

Kick Howard Out DEFEND MEDICARE

Anna Pha

“Medicare is dying. So are our patients”. This grim warning came from Dr Tim Woodruff, President of the Doctors’ Reform Society (DRS). He referred to the Howard Government’s propaganda booklet being delivered to every home and appearing in the print and television media. It is a scandalous waste of money by a discredited government making a last ditch attempt to fool the public in the coming federal election. The booklet is a multi-million dollar donation from taxpayers to the Liberal/National Party election campaign.

It is the latest big lie from a government that has become notorious for lying to the public. It is called “Strengthening Medicare” when the Government is doing exactly the opposite.

“Taxpayer money is being spent promoting the murder of Medicare under the dishonest label ‘Strengthening Medicare’”, said Dr Tim Woodruff. “Our patients see daily the evidence of Medicare dying a slow death, and we know this means some of our patient are dying the same death”.

Propaganda booklet

The Medicare propaganda booklet has photos of happy families with banner headlines such as “Caring for all Australians” and “Protecting and strengthening Medicare”.

One of its biggest boasts is a new “Safety Net” which applies to treatment outside of hospitals, such as X-rays, scans and pathology tests.

This safety net cuts in when out of pocket costs (the gap between fees paid and Medicare refunds) total \$300 or \$700. The \$300 threshold applies to families who qualify for Family Tax Benefit Part A or individuals holding a Commonwealth Concession Card (Health Care, Pensioner Concession or Seniors Health Card).

Once this threshold is met, the usual rebate will be refunded plus 80 percent of the gap. **There is no cap on this payment and specialists will be tempted to double or triple their fees.**

The DRS point out that patients are faced with ever increasing out-of-pocket expenses to see GPs and that all the Government is doing is putting in place a safety net which will lead to a cost blow-out in the health budget as doctors realise the Government is prepared to cover whatever they charge.

Dishonest promises

Government promises that the new safety net will “protect all Australians against high medical costs” for out of hospital treatment are totally dishonest.

A safety net has only become necessary because of the failure of the Government to fund and strengthen Medicare. During its eight years in office the Government has consciously and systematically, bit by bit, set about killing it off.

If bulk billing were universal, patients would not be out of pocket when they visited a doctor or used other medical services.

The Medicare booklet says that the “mainstays” of Medicare are:

- free treatment as a public patient in a public hospital;
- continuation of the Medicare rebate of 85 percent of the schedule fee for a visit to a doctor;
- affordable medicines through the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS).

Medicines

The booklet does not go into details about the plans for the PBS but with the Australia-US Free Trade Agreement about to be adopted, the cost of medicines will inevitably rise.

The continuation of the Medicare rebate means nothing if the government does not raise scheduled fees to doctors in line with rising costs. The Howard Government froze them after coming to office, forcing many doctors to abandon bulk billing or close their practice.

Free treatment for a “public patient in a public hospital”, glosses over the number of people who are now entering public hospitals as private patients.

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Protests promised against new US base

Peace activists immediately protested the announcement last Monday by Defence Minister Hill in Singapore that an “in principle” agreement had been made to establish yet another United States military base in Australia.

“Australia already has too many US military facilities on our soil. We do not want another one”, Dr Hannah Middleton, spokesperson for the Australian Anti-Bases Campaign Coalition said in response to the announcement.

Senator Hill claims the new base will “enhance mutual capability, ensure interoperability and to assist a critically important ally is simply Government spin for the gradual fusion of the Australian Defence Force into a de-facto arm of the United States military”, Dr Middleton said.

“The decision is another step in the militarisation of Australia which we simply cannot afford.

Australia’s current military budget is already a staggering \$55 million a day.

“At the same time Prime Minister Howard claims we cannot afford Medicare or to upgrade public schools, cut university fees, support childcare, tackle poverty or create jobs.

“The new base will lock up huge areas of our territory and contaminate it with unexploded ordnance.

“By signing up as a front line collaborator with the US military, the Howard Government is putting all Australians in danger.

“Australia does not have to be a cog in the US military machine. An independent, made-in-Australia policy for reduced military spending and respect for the sovereign rights of nations to independence, equality and self determination is a better way to defend Australia”, Dr Middleton concluded.

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The Guardian

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Putting the judiciary in prison

The arrest of Bilal Khazal as a suspected terrorist and the alleged "fury" of some politicians when he was released on bail hide the utter fraud of the so-called "war on terrorism". Rather they demonstrate how "terrorism" is being systematically used, among other things, to politicise and shackle the legal system by both Liberal and Labor Party Governments.

The press reports that Khazal had been under observation by ASIO for the last 10 years – yes, ten years! His home was raided recently when documents and computer equipment were seized. He is alleged to have posted on a website some material drawn from "other authors" together with "his own words". Mr Murphy, his solicitor, said it was simply a "cut and paste" job from other websites. Furthermore, he had removed it from the internet when police brought it to his attention.

So why was he arrested now, why the newspaper headlines and the "fury" when he was bailed by a Sydney magistrate?

The answer is to be found in the extreme embarrassment being suffered by the "coalition" waging war in Iraq, the torture revelations and, perhaps most important of all, the relentless moves by the Howard Government to politicise the judicial system as they have already done to Australia's intelligence organisations and the military. Their objective in regard to the judiciary is to impose politically driven "mandatory" rules of procedure and sentencing.

The arrest of Khazal and his release on bail provided the excuse for Attorney-General Ruddock and then the NSW Premier Bob Carr to rush legislation into parliament requiring judges and magistrates to only grant bail to "terrorist" suspects in extreme cases. There will be a "presumption against bail" whenever a person is charged (not found guilty) of terrorism offences. The principle of being "innocent until proven guilty" and the "presumption of innocence" are being destroyed by such measures.

Federal Labor Party spokesperson, Robert McClelland, jumped in behind Ruddock declaring that "the errors [of the courts] must now be regarded as more than individual oversights". He was referring to the bail granted to Khazal and to the fairly short sentence imposed on Jack Roche in WA.

It is disgraceful that some Labor leaders seem more intent on outdoing even the Howard Government when it comes to showing that they are "tough on terrorists" rather than fighting for even the limited independence of the judiciary from the government of the day.

Thank you Mr Bush

If anything more was needed to show that the United States leaders regard Australia as its colony, it has been provided by Bush's public attack on Labor Party leader, Mark Latham, over the ALP's commitment to bring Australian troops in Iraq home for Christmas.

Bush made the comments in the presence of the always fawning Liberal leader, John Howard. Howard's obsequiousness in the past has encouraged such a view on the part of the US leaders. When they say jump, Howard asks, "How high?"

Bush's remarks are a flagrant interference in the internal affairs of Australia. They are patronising in assuming that the Australian people do not have the right to work these matters out for themselves and have to be told what to think and do. They are beyond the bounds of all accepted diplomatic behaviour.

They, however, may not have been such an un-diplomatic slip as might at first seem to be the case. Both Howard and Bush are in election mode and face elections at approximately the same time. They desperately need each other and will fight together for their mutual re-election and political survival. Howard will use Bush's remarks and the photo-op of Howard and Bush on the lawns of the White House, to show that they are partners (in crime!) and that Howard is the only one able to maintain the United States as Australia's defender in a dangerous world.

The media totally ignore the fact that the US, with Howard at his side, is responsible above all others for making the world a dangerous place and that it is the US alliance that is helping to isolate Australia in the Asia-Pacific region.

It is to be hoped that the Australian people will reject this course and continue to build on Australia's independence of any foreign power.

PRESS FUND

The Press Fund goal seems pretty meagre compared to the way the Howard Government spends your money. Alladin Sisalem, the sole immigration prisoner – sorry, detainee – on Manus Island was released recently, having been kept there for nine months. This cost \$23,000 per day, so Australian taxpayers forked out nearly \$6,300,000 to unjustly incarcerate this unfortunate young man. In comparison, *The Guardian's* annual Press Fund target of \$14,000 is a very modest objective! However, we're still struggling to reach it, so if you possibly can, please send us something for the next edition. Our sincere thanks go to those who contributed this week, as follows:

Bert Appleton \$40, M H \$50, W Irving \$10, Andrew Jackson \$20, Hector Kerswell \$200.

This week's total \$320. Progressive total \$4550

ATSIC bill referral points to policy void

Statement by Acting ATSIC Chairman Lionel Quartermaine

The ALP's decision to refer the Government's bill to abolish ATSIC to a Senate Committee for review is a welcome first step towards giving suitable consideration to the future governance of Indigenous affairs in this country.

All actions by governments that have an impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people must be reviewable.

Improved accountability for Indigenous programs must operate in both directions – upwards through legislators as well as downwards to our communities.

In addition, the time has long passed since it was acceptable for governments to make arbitrary decisions about the lives of Aboriginal people.

Policy decisions must be based on evidence of best practice and demonstrated results, not whims and political expedience.

Minister Vanstone has not yet explained how the Government's changes will provide improvements to Indigenous communities. This is not surprising, as its ideas are not based in a policy framework that stands up to scrutiny.

Instead, the Minister is banging the drum about increases in spending since the Keating years.

The fact is that increased expenditure in education and other areas is linked tightly to increased population.

It has nothing to do with government generosity.

Indigenous communities are growing and producing much higher numbers of children and young adults in need of education services than their non-Indigenous counterparts.

Neither nor inspires confidence that they know what they are doing.

Both sides of politics have chosen to ignore the recommendations of the most extensive review of Indigenous administration conducted in the past decade that clearly recommended maintaining a revised

The time has long passed since it was acceptable for governments to make arbitrary decisions about the lives of Aboriginal people.

It is time the Government got over its obsession with Keating and stood accountable for its own efforts.

Access to education, health and housing services is a legal entitlement that every Australian should enjoy.

Governments should be embarrassed by their lack of ability to overcome the continuing shortfall in services, rather than boasting that the gap has become slightly smaller over a decade.

Apart from the Senate referral, the Opposition is currently in the same boat as the Government in holding a position on Indigenous policy that neither has a solid found-

ATSIC, although with a stronger regional focus.

Neither has substituted a set of substantial future objectives and the means of achieving them.

Both support the abolition of ATSIC for the sake of political expedience in a game of wedge and counter-wedge politics that casts another shadow over race relations in this country.

Neither has put forward a vision for the future that Indigenous people can embrace.

We must hope that the Senate makes the most of its opportunity to restore some sanity and integrity to the administration of Indigenous affairs. ☼

Increased aid to Pacific flows back to Australia

Australia's aid for Papua New Guinea and the South Pacific for the financial year 2004-05 has leapt by nearly \$300 million to \$805 million. But this aid will result in a cut in money for basic needs. Aid is being redirected from poverty, health and education programs to concentrate on "governance" and "law and order", in line with Australia's interventionist approach to the region.

Australian police and military are set to reap a windfall as they are charged with implementing the majority of these programs. Unfortunately, most of these funds will be paid out in wages to Australians and not end up in the countries that so badly need them.

Despite much of the area where Australia's aid program is focused lacking essential services, such as comprehensive health and education systems and access to basics like drinking water, the Foreign Minister

has deemed it more pressing to give \$114.3 million to Australians for operations in PNG and \$93.7 million to Aussies for the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands.

The 2004-05 aid budget was hailed by the Foreign Minister, Alexander Downer as a huge increase in aid funding, yet the facts belie the spin according to AID/WATCH's Tim O'Connor. AID/WATCH is an NGO which monitors Australian aid to other countries.

"If you deduct the money Australia is spending on employing Australian police in PNG and Australian troops in the Solomon Islands and the money going to Australian government departments, then we are giving much less in aid than Australia gave last year", said Mr. O'Connor.

"These programs can not be seen as aid programs", continued O'Connor. "The money is not alle-

Most of these funds will be paid out in wages to Australians and not end up in the countries that so badly need them.

viating poverty in the Solomons or PNG. This money will end up in Australia in the back pockets of Australian police, military and bureaucrats. It's another form of boomerang aid. This approach will not support people getting out of poverty. This is taking the aid program back to where it was seven years ago – too little money attempting to achieve too many objectives." ☼

Omission

The photo which appeared on the front page of last week's issue of *The Guardian* (2-6-04) was courtesy of the NSW Teachers' Federation. It was taken during the rally of striking teachers outside NSW State Parliament on May 27. The acknowledgement and caption were accidentally omitted. *The Guardian* apologises for this omission and thanks the NSWTF for kindly supplying the photo.

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.

Howard and defence chiefs plead ignorance

Bob Briton

The most peculiar things appear to be happening in Canberra lately. While one would think that John Howard, his ministers and the heads of government departments would have the best access in the country to important and sensitive information, it seems that nowadays they are the only ones being left out of the loop!

Take Attorney General Philip Ruddock, for example. It was not until last week that he was brought up to speed about a couple of significant phone calls to the Australian Federal Police and ASIO, reportedly offering credible information of terror threats against Australian targets.

The first was to the AFP's post in Singapore in 2000. Mr Ruddock was only told about a note recording the call the Monday before last, and only then following a question in Parliament arising from a media report. The caller, who identified himself as Ibrahim Fraser, wanted to warn authorities about a plot to blow up the Australian Embassy in Singapore.

If not lying then it must be incompetence

Then there was the call to ASIO in 2000 by Jack Roche – the Perth man sentenced to nine years jail for his part in an abandoned plot to bomb the Israeli Embassy in Canberra. Mr Roche apparently rang the spook outfit offering information about Hambali, the alleged mastermind of the Bali bombing currently detained in the US. It seems that nobody got back to Mr Roche until it was much too late.

Mr Ruddock – and Mr Howard – are apparently as mad as hell about this and are rushing to put “systems” [notepads?] in place to ensure that people pass on their phone messages.

Who knew what, when?

Of course, the most famous of these lapses involves the question of who knew what and when about the torture and abuse of Iraqi prisoners in the notorious Abu Ghraib prison. Senator Hill told Parliament on May 11 that he only found out about it in February – the month after US news channel CNN broadcast details of the Red Cross report into the matter.

Australia's Chief of the Defence Forces, Peter Cosgrove, and the secretary of the Department of Defence, Ric Smith were sticking to the same story. They claim to be as shocked as the rest of us when the disgusting photographic evidence was made public by the media.

Outrageous abuse

Still, something does not seem quite right about the claims of the defence big wigs when they appeared before a Senate estimates committee last week. It turns out that an Australian military lawyer, Major George O'Keane, had been dealing with the Red Cross complaints about the abuse at Abu Ghraib as early as October last year.

What is more, Major O'Keane's reports contained references to the sexual abuse that have since become common knowledge. Mr Hill and the PM both claim that, until the media opened their eyes, the mistreatment noted by the Red Cross “only” extended to poor food, inadequate contact, humiliation, forced nudity and keeping prisoners in cells without light for days on end.

Such complaints seem to hardly raise a senior bureaucrat's eyebrows in these days of the “war on terror”.

Unfortunately for the cause of truth, Major O'Keane was not allowed to appear before the estimates committee last week. It seems the Major is caught in an unusual kind of limbo. He is competent enough and old enough to be a legal adviser to the Coalition's military commander in Iraq and to report back to Australia's Joint Operations Command but NOT to appear before a Senate estimates committee.



At his last press conference before heading off to the US, the PM was again trying to pass off the “I wasn't informed” story. He made heavy going of a question from Michelle Gratton of *The Age*. She asked why he had not been aware of the Iraqi prisoner abuse scandal while Labor senators down the corridor had managed to stay up-to-date.

“I'm sorry, Michelle, but it is simply not possible for someone in my position to talk to every single person”, was the lame reply. It was doubly ineffective given that he had just spent the previous several minutes namedropping about who he WILL be speaking to overseas – President Bush, Vice-President Cheney, California Governor Schwarzeneger, Chairman of the Federal Reserve Greenspan, etc.

It's all probably just another case of lying. If not lying then it must be sheer incompetence. ✪

Fanning “law and order” hysteria

Sydney's *Daily Telegraph* recently carried out a “law and order” survey. It posed a large number of questions based on threats to personal safety, but leaves virtually untouched the underlying reasons for the level of crime and other threats to personal safety in Australia.

Rigging the questions to get the “right” answers is a favourite method of governments and the mass media. This is what the *Daily Telegraph* survey did.

One question in their survey was “Should guns be legal for use by the general community (excluding law enforcement officers)?” This question was placed at the end of a series of other questions that dealt with threats to personal safety and actually encouraged respondents to answer, yes!

The survey asked whether caning should be reintroduced into Australian schools. Simply asking the question encourages readers to consider this as a socially valid option.

The survey asked whether groups of kids loitering on the street, and/or wearing similar clothes, and/or of similar racial appearance, constitute a gang. It also asks whether gang rape is culturally or racially driven. The survey virtually puts a prejudiced answer into the mouths of respondents.

The survey includes a number of questions that deal with social conscience, but at a very superficial level. For example, it asks the reader whether some or all of certain workplace misdemeanors (such as using Cabcharge for personal use, or using petty cash to buy lunch) should be considered crimes.

Perhaps the biggest failing of the survey lies in the questions that are not asked at all. There is

not a single question concerning the need to overcome religious and cultural prejudices in order to unite the community and lower the crime rate.

The survey gave almost no emphasis to community action to overcome criminal behaviour or on unemployment as a factor in the level of crime.

It pays no attention whatsoever to crimes committed by big business such as the theft of employee superannuation entitlements, the marketing of unsafe products, or workplace manslaughter.

Despite the current level of threat to civil rights in Australia the survey doesn't raise the issue of opposing unjust laws as a matter of social conscience.

Issues ignored

The issue of Iraq and the continued occupation of that country are ignored by the *Daily Telegraph* survey.

There is not a single question relating to the important issues raised in the “law and order” campaigns of State and Federal governments. Such campaigns are boosted by initiatives such as the *Telegraph's* “Law and Order” survey.

Civil liberties in Australia are certainly under threat in the current climate. They include the right to remain silent, the right to legal representation, the right to remain at liberty unless charged with a crime, and the presumption of innocence. The *Telegraph's* survey is not the least bit concerned with such matters.

It is intended to help create a climate of fear in order to persuade the public that unjustified acts of war and the curtailment of civil rights are necessary and justified and supported by the public. ✪

Pete's Corner



Howard helps BHP make a killing

As Prime Minister John Howard was in the US with BHP-Billiton chairman Don Argus to tie up a liquefied gas deal off the Californian coast, back in Australia Pilbara families mourned the deaths of their loved ones at the hands of the mining company's speed-up operations in WA.

And as the WA Government announced an "independent" inquiry into BHP-Billiton's safety procedures the company unveiled plans to double the speeds of monster trucks at its operations and do away with "safety spotters".

The move to speed up "haul paks" roaming BHP's Mount Whaleback mine, in the Pilbara, is being opposed by workers from a range of unions.

BHP-Billiton wants speed limits increased from 30 to 60 kph around the iron ore pit, and to reduce the number of safety spotters, charged with preventing the crushing of human beings.

Prior to its latest move, BHP had already been accused of "putting production before safety" by ACTU Pilbara organiser, Will Tracey and representatives of the Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union and Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union.

The accusations followed the death on May 2 of Port Nelson iron ore facility delegate, Cory Bentley, and incidents that claimed the lives of Boodarie tradesman, James

Wadley, and Iron Ore Body 25 apprentice, Ross McKinnon.

James Wadley sustained burns to more than 90 percent of his body when a gas explosion ripped through the BHP Hot Briquette Plant. Royal Flying Doctor Service aircraft from Derby, Meekatharra and nearby Port Hedland had to be mobilised to transport injured workers to hospitals.

Three of Wadley's former work-mates are still in hospital recovering from burns.

Ross McKinnon lost his life when he was struck in the head by a "piece of equipment" at a mine, near Newman, operated for BHP by Henry Walker Eltin.

Will Tracey said the deaths followed a "number of near misses" at the company's Pilbara facilities.

Safety plummeted

He said safety standards had "plummeted" in the five years since BHP moved to drive organised labour out of its operations.

In 1999, the resources giant led the push to de-unionise the Pilbara, luring 40 percent of its workforce onto non-union federal AWAs (Australian Workplace Agreements), courtesy of salary packages \$10,000 to \$20,000 a year better than it was prepared to offer trade unionists.

On top, it whacked up super payments from eight to 14 percent of gross earnings.

Inevitably, there was a catch.



Howard ties up the deal with Californian Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger

Significant elements of annual earnings would come from company-evaluated performance reviews.

"The thing with these individual contracts is that they inhibit people from speaking out on safety for fear of being hammered in performance reviews", Mr Tracey said.

"Anyone who speaks out on safety is labelled a trouble-maker."

As Cory Bentley was being buried in Perth, company representatives began removing posters from

Port Nelson that urged workers to higher production levels.

"Aim high, move fast" was their central message. They carried graphs outlining how far workers had fallen behind massive targets set by management.

"The countdown is now on", the posters read. "Between January and December 2004 the Port must ship 100 million tonnes of ore".

Workers at a mass meeting passed a unanimous resolution call-

ing for an independent safety audit of all BHP's Pilbara operations. When James Wadley and Ross McKinnon were killed less than three weeks later, the state government signalled its agreement.

BHP-Billiton is one of the world's biggest minerals companies with interests across the resources sector. It stands to make an absolute killing from the deepening oil crisis which is bringing record prices for crude oil. ☼

Ghan to hell: 2 staff for 126 passengers

A company accused of showing "scant regard for the safety of its own workforce" is being exposed for moving disabled passengers off luxury trains with forklifts.

Great Southern Railways, which operates the Indian Pacific and The Ghan, is also alleged to be emptying toilets on its way across

the World Heritage Listed Blue Mountains.

According to the Rail Tram and Bus Union (RTBU) safety has been an ongoing issue with the operator since its inception in 1997.

Crews, who are often working shifts of up to 17 hours with only one or two breaks, point to under-

staffing, with 75 percent of all trains departing short handed.

Scant regard

Two staff are expected to look after the needs of up to 126 passengers.

"Imagine running a hotel with 126 guests with only two staff", said Greg Harvey from the RTBU, who believes that the company's scant disregard for its workforce is now extended to its passengers. "One person is expected to make 48 bunk beds in an hour while the train is travelling through the Blue Mountains".

Other issues that have been highlighted by workers include hospitality staff having to manually unblock toilets (leaving them

covered in waste, for which they have been given an apron), burns from unsafe kitchen appliances, untagged electrical equipment, needlestick injuries and inadequate amenities.

"The carpet in the staff accommodation is so dirty that mushrooms are growing in the corner", said Greg Harvey. "One employee was hit in the face by an unsecured fridge door, which left his glasses broken. The company refused to replace the glasses because they didn't want to 'set a precedent'".

Casualisation

According to the RTBU Great Southern Railways, who are covered by South Australian safety laws, has a high rate of casualisation, leav-

ing workers frightened to speak up through fear of the company refusing them work.

"There's nine crews operating on the Great Southern Railway and we wanted health and safety representatives on each crew", said Mr Harvey. "But they offered us one or two, which is ineffective".

"I'd like to say it was unbelievable but nothing surprises me any more," he said when disabled passengers were removed from carriages by using forklifts. "Why should they resort to that when there are things like mobile platforms and ramps that have been used in the past."

Management are on the record claiming that the forklift procedure was "100 percent" safe. ☼

NSW teachers refuse to back down

NSW teachers show no sign of backing down in their fight with the State Labor Government for wage justice and in defence of public education.

Premier Bob Carr, has already faced three strikes by teachers, provoked by his unprecedented intervention in the Industrial Relations Commission (IRC) just as it was about to announce its decision on the teachers' wage claims.

The second NSW Teachers' Federation strike on June 2 took the form of Sky Channel meetings at venues across the state. The resolution adopted by these meetings warns that further industrial action will take place if the Premier moves to fund teacher wage increases from the education budget "at the expense of the teaching and learning conditions across the public education system."

What started out as a struggle for wage justice has moved to defence of the education budget and the public education system.

Following an IRC report that included a reference to the "deep and profound changes in teachers' worth", teachers are expecting a big wage rise when the IRC decision is delivered. Teachers will not tolerate

the education budget being raided to fund this salary increase.

Further action likely

The NSW Teachers' Federation Council meeting on Saturday June 5 decided to wait for a decision from the IRC or the NSW budget on June 22. If either one of these goes against teachers or the education budget, further industrial action is to be taken.

Premier Carr is showing no signs of remorse or compromise and continues to ignore union letters and requests for meetings. The stage is set for further action by NSW teachers. Teachers say that MPs who do not distance themselves from the Premier's provocative policies may pay the price in their electorates.

The Communist Party congratulates teachers on their determined struggle and fully supports their wage claims, their defence of public education and no cuts to the State's education budget. The CPA advocates a free and secular public education system.

The Party asks *Guardian* readers to write to their State MPs, urging them to support the wage claims of NSW teachers and non-interference by the government in the IRC. ☼

Nurses, Ambulance Officers consider action

Jessica Martin

Critical bed shortages and up to nine-hour waiting times at Wollongong Hospital on the NSW south coast have forced ambulance drivers and Emergency Department nurses to threaten industrial action. Emergency doctors are also said to be up in arms about the bed shortages.

Anger has been simmering in the Illawarra since April when the Illawarra Health Service closed Bulli Hospital's emergency department (the only emergency department between Wollongong and Southern Sydney) to ambulances. Since then ambulance officers have been forced to take all patients to Wollongong Hospital.

A deputation of nurses in the Wollongong Hospital emergency department told senior health officials in the Illawarra last week that they were no longer prepared to

work under the conditions that exist in the hospital.

The Health Services Union (HSU), which represents NSW Ambulance Officers held a meeting of delegates last week to consider the current crisis in a number of NSW hospitals.

Action plan

Ambulance delegates endorsed a plan of action that includes taking their concerns directly to the NSW Minister for Health and to the NSW Industrial Relations Commission.

The delegates have recommended that:

- There be an immediate increase in Patient Transport Officer numbers so that ambulance crews can be made available for emergency responses;
- There be an urgent audit to ensure compliance by Area Health Service Chief Executive Officers with their 'key performance indicator' relating

to the 'clearance rate' for ambulances from Emergency Departments;

• The Emergency Departments at Bulli, Camden and Mt Druitt be reopened for ambulance patients and that no further closures to ambulance patients occurs at any other Emergency Department.

General Secretary of the HSU Michael Williamson said "Our members have demonstrated considerable good faith today and have authorised the union to engage in discussions at the highest level to try and achieve some relief to the trolley block issue [the dropping off of patients]."

"However, they have agreed to reconvene on June 17 to consider progress. If we are unable to achieve any significant improvement in the Emergency Department access problem, then I think our members will have little option but to consider industrial action from June 17." ☼

Thirty years wallowing in the dregs

Marcus Browning

When last month, John Howard marked 30 years in parliament with a fanfare of self-promotion, the endorsements and nostalgic reminiscences that flowed like sewage at a purging convention were not hallelujahs for a concrete plan for the future but a call to keep looking backwards, for more of the same.

This is the mantra of the ultra-conservatives: that there is no future beyond the bounds of some imagined, permanently-fixed past which they yearn always to relive and reinvent in the present.

Progress is poison to them, because it means living history ringing in change, the bringing down of the status quo, the elimination of elite privilege.

Instead, they look to a past suffused in the glow of sentimentality and present it as the golden mode of existence towards which we must all strive. It contains the idealised family-home-maker mother, bread-winning father and obedient offspring that attend church every Sunday and are deeply nationalistic while being patronising, fearful and ever-vigilant in guarding against other peoples and cultures.

It is a world where challenges to

lies apart – is the bitter legacy of Howard's ultra-conservative views and the reactionary predecessors he worships. These are the putrefying dregs he has wallowed in for the 30 years of his parliamentary sojourn.

It wasn't until 1996 that Howard finally managed to get elected as Prime Minister over John Hewson's assassinated body. It was also in the slipstream of the 13 years of empty promises, unemployment, falling living standards and burgeoning corporate profits that the Hawke and Keating Labor Governments dished up.

One cover-up after another

Since then it's been one cover-up and lie after another – the secret training of scabs in Dubai to push the union off the waterfront; Minister Reith's roting of his taxpayer-funded phone card and a litany of outright lies: children overboard; Iraq's non-existent weapons of mass destruction and torture in Au Graib prison.

There is the growing list of human rights violations: contraventions of international labour laws; the attack on Indigenous rights; the locking up of asylum seekers. There is a widening gap between rich

For example, the TV and radio advertisements which are part of the campaign propose that instead of calling the police, women victims of domestic and sexual violence should use a telephone counselling service run by a Christian charity.

Closure of services for women

The fact is, this government has withdrawn funding from and caused the closure of services for women such as rape crisis centres, and shelters for women and children made homeless, in many cases, by domestic violence.

But best not to dwell on these cold, hard facts. The conservative's claim that it is all the fault of the women's rights movement which made members of the fair sex believe they could go against nature and God and become equal and independent. All will be put right again once they recognise their folly and return to the golden state of domestic bliss and the sanctity of the church (Christian, of course).

Let's go back to the future according to Howard. This is where we'll find the youth and, in particular, those young workers being ripped off by transnational fast food chains, who are, apparently, ever so polite.

"Some of the friendliest, most well mannered young people around are the one's you find in McDonald's", Howard stated last month.

"There's some cause to believe that in the young people, there might be better manners, a return to those things", declared Howard as he covers-up the torture of Iraqi prisoners.

To listen to that tripe one might believe that in the making and serving of hamburgers and chips a kind of osmosis takes place that infuses people with a code governing social niceties. (The reality is that all these polite youngsters will be sacked from McDonalds and be replaced by other easily exploited teenagers).

These are just the kind of workers Howard wants everywhere – low-paid, lousy conditions, and non-union.

So, what to do? In the immediate future – vote them out at the coming federal election. That would be an important step and send a strong message that the people reject this government's backward policies, its ultra-conservative ideology, its wallowing in the past, and its attempt to drag the country into this cesspool with it. ✪



Howard – an obsequious promoter of US imperialism

These are the putrefying dregs he has wallowed in for the 30 years of his parliamentary sojourn.

the pre-ordained hierarchy are forbidden, by both divine and civil law, where there are no trade unions, no organised dissent, where homosexuals simply do not exist and there is definitely no recognition of Indigenous rights. Everyone knows and accepts his or her place, be they oppressor and dispossessed, master and servant, man and wife.

Fiction

This portentous and nauseating fiction is part of the philosophical underpinning that drives the Howard Government's actions – seen from their born-to-rule rejection of any public accountability and from the dictatorial arrogance of the Prime Minister himself.

The real past – the racism, the discrimination against women, the ruthless exploitation of labour, the despair and hardship that tears fami-

and poor, the pro-big business tax restructure, punitive welfare provisions, increasing levels of poverty, the destruction of jobs and services and the privatisation of everything the corporations can lay their hands on.

During his 30 years (in a sure-fire, blue ribbon Liberal seat, of course) Howard has been consistent in a number of areas: the fawning and obsequious promoter of US imperialism, union basher, racist.

And his attitude toward women is nowhere better expressed than in the new media promotion of the Government's National Elimination of Violence Against Women program.

The program is at once an opportunistic pitch for votes and the means to perpetuate the marginalisation of women as second class citizens.

Kick Howard Out: Defend Medicare

continued from page 1

The government says little about the more than \$2.4 billion injection it makes to private insurance companies through the tax rebate and other subsidies. Without this injection the private hospital system would collapse.

Any government genuinely committed to Medicare and the public health system would abolish that \$2.4 billion rebate to the private system and redirect the money to public hospitals and bulk billing. There would be more than enough left over to fund a public dental health system.

The real "mainstays" of Medicare are universal bulk billing (no fees at point of service), quality

health care and adequately funded and staffed hospital services accessible to all.

Patients who fall into the safety net will have to divulge endless personal details, collect receipts, monitor spending and some will have to register.

Doctors and other health professionals and their staff will be confronted with time-consuming complexities: categorising patients, deciding who can be bulk billed, and how much to charge. They will need to check health cards, assist patients and intrude into their private affairs.

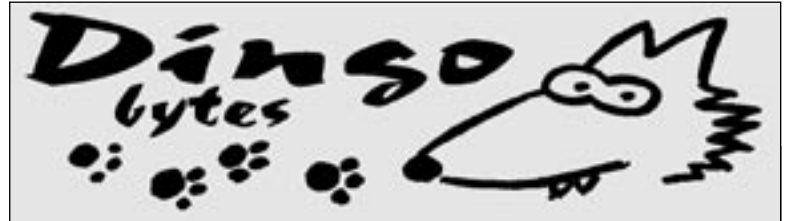
While there are some worthwhile proposals, such as increasing the number of doctors, the main objective of the government's

policy is the privatisation of health services.

This is why the Howard Government is hell bent on destroying Medicare as a huge step to the total privatisation of health services. The Labor Party is sitting on the fence, still holding back from making a firm commitment to abolish the private health insurance rebate.

The Communist Party of Australia is firmly committed to Medicare in all its key features, with central funding through a progressive taxation system.

In the forthcoming elections, the CPA urges readers to vote for left and progressive candidates who have a strong commitment to the public sector, including Medicare. ✪



Alan Ramsey informs us in *The Sydney Morning Herald* of the Howard Government's new-found generosity in handing out pay increases. Not to workers – it opposes every wage rise even for the lowest paid workers – but to those at the very top of the public service hierarchy. The country's 22 most senior public servants, including the Commissioner of Taxation, the CEO of Customs and the heads of the departments of Prime Minister and Cabinet and Defence and Treasury, are to get increases of up to \$300 per week. Bribes in an election year?

Apple and pear growers are up in arms over plans to allow the importation of New Zealand apples. Growers took to the streets in Australia's capitals last week to protest against Federal Government plans to scale down quarantine protection. The main fear is the introduction of fire blight disease, which Australia is free of at the moment. "Fire blight would be a social and economic disaster", warns Jon Durham of growers' organisation Apple and Pear Australia. He said the disease has the potential to effectively destroy the Australian apple and pear industries, at a cost of \$1 billion over six years and threatening 250,000 jobs. That's free trade for you!

Former Victorian premier John Cain threw the cat among the pigeons last week when he suggested that the state's organised crime network was connected to Melbourne's Crown Casino, owned by none other than Kerry Packer. This led to a suggestion that the Bracks' Government is stalling on an inquiry into police corruption in order to protect the casino and its filthy rich and powerful owner. Crown Casino has rejected any suggestion that money laundering is taking place. Of course! How could we have imagined that organised crime could have anything to do with gambling?

CAPITALIST HOG OF THE WEEK: is former Telstra board member William Owens. Last month Admiral Owens resigned from the board of Telstra – yes, Admiral. He was the commander of the US Sixth Fleet in the 1991 Gulf War and vice-chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff. He had been on the board of Telstra for six years. Q: How was it that an American Admiral ended up on the board of a majority publicly-owned telecommunications company, I hear you ask. A: He's on the privatisation gravy train. When he retired from the navy he became chairman of the US telco Teledesic as well as a director of a number of US transnationals such as Daimler-Chrysler and British-American Tobacco. Two years ago he became chairman – then president and chief executive – of Nortel Networks, the biggest telecommunications manufacturer in North America. Nortel is currently under investigation for "accounting irregularities".

Anger over detention of refugees

Young people lead the way in organis

The Federal Government's callous policy of mandatory detention of asylum seekers is clearly alienating young people throughout the country. In March, Immigration Minister Amanda Vanstone tried to downplay the significance of the phenomenon by suggesting that adults with political agendas were behind the flood of protest letters from school students arriving at her office.

Her attempts at diplomacy with a group of teenage ambassadors from the ChilOut organisation, which opposes the detention of children in the notorious facilities in Australia, Christmas Island and the Pacific, were disastrous. "She sat there, emotionless to our pleading and tears, we wept at the wounds of those who suffer from the effects of Australia's immigration policy", was how one of the participants remembers their meeting with the Minister.

Recently a group of high school students from the Adelaide hills organised a demonstration about the issue outside the electoral office of their local member, Foreign Minister Alexander Downer. Last week Bob Briton from *The Guardian* spoke to two of the students about the depth of feeling on the issue that is inspiring them to take action and how they have gone about organising it.

Bob Briton: Was it the students of Mt Barker Waldorf School that organised the recent demonstration outside Alexander Downer's Electorate Office? What was it that prompted you to do that?

Max McHenry: Well, I kind of organised it and had help from other people. I had the idea and did press releases but I had so much help from other people that it would be wrong to take credit. It was students from the school that put in all the work.

Patrick Wundke: It was really a response to the issues raised in the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission(HREOC) report.

No justification for detention

MM: The report said all children should be released from detention by June 10 and listed all these horrible conditions that they are in. It said – surprise, surprise – that children should not be kept in detention facilities. [The reference is to the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission's *National Inquiry into Children in Immigration Detention Report* –

A Last Resort? released mid-May. See *Guardian* 26-05-04, No 1184 – Ed.]

I knew the whole thing was wrong because I'd been up to Baxter last year and I've been sort of caught up in it for the past year and a half. It just seemed really, really urgent that all children should

the group at your school? How long has it been involved in the refugees issue?

PW: It's been going for just over a year. We just get together at lunchtimes; we have trips up to Baxter every now and then. We talk about the issue and write to people in detention, ring the detainees,

There was an eight-year-old kid and he'd been in there since he was four... until recently, he thought that all people in Australia lived like that. All Australian people were kept under guard and bussed from compound to compound.

be released from detention because there's just no justification at all for keeping them there – especially when you meet them. They're just people like you and me.

BB: Could you tell us about

being in communication and just talking to the people.

MM: I guess going up and visiting just gives you a whole new outlook. I remember when I came back I thought to myself, now I know what's really going on.

PW: When you up go there you know that it's wrong, but when you visit them you feel this is just completely stupid, just completely outrageous that we're doing this to these people, that they should have to go through this when they've already gone through such hardship.

Overkill

MM: It's such overkill. It's more like a breaking down thing, really. It's not like these people are going to make any major escape attempts. On the way out, you go see the Port Augusta prison and there's grass and trees and one line of wire fence.

PW: You go to Baxter and it's a double fence: iron bars, barbed wire at the top. It's dry desert. You go through the security and it hits you: the people can't see out. They can see a square of sky. The roof overhangs. In the visitors' centre it's the same; you can look up but you can't look out. The windows all face inwards, the compounds all look inwards.

MM: And you know that there are children in there. They're not even allowed the dignity to walk out over to the visitors' centre. They're taken by guarded bus through gates and stuff. And when you send mail, you don't address it to them to "Joe

Bloggs", you have to address it to "Blue 5, 56". They don't have the dignity of being known by their name.

The other thing you need to remember is that 93 per cent of all people in detention are eventually released on Temporary Protection Visas anyway. So they're recognised by the Government as refugees but they're still kept in there for long periods of time – like four years. And for a little eight-year-old kid that's half your life spent in a prison.

One of the families we met and talked to, there was an eight-year-old kid and he'd been in there since he was four. Those are some of the most important growing years of your life and, until recently, he thought that all people in Australia lived like that. All Australian people were kept under guard and bussed from compound to compound.

PW: The family had just come from Afghanistan and they'd been caught in the fight between the Taliban and another power group. People in their village were just being slaughtered. They escaped, came over here and they've been there for four years, the whole family including five kids.

BB: Do most of the kids at school feel this way about the situation? Have you encountered any discouragement of your efforts?

MM: No real open negativity, not from within the school community. There have been a whole lot of people from outside sort of abusing me but never anyone from inside the school. There's a real feeling of support there.

PW: A friend of mine, she's at the local public high school, she was putting up posters for Max's rally around her school and she got called up to the principal's office and told she's being too political. There's everything to argue against that but that happened. There's no reason why she should have been pulled in there. She was told that



Max McHenry(left) and Patrick Wundke(right)

others, about the world and just to talk to someone. Anyone you see will come up and greet you. You've never met them before in your life and come from two places that are so opposite. That's where we met him.

Informing people

MM: But it is particularly hard to meet the people when they're out there in the most difficult places to get to. It's a five-hour drive to get to Port Augusta.

PW: That's why they're put there – because they're out of reach. It's difficult for people to get to see what's happening at the detention centres because everything's made as hard as possible. You have to put in an application weeks beforehand. Recently we put in one and it didn't get processed, which could have meant that no one had bothered to

You go to Baxter and it's a double fence: iron bars, barbed wire at the top. It's dry desert. You go through the security and it hits you: the people can't see out. They can see a square of sky.

there's not supposed to be anything at the school that is religious or political and yet there's a chaplain at the school.

[Max's mother interrupts to tell the Max and Patrick that the boyfriend of a member of the school circle has just been released from detention. He is from Sri Lanka. There is much excitement and happiness at the news.]

BB: This person that's been released, is he one of the people you've been in contact with?

PW: Yeah. We were visiting different families and this guy happened to be visiting someone else, so we met him. It's really kind of special because when you go there the people are so keen to hear from

pick it up to process it. You feel bad walking in there. You get a feeling for what it might be like for the people in there and yet you haven't seen any of the things that they've seen.

They say that only 47 people are allowed in the visitors' centre but – depending on the guard – that may be 27 or it may be 50. They just make it up, really. You can't give anything to anyone.

MM: You can't take a photo of yourself in there because apparently they'd be able to make a fake ID and leave you in there! You have special ink that they put on you that can be viewed under UV light and armbands and everything like that. The idea of being able to do that is just ridiculous.



Photo: John Sone

ing opposition



Photo: Avante Media Australia

Support base in school

BB: Could I just backtrack a bit? Was the circle at your school an initiative from the students?

PW: Yes. However we've got a teacher, a really fantastic teacher, who had been visiting for a while, but there was already a lot of interest among the students. There was a big support base there and she just sort of put it in motion. She said, "let's meet this lunchtime and have a chat about what people know and what people want to pursue".

MM: Thirty people turned up and so now we meet regularly, share lunch and just chat about it, write letters and so on.

BB: How did you organise last Friday's demo?

MM: We didn't use the internet that much. It was mainly done through word of mouth and putting up posters everywhere. I put one thing up on *Active Adelaide* [www.active.org.au/adelaide] but that was pretty much the only place on the net I actually know of.

The rest was done through people getting big wads of posters and putting them up on stobie [electricity] poles, in libraries, in any shops that would take it and all over Rundle Mall. We put them in the uni and everything like that. Oh and *Rip It Up* [a free Adelaide gig guide] gave us a free full-page ad, which I thought was pretty cool.

BB: What sort of things are you planning to do now?

Future actions

MM: I was talking about a forum with Downer. I'm going to get on to Triple J, and some news

people. Chris Warren from Seven News was really supportive and he would be prepared to put a thing on *Seven News* about that. Hopefully get something organised with them and get a whole lot of students from schools from all over Adelaide to just ask really good questions about it. He might refuse to come but if he does it would be a good opportunity.

PW: Maybe things like follow up vigils. Because if there's something regular every month people are going to know about it and that there's support out there in the community.

BB: Are you aware of things happening in other schools? Have you been able to link up?

MM: I'm trying to get in contact with St Ignatius. I know they've had a whole lot of things happening.

PW: There have been some good things happening. The same public school I was talking about before, a week before this friend of mine she organised a gig night to raise money for the circle of friends in Stirling. She raised about \$800 towards helping a family get out of detention. It's just great. I was part of organising it and it was really good. We got over 100 people there. We got people there from the Field of Hearts Project. [The Field of Hearts is a visual installation project launched in the ACT on UN World Refugee Day, June 20th 2003] We had information and Sally talked, just the educating of people that needs to be done. Everyone's got lots to learn.

If you would like further information about vigils, etc, then Max may be contacted by writing to amchenry@chariot.net.au. ☺

It just seemed really, really urgent that all children should be released from detention because there's just no justification at all for keeping them there – especially when you meet them. They're just people like you and me.

Corporate greed creates crises



The following article by Phil E Benjamin from the Communist Party USA newspaper *People's Weekly World* has an all too familiar ring to it, right down to the millions of dollars being splashed around by a desperate government trying to convince the electorate that it is looking after their health and protecting Medicare.

Two simple examples of the unrelenting attack on working people: drug prices and no paid sick time at work. Two examples of corporate greed: Bush's use of taxpayer money to advertise his bogus Medicare legislation and the massive give-away to Medicare HMO [Health Management Organisations – US private health insurance companies] profiteers. These examples emphasise the importance of replacing Republicans with pro-people candidates in the year 2004 election.

Drug prices are killing people

A front page story in the May 19 issue of the *Wall Street Journal* says it all: "Higher Co-pays May Take Toll on Health."

A joint study by the Harvard Medical School and Medco Health Solutions found that when co-payments were doubled for common prescription drugs, 31 percent of people with allergic rhinitis stopped taking their prescribed drugs.

Arthritis sufferers dropped their drug use by 27 percent, and patients with diabetes dropped their drug use for that life threatening illness by 23 percent.

An increase in co-payment from as little as US\$5 to US\$10 can make that life change.

Another study, this one by the Institute for Women's Policy Research has found that over 60 million workers cannot take paid time off if they are sick.

Of course, those earning the lowest wages are also those with the least sick time. Low-wage workers also often end up with the most dangerous work, work that only attracts desperate unemployed or soon-to-be-unemployed workers.

The attack on women, in this area of worker exploitation, is even more dramatic. The Institute found that women workers, especially those with family responsibilities, have higher rates of illness and absenteeism than men do, yet are less likely than men to be entitled to any paid time off.

Where's the money?

The Bush administration and its corporate allies and media experts are quick to talk about the need for administrative cost effectiveness and productivity ("keep 'em working"), but when it comes to feeding their corporate allies, the sky's the limit.

For example, the Government Accounting Office, one of the few remaining independent government agencies, has found that the Bush administration broke the law in using public monies to advertise its bogus Medicare Program.

Now, you have to really be blatant to get this kind of ruling and in fact the Bush administration's "info-mercials" were pure "Bush for President" propaganda.

Millions of taxpayer dollars were spent on this partisan effort. That money would have been better spent in getting drugs into the hands of those in need.

Millions to privatise Medicare HMOs

Finally, in an excellent report, the Commonwealth Fund revealed that the federal government under the Bush administration paid an extra \$2.75 billion in 2004 to the private, mostly for-profit HMOs to remain in the Medicare Program. This is over and above the money that these HMO insurance carriers routinely receive when a Medicare recipient leaves the federal program and joins a private Medicare HMO.

Dump Bush and change Congress

Facts from these reports are just a few more tools to use to explain to your co-workers, family and friends how important this year's election is. The White House is certainly within reach as are both the House and Senate. Let's get to work. ☺

Arrows

We, as individuals, are fast losing our reputation for honest dealing. Our nation is losing its character. The loss of a firm national character, or the degradation of a nation's honour, is the inevitable prelude to her destruction.

William Wells Brown
(First published African-American author)

Yes, I will sing wherever the people want to hear me. I sing of peace and freedom and of life

Paul Robeson

I give a warm handclasp to the comrades who outlive this last battle and to those who come after us. And I repeat once again: we live for joy, we went into the struggle out of joy and we die for joy. Therefore let sadness never be linked with our names.

Julius Fucik
(Czech communist resistance fighter, executed by the Nazis in 1943)

We must become the owners, or at any rate the controllers at the source, of at least a proportion of the oil which we require.

British Royal Commission, agreeing with Winston Churchill's policy towards Iraq, 1913.

I hope our wisdom will grow with our power, and teach us, that the less we use our power the greater it will be.

Thomas Jefferson
(US President 1801-1809) ☺

Housing cooperative movement comes together in South Africa

At the end of May a very important event took place in South Africa. It was the formation of the South African Housing Co-operatives Association (SAHCA). The launch brought together housing co-operatives from different parts of the country to form a single national voice and organisation to represent the interests of co-operatives involved in the housing sector.

This historic event passed without any press coverage whatsoever or the presence of big names normally associated with so-called "black economic empowerment" capitalist deals, said Blade Nzimande General Secretary of the South African Communist Party.

If this were white capitalist corporations giving shares to emerging black capitalists, we would have had screaming headlines in many newspapers, and on television and radio stations – "Historic black economic empowerment in the housing sector", he said.

The SAHCA aims "to provide advice, education and training to

primary co-operatives, to represent them at a national level, to assist in accessing capital, to speak on their behalf, to unite housing co-operatives in order to increase the level of networking and co-operation, and to create programs for the support of members at regional level".

Their activities include joint

The South African Communist Party intends to be the party political champions of a progressive co-operative movement in our country

co-operative purchase (using the government's housing subsidy for the poor) of flats in the cities to provide accommodation next to areas of work and accessible to public transport. Some of the housing co-operatives are involved in construction activities, whereby members build each other's houses to maximise the government's subsidy by reducing building costs.

The formation of the SAHCA brought home the reality that at the centre of "broad-based black economic empowerment" must be the creation of institutions collectively owned and run by and for the benefit of the workers and the poor, said Blade Nzimande.

He criticised many of the exist-

ing co-operatives which have transformed themselves into medium and large-scale capitalist enterprises, benefiting an Afrikaaner elite at the expense of even the white Afrikaaner working class and the poor, in addition to the hundreds of thousands of black workers who work for these enterprises.

He said it was time to reclaim their co-operative traditions, both black and white, to build a viable and progressive co-operative movement to serve the interests of the overwhelming majority of the workers and the poor of our country.



The aim is collectively-owned and run housing

The advantage of co-operatives is that they benefit a larger pool of ordinary people through common and equal ownership.

Blade Nzimande said that to build a cooperative movement serving the people, they needed to first mobilise the people to build co-operatives around the provision of their basic needs, savings and affordable credit. This is the most critical pillar in building a co-operative movement and empowerment of the overwhelming majority of the workers and poor of our country.

Secondly, they needed to ensure that the state is supportive of the co-operative movement, through appropriate legislation, policies and support.

Thirdly, global experience with co-operative movements points to the need for a party political

champion to help build a progressive co-operative movement. The SACP has led the way in struggling for the appropriate legislative and policy framework for a progressive co-operative movement. It intends to be the party political champions of a progressive co-operative movement in our country, said the SACP General Secretary.

The SACP is intensifying its financial sector campaign to ensure that the banks and insurance companies serve the interests of the workers and the poor as they are the owners of the funds in these institutions.

"Let us build a co-operative movement for a genuinely broad-based black (and particularly working class) economic empowerment", concluded Blade Nzimande.

Acknowledgement to Umsebenzi ☺

New European left party formed

On May 9 a new European Left Party was established in Rome after months of discussions and arguments. The new party wants to be seen as a critical voice inside the European Union (EU).

However, a number of parties that had taken part in or observed the initial discussions withdrew, including AKEL of Cyprus, the Communist Party of Greece, the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia, the Socialist Party of the Netherlands, and all the Scandinavian Communist and Left Parties.

Thirteen parties remained, these include some small left social democratic parties and the German Party of Democratic Socialism, the United Left of Spain, the Communist Parties of France and Slovakia and the Italian Refoundation Party.

The number of parties remaining were enough to have the new party registered as a EU party. It will receive financial support directly from the EU.

The reason why most Communist parties withdrew from this project is related to the fact that it would be subordinate to the EU constitution and accept that its activity will be within the framework of the EU constitution.

All parties registered as EU parties have an obligation to promote EU towards federalism through a common program and by voting as a block in the EU Parliament.

It means that all questions of national interest will be subordinated to the common program. National interests on questions concerning national sovereignty will not be supported either.

As a result, democratic institutions in the member states of the EU will be undermined and the fight against increasing monopolisation, both nationally and internationally, will be weakened.

The establishment of the European Left Party created considerable friction within those parties that took part in the process, including some communist parties.

The whole process has damaged the struggle against the federal development of the EU. In some parties there exists the risk of a split.

The Communist Party of Norway circulated a statement saying: "Now that the European Left Party is a reality, we hope that the Party does not develop to be a party justifying the EU system, but will live up to its own definition as a party critical of the EU, fighting for more social justice, peace and against neo-liberalism."

"The European Left Party is not ideologically based on Marxism. They define their political view as a party of social justice, ecology and feminism. Our hope is therefore that the European Left Party will be an important and close partner of Communists and other progressive forces inside the EU." ☺

China calls for Iraq sovereignty

While welcoming another UN Security Council resolution to cover Iraq's new situation, China's Foreign Ministry has called for substantial amendments to the resolution submitted by the US and British governments.

A Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson said that the Iraqi interim government should exercise full sovereignty, in the political, economic, security, judicial and diplomatic areas, including the power to control and dispose of all natural and economic resources, sign economic cooperation agreements and contracts, and enjoy judicial independence and the power to administer prisons in Iraq.

China also called for a time limit on the stay of the US-led multinational force as well as a say by Iraqis on their operation, after power was transferred to a new Iraqi government on June 30.

In a three-page paper, China said that the multinational force's mandate would expire in January 2005 in keeping with the timetable of the Iraqi political process, and its extension should have the consent of the new Iraqi Government and be decided by the Security Council.

The United States and British draft resolution does not give a timetable for the withdrawal of their forces. It only stipulates that the force's mandate would be reviewed one year later or at the request of the Iraqis.

Nor does it mention whether the new Iraqi government would have full control of its army, have a say on the multinational force's actions or have the right to sign economic contracts with foreign countries. ☺

Anniversary of the liberation of Southern Lebanon commemorated

The 4th anniversary of the liberation of Southern Lebanon and Western Bekaa, through the struggle and resistance of its people against the Israeli occupiers, was commemorated on June 1 in Cuba. However, there are still some areas that remain under Israeli control.

Tony Badawi, extraordinary and plenipotentiary Ambassador of the Republic of Lebanon in Cuba, reiterated his country's support for the Cuban Revolution and rejected measures to further intensify the blockade.

"It was the first time in the history of the Arab-Israeli conflict that the Zionist forces of occupation were obliged to unconditionally withdraw from an occupied territory ... after the people's heroic resistance", the ambassador told a press conference.

Lebanon is today reaffirming its disposition to continue respecting its commitment to the so-called "blue line" (its national borders), while at the same time demanding that Israel withdraw its troops from Arab lands.

Mr Badawi reiterated the legal and moral right of the 400,000 Palestinian refugees in Lebanon to return to their homeland.

The occupation of Iraq and

the Israeli aggression against the Palestinians are endangering the normal functioning of the countries in the region and other parts of the world, he stated.

"Israel should withdraw to its 1967 borders and Jerusalem should be the capital of Palestine; that is the only way to reach peace in the Middle East."

"Lebanon demands that its prisoners be freed, that the whereabouts of its disappeared be made known, that the bodies be returned, as well as access to maps in Israeli possession of mines laid in various villages, which currently represent a mortal danger to many people in Lebanon, and which have caused the death of women and children", Badawi stated.

The diplomat added that the Chebaa farmland, still in Israeli possession, should be returned to his country.

Political relations between his country and Cuba are excellent, he noted, although more joint work needs to be done to extend and diversify trade relations.

Lastly, he thanked Cuba and its President for the solidarity and support consistently offered to his people and to the Arab cause.

Granma ☺

Brown Nose Day 2004 Inaugural Awards Gala

Comedy/Music/Information/Nose Awards

Sunday 4th July 4-6pm

(Venue to be announced)

Brown Nose of the Year For outstanding achievement in going all the way with the USA in 2003/4. Email your nominations to the Australian Anti-Bases Campaign Coalition at aabcc@zipworld.com.au

For more info: www.anti-bases.org

Vietnam Veterans say torture policy not an aberration

As the scandal of abuse and torture of Iraqi prisoners continues to intensify, the US organisation Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW) has called on policy makers to hold the real decision makers responsible for these crimes rather than scape-goating the individual GIs.

VVAW has documented the torture and abuse of prisoners dating back to the Vietnam War and has seen how the military is constructed to confuse and instruct individual soldiers to conduct these horrendous actions.

While many have expressed surprise at these recent revelations of torture, VVAW members have witnessed the American military's systematic pattern of prisoner mistreatment since the Vietnam War.

Of the 109 Vietnam Veterans who testified at the Winter Soldier Investigations in January 1971, more than a third (39) testified to observing and having first-hand knowledge of the mistreatment of prisoners of war.

Incidents described in detail included beating of prisoners, throwing prisoners from helicopters, requiring POWs to kneel beside piles of dead comrades sometimes for hours, attaching electric wires to body parts, interrogation with attack dogs, interrogation with snakes, water torture, and burning skin with heated pieces of metal. Even back then some graphic evidence was available in photos and slides of specific incidents.

The accused enlisted personnel at Abu Ghraib say that their actions were directed by Military Intelligence (MI) agents. While GIs were able to identify the MI agents in selected photographs of abuses in Abu Ghraib, the accused enlisted

personnel may not be able to identify agents efficiently enough to build their legal cases.

GIs were often unable to report whether the MI agents guiding them were military personnel or private contractors. VVAW members know that the vagueness in the identity of the MI agents is intentional.

VVAW National Staff member and former military intelligence officer Dave Curry said, "Military intelligence practice in the field involves layers of illusion and deceit. Ostensibly the layers of identity protect intelligence operations from the enemy.

"Military intelligence practice in the field involves layers of illusion and deceit. Ostensibly the layers of identity protect intelligence operations from the enemy."

At the same time, these levels of identity fool "ordinary GIs and make it difficult for them to know who has done what or who has asked them to do what. GIs may assume that they are working with a Military Intelligence civilian when they are in fact dealing with a regular army officer or enlisted man or woman. Such a set up can leave the GI with all of the blame and no evidence who these MI contractors were."

"In Vietnam as part of my assigned duties, I dressed in civilian clothes. Other MI agents wore combat fatigues with no insignia or rank. In Vietnam, I at times was required to carry phoney identification", he continued.

Curry graduated from the 16-

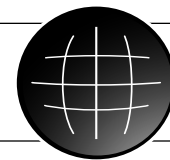
week Army interrogation training program (featured on NBC News on May 13) in 1971, when the program was still located at Ft Holabird, Maryland. (The training program is now located at Ft Huachuca, Arizona.) Curry served from April 1971 to March 1972 in Vietnam in the 55th MI Detachment in II Corps and in the 525th MI Group. He is now a professor at University of Missouri-St Louis and the St Louis contact for VVAW.

Vietnam Veterans Against the War has more than 1000 members throughout the country and includes veterans since World War II. It

currently organises for better benefits for all American vets and has become one of the most outspoken and respected peace organisations in the country.

The first group to organise Vietnam veterans in 1967, it was founded to voice returning servicemen's and women's growing opposition to the Vietnam War and grew to include more than 30,000 members.

The group started the first rap groups to deal with the war's traumatic after effects on GIs, helped make known negative health effects of exposure to chemical defoliants and exposed the Department of Veteran's Affairs attempts to cover up Agent-Orange-induced illnesses. ✪



Global briefs

The Guantánamo prison in a London theater

In a London theatre, 12 actors are reproducing life in the controversial US detention camp in Guantánamo (Cuba), via a play based on the testimony of former prisoners.

In *Guantánamo: Honor Bound to Defend Freedom*, actors from London's Tricycle Theatre are playing the parts of prisoners, their families and politicians like US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld.

"We are staging a play that uses transcriptions of interviews with the British prisoners, their families, former prisoners who have come home, their lawyers and soldiers on Guantánamo", explained theatre director Nicolas Kent.

"There is not a single word in the play that was not pronounced by the people we interviewed. Nothing was invented by us", he added.

Other information comes from the letters received by prisoners' families. "I don't know what crime I am suspected of, nor why my wife and children have to go on suffering", wrote Moazzam Begg, 36, a British citizen imprisoned in Guantánamo.

Another five British prisoners from the camp on the US naval base were repatriated in mid-March after having spent two years in prison without a trial or being charged

with anything. After their arrival in Britain, they were freed, without having a single charge brought against them.

Another four Britons are still being held in the camp, together with approximately 600 other prisoners from 40 different countries, most of them detained during the war against Afghanistan at the end of 2001, after the September 11 attacks.

"I don't know what crime I am suspected of, nor why my wife and children have to go on suffering"

The US Government does not recognise them as prisoners of war, defined by the Geneva Convention, in spite of repeated criticism by human rights organisations.

The US Supreme Court decided to deliberate the question of the legality of these indefinite detentions for the first time on April 20, and will make a ruling on the matter before the end of June. In particular,

it will have to decide whether the Guantánamo prisoners have the right to appeal to the US courts to challenge their imprisonment or prison conditions.

"Up until now, the reaction from the public has been very strong. Some spectators cry when they hear the testimony. They think it's terrible, abominable", Kent commented.

The director, who has previously staged works about the Nuremberg trials and the racist murder of a young Black man in London in 1993, added that his objective was also to show the inanity of efforts made by the British Government to help the Guantánamo prisoners.

The government "provides (legal) representation for those who have citizenship, but not for those who don't, even if they have resided in the country for 16, 17, 18 or 20 years", he said.

Kent cited the case of a prisoner from Iraq who had been living in Britain for 19 years, but whom the British Government has refused to attend.

"Before the war in Iraq, the British authorities had told him that he should be represented by the Saddam Hussein regime. What cynicism!"
Granma ✪

USA: The New York City Parks Department denied an appeal from anti-war campaigners who want to stage a massive demonstration in Central Park on the eve of the Republican national convention. The department had previously denied United for Peace and Justice's application for an August 29 rally for 250,000 people, saying that such a crowd would be too large and would damage the Great Lawn. A lawyer for the group accused the city of an "apparent unwillingness to allow the protest to go forward".

INDIA: The new Congress Party Government of India has offered the post of Speaker in the Lok Sabha, India's parliament, to Somnath Chatterjee, a leader of the Communist Party of India (Marxist). The Polit Bureau of the CPI(M) has decided to accept the post. It explains that this does not contradict the decision of the Party to support the Congress led government but to not join it. The Party says that parliamentary democracy has three wings of government – the legislature, the executive and the judiciary. The government concerns itself with the executive functions of the State while the Speaker heads the legislative wing. The post of speaker cannot be confused with that of the executive said a Party statement. The CPI(M) won 44 seats and the left as a whole won 61 seats in the new Indian parliament.

ITALY: One of the biggest inquiries into marketing practices of pharmaceutical companies ended in Italy with the Italian police seeking to put on trial almost 5000 people, including more than 4000 doctors and at least 273 employees of the British pharmaceutical giant Glaxo-SmithKline. Some face up to five years in jail if convicted. Pharmaceutical companies spend millions of dollars on "sweeteners", in other words, bribes to doctors to prescribe particular brands of medication. Italian authorities said Glaxo-SmithKline "should be held responsible for corporate crime as its managers and other employees acted in the company's interest".

KOREA: North and South Korea have agreed to open their first cross-border road and rail links by October this year.

KENYA: Kenya's Central Organisation of Trade Unions (COTU) will go to the International Labour Organisation Conference in Geneva to protest government plans to lay off thousands of workers. Internal Security Minister recently announced that the government plans to retrench 21,338 workers on a voluntary basis beginning in June, and ending in 2007. Civil Servant Union leader said the union would oppose the layoffs, which could result in unrest in the public service. The union leader also said the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund were exerting pressure on the government to carry out the layoffs.

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



email: guardian@cpa.org.au

Dealing with realities

The letter of Bob Saltis (*Guardian* 2/6/04) and headed "Where to begin?" raises so many questions that need a response that it is indeed difficult to know "Where to begin?"

Bob's letter suggests "A left strategy ... that propose[s] the immediate transfer of the ownership of the means of production to the people..." but immediately follows this with the remark that, "Nationalisation is out of the question at present".

Bob writes, "We need bold approaches" and then suggests "We could try buying strategic parcels of shares in companies from the capitalists with their own money".

He asks: "Where are the policies that can here and now begin the struggle for 'control over the wealth' the workers create..."

The failure for the situation to "move forward" is placed at the door of the CPA because it has not "elaborated specific proposals" and then Bob Saltis makes a breathtaking comparison with China saying that "The Chinese Party adopted bold programs to build socialism and is doing it successfully". He says: "The only reason why we can't is a fear that we haven't the

strength (unlike the Chinese) to carry it through".

Bob overlooks the "little" detail that the Communist Party of China and the Chinese people have won political power from the Chinese bourgeoisie and the foreign imperialists. The Australian working class has not yet taken that step and by Bob's own admission they are not yet ready to do so.

He writes, "...all the organised workers can see as a solution [to unemployment] is for public money to be used to protect jobs through hand-outs to the capitalists".

Bob Saltis, I am sure, claims to be a Marxist but one of the first obligations of a Marxist is to base oneself on realities rather than wishful thinking and then show off one's frustrations at the difficulties and the slowness of change. That does not mean meekly accepting the realities but setting out to change things for the better.

I guess if Bob were living in the scores of other countries where the working class have also not yet solved the problem of unemployment and not yet set out on the task of building a socialist society he would be lambasting the communist party of that country for "failing to carry out its vanguard role".

The CPA's program, its Congress political resolutions and a number of other statements do include comprehensive policy proposals. The fact that they have not yet been taken up by the working class is due to the reality that most are satisfied at present with the "social policies" of the Greens and the Labor Party and this is a reflection of the political reality in Australia.

The job is to work conscientiously

to change the situation rather than thinking up gimmicks such as "buying strategic parcels of shares in companies from the capitalists with their own money".

Bruce Gillman
Sydney, NSW

"Bush move sparks Cuba dollar freeze"

With the world's attention focused on the travails of the US's attempt to impose its so called ideal of democracy upon the Iraqi people, another country which may not fit their "democratic" ideals is facing a similar move to impose regime change.

Usually if an unpopular, autocratic despot governs a country, any of their citizens who leave the country, defect and don't want to come back, unless they can make a killing financially in some so-called liberal democratic country where money is everything.

Cuba may have had the same head of state for the past 45 years, but that does not mean: the people don't have a say in the running of the country, that an overwhelming majority of the people object to the rule of Fidel Castro or that the Cuban Revolution has caused a social, cultural, political and economic decline to grip the nation since the US backed Batista was overthrown.

On the contrary, Cuba has one of the lowest infant mortality rates and most advanced systems of education and health care in the world. On top of which the only "insurgents" the Cuban Government sends overseas are the thousands of doctors, spe-

cialising in medical interventions instead of the military kind, to be found in many parts of the globe.

As a testimony to the popularity and endurance of the Cuban Revolution, Perth has just had its second visit from the talented Buena Vista Social Club of Havana, and we didn't see any of them scrambling to claim political asylum or refugee status.

If the US manages to, "subvert" the government of Fidel Castro, the world will become a less free and democratic place as a consequence.

Richard Titelius
Perth, WA

GROVIL challenge

GROVIL – the Grassroots Resistance to Violations of International Law – is offering \$5000 reward for the arrest and conviction for complicity in Iraq war crimes any MP supportive of the war on Iraq.

John Howard boasts that he did not shackle Australia to the US-led illegal war on Iraq by attending to opinion polls. Quite. Neither he nor his companions in crime, Blair and Bush, attended to the overwhelming world-wide opposition to the war.

Howard also ignored the esteemed opinions of 43 experts in international law who unanimously declared the war to be illegal.

Now we have the tail wagging the UN dog in that the UK and US are trying to inveigle the international community to clean up and pay for the colossal mess they have created.

Before the war, they maligned the UN and bugged the delibera-

tions of its members whilst all the time doing their utmost to precipitate a war through lies, distortions, bribes and power politics.

The time has come for citizens everywhere to reclaim their countries now in the hands of shysters, racketeers, con-men, snake oil salesmen and gangsters. Make no mistake about it, this description aptly describes the military-industrial complex which Eisenhower warned about, and its latest manifestation, corporate globalisation.

In medieval times citizens enjoyed arrestive powers almost the same as those of the sheriff and constable. They were often called upon to form a posse comitatus to assist law officers.

GROVIL is part of this long tradition and believes the Rule of Law should dominate, not the rule of War. The failure of legal authorities to enforce the law, which is being blatantly disregarded by those in high office, has necessitated the formation of GROVIL.

Our objective is to bring before the courts MPs charged with complicity in war crimes. To do this we will be totally non-violent and, after touching the offender and announcing the charge, we will immediately hand them over to the police who will be close to hand. It is hoped that GROVIL will take root in all parts of Australia and internationally.

Initially, we will focus on federal members, Larry Anthony and Ian Causley and issue them with warrants of arrest. July 4 is brown nose day in Australia. It would be supremely apt if John Howard could be arrested at this time.

Gareth Smith
Byron Bay, NSW

Culture & Life

by Rob Gowland

Snuff videos and black ops

Back in the olden days, you know "Before Television", imperialist governments that wanted to provide "evidence" to a sceptical press and public or to distract that same press and public from the imperialist government's own actions would turn to the "black operations" departments of their intelligence departments.

The skilled men and women in these highly secret establishments would most commonly manufacture an incriminating document that could be produced with great fanfare and expressions of shock. It would be written about, and extracts would be published, and the original shown perhaps to a few trusted opinion makers.

Some of these documents, such as the "Zinoviev Letter", became notorious, but they needed time to disseminate and they could be studied which too often led to them being exposed as fakes. The public became harder to fool, and in response imperialism became more sophisticated.

Today, if the US needs evidence to be found showing Osama Bin Laden to be the black-hearted anti-US terrorist leader that George Bush says he is, black ops produces not an incriminating piece of paper but a videotape, something that can conveniently be run on television everywhere.

I am sure we have all been

struck by the propensity of the USA's enemies for shooting compromising videos of their activities, complete with incriminating interviews, and then leaving them lying around willy nilly, to be found just when they are most needed by the White House.

In most cases, these tapes could not have turned up at a better time for US propaganda purposes if the Pentagon's black ops units had planned it themselves. Which, of course, you and I know they would never, ever do – don't we?

Nevertheless, some unkind media types have even suggested that Pentagon black ops were involved in the Nicholas Berg kidnapping and beheading affair.

If you will remember, the body of the 26-year-old American was found on May 8 near a Baghdad overpass. At the time, the Bush administration was up to its ears in the global outcry over the photos of torture and human rights abuses at the US-run Abu Ghraib prison in Baghdad.

Just three days after Berg's body was found, pro-Bush outlets Fox News, CNN and the BBC ran the inevitable video – in this instance of Berg's supposed decapitation death by a knife-wielding Iraqi terrorist.

The three Western news outlets claimed they obtained the video footage from "an Arabic-only al-Qaida-linked website" but the Arabic newsgroup Aljazeera reported on May 13 that it had been unable to locate it.

Berg, who disappeared in Baghdad on April 10, was variously described as an American businessman, a contractor to the US military administration, and even a mercenary.

Did he have Intelligence connections or did the US authorities consider him an "enemy" of the Bush administration?

His family company,

Prometheus Methods Tower Service is in communications. It is claimed the FBI had interviewed him after September 11 because his computer password had been used by alleged al-Qaida terrorist Zaccarias Moussaoui.

Berg went to Iraq in December 2003, allegedly in search of reconstruction contract work for the family company. Curiously, among the places he inquired for this contract work was the Abu Ghraib prison.

He went home to the US on February 1 and returned to Iraq in mid-March, shortly after his father Michael Berg had publicly endorsed an anti-war demonstration in Washington planned for March 20 by US group ANSWER.

Within one week of returning to Iraq, Berg was arrested for "suspicious activities". He was held incommunicado in prison in Mosul.

According to e-mails sent from a US consular officer in Baghdad, Beth Payne, to the Berg family, Nick Berg was being held in Iraq "by the US military in Mosul". The US State Department however denied this, saying Berg was being held by the Iraqi police.

However, on May 13, Associated Press reported that Iraqi police chief Major-General Mohammed Khair al-Barhawi denied that Iraqi police ever held Berg, saying such reports were "baseless".

Berg was interviewed in detention several times by FBI agents who wanted to know if he had ever constructed pipe bombs or visited Iran. The FBI also questioned his parents in Philadelphia about why their son was in Iraq.

On April 5 his family filed a federal court case against the US Government alleging illegal imprisonment. Nicholas was released the next day. And apparently kidnapped just 72 hours later.

Doubts about the authenticity of the decapitation video arose



almost immediately it was aired. The way Berg's captors act and speak has prompted speculation that they weren't native Arabic speakers (black ops US military personnel, perhaps?).

Berg appears to be wearing US military prison-issue clothing, sitting in what appears to be a US military-type white chair, virtually identical to those photographed as used at Abu Ghraib prison.

For forensic experts the way Berg's body reacts to the act of decapitation and the almost complete lack of blood, which would be expected to gush everywhere, suggest that he may have been dead already when the video was shot.

The *Asia Times* showed the tape to Dr John Simpson, Executive Director for Surgical Affairs at the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons in New Zealand, and to forensic scientist Jon Nordby, PhD and Fellow of the American Board of Medicolegal Death Investigators.

Simpson said he would "need convincing" that the taped scene was authentic, while Nordby said he thought the "best explanation" of it was that it had been staged.

Unfortunately for the Pentagon and the White House, the "Berg beheading" tape failed to divert attention from the shots of US prison torture. Those photos definitely were *not* staged. ☘

Rob Gowland
previews
ABC & SBS
Public Television

Sun June 13 ~
~ Sat June 19

This week's instalment of *Seven Wonders Of The Industrial World* (ABC 7.30pm Sundays) concerns the building of the *Bell Rock Lighthouse*.

The Bell Rock, also known as Inchcape Rock, is the subject of the famous ballad by Robert Southey. A reef of sandstone rocks in the North Sea some 11 miles off the Scottish coast, at high tide it lies some four metres below the surface.

In a storm in December 1799, 70 vessels foundered on the reef or on the rocky shore trying to avoid the reef. In 1807, following the loss of the reef of a 64-gun Naval ship with all hands (some 500 men), the government authorised the construction of a lighthouse.

This program recounts the arduous story of its construction by men who could only work on the rock at low tide in good weather (a total of only 80 hours in their first year).

Nevertheless, by 1811 it was built and still stands today. Not a ship has been lost on the Rock since.

The program focuses on Robert Stevenson, the engineer who conceived the idea of building a lighthouse on the exposed rock and was largely responsible for its construction. Stevenson, the grandfather of writer Robert Louis Stevenson, would eventually build 23 lighthouses as well as being a consulting engineer on railways, canals, tunnels and bridges.

This week's Stanley Kubrick movie on SBS is his imaginative sci-fi epic *2001: A Space Odyssey* (SBS 9.30pm Sunday). Based on Arthur C Clarke's typically unscientific short story *The Sentinel*, it was nevertheless for most of its



Imaginative sci-fi epic (*2001: A Space Odyssey*)

length (daft ending aside) eminently watchable when it first came out almost 40 years ago.

I'm afraid Kubrick's groundbreaking visionary imagery will seem mundane today, and decidedly unimpressive on the small screen at home.

From the Heart, billed as "intimate stories of Australia and New Guinea told by those who have lived there", returns this week in the *Reality Bites* slot (ABC 8.00pm Tuesdays) with another four stories from our region.

The first episode, *Kimberley*, uses the eyes and reminiscences of two friends we met in the last series of *From The Heart*, Ian Morris and Joe Ross, to explore the Kimberley region from the magnificent beehive formations of The Bungle Bungles, to the mighty Fitzroy River. Morris is a Top End naturalist and Ross is an Aboriginal activist whose Bunuba people come from the limestone country west of Fitzroy Crossing.

In extraordinary and very beautiful images, we see the region during the monsoonal storms and the floods that turn towns into islands, and go on the wild canoe trip that helped save the Fitzroy River. Joe and Ian remember the

tales of lost boys and stranded German aviators who were saved by the Aborigines.

Directed by Pino Amenta, perhaps the most extraordinary thing about this excellent yet very personal look at an exotic part of our country, is that it was produced by the Australian Children's Television Foundation.

September 11, 2001, initiated a bonanza for the US defence and surveillance industries. In just over a week, the CIA, FBI and other defence and intelligence agencies produced a list of 150 technologies that could be fast-tracked and used in the "war against terrorism".

They included ultra-sensitive airport bomb detectors, electronic translators for soldiers, 3-D face recognition and information management systems to track terrorists, and the thermogaric bomb.

Twelve times more destructive than conventional explosives, the thermogaric bomb detonates forward, penetrating bunkers and caves. It went from laboratory to battlefield in just 90 days.

In the first part of the two-part *Cutting Edge* documentary *The Perfect War* (SBS 8.30pm Tuesdays), producers of military

and intelligence technology explain how their phones constantly rang after September 11, with US government officials requesting access to their research and latest developments.

The program discusses the ethical questions raised by the use of these new technologies, the chinks in the technological armour, American hegemony, other potential future weaponry, and the effects in international relations.

One of the experts who speak in the program is Vice Admiral Arthur Cebrowsky, Director of something with the intriguing name US Office of Foreign Transformation. Now what do you reckon that actually means?

There is no doubt that Al-Qaeda exists as a terrorist organisation. The question that exercises the mind of progressive people is whether the US is Al-Qaeda's bitter foe, its undeclared ally or its creator.

Or is the answer a combination of all three, depending on place and circumstance?

You won't find out from the documentary series *The Third World War: Al-Qaeda*, screening on *The Big Picture* (ABC 8.30pm Wednesdays). As the title indicates,

this series takes the "sworn enemy" approach, adopting the US posture that we are involved in a "third world war", of civilisation versus terrorism.

The series is meticulous in its examination of the pursuit of small terrorist cells, its global focus, its concentration on the tactic of terrorism as though it was an actual movement in itself.

Overall, it serves the interests of the US and other imperialist governments. Rather like Al-Qaeda itself, really.

After ten minutes of *Dame Edna Lives At The Palace!* (ABC 8.30pm Thursday), during which I didn't crack a smile, I gave up. Barrie Humphreys is – or, at least, was – a gifted comedian, but this was just dull.

I found the final episode of the crime thriller *Amnesia* (ABC 8.30pm Friday) unsatisfying. The explanation for Lucia's mysterious appearances and disappearances, as well as the fate of the killer, seem to cheat the audience.

And what is the significance of the last scene with John Hannah, which fades to white to avoid a resolution?

Still, it had a good cast and if it becomes a series, I'll watch it. ☺

Sydney

BOUGANVILLE: REVOLUTION – EVOLUTION
Art exhibition
By Marilyn and Taloi Havini (mother and daughter)

The people's aspirations evolve from the revolution and are mirrored in oils, photo media & ceramic sculptures

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Macquarie Uni campus

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Sydney

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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

June 25
Australian Trade Union Leaders
What We Expect From A Labor Government
Doug Cameron, National Secretary AMWU
John Sutton, National Secretary CFMEU

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Harken vs Costa Rica

US companies employ blackmail in "free trade" with Central America

Mark Engler & Nadia Martinez

When most people think of Costa Rica, they don't imagine oil rigs stationed off the pristine beaches. Nor do they envision pit mines cutting into the cloud-forested mountains.

But, despite the country's noteworthy conservation efforts, its scenic vistas and extraordinary biodiversity face ongoing threats from extractive industries – and from international trade deals.

Nearly two years ago, Costa Rican nationals and admirers thought they'd been given reason to rest easy. In May 2002, responding to a large-scale mobilisation of the country's environmentalists, President Abel Pacheco announced a moratorium on oil exploration and open-pit mining in Costa Rica.

Legislators are currently working to give congressional backing to the executive order and repeal laws that expose the country to extractive industries.

At least one multinational interest isn't happy about the developments, however, and its model of corporate discontent may soon end the prospects of an activist siesta.

Harken Energy, a Texas-based oil company with close ties to US President George W Bush, had previously obtained rights to search for crude in Costa Rica. Before failing an environmental impact review in February 2002, it had planned to drill offshore.

Now Harken is demanding that the Costa Rican Government pay upwards of US\$12 million in reparations for its aborted exploits.

On March 11, Costa Rica announced that it would not accept a proposed out-of-court resolution to the dispute, delivering another blow to the bitter oil interest.

But that's not the last word on the subject. Even as the company contemplates sending the case back into international courts, the Bush administration is brokering a treaty that threatens to make the Harken suit into something more than an obscure legal grudge match. That treaty is the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA).

With the US and five Central American countries working to ratify CAFTA, it's not just local environmentalists and Texas oil barons closely watching ongoing developments in the Harken dispute. International observers say the case is shaping up as the latest cautionary tale of how "free trade" agreements give corporations the power to trump local environmental laws.

In 1994, the Costa Rican legislative assembly passed a hydrocarbons law as part of a series of measures designed to comply with a Structural Adjustment Program sponsored by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. The law opened the way for foreign corporations to win concessions on oil exploration.

Subsequently, a little-known

Louisiana-based company named MKJ Xploration successfully bid to prospect in several blocks on the nation's Caribbean coast. The company later sold its Costa Rican interests to Harken Energy.

Harken fails environmental test

Area residents, fishers, indigenous groups, and environmentalists learned of the deal by reading about it in the newspapers. They quickly realised that lack of local consultation was only the first of the plan's many problems.

Offshore drilling, they argued, would damage coral reefs and mangrove swamps and threaten endangered sea life. They waged a prolonged battle against the deal, and a national board came to take their side.

It ruled that Harken's plan was not permissible under the country's environmental impact laws.

Shortly thereafter, in denying Harken's appeal, the board cited more than 50 reasons why the company's impact statement did not make the grade.

Harken was furious. Arguing that it had already invested more than US\$12 million in the deal, it turned to international investment treaties to sue Costa Rica – for US\$57 billion.

That's no misprint. Harken wanted US\$57 billion, a figure it said represented the total projected profits of the scuttled deal. Costa Rica's annual GDP is around US\$17 billion, and the government's entire annual budget around US\$5 billion.

Costa Rica defends its sovereignty

In late September 2003, soon after the World Bank's International Centre for the Settlement of Investment Disputes notified the Costa Rican Government of Harken's claim against it, Pacheco announced that his country would not submit to international arbitration.

He refused to acknowledge any decision made by the Bank's body, insisting instead that Costa Rica's national court system was the legitimate venue for the dispute. A few days later, Harken withdrew its claim and pursued plans to reach an out-of-court agreement.

In January 2004, former US Senator Robert Torricelli travelled

to San José to negotiate on behalf of Harken. At the time, the Costa Rican Government appeared grateful to be eliminating the spectre of a costly international lawsuit. Environmental groups, however, greeted Torricelli with protests outside the Environment Ministry.

They argued that the negotiations were a form of "oil extortion" – that Harken was punishing the country for enforcing its environmental laws.

Whether the protests worked or, more likely, Costa Rica and Harken were unable to agree on a settlement amount, it now appears that the talks have failed.

On March 11, the government announced its position that Harken did not have legal grounds to demand compensation and that Costa Rica is not obliged to pay anything. The dispute, freshly reignited, is on course to return to international arbitration in the near future.

New threat from CAFTA

As the Harken case has moved forward, so has CAFTA. In December, the US finished negotiations with Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, and Nicaragua on the regional free trade agreement. Costa Rica, which had held back over concerns about privatising public industries, was brought into the accord in January. Now, each country must ratify the treaty if it is to become law.

For opponents of CAFTA, the Harken case is a paradigmatic example of how corporations use international agreements to bully countries into dropping environmental protections.

CAFTA's investor protections, which are similar to NAFTA's notorious Chapter 11, allow companies to bring complaints directly to international tribunals.

Under the new agreement, Costa Rica would not be able to rebuff efforts to bypass its national courts. Instead, it would have to

allow deliberations about Harken's astronomical US\$57 billion "compensation claim" to move forward on the international level.

Regardless of whether such corporate claims are upheld, the threat of a multi-billion-dollar lawsuit is enough to persuade many developing countries to back down on enforcing their environmental laws.



The example of NAFTA shows that even powerful countries are susceptible to what activists dub environmental "blackmail."

In one famous 1998 case, the Ethyl Corporation sued Canada over its public health ban on MMT, a fuel additive. Canada chose to overturn its environmental provision and pay US\$13 million to Ethyl rather than risk US\$251 million in damages.

US Trade Rep Robert Zoellick claims that CAFTA contains strong environmental protections. Likewise, Costa Rica's Minister of energy and environment, Carlos Manuel Rodriguez, argues that CAFTA "presents an opportunity for [Costa Rica] to seriously apply its environmental legislation."

It is true that the agreement includes provisions for citizens to submit charges regarding violations of environmental laws. However, while there are clear consequences

CAFTA could complicate if not thwart efforts by the assembly in San José to reverse the 1994 hydrocarbons law.

"Costa Rica of course can repeal its hydrocarbons law. But under the final CAFTA text, the oil companies would be empowered to sue for lost profits", says Lori Wallach, director of Global Trade Watch at Public Citizen. "Plus, governments could claim that a repeal would infringe on their rights to market access in the service sector."

It remains to be seen if the Costa Rican legislature will continue with existing plans to reverse the law. But it is clear that CAFTA bodes ill for environmental protection in the participating countries. Should a subsequent administration make the decision to go oil-rig-free two or three years from now, it may be nearly impossible to implement.

Of course, that's only if CAFTA gains ratification. In the US, the deal faces a bruising battle in Congress if the Bush administration tries to push it through in an election year.

Back in Costa Rica, legislators committed to extending the country's conservationist tradition may yet prove hesitant to subject their environmental laws to the threat of corporate attack – a threat that the ongoing dispute with Harken has made all too vivid.

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The Harken case is a paradigmatic example of how corporations use international agreements to bully countries into dropping environmental protections.



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