle lenses.

The violence is perpetrated by Alex (Malcolm McDowell) who is depicted as wittier, more intelligent and more honest than any of his victims, who are usually grotesque.

Anthony Burgess' novel is essentially fascist. Burgess has defended it thus: "it is preferable to have a world of violence undertaken in full awareness – violence

chosen as an act of will – than a world conditioned to be good or harmless."

Danny Peary, author of *Cult Movies I & II*, says of the film version: "Film's strong, gratuitous violence is objectionable (as is the comical atmosphere when violence is being perpetrated), but the major reason the film can be termed fascistic (sic) is Kubrick's heartless, super-intellectual, super-orderly, anti-septic, anti-human, anti-female, anti-sensual, anti-passion, anti-erotic treatment of its subject."

The second Kubrick feature this week is *Lolita* (SBS 10.10pm Thursday), the oddly successful black comedy about abnormal people. James Mason is the middle-aged Humbert Humbert who falls hard for his landlady's school-age daughter.

Sue Lyon underplays the nymphette of the title while Peter Sellers is splendidly manic as her secret lover. Not everyone's cup of tea but certainly worth a try.

*Angels in America* (ABC Tues, Wed & Thurs) is reviewed on page 5. ☼

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**June 4**  
Intelligence? Politics of deceit.  
What a Labour government should do  
Alison Broinowski, former diplomat, and author *About Face: Asian Accounts of Australia* and forthcoming *Howard's War*  
Tony Kevin SIEV X whistleblower, author of forthcoming book *The Sinking of SIEV X* and independent commentator on Australian foreign policy and national security issues

**June 11**  
LONG WEEKEND

**June 18**  
The "Awful Truth" about the  
Australian-US alliance and future consequences  
Richard Broinowski Adjunct Prof Sydney Uni,  
former diplomat and General Manager Radio National, author *Fact or Fission - The Truth About Australia's Nuclear Ambition*  
Helen Caldicott, global peace activist, author  
*New Nuclear Danger*  
Anna Broinowski's film *Helen's War - Portrait of a Dissident* opens at Valhalla Cinema June 11

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# Two million work deaths a year

Luc Demaret & Ahmed Khalef\*

**Work kills more people than wars. And it injures and mutilates, too. Almost 270 million accidents are recorded each year, of which 2.2 million are fatal, that's six thousand a day. Many of these tragedies could be prevented, the International Labour Organisation believes. And yet, 20 years after the Bhopal disaster [in India], which killed 2500 people and injured 200,000 in the space of a few hours, the situation has scarcely improved.**

In Kemerevo, Siberia on April 10, 2004 a fatal explosion in a mine killed at least 44 miners. The Russian mining industry is in bad shape. Due to a lack of maintenance, accidents happen frequently.

Between January and October 2003, 13,283 fatal work accidents were registered in China's industries and mines – an increase of 9.6 per cent over the previous year. The rise is particularly steep in the construction sector.

A study made in Dublin, Ireland, (April 13, 2004) revealed that hundreds of thousands of workers suffer from stress. Four million working days were lost in 2003 at a total cost of US\$300 million.

In Phnom Penh Cambodia, this February, dozens of workers at a textile plant fainted next to their machines. The premises were badly ventilated and the company was making uncontrolled use of a highly toxic product, trichloroethylene. Workers at the factory were regularly putting in two hours more than the permitted working day.

In January 2004: An explosion at a liquified natural gas complex in Algeria killed 27 workers.

In November 2003 a gangway leading up to the liner *Queen Mary 2*, then under construction at Saint-Nazaire in France collapsed killing 10 persons.

As work nears completion at the venue of the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens, no less than 154 work accidents have already occurred there. Twelve building workers have been killed. Last October, 600 workers at the Olympic village went on strike in protest over the poor conditions on site.

Work causes injuries, mutilations, sickness and, still all too often, death. Not by fate, but through negligence. Due not to the absence of standards, but to their violation. Not because of poverty, but because of the lack of preventive measures.

## Six thousand deaths a day

The International Labour Organisation, estimates that 2.2 million people die from work-related causes every year – 750,000 women and 1,500,000 men. The difference in the figures for men and women is mainly due to the distribution of the two sexes within dangerous jobs. However, the large number of women working in agriculture in developing countries makes them

particularly vulnerable to work-related infectious diseases.

Experts also point out that the statistics underestimate the real situation, given the lack of information and reporting in many countries.

More than 400,000 deaths are caused by exposure to chemicals. Every year, one thousand new chemicals come on to the market, and more than a hundred thousand different ones are used each day. Many of them, if handled incorrectly, constitute a hazard. More than 300,000 cancers per year are due to dangerous substances.

## Employer responsibility

Health and safety in the workplace are the sole responsibility of the employer. Some employers take this obligation seriously and, increasingly, they draw competitive advantage from it in their advertising campaigns. Others seem to put short-term profit before safety.

## Asbestos

Why are millions of workers still exposed to asbestos, when we know that its fibres kill more than 100,000 people each year? This is clearly down to negligence on the part of certain employers and governments who persist in using this substance.

Many governments appear to be in no hurry to ratify and implement the international Convention adopted by the ILO in 1986, banning some kinds of asbestos. **To date, this Convention has been ratified by only 27 of the ILO's 177 member States.**

"Asbestos is already banned in

die at work. This despite a whole arsenal of international conventions, declarations and legislation.

"We want to see more serious penalties imposed on employers who violate safety measures," says the International Federation of Building and Wood Workers.

"We work to live, but work still means death", says the Food, Agriculture And Allied Workers' international IUF.

Of the 270 million work accidents recorded each year worldwide, a large proportion are in agriculture.

In 2002 governments, employers and unions adopted a new international Convention on safety and health in agriculture. It would give workers the right to refuse tasks that would put their lives at risk.

Many countries have brought in legislation to tackle the most obviously negligent attitudes to work safety. But the penalties are often derisory.

## The price of negligence

Expenditure due to occupational illnesses and work accidents (invalid benefits and compensation to victims' families, medical expenses, lost time etc.) adds up to four per cent of the GNP of all the countries on the planet. That is more than a thousand billion dollars, or 20 times more than the public assistance provided to the developing countries.

The industrialised countries must take part of the blame. An ILO specialist says, "one of the trends is that industrialised countries are exporting their hazards to developing countries. Labour there is not only cheaper but also significantly



Child labour in an Indian carpet factory

this hazard, six million in Brazil and almost two million in Colombia. In Latin America, according to an ILO report 37 per cent of miners suffer from silicosis – a figure that rises to 50 per cent for miners aged over 50.

Social coverage for occupational safety and health varies greatly from one part of the world to another. Workers in the Nordic countries

and health has garnered just 42 ratifications. [Australia ratified it in March this year – Ed]

Studies confirm that where unions are fully recognised and there is a workplace health and safety committee (with equal representation of management and the unions), the serious accident rate may be halved compared to workplaces where unions are not recognised and no such committee is in place.

Although trade union freedom is a vital factor in workplace safety, all too often it is still flouted. In fact, trade unionism is a high-risk occupation. And the price to be paid for improving conditions at work is sometimes high.

## Trade Unionists murdered

Across the world, two hundred trade unionists are murdered every year. Although he was receiving death threats, Cambodian union leader Chea Vichea never abandoned his struggle, which secured marked improvements in working conditions for some 200,000 women in the country's garment industry. On January 22, 2004, in Phnom Penh, he was killed by three bullets fired at close range.

"Safe Work is not only sound economic policy", declared UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan in 2002, "it is a basic human right". Getting that basic right respected everywhere will take some major changes of attitude.

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**Every year 22,000 children, who ought to have been at school, die at work.**

25 countries, but that means that almost 150 others are still using it", says the head of the ILO's occupational health and safety work. "Although asbestosis is not an infectious disease, it is tempting to call it an epidemic. This is especially true of mesothelioma caused by asbestos. And don't forget that, after a worker has been exposed to asbestos, the disease may take 20 or even 35 years to appear."

## Thousands of children sacrificed

Another clear sign of negligence is that every year 22,000 children, who ought to have been at school,

less protected. Dirty and difficult jobs are left to the South. That includes mining, of course."

## Silicosis

So while the mining diseases commonly known as pneumoconiosis, including silicosis, have disappeared in the industrialised countries, they are still claiming fresh victims every day in the developing world. For instance, on current estimates 10 million workers are at risk from silicosis, and it causes 5000 fatalities every year.

In Vietnam, it is the source of 90 per cent of compensated occupational illnesses. In India, more than two million miners are exposed to

have almost universal coverage, whereas only 10 per cent – or even less – of developing country workplaces are covered in any way.

## Boosting safety

Almost half of the 184 Conventions adopted by the ILO have a bearing on health and safety issues. Ratification of these standards, that is, the formal commitment of countries to respect them, is uneven. Some have been widely ratified, such as Convention 81 on labour inspection (130 ratifications). Others, however, have produced less encouraging results. The Convention 155 on worker safety

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